Employability programmes and work placements in UK higher education

Research report

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Contents

List of figures

List of tables

List of abbreviations

CIPD   Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

CMC   Career Management Competency

DfE   Department for Education

HE   Higher Education

HEI   Higher Education Institution

HESA   Higher Education Statistics Agency

IER   Institute for Employment Research

KTP   Knowledge Transfer Partnership

RWL   Real World Learning

SME   Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

VLE   Virtual Learning Environment

WBL   Work-Based Learning

WIL   Work Integrated Learning

WRL   Work-Related Learning

Executive Summary

Given the recent focus on the employability and earnings of university graduates in the UK, there is a need to explore the employability initiatives offered by higher education institutions (HEIs). Work placements and work experience offered through HEIs aim to improve students' job readiness, and ability to secure suitable jobs after graduation, but little is known about the work experience opportunities available, who can access them, and their impact on individuals, institutions and employers.

To address this situation, the Department for Education has commissioned this review of available literature on work placements and work experience in higher education in the UK since 2010, to explore the value that they offer to individuals, HE institutions and employers, focusing on the following research questions:

1. **What approaches do universities currently take to improve employability of their students/graduates**, and how do they vary across institutions, subject choice and regions? What barriers or challenges do institutions face to improving the employability of their students/graduates?

2. **What types of work placement/work experience opportunities are available to students in the UK**, and how do they vary across (and within) institutions, subject choice and regions? What are the main challenges that students face in organising / taking up placements/ work experience, and how do these differ by type of student?

3. **What benefits/costs are realised by students who undertake a placement / work experience opportunity?** How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement?

4. **What benefits/costs are realised by institutions that encourage placement / work experience opportunities?** What is the role of HE institutions in organising these opportunities? How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement? What do universities do to encourage the widest possible participation? What are the main challenges that institutions face in providing these opportunities?

5. **What benefits/costs are realised by employers that offer a placement / work experience opportunity?** How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement? What process do employers follow to offer a placement or work experience? What are the main challenges that employers face in providing these opportunities?

Approach to the review

We employed a reliable five-step **targeted literature review methodology** for the review (see Section 1.2). This methodology has been developed for and adapted to a number of previous projects, including recent projects for the DfE, such as a review of post-18 choices and the wider benefits of higher education (Hunt and Atfield, 2018)[1].

While not as comprehensive as a full systematic literature review, the methodology used incorporates the main principles of systematic reviews while remaining expedient and cost-effective. The targeted literature review also results in transparent and replicable research that contributes to the Government's open data initiative. The five steps are:

1. **Setting review parameters** – this crucial phase sets the rules that will guide the information gathering process, including search terms, dates and databases;
2. **Searching** – systematic identification and gathering of relevant literature based on parameters identified in stage 1. Literature was managed using Endnote software;
3. **Screening** – the screening of relevant sources based on pre-determined criteria using titles, keywords, abstracts and full-text (as appropriate);
4. **Data extraction** – in-depth examination, quality assessment and extraction of evidence;
5. **Synthesis and reporting** – analysis, synthesis and identification of key themes.

Review parameters, screening criteria and databases were agreed with DfE. We focused on the ProQuest database and included journal articles, as well as trades publications and newspapers to cast our net as wide as possible. We also included key sources of grey literature known to the team from Government and other sources, e.g. www.gov.uk; think-tanks, etc. Our search was limited to sources from 2010 onwards and to the UK, rather than to studies in other countries. All review parameters, search metadata, screening and decisions made at the extraction phase are included in the Appendices as part of data analysis transparency.

More than 400 sources were found through the database search (407). On the basis of screening by abstract, 142 of the 407 were selected for further review (59 'probably relevant' and 83 'maybe relevant'). After further review of the 142 articles, we retained 48 as being relevant and 38 as potentially relevant. A further 52 sources were not relevant. In four further cases, the full-text article was not available. This report is therefore based on the 86 sources that we thought should be included. Additional sources were found through a targeted literature search based on the expertise of the research team and

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[1] Hunt, W. and Atfield, G. (2018). *The wider (non-market) benefits of post-18 education for individuals and society*. London: Department for Education.

through the use of the research team's network, including conversations with HEI representatives. We found that:

- Given the specific nature of the research questions (employability initiatives provided by HEIs, rather than the broader question of the impact of engaging in initiatives such as work placements and work experience in general) meant that limited academic literature was of direct relevance to the research questions;

- Of the available information, more information was available on questions relating to the advantages of and challenges to entering work placements/experience for students. Much less was available on the benefits to HEIs and to employers.

- In addition to the above review methodology, and having anticipated the difficulty in finding appropriate information on the research questions, we also made use of the research team's expertise, networks and recent project experience in the area. In particular, we wrote to contacts who work in employability-related areas in HEIs across the UK.

- An overview of the findings is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of 'relevant' sources of information on the topic

	HEI-initiated activities to improve students' employability	Work placements and experience available to students	Benefits and costs to students	Benefits and costs to institutions	Benefits and costs to employers
Available information	Sandwich placements; WIL projects in career-related skills, short placements abroad/in the UK for languages students; Incorporating placements or part-time work into the curriculum.	Different types of placements; Different types include: 6- and 12-month sandwich placements, shorter ('thin' placements), external project work and entrepreneurial placements.	Benefits include the development of general skills, confidence, professionalism; improved academic performance, a greater propensity to get a job and higher salary. Costs include the difficulty of switching between placements and the academic setting, and differential access to placements.	Little was found about HEI costs and benefits. Benefits include potentially better TEF scores (although most research was published before this was introduced) and other rankings. Costs include the time investment and the trade-off between other skills and knowledge development in the curriculum.	Very little was found about employer costs and benefits using the agreed search terms.
Limited information	Almost no up-to-date comprehensive study or source on all the different types available.	Almost no up-to-date comprehensive study or source on all the different types available.	The majority of the research does not address the selection problem.	University status may affect the extent to which it has to take the employability agenda.	
Need more information on					It may be that searching for work placements and internships more broadly would generate more findings in this area.

HEI-initiated activities to improve students' employability

We found evidence of the following types of activities:

- Developing or creating new modules facilitating work placements, including modules for short placements abroad/in the UK for languages students, incorporating part-time work into a work-based learning module, and developing WIL projects in career-related skills.

- Developing virtual or simulated work placements to facilitate access to placements and to begin the employability process early, for students earlier on in their degree subjects.

- Incorporating reflective components in students' work placement programmes.

Work placements and experience available to students

We saw evidence of different types of work placements for students studying a range of subjects, including business studies, criminology, pharmacy, nursing, social work, languages, creative arts and others. A larger number of sources focused on business students than on others, however, this may be related to the types of journals that authors are submitting their papers to and the disciplinary background of the authors, which may also influence their choice of and access to data for analysis.

Evidence was found of the following types of work placements and work experience. However, no comprehensive source of data was identified that could survey the availability of work placements or work experience facilitated by HEIs across the HE sector as a whole.

- Placements abroad, including year abroad placements, for languages students and others, for example, in social work (Crabtree, Parker, Azman, & Mas'ud, 2014) and business studies (Fowlie & Forder, 2018) subjects, and other international work experience placements, including for those students on year abroad programmes who were studying at universities. These placements were of various durations.

- Sandwich placements, in various subjects, such as construction, psychology. We also found some evidence of an increase in the uptake of 'thin' (six month) rather than 'thick' (one year) placements (HECSU, 2010).

- Entrepreneurial ventures, such as the SPEED (Student Placements for Entrepreneurs in Education) project that took place between 2006 and 2008 (Rae, 2012).

- Work-based projects with an external organisation.

- Placement options as part of career management module options (not connected to a subject of study).

Benefits and costs to students who do work placements/experience

Work placements during undergraduate study in UK higher education tend to be linked to a variety of positive outcomes for students, supported by a broad range of research in the UK. In general, although the associations between work placements and outcomes appeared to be positive, there was little available research that dealt with the problem of self-selection. If students' ability (broadly speaking) is positively associated with outcomes, it may be the case that inherently more 'able' students are more likely to undertake placements, and the outcomes of having done a placement are really driven by students' ability, i.e. such students may have also had positive outcomes even in the absence of doing a placement. Only a few of the studies we looked at aimed to address this challenging empirical issue. Those that did address it found a lower, but still positive, association.

- The literature discussed positive outcomes related to skill development, academic attainment, labour market destinations and career development.

- The costs included the difficulty of switching between placements and the academic setting, the differential access to placements (including financial issues)/

- Another main finding was that the literature tended to find that most types of work placements were perceived to have improved students' 'employability' skills. However, not all types of placements were found to be associated with positive labour market outcomes (e.g. some of the evidence suggests that compulsory placements or curricular placements were not as helpful to 'successful' labour market outcomes as voluntary placements). This suggests that there may be different benefits to different groups of people.

Benefits and costs to institutions that encourage work placement/experience opportunities

There was limited empirical evidence available about the benefits and costs to HEIs that encourage work placement or work experience opportunities. We found examples of the following main types of benefits and costs of offering work placement and work experience opportunities to HEIs.

- Spillover effects and community reputation, largely from collaborative work with other local organisations.

- HEI may need to consider the extent to which compulsory placements align with the HEI's strategic vision, values and culture.

- Developing in-house employment activities to provide placement opportunities to students could also become a revenue stream for the HEI.

- The main cost is the resources required to ensure that work experience and work placements are delivered well, as well as to maintain employer relationships so that placement opportunities are available to future generations of students.

Benefits and costs to employers that offer work placement/experience opportunities

There was almost no empirical evidence available about the benefits and costs to employers offering work placement or work experience opportunities for students. The main benefits to employers of offering work placement or work experience opportunities that were mentioned in the literature include:

- Staffing issues. Employers could cover short-term staffing issues as well as looking more long-term and developing a pipeline of future employees.

- Cost. Work placements and work experience can be a source of cheap(er) labour for employers.

- Trial. Internships and work placements can be used by firms to 'trial' potential workers without having to commit to an employment contract.

- Fit. Employers can ensure that students have the skills they need through influencing curriculum design.

- Innovation. Students or graduates on a work placement may be a source of new ideas for the organisation.

- Reputation. Through collaborative activities with HEIs and providing opportunities to students in the local area, employers could potentially raise their profile in the community.

- Some of the main challenges for employers arose from the misalignment of stakeholder expectations.

- We found no information about this specific question of what process do employers follow to offer a placement or work experience.

1 Introduction

Higher education (HE) is a major part of UK skills policy and is seen as a route to a high-skill, high-wage economy (e.g. Leitch, 2006; Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2017).[2] However, increases in HE participation combined with a shift of the cost of HE onto students intensifies interest in graduate outcomes and employability with some commentators noting that mere possession of a degree may no longer be 'enough' (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012, 2008).[3] At the same time, developments in the global economy such as globalisation and technological have led to a shift in the responsibility for the development of workplace skills from employers to individuals and educational institutions such that graduates are expected to adapt quickly to the workplace and/or to 'hit the ground running' (Smith, 2010). Work placements and work experience offered through HE are aimed at improving students' job readiness and ability to secure suitable jobs after graduation.

Although work placements have been the focus of many studies in the US and elsewhere, research in the UK has been less forthcoming. While some studies show that work placements undertaken while studying can have a positive effect on employability, others suggest that this may not always be the case (Moores and Reddy 2012; Brooks and Youngson 2016; Purcell et al. 2013; Wilton, 2011).[4] A comprehensive and recent overview of the work experience opportunities available, who can access them, and their impact on individuals, institutions and employers, has not yet been conducted.

1.1 Aims of the project

To address this situation, the Department for Education has commissioned this review of available literature on work placements and work experience in higher education in the UK since 2010, to explore the value that they offer to individuals, HE institutions and

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[2] Leitch, S. (2006). *Leitch review of skills. Prosperity for all in the global economy–world class skills.* London: HM Treasury.

[3] Bathmaker, A. M., Ingram, N., & Waller, R. (2013). Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: Recognising and playing the game. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *34*(5-6), 723-743; Tomlinson, M. (2008). 'The degree is not enough': students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability. *British journal of sociology of education*, *29*(1), 49-61; Tomlinson, M. (2012). Graduate employability: A review of conceptual and empirical themes. *Higher Education Policy*, *25*(4), 407-431.

[4] Moores, E., & Reddy, P. (2012). No regrets? Measuring the career benefits of a psychology placement year. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *37*(5), 535-554; Brooks, R., & Youngson, P. L. (2016). Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of the effects on career progression. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(9), 1563-1578; Purcell, K., Elias, P., Atfield, G., Behle, H., Ellison, R., & Luchinskaya, D. (2013). *Transitions into employment, further study and other outcomes: The Futuretrack Stage 4 Report.* Coventry: University of Warwick; Wilton, N. (2011). Do employability skills really matter in the UK graduate labour market? The case of business and management graduates. *Work, employment and society*, *25*(1), 85-100.

employers. The review aims to identify sources of current evidence and identify gaps in coverage in relation to the following questions:

1. **What approaches do universities currently take to improve employability of their students/graduates**, and how do they vary across institutions, subject choice and regions? What barriers or challenges do institutions face to improving the employability of their students/graduates?

2. **What types of work placement/work experience opportunities are available to students in the UK**, and how do they vary across (and within) institutions, subject choice and regions? What are the main challenges that students face in organising / taking up placements/ work experience, and how do these differ by type of student?

3. **What benefits/costs are realised by students who undertake a placement / work experience opportunity?** How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement?

4. **What benefits/costs are realised by institutions that encourage placement / work experience opportunities?** What is the role of HE institutions in organising these opportunities? How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement? What do universities do to encourage the widest possible participation? What are the main challenges that institutions face in providing these opportunities?

5. **What benefits/costs are realised by employers that offer a placement / work experience opportunity?** How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement? What process do employers follow to offer a placement or work experience? What are the main challenges that employers face in providing these opportunities?

1.2 Literature review methodology

The literature review contained in this report employed a five-step methodology informed by the principles of systematic reviewing. Although the review was not a full systematic review, a systematic set of steps were followed in a bid to capture a wide range of sources using a transparent approach. The review used the following five steps:

1. **Setting review parameters** – this crucial phase set the rules that guided the information gathering process, including search terms, dates and databases;
2. **Searching** – systematic identification and gathering of relevant literature based on parameters identified in stage 1. Literature was managed using Endnote software;
3. **Screening** – the screening of relevant sources based on pre-determined criteria using titles, keywords, abstracts and full-text (as appropriate);

4. **Data extraction** – in-depth examination, quality assessment and extraction of evidence;
5. **Synthesis and reporting** – analysis, synthesis and identification of key themes.

The search focused on research on employability initiatives (work placements and experiences) in UK HE published since 2010. The breakdown of search results was as follows:

- **(a) Focused review:** the focused bibliographic literature review covered Social Science Premium Collection, ABI/INFORM and the SciTech premium collections. These databases are the ones identified as the most relevant to the study based on the experience of the researchers and consultation with University of Warwick library staff. The database search identified **407** sources relating to higher education-supported work placements or work experience, of which 56 were duplicates, and were removed, and **142** were selected for further review (59 were identified as being probably relevant, and 83 as possibly relevant (e.g. it was not clear what the country focus was)).
  After further review of the 142 articles, we retained 48 as being relevant, 38 as potentially relevant and 52 as not relevant. In four further cases, the full-text article was not available.
- **(b) 'Grey' literature review and (c) use of networks:** this review also looked at websites identified as relevant (through the researchers' experience) to the main research questions. This covered the websites of UK organisations (such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development), UK governmental organisations (e.g. the Department for Education), as well as research institutions and third sector organisations. In addition, a Google search was undertaken using the search terms of the focused review.

The number of abstracts that were reviewed against the inclusion criteria and the questions they were assigned to are summarised in Table 2.

The main conclusions from both search processes were as follows:

- The bibliographic review turned up a considerable amount of literature that needed to be reduced during the second stage of the research;
- On further inspection many of the sources identified, especially the ones published in trade publications, were not directly relevant to the research questions;

The advantages of the methodology that we used are that, for the time period specified for this study, it is possible to replicate the literature search that we undertook. However, the disadvantages of the methodology are that it may sometimes exclude potentially relevant material if it has been published outside of the specified time frame, if the key words selected for the search do not quite capture the material, and/or if it is not listed with the main bibliographic databases. To attempt to address these drawbacks, we have asked contacts in our network if they could recommend sources in addition to those that we

identified in the search. Therefore, it should be borne in mind throughout that the report is based on the available sources that were found in the course of the review, as well as a number of sources that the authors have included based on their previous research.

Table 2: Overview of the literature

Research questions	Number of articles containing at least some information on the RQ (of 142)	Number of articles (of DIRECTLY relevant)	Number of articles (of TAGENTIALLY relevant)
Q1 What HEIs offer in terms of work placements/experience	34	19	13
Q2 Opportunities available to students in the UK	32	19	8
Q3 Benefits/costs to students of participating in work placements/experience	49	34	12
Q4 Benefits/costs to HEIs of providing work placements/experience	18	11	6
Q5 Benefits/costs to employers of providing work placements/experience	28	16	8
Total	161	99	47

*Note some articles are relevant to more than one category so the actual number of articles reviewed is slightly lower than the total presented in the above table

2 Work experience initiatives in UK higher education

While the focus of this report is on initiatives that have taken place since 2010, it is pertinent to provide a short contextual overview of the role of work experience and work placements in UK higher education. This overview will be only brief, as it has been widely described in depth elsewhere.[5]

Higher education in the UK has been orientated towards workplace learning for a long time, at least in certain subjects. For example, even in the 1950s, various bodies recommended that programmes in engineering and technology should include industry placements. Placements typically took place through 'sandwich' courses that enabled students to undertake a placement for a year in-between their undergraduate study at university, or through shorter placement blocks. The placements also varied in terms of whether they were optional or compulsory.

The 1997 Dearing Report, which recommended that in response to perceived employers' needs work experience should be made more available to undergraduate students across all subjects, made a major impact on higher education policy and played a role in shaping today's higher education and employment climate. The recommendations of the Dearing report are still felt in today's policy directions and discourse, such as the Augar review of post-18 education.[6]

In recent years, there has been a move away from traditional stand-alone student placement experiences towards a greater variety of integrated and flexible programs. At the same time, it has also been well-documented that, despite the frequently mentioned advantages of sandwich year placements, the proportion of students undertaking sandwich placements has been shrinking: e.g. between 2002/03 and 2012/13 decreased from 8.2% to 5.0%.[7] More recent statistics suggest a possible reversal of this trend, with students on sandwich courses as a proportion of all student enrolments at around 10.1%

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[5] Little, B., & Harvey, L. (2007). UK work placements: a choice too far?. *Tertiary Education and Management*, *13*(3), 227-245; Harvey, L., Geall, V., Moon, S., Aston, J., Bowes, L., & Blackwell, A. (1998). *Work Experience: Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduates*. Birmingham: Centre for Research into Quality, University of Central England; National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, Great Britain). (1997). *Higher education in the learning society ('The Dearing Report')*. London: Her Majesty's Statistical Office.

[6] Augar, P. (2019). Independent panel report to the review of post-18 education and funding. *Post-18 Education and Funding Review Panel*.

[7] Jones, C. M., Green, J. P., & Higson, H. E. (2017). Do work placements improve final year academic performance or do high-calibre students choose to do work placements?. *Studies in Higher Education*, *42*(6), 976-992.

in 2014/15 and 11.1% in 2017/18, although it is not clear to what extent these figures are comparable with the previous figures.[8]

Over the last several decades, the use of work placements as part of work-integrated learning (WIL) has become increasingly prominent. From a theoretical perspective, WIL methods aim to encourage students to apply the knowledge they learn during their degree course at work, and/or to gain work-related skills through carrying out the work.[9] The research literature typically tends to focus on students' outcomes, with only very few studies addressing the implications for employers and higher education institutions.

2.1 Key terms

Defining different types of work placements available in higher education remains difficult. Often, terms such as 'internship', 'placement', 'sandwich year' are used interchangeably. In this report, we focus on **placements supported by HEIs in the UK, including: sandwich placements, shorter term-time placements, periods of time spent working abroad as part of a course, and any placements organised in addition to a course**, that are **supported by the HEI**. We define these terms below.

Excluded from our definition where possible are any student-led initiatives not supported by HEIs (e.g. a student applying for a vacation internship arranged outside the HEI), wider extra-curricular activities (e.g. student club administration) and less formal engagement with the workplace, even if organised through HE courses or supported by HEIs (e.g. careers fairs, short periods of work shadowing).

Work placements are a key component of the broader 'work-integrated learning' (WIL) approach. WIL can refer to a variety of programs and initiatives where "the theory of the learning is intentionally integrated with the practice of work through specifically designed curriculum, pedagogic practices and student engagement.".[10] Work placements may be viewed as a type of situated learning that occurs within *communities of practice* through which the learners move closer to full participation in those communities (e.g. an

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[8] HESA. (2019). *Undergraduate sandwich student enrolments by subject area, principal subject, level of study, sex and academic year, DT051 Table 12, Academic years 2014/15 to 2017/18.* London: HESA. Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-12; HESA. (2019). *HE student enrolments by subject area, principal subject, level of study, mode of study, domicile, sex and academic year, DT051 Table 9, Academic years 2014/15 to 2017/18.* London: HESA. Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-9

[9] Brooks, R., & Youngson, P. L. (2016). Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of the effects on career progression. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(9), 1563-1578.

[10] WIL should not be confused with work-based learning (WBL), which takes place primarily in a work context and is integral to the vocational education and training system (Atkinson, 2016). Atkinson, G. (2016). *Work-Based Learning and Work-Integrated Learning: Fostering Engagement with Employers*. Adelaide, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd (NCVER).

apprentice becoming a fully qualified master of the trade).[11] We look into the following types of work placements; informed by ASET the Work Based and Placement Learning organisation .[12]

Sandwich courses are typically those degree courses where between six months and a year is spent in industry, usually in the third year of study. Sandwich placements may or may not be compulsory, and may or may not be arranged by the HEI.

Practice placements tend to be those where the placement is conducted as part of an academic course and is governed by a formal agreement between the HEI and employers. Such placements are typically found in courses leading to a license to practise, e.g. health and education. The placement provides a location for learning, and the learning is strongly influenced by the HEI in terms of its focus and content.[13]

Shorter work experience or semester placements may take place over one semester, or may be undertaken as a part-time placement over a year. There is not necessarily any formal governance agreement and the placements are not related to a license to practice. Students may be encouraged to undertake such placements to improve their employability.

Project work involves pieces of work that may be sourced by the HEI or by students in negotiation with employers. Projects may be individual or group-based.

Year abroad placements tend to be undertaken by students studying language degrees, and increasingly, other subjects, for example, business and social work courses. Students typically spend their third year in a country or countries where the languages being studied are spoken, and may teach in schools, work, or attend a year at university. Placements may or may not be facilitated by HEIs and may or may not be compulsory. They may or may not be carried out through exchange programs such as Erasmus.

When we discuss employability in this report, we use a broader definition, which includes not only a narrowly defined range of individuals' skills and attributes, but also the social and economic context and employability as a process of developing an employable graduate identity.[14] The broader concept of employability allows us to highlight the role of

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[11] Reddy, P., & Shaw, R. (2019). Becoming a professional: A longitudinal qualitative study of the graduate transition in BSc Psychology. *Education+ Training*, *61*(2), 272-288.

[12] ASET. (2013). *ASET Good Practice Guide for Work based and Placement Learning in Higher Education.* Sheffield: ASET. Retrieved from https://www.asetonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ASET-Good-Practice-Guide-eWBPL.pdf

[13] Foster, E., & Stephenson, J. (1998). Work-based Learning and Universities in the UK: a review of current practice and trends. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *17*(2), 155-170.

[14] Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: possession, position or process?. *Studies in higher education*, *38*(4), 538-554.

year abroad placements in developing students' sense of selves and values that may otherwise be ignored by narrow conceptualisations. We also take a critical stance on employability [15], and highlight other potential barriers to graduates' outcomes that may counteract gains made through participation in work placements[16].

2.2 Why are work placements important?

WIL, and work placements and experience in particular, have important advantages for students, higher education institutions and employers. For students, WIL has been argued to improve knowledge, skills and experience that in turn improves the likelihood of getting a job, career outcomes, personal and professional development, and, potentially, academic achievement [17].

Empirical research on work placements and students' experiences can be divided into four key areas [18]: (1) the impact of placements on academic performance; (2) the influence of work placement on personal development; (3) the development of skills for employment; and (4) the placement as a forum or strategy for learning. Three arguments can be made about the current state of work placement research. First, the **(over)emphasis on establishing links between placements and successful outcomes in terms of degree results** constricts the parameters of what is considered valid research. Second, the **insufficient attention paid to the meaning of work placement as an experience and a process** and not simply a means to an end. There are arguments that the end result is not the only criterion on which students are judging 'value'. This point is supported by the very existence of instruments such as the annual National Student Satisfaction survey. Third, there is a **dearth of research that provides a space for students to articulate their own concerns** and influence research agendas.

For higher education institutions (HEIs), working with employers and the wider community through the organisation of work placements and experience activities can raise their profile in the area, and build strategic linkages with key organisations. Such

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[15] Moreau, M. P., & Leathwood, C. (2006). Graduates' employment and the discourse of employability: a critical analysis. *Journal of Education and Work*, *19*(4), 305-324.

[16] Morrison, A. R. (2014). 'You have to be well spoken': students' views on employability within the graduate labour market. *Journal of Education and Work, 27*, 179-198. doi:10.1080/13639080.2012.742178

[17] Purdie, F., Ward, L., McAdie, T., King, N., & Drysdale, M. (2013). Are Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Students Better Equipped Psychologically for Work Post-Graduation than Their Non-Work-Integrated Learning Peers? Some Initial Findings from a UK University. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *14*(2), 117-125.

[18] Anderson, P., & Novakovic, Y. (2017). Listening to student views on the transition from work placement to the final year. Accounting Education, 26(4), 377-391. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2017.1315604

linkages and relationships can in turn facilitate future teaching and research opportunities and improve HEIs' reputation.

For employers, placements typically allow an inflow of new ideas into the firm, provide a source of cheaper labour, and enable the employer to carry out an 'extended interview' of the potential recruit. However, the issue of cheaper labour may be at odds with students' barriers to participation in placements, especially given the pressures of tuition fees and costs of living.

2.3 Outstanding questions

It is often unclear whether the benefits to students and graduates of undertaking placements arise because of the placement itself, or because more able students self-select into doing placements.

Similarly is also not clear whether work placements serve an advantage because they develop students' skill (the human capital perspective) or because they help students get to the front of the queue (the job queue / signalling/screening perspective).

There is also much less information available on the benefits and drawbacks of work placements to employers and to HEIs compared to what is available for the benefits and drawbacks to students. More research is needed in this area.

The following sections discuss the 161 articles that were considered relevant or moderately relevant for this literature review, as well as insight from additional articles that were not captured through the review process.

3 HEI-initiated activities to improve students' employability

What approaches do universities currently take to improve employability of their students/graduates, and how do they vary across institutions, subject choice and regions? What barriers or challenges do institutions face to improving the employability of their students/graduates?

In the literature, we found evidence of different initiatives HEIs take to improve and develop the employability of their students, both in terms of finding a job and progressing in the labour market. We found evidence of the following types of activities:

- University-supported placements – these have become available for students undertaking a range of subjects, such as history and literature, sometimes as an assessed module. Such placements may be viewed as aiming to provide students doing subjects that do not traditionally have a work-integrated learning component with a way of gaining work-related experience and gaining a range of transferable, work-related skills.

- Sandwich courses – established in the 1950s, sandwich placements in industry have taken place in subjects such as engineering and technologies, and increasingly in other subjects.

- Other structured practice placements that are part of the course – in other vocationally-orientated subjects such as nursing and teaching, structured placements were widespread.

- Year abroad placements – these tend to be undertaken by students studying languages degrees, and increasingly, those doing business, law, social work, or other subjects that may involve an international component. These placements are deliberately designed to be undertaken abroad, and are distinct from students organising a placement in a country other than the UK as part of a placement module on a course.

- Virtual or simulated work placements that take place either in-house through a company set up by university academics or through a virtual setup like Second Life. The idea behind these placements is that they could potentially facilitate access to more students and develop new ways for universities to collaborate with employers. The authenticity of the placement was especially important for the placement's success in these cases.

3.1 Approaches currently taken by HEIs

Unfortunately, no comprehensive source of data exists to our knowledge that maps the employability approaches currently being undertaken by HEIs in the UK. The information below tends to come from piecemeal sources, e.g. students from a particular course or a particular university.

3.1.1 New modules incorporating work placements

We found several examples of HEIs developing new modules to incorporate work experience for language students. For example, at Lancaster University, a **placement module was developed to formalise language students' professional development**.[19] The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences already developed and held a bank of unpaid short placements that students could take to develop their employability skills. The placements could be organised by students and staff. Part of the course outcomes was better coordination between staff in different fields, including languages faculty staff and project placement officers. The reflexive component of the module also allowed students to reflect on their skills and experiences.

The University of Huddersfield developed a new module: Language in the Workplace, **developed in collaboration between the subject teachers and the Careers service at the University**.[20] It ran for the first time in 2014-15 with 46 second-year Linguistics and Modern Languages students. In the pilot phase, the students were required to find and complete a 180-hour placement with an external organisation and whilst on placement, they were to analyse the communication practices in their workplace. The assessment consisted of two pieces of work: 1) a written reflective commentary on these communication practices; 2) and a 5-minute oral presentation analysing a particular type of interaction from their workplace. Six lectures were delivered in the first semester, and the second semester had no contact time in order to allow the students to spend time on the placement. The six lectures consisted of advice from Careers staff on how to find and secure a placement, as well as a grounding in the theory and analysis of workplace discourse. Students were encouraged to use the Virtual Learning Environment to keep an individual blog, which was used as formative assessment. In addition to the module there were events, the most important one being a networking event, which helped the University to forge relationships with employers and placement providers. Many first-year

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[19] Gomez-Cash, O. (2016). 'Professional Contexts for Modern Languages': work experience and academic reflection in a multilingual context. In E. Corradini, K. Borthwick and A. Gallagher Brett (Eds), Employability for languages: a handbook (pp. 57-66). Dublin: Research-publishing.net. http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.cbg2016.464

[20] Lugea, J. (2016). Language in the Workplace: Combining Academic Study with Work Experience.

students at this event met placement providers and secured placements for the following academic year.

3.1.2 Building in part-time work experience into employability

There were also **cases of incorporating part-time work into an employability module**. A study by Shaw and Ogilvie (2010)[21] found that, rather than having a negative impact on learning, ad hoc casual part-time work could be harnessed as an effective source of work-based learning (WBL), if a reflective component was introduced. The research focused on the evaluation of a new undergraduate module at a post-1992 business school that was introduced in order to offer first year students who were engaged in part-time work to fund their studies an opportunity to use their experiences to "enhance their understanding of theoretical concepts in 'real life' situations and to gain academic credit" (p. 810). The 20-credit module was offered to HRM and general business studies students and aimed to critically explore organisational and management issues in a real context. The work could involve any paid work as an employee, or any self-employed or voluntary work, and did not require the formal involvement of the manager or employer. Overall, the module was felt to not only develop the usual capabilities associated with WBL, such as transferable skills, communication skills and self-management, but also higher-level skills such as enquiry, self-reflection, awareness, learning to learn and self-understanding.

3.1.3 Virtual or simulated work placements

There were also examples of **simulated or virtual placement activities**. One example was a case study of how a small computer games studio set up by university lecturers provided students with employability skills development and explored the boundaries between 'real' and 'simulated' learning.[22] The studio acted as an 'interface' between the university and industry. Supported and advised by the industry reps, the student team entered their game concept to a Microsoft 'Dream Build Play' competition in 2005, and won second place, out of 3,400 entries. This meant that the students had a development contract with Microsoft, as well as support from the Microsoft Xbox Live Arcade (XBLA) team in Seattle and a 'route to market' via the XBLA global distribution network, considerably improving the professionalism and opportunities for the in-house studio. The success of the studio also provided an income stream for the university. Other universities, such as the University of Derby, run their own businesses (e.g. spa,

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[21] Shaw, S. & Ogilvie, C. (2010). Making a Virtue Out of a Necessity: Part time work as a site for undergraduate work-based learning. Journal of European Industrial Training, 34(8/9), 805-821.
[22] Taylor, R., & De Luca, D. (2014). Theory to practice: Canalside Studio, a case study. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 4(1), 5-16.

restaurant) where students studying for vocational degrees can gain work experience.[23] Graduates felt that working in these businesses has helped them to contextualise their knowledge making it easier to transfer to the workplace.

A somewhat different example was a pilot project looking at the effectiveness of virtual placements of providing access to employability opportunities for first year students, to avoid overburdening employers and to ensure that students are exposed to employability initiatives early on.[24] Students in civil and environmental engineering undertook a virtual internship, coordinated through the help of engineering consultants and the course tutor, using a combination of a virtual learning environment and SecondLife. Students did rate their employability skills more highly after having completed the project, but there were several issues: technical difficulties, lack of 'real' interaction, other commitments – employment, or family, or being in a different time zone to the UK, an undermined sense of reality, and a large time commitment on the part of the tutor. The students did feel that it was a useful exercise for first year undergraduates. The paper recommended that with the right support and buy in, as well as with assessment, the scheme could be rolled out more widely, and could even be used by employers as a selection tool for offering 'real' placements.

Another case study focused on the University of Derby Buxton that set up "university learning laboratories" to provide experiential learning opportunities (Real World Learning) as part of a vocational degree programme.[25] These laboratories are based on a new type of stakeholder partnership with local employers and on a shared responsibility for vocational curricula in higher education. The faculty began to develop much closer links with local businesses to facilitate "real world learning" (RWL) as an alternative to old-fashioned work placements. One example is given in the text is: "directed work experience" in an industry or professional workplace, which involves a supervised work placement, or an internship, where the student is engaged in work and is located in a workplace typical of the profession for which their programme of study is preparing them. An RWL placement can include any educational work experience established by the faculty to integrate theoretical learning from a programme of study with its practical application. Key to the program success that the faculty's support must extend to organising the student placements, interacting with them, monitoring their work and progress, and assessing their performance throughout the period of the RWL activity. A suite of off-campus "learning laboratories" was established. The faculty made explicit the

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[23] Rawlinson, S., & Dewhurst, P. (2013). How can effective university-industry partnerships be developed? *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes,* 5(3), 255-267.
[24] Paul, P. (2015). Virtual placements to develop employability skills for civil and environmental engineering students. *Education Sciences*, 5(2), 47-64.
[25] Rawlinson, S., & Dewhurst, P. (2013). How can effective university-industry partnerships be developed? *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes,* 5(3), 255-267.

fact that they are intended to provide high quality learning opportunities for the students rather than cheap labour for local employers, and employers also offered other opportunities to students:

- A number of £1k bursaries to high performing students.
- Committing to interview the highest performing final year undergraduate students with a view to offering them career progression into their organisation.
- Sponsoring students engaging in international competitions and the provision of an annual award/prize.

3.1.4 Partnerships between HEIs and employers

Universities can also develop partnerships with employers to encourage collaboration and opportunities for students. For example, a case study reports on Independent Work Placements (IWP) offered to students on modern languages courses.[26] The case study reflected on how a partnership between employers, universities and students provided a successful learning experience, and argued that this experience guaranteed a smoother transition from university to the world of work through the development of academic and soft skills (resilience and problem solving ability). The argument is that students work in a foreign country, use a foreign language daily and 'survive' a new culture and society. During this time, students acquire a wide range of soft skills, which would have been otherwise developed in their first job. Students in IWPs were required to reflect on their practice and to work on an assessment that grants them credits for their programme of studies. They were assessed in the target language by a Project Essay (a systematic and coherent study of a cultural, historical, linguistic or literary theme) or a Portfolio (a logbook, and a final report to reflect on their personal development abroad).

A qualitative study[27] looked at criminology students experiences of engaging in a work placement at a prison while studying. The research found that completing a work placement in a prison gave criminology students a better appreciation of the issues around imprisonment and of the wider impact of a prison sentence on the families of prisoners and on prison staff. The author noted that the students gained much more from the experience than anticipated, with some regarding the experience as life changing. Not only did it transform their view of prisons, prison staff and prisoners, students considered themselves as better equipped to 'stand out' from other graduates in the graduate labour market. The experience also gave students insight into issues around imprisonment and in some cases inspired a passion to "counteract some of the

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[26] Biasini, R., Bohm, A., & Rabadán-Gómez, M. (2016). *Independent work placements as a gateway to the world of work.* Research-publishing.net, La Grange des Noyes, France.
[27] Ridley, L. (2014). No Substitute for the Real Thing: The impact of prison-based work experience on students' thinking about imprisonment. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 53(1), 16-30.

misinformation about imprisonment that shapes public opinion" (p. 26). The timing of the placement (before the final year) also helped inform their final year dissertations and to be able to relate their experiences to prior theoretical and academic knowledge as well as challenging populist conceptions in the media. The placements also had a wider impact on fellow students on the course as those taking part in placements were able to draw on their experiences in seminar discussions adding a level of insight and animation to seminars that would otherwise not have been there. In addition, as line managers and prison governors attend students' presentations as part of their final assessment, they reportedly often left with new ideas about improving and developing the placement scheme for the next cohort of students. Ridley argues that, in effect, the programme resembles a knowledge-exchange partnership rather than a traditional work-experience model.

Harris et al.'s (2013)[28] conceptual paper argues for introducing a knowledge-transfer partnership (KTP) approach to undergraduate education to encourage employer engagement for gains to the employer. The paper argues for better clarity around the concepts related to work-based learning, work-related learning, sandwich-based learning and work experience learning, and towards establishing a 'shared language'. It discusses that employers tend to use a 'competency-based language' and tend to comment on the lack of competencies (or 'soft skills') rather than hard skills, for which they thought training could be provided. Employers also need incentives to engage with WBL and related and to be aware of advantages to them of doing so. The advantages of a KTP approach for employers include improved innovation and competitiveness, as well as providing access to a talent pool and to particular experts that enable employers to solve their problems. It could also help overcome language barriers.

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[28] Harris, M., Chisholm, C., & Burns, G. (2013). Using the Knowledge Transfer Partnership approach in undergraduate education and practice-based training to encourage employer engagement. *Education+ Training,* 55(2), 174-190.

What we do: University of Birmingham, College of Arts and Law

The College of Arts and Law is home to arts and humanities, languages and law subjects. Over the last five years, the College has been developing 'Undergraduate placements modules' that enable students from different subjects to undertake a 70-hour work placement. These placements originated in the heritage module for History students, when six students undertook placements in the heritage sector. The Undergraduate placements module is now taken by over 100 students from a range of subjects and in a variety of organisations, including the cultural and arts sectors, charities and social enterprise.

The Placements Officer leads on sourcing exclusive placements, fostering communication and building relationships with employers through alumni networks, contacts with the voluntary community and other networking activities, which are advertised to students through an online placements 'bank'. The placements span a variety of roles, including marketing, PR, events, research and writing, as well as the more traditional museum-based jobs in archiving, cataloguing and related work. The majority of students secure placements through the Bank, but they can also apply for advertised internship opportunities, through the University or externally, or make speculative applications for placements through their own research or networks. Most placements take place in the Midlands, and the Placements Officer aims to develop links within the type of roles or sectors that serve student need. Owing to the nature of the employers providing the placements, most are unpaid, but cover travel expenses. The University also has a fund to support students on placements with travel costs.

Student feedback has been very positive. Students consider that these placements help them develop their skills, apply their knowledge, and gain a competitive edge and work readiness when applying for jobs. A history student who did a placement testified, *"This module was one I enjoyed the most, it was exciting to put skills gained from University into the workplace whilst also gaining experience to put on my CV. I was able to network and build relationships with new people, not to mention gaining a great reference that will help me with future employment."*

Employers are equally positive about the experience of hosting placement students, many reporting that their recruits can undertake projects that make a significant contribution but would not otherwise be fulfilled. One employer said: *"The Professional Skills Placement is something we welcome and look forward to every year, as it gives us an opportunity to focus on areas of the business that we don't always get adequate time to exploit as a small charity."*

"It's just brilliant working with the students from UoB, they've been so adaptable, so happy to understand the way we work and what's different about our organisation.

> *They've been fantastic at getting to know the wider team, really flexible, quick thinking, fun to be around, challenging and imaginative."*
>
> There are some challenges around operating such a scheme and these include: developing and maintaining ongoing relationships with placement-providing organisations; ensuring that the module assessment (presentation and reflective essay) fit with the student and staff timetable and that appropriate support is made available; and, for students who choose to do international placements, e.g. in their home countries, that an appropriate risk assessment is carried out.
>
> For more information, please see
> https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/colleges/artslaw/student-experience/careers/undergraduate-placements-module.aspx

3.2 What barriers or challenges do HEIs face to improving the employability of their students/graduates?

The majority of the literature that we reviewed suggested that effective support for students on placements as well as room for students to reflect on their learning were crucial for improving the success of work placements.

Many of the papers we reviewed highlighted the importance of integrating placements within courses and providing students with the space to reflect on their experiences. Sometimes, such reflection was part of an assessed component of the course, and at other times it was an optional – the literature suggests that it may be better if the reflection was assessed. If designed and delivered well, even part-time work undertaken by students for the money can provide intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, if a reflective component was introduced .[29] Reflection provides an opportunity to connect theory and practice and develop deep learning even for shorter-term placements.[30] In the case of legal education, WIL is intended to prepare students for the workplace – "to produce 'work-ready' graduates" (p. 178), and reflexive activities are highlighted as one of the

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[29] Shaw, S. & Ogilvie, C. (2010). Making a Virtue Out of a Necessity: Part time work as a site for undergraduate work-based learning. Journal of European Industrial Training, 34(8/9), 805-821.
[30] Tennant, S., Murray, M., Gilmour, B., & Brown, L. (2018). Industrial work placement in higher education: A study of civil engineering student engagement. *Industry and Higher Education, 32*(2), 108-118; Thompson, D. W. (2017). How valuable is "short project" placement experience to higher education students? *Journal of further and Higher Education*, 41(3), 413-424; Deeley, S.J. (2014). Summative co-assessment: A deep learning approach to enhancing employability skills and attributes. *Active learning in higher education*, 15(1), 39-51.

main tools of getting students to understand their experiences, that can be 'transformative'.[31]

A paper by Turner (2014)[32] explored how joint learning materials could be developed between HEIs and employers. In the UK, policies such as the Children's Plan 2008 -2020 through to Promoting the Emotional Health of Children and Young People (2010) identify that professionals such as teachers, youth workers, social workers and youth offending specialists, do not always have the underpinning knowledge to adequately support children and young people's emotional well-being. Further that these professionals fail to recognise when a child or young person may need additional help. These findings suggest that gaining knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people is a key requirement for those working in this field. This paper is an evaluation of an initiative that saw a partnership of developing joint learning materials from expert emotional well-being organisations being delivered as part of an undergraduate award at a traditional Higher Educational (HE) Institution. The evaluation showed that the introduction of interactive, e-learning materials, supplemented with role play and scenario-based learning and running concurrently alongside work experiences enabled students to acquire and apply knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people to real situations, and thus bridged the 'practice - theory gap'.

Shaw and Ogilvie (2010)[33] used data from a group tutorial exercise about the expectations of 85 students taking part at the beginning of the course (focus group data), a reflective report at the end of the term (n=62) and 14 in-depth interviews. By and large, students appreciated the *flexibility* the module offered, with no formal classroom attendance required and materials accessed online, students could manage their college work around their jobs, and students reported gaining an enhanced understanding of the workplace and better job satisfaction that came from showing greater interest in their jobs – something that was often reciprocated by employers. Students also appreciated the opportunity to *'put theory into practice'*, which helped consolidate academic learning and the blended learning approach was felt to foster independence and confidence. However, this was not always the case. Some students missed the direct classroom contact and students working in smaller organisations found it harder to research and explore concepts that tend to apply to larger, more complex, organisations.

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[31] Babacan, A., & Babacan, H. (2015). A transformative approach to work integrated learning in legal education. *Education & Training*, 57(2), 170-183. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ET-07-2013-0098

[32] Turner, W. (2014). Enabling undergraduates to put into practice learning to support emotional well-being for children and young people. International Journal of Emotional Education, 6(1), 76-94.

[33] Shaw, S. & Ogilvie, C. (2010). Making a Virtue Out of a Necessity: Part time work as a site for undergraduate work-based learning. Journal of European Industrial Training, 34(8/9), 805-821.

It could be the case that the effect of even shorter-term placements is improved by ensuring that there is a **well-integrated reflexive component to the placement module**.[34] One study collected data on students' project work experience in one post-1993 institution in England through an on-line survey that contained multiple-choice questions, Likert scale responses and questions that encouraged open-ended responses in the students' own words, thus building in a strong qualitative dimension. The survey was conducted at the end of students' placements, following the submission of their assignment. The analysis found that *building confidence* was a recurring theme throughout and became interwoven with other themes such as acquiring experience and knowledge, building professional relationships and understanding. *Putting theory into practice* helped students apply aspects of their theoretical studies in ways that brought important topics to life, such as inclusion. Structuring these processes with action plans, objectives and learning diaries helped provide direction and there was a sense that students became active partners in the process. Whilst somewhat subjective, throughout the data one could identify students' growing realisation of their own abilities, resulting in increased levels of confidence; as one student stated, 'I learned so much about myself as a person'. There were many advantages to supporting experiential learning delivered through a blended approach that included formative exercises, on-line activities and learning diaries; despite this, however, it was clear that many students still preferred a significant amount of contact through the more traditional delivery of lectures and seminars. Within the context of a 'short project' placement, students regarded it as highly beneficial if there is a significant element of face-to-face contact with academic staff, formalised as part of a teaching programme .[35] Writing reflective diaries and an action plan that students needed to complete were particularly valued elements of the short placement. The paper suggested that HEIs can better support students to benefit from their work placements by (1) offering more lectures and formulating a set of objectives through the action plan or (2) encouraging writing reflective diaries.

Similarly, Tennant et al. (2018) explored the educational added value of short-term industrial placement undertaken by civil engineering students. A survey was conducted on four campuses in Scotland in 2015 (n= 489). The study captures workplace experience of university students enrolled on civil engineering programmes, excluding first-year students. Students were asked to rate, using a Likert scale (1–5), the extent to which the work placement experience had improved their knowledge and appreciation of a range of transferable skills. They were also asked a number of questions that connected university life with placement experience and were asked to rate these on a

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[34] Thompson, D. W. (2017). How valuable is "short project" placement experience to higher education students? *Journal of further and Higher Education,* 41(3), 413-424. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1117601
[35] Pegg, A., J. Waldock, S. Hendy-Isaac, and R. Lawton. 2012. *Pedagogy for Employability*. York: Higher Education Academy, in: Thompson (2017).

Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Students were also invited to write a brief testimony reflecting on their civil engineering placement experience. Of the surveyed students, just over a third (36%) recorded a civil engineering industrial placement during the stipulated period, and around half (48%) had experienced employment in a non-civil engineering capacity. The share of students securing civil engineering work placements increased as students progressed from the second year to the fifth year. Students' 'testimonies' (free text survey responses) revealed that the majority of students found the placement useful and meaningful. Students made explicit connections between taught theories and industrial practice and were enthusiastic – some appeared to have been emboldened by the experience. Furthermore, students refined their academic cognition of largely abstract concepts as applied in practice (situated cognition) and identified gaps (e.g. a student noted that the work placement had highlighted construction issues which were not highlighted on their course. Ideas for improvement frequently mentioned included induction (better introduction at the beginning), variety (more varied experience in different departments; more varied work within the company), length of the placement period (could have been longer) and university engagement (better employer–university ties). Many students wanted a more formalized and structured placement. Introducing reflective learning strategies before, during and after industrial placement would resonate with the 'grounded' realities of everyday civil engineering practice. HEIs could do more to enhance the current provision through better preparing and supporting students before placement, in placement and on return to university.

Curtis (2012)[36] reports on the lessons learned from a project aimed at 'embedding an experiential element to the curriculum' of politics and international relations undergraduate programmes at universities. Drawing on the experiences of those involved in organising the programme and feedback and reflective accounts of students taking part, Curtis argues that short, research-based placements could not only enhance learning (the main objective) but could also result in personal development and improved employability. The researchers involved in the project negotiated short placements with placement providers (usually MPs or MEPs) that were focused on a specific research project, rather than general work tasks. The placements formed an assessed part of one of two second year politics and international relations modules. Placements were between five to 16 days in duration (e.g. five consecutive days or eight two-day periods) were designed not to interfere with other modules, or other part-time work students might be doing, so as not to preclude the participation of those with wider commitments.

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[36] Curtis, S. (2012). Politics Placements and Employability: A new approach. *European Political Science,* 11(2), 153-163.

Research by Ashton (2015)[37] focused on how students articulated their relevant employment experiences to communicate their skills to employers in the way that employers are looking for. There is substantial critique of employers' understandings of and demands for 'appropriate skills' and there have been some findings of associations of skills with social advantage. However, accompanying work placements with a reflexive component may help develop students' ability to develop the necessary narratives about themselves to facilitate their employability. Students were encouraged to be reflexive via using short films, in contrast to more frequently used media such as essays.

A companion piece focused on work placements in the creative industries, using student-made reflective films.[38] As part of Creative Contexts, 18 student contributions were made, 17 as part of a placement module on a media production degree and one in a partner FE college. The reflective films focussed on different aspects of work placements: (1) placement stages, which provide guidance to other students interested in going on placements; (2) overcoming nerves, and dealing with anxiety and exploring challenges arising during the placement; (3) the specific placement structure and developing/adopting meaningful roles to participate in the placement – e.g. being resourceful, using initiative; (4) industry practices – focussing on critical accounts of 'work placement enculturation', tackling issues such as unpaid work or learning to adopt the practices of the organisation (not sure about that last one though). As other literature tends to point out that the discourse about student employability (in the creative sector and beyond) is dominated by the focus on individual attributes, the student reflective accounts, with the possible exception of those coded under theme 4 (industry practices) are also focussed on the individual. Part of this may be to do with how the reflective account exercise was set, it may incite students to focus on individual attributes partly by design. However, it is also possible that while constructing narratives of employability, students are constructing their employable self in these same terms. Being more critical of wider structures could introduce a tension into their students' employability accounts, especially if the students' reflexive films are made publicly available.

However, reflection is not always a panacea to ensuring a good quality work placement. Research by [39] suggest that placements do not necessarily lead to students' cognitive development and that placement students may also be displaying 'reflective bracketing' based on Lowry's (2003) idea of placement students' 'ethical bracketing'. The findings of

[37] Ashton, D. (2015). Creative contexts: Reflecting on work placements in the creative industries. *Journal of further and Higher Education,* 39(1), 127-146. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.831038
[38] Ashton, D. (2016). Creative contexts: Work placement subjectivities for the creative industries. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(2), 268-287. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2014.916602
[39] Adelopo, I., Asante, J., Dart, E., & Rufai, I. (2017). Learning groups: The effects of group diversity on the quality of group reflection. *Accounting Education*, 26(5-6), 553-575. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2017.1327360

the study confirm the findings of Lucas and Tan (2014, p. 796) that 'placement students were not exposed to situations where they had to make significant independent decisions, resolve conflicting views or exercise significant individual judgement over a sustained period.' It is then perhaps not surprising that there were not any clear benefits of placement experience on the quality of group reflection.

Additionally, there are sometimes barriers to carrying out reflective practice when on work placements. For example, a study [40] investigated the barriers to developing reflective practice for students on a vocational outdoor leadership degree regarding their summer work placements. The study was conducted with 15 students on an outdoor leadership course who had placements lasting 5-12 weeks in the summer, using reflective journals during their placements. One of the main obstacles to developing reflective practice was the available time and the low status given to the practice by the employers. When faced with a limited amount of time, students considered that it was more important for them to develop 'skills' that would make them more employable (e.g. kayaking) rather than reflective practice. Even if they did manage to write such a journal, they often did not have the time to re-read what they wrote until after the -placement period finished. Some also did not remember all that they had done when they came to write in their journals. Some students observed the pressures on their time and their being used as a source of 'cheap labour' during the placement. Students' reflections also considered that it was difficult for them to use interpersonal skills and that these developed through their interactions with clients – it would be difficult to develop such skills in an academic context. There was also a misunderstanding among some students that thinking critically and problematising experiences was the same as focussing on their own failings and problems they encountered. This could be better explained to students at the start of their reflective practice activity. Furthermore, on teaching methods, some students reflected that while group work was encouraged at university, the reflective writing was an individual activity, so perhaps more could be done to integrate different learning styles. Some found the reflective practice to be repetitive and 'boring'.

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[40] Hickman, M. & Collins, D. (2014). Terrain traps: barriers to effective reflective practice in undergraduate vocational outdoor leadership students. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 32(3), 218-232. DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2014.940550

4 Work placements and experience available to students

What types of work placement/work experience opportunities are available to students in the UK, and how do they vary across (and within) institutions, subject choice and regions? What are the main challenges that students face in organising / taking up placements/ work experience, and how do these differ by type of student?

4.1 Types of work placement/work experience opportunities are available to students in the UK

Although it is not possible to get an overview of the current picture of what kinds of activities students have done, Futuretrack Stage 4 data from 2011-12 shows the distribution of work-related activities that 2009 and 2010 graduates undertook as students (Figure 1, Purcell et al., 2013).

Figure 1: Students' reasons for undertaking work experience during their course
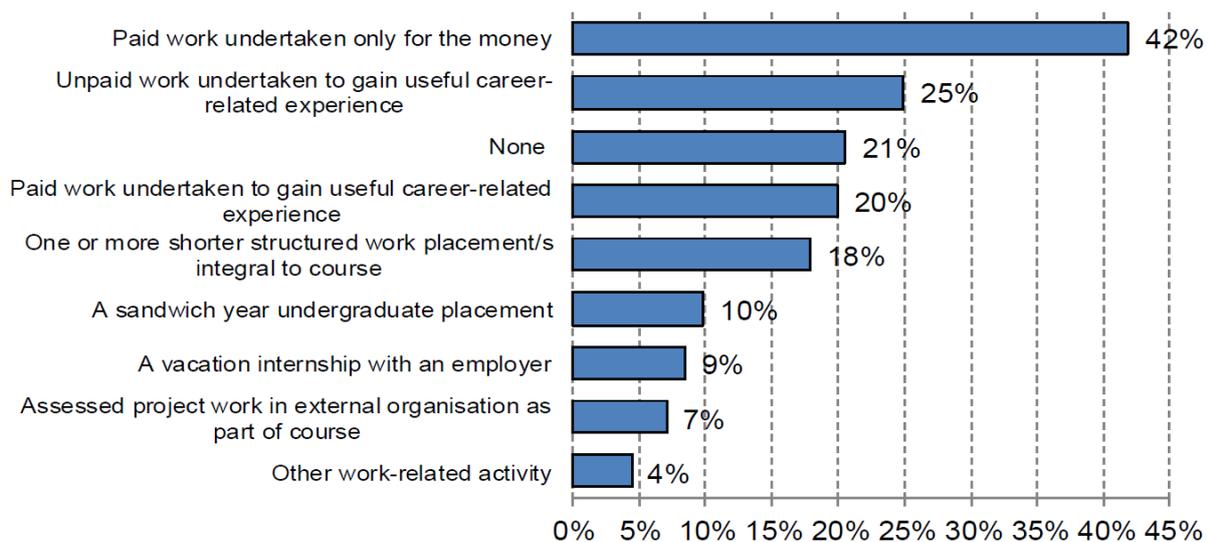
Source: Futuretrack Stage 4, all UK domiciled graduates (weighted) who have an undergraduate degree and are no longer in full time study only, Purcell et al., (2013, p. 97, Figure 7.1). Respondents were able to select multiple options, so the percentages add up to more than 100%.

A REED poll of 700 graduates [41] showed that 43% of respondents had the opportunity to do work experience as part of their undergraduate education, and around 95% thought it was beneficial to their education, but no further details were reported. It is also unclear how the poll was conducted.

According to data from the Student Employability Index 2014, around 47% of students had undertaken work experience since starting university (but it is not clear how work experience was defined.[42] The data came from around 4,000 students at 20 HEIs in England. The findings further suggested that nine out of ten students considered that placements, work experience and internships would be most helpful for developing their employability, however there was also a large disparity across different subjects. For example, almost two thirds (60%) of graduates on veterinary science courses completed some work experience and internships, while less than a fifth (20%) of students studying history and philosophy did any work experience. Moreover, courses in social science, creative arts and design, and biological science had the highest proportion of students saying that courses lacked industry content. Shury et al. (2017)[43], similarly found that around half of graduates did work experience for career-related reasons (paid or unpaid), while around 30% did a mandatory work placement, and around 25% participated in each an internship and in a non-mandatory placement.

Recent HESA data show that the proportion of students enrolled on sandwich placements as a proportion of total enrolments in first degrees only may be increasing in non-science subject areas especially. Table 3 shows that the proportion of students enrolled on sandwich placements as a proportion of total enrolments was around 10.1% in 2014/15 and 11.1% in 2017/18. While the proportion of students enrolled on sandwich placements in science-based courses remained at around 11.5%, those on non-science-based courses increased from 8.9% to 10.6% over the period.

Looking at the distribution of students on sandwich courses as a proportion of enrolments by subject area in 2017/18, it can be seen that the highest incidence was in agriculture and related subjects and the lowest in education. However, this does not mean that there were few work placements taking place in education, rather, that there were few placements specifically defined as 'sandwich' in education related courses. This is most

[41] PR Newswire Europe. (2011). Work experience invaluable to university degree say 72 percent of graduates. (2011, Oct 24). PR Newswire Europe Including UK Disclose Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/docview/900149702?accountid=14888

[42] Work experience: It's a good idea. (2014). Times Higher Education, (2146). Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/docview/2169287799?accountid=14888

[43] Shury, J., Vivian, D., Turner, C., & Downing, C. (2017). Planning for success: graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes. Department for Business. *Innovation and Skills*.

likely because the work placements in education (and in medicine and related subjects) are 'practice placements' (see Section 2.1 Key terms).

Table 3: Students enrolled on undergraduate sandwich courses as a proportion of all first degree enrolments, by subject area

Subject area	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
(2) Subjects allied to medicine	3.3%	4.3%	4.3%	3.0%
(3) Biological sciences	7.5%	8.0%	8.4%	8.3%
(4) Veterinary science	1.0%	3.3%	0.0%	23.7%
(5) Agriculture & related subjects	31.9%	32.3%	32.3%	31.0%
(6) Physical sciences	9.3%	9.2%	9.1%	9.7%
(7) Mathematical sciences	9.8%	9.5%	9.1%	9.1%
(8) Computer science	28.0%	28.2%	26.2%	25.4%
(9) Engineering & technology	21.7%	22.1%	21.6%	21.8%
(A) Architecture, building & planning	18.7%	17.3%	18.2%	18.2%
Total science subject areas	**11.4%**	**11.8%**	**11.7%**	**11.6%**
(B) Social studies	5.2%	5.8%	6.6%	7.5%
(C) Law	3.5%	3.6%	5.0%	5.8%
(D) Business & administrative studies	22.4%	22.5%	23.1%	23.0%
(E) Mass communications & documentation	4.6%	4.7%	5.0%	5.6%
(F) Languages	6.5%	6.4%	6.8%	8.1%
(G) Historical & philosophical studies	1.0%	1.3%	1.7%	2.1%
(H) Creative arts & design	6.6%	6.9%	7.2%	8.2%
(I) Education	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
(J) Combined	2.2%	2.3%	2.6%	3.8%
Total non-science subject areas	**8.9%**	**9.2%**	**9.9%**	**10.6%**
Total %	**10.1%**	**10.4%**	**10.7%**	**11.1%**
Total student sandwich enrolments (base, N)	153,535	162,895	171,115	179,425
Total student enrolments (base, N)	1,524,235	1,563,900	1,597,825	1,621,725

Source: Authors' calculations based on HESA Table 9 (student enrolments) and Table 12 (sandwich student enrolments). Note: The calculation is the number of undergraduate sandwich student enrolments by subject as a percentage of HE undergraduate student enrolments by subject area, first degree only). HESA open data is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence. The total for Total student enrolments includes (1) Subjects allied to medicine, but the total for Total student sandwich enrolments does not. The implications of this are that we assume that no sandwich placements are carried out in the Subjects allied to medicine group of courses.

Figure 2: First-degree undergraduate sandwich student enrolments as a proportion of total enrolments by subject area, 2017/18
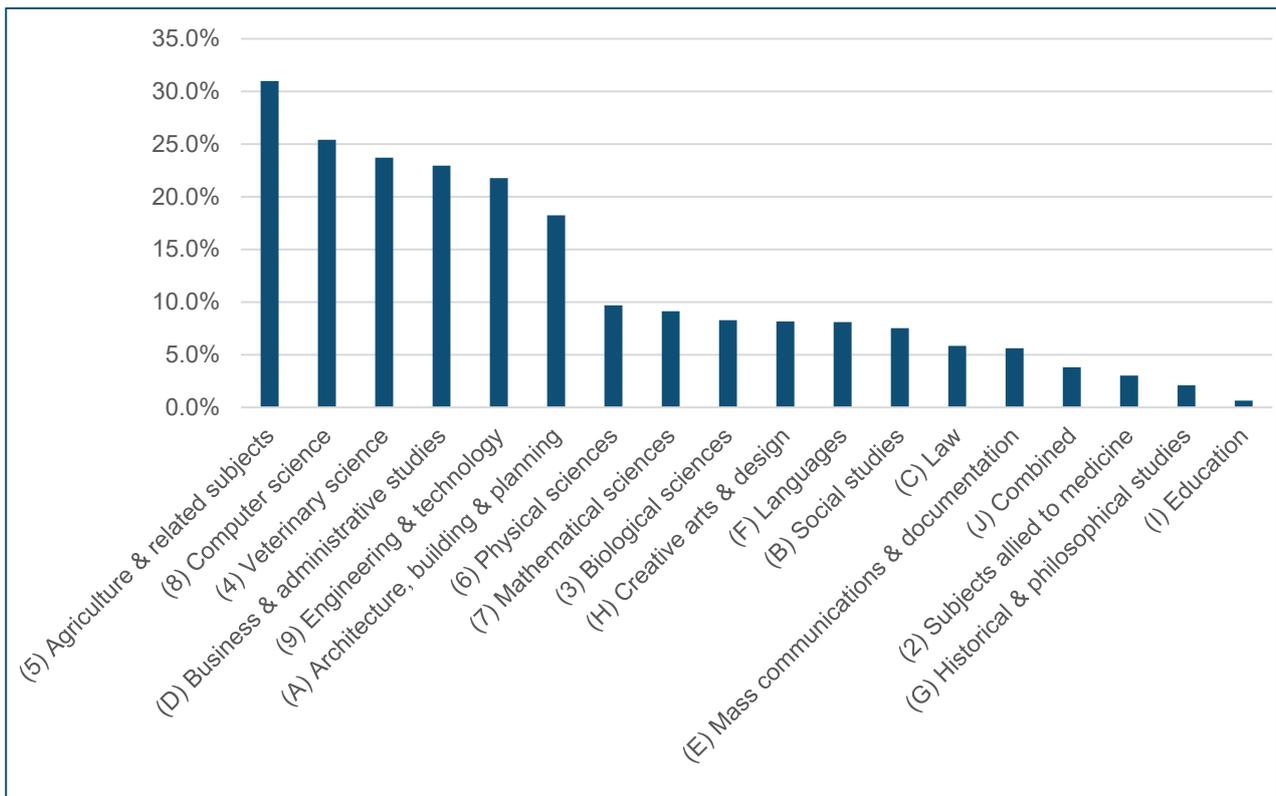
Source: HESA Table 12 (sandwich student enrolments) and Table 9 (student enrolments), 2017/18, first degree only. Base (N) = 179,425; Medicine and related subjects subject area not included.

4.2 Why do students participate in work experience or placements?

In the literature, we found that the decision to participate in work placements or work experience was influenced by different themes. These themes included students' initial abilities, developing their employability, developing language skills and intercultural awareness and participating in a particular route to professional practice. Evidence relating to these themes is discussed below.

4.2.1 Psychological attributes

From a psychological perspective, reasons for undertaking work placements may be related to having goal-orientated or career-orientated psychological attributes. For example, a survey of 700 (female-dominated) undergraduate students in the UK[44] looked

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[44] Purdie, F., Ward, L., McAdie, T., King, N., & Drysdale, M. (2013). Are work-integrated learning (WIL) students better equipped psychologically for work post-graduation than their non-work-integrated learning

into students' psychological attributes (Trait Hope Scale; Procrastination Assessment Scale; Self-Description Questionnaire III; College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale; and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire). Around one third of respondents did at least one placement. However, it is not clear how this compares to the student population on average. Those who participated in WIL tended to report having higher hopes and confidence in attaining their goals than those who did not. However, the findings are not that reliable, as they result from a cross sectional survey based on self-selection, and moreover, causality cannot be established. Similarly, according to a small survey(N=82),[45] students tended to say that they decided to do a paid work placement to help with job prospects or for career clarity ideas. Another studyalso highlighted that graduates who had an 'exact career plan, or a good idea of one, before university' were more likely to gain career related experience through unpaid work (2017, p. 88)[46].

4.2.2 Language skills and intercultural awareness

Fowlie and Forder (2018)[47] compared the views of students from England and Germany about undertaking international placements and how these might refer to student perceptions of employability. The authors designed an online survey, completed by 32 students (21 Brighton/11 Goethe). Students were asked to rank reasons for why they might and might not undertake an overseas placement. For reasons not to undertake an overseas placement, the top-ranked reason was that students thought that an overseas placement was not necessary. For reasons to do such a placement, students from the UK mentioned developing language skills and intercultural awareness, while the German students wanted to develop international business knowledge. The article also discusses the difference between UK and German students' definitions of employability and pointed out that the German students' definitions tended to be more mobile and to accept more personal responsibility for their employability (but see Deakin, 2014). There was also some evidence that the low profile of the Bologna Process in the UK, careers service resources and other institutions/institutional attitudes may have been acting to depress UK students' orientations to international mobility. While the findings are interesting, and the point that international work experience is simultaneously lacking from UK employability frameworks while being mentioned as desirable by firms is well-made,

peers? Some initial findings from a UK university. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 14(2), 117-125.

[45] Smith, S., Smith, C., & Caddell, M. (2015). Can pay, should pay? Exploring employer and student perceptions of paid and unpaid placements. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 16(2), 149-164. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1469787415574049

[46] Shury, J., Vivian, D., Turner, C., & Downing, C. (2017). Planning for success: graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes. Department for Business. Innovation and Skills.

[47] Fowlie, J., & Forder, C. (2018). Employability, work placements, and outward mobility: Views from England and Germany. *Higher Education, Skills and Work - Based Learning*, 8(2), 151-163. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-10-2017-0084

there is not much discussion about how international placements could fit into employability. UK students tend to view them more as a way of developing their language skills rather than their job prospects, but it was not clear why that might be the case.

López-Moreno (2017)[48] discussed the 'global graduate' identity and the idea of 'branding' oneself as a 'global graduate'. In particular, this paper looks at how students who are internationally mobile and who undertake work placements abroad can use their experience to their advantage to meet the needs of employers who are looking for 'qualified, multilingual, globally-minded international graduates' (p. 22). Focusing on graduates from languages courses, the paper argues that linguists should present themselves as 'global graduates', emphasise their 'global mindset' and their 'global skillset' (p. 26). However, there is no data about graduates' labour market outcomes to support these claims.

4.2.3 Employability

Mahmood et al. (2014)[49] point out that most employability research tends to overlook students/graduates own understanding of what employability means. The article then focuses on a sample of 50 undergraduate students doing applied psychology who spent their 3rd year doing a work placement. It is not clear whether the placement is compulsory or whether it is paid. The set of respondents was female-dominated (42 women), including post-placement student and pre-placement students (so it's not a direct before and after comparison). Most respondents highlighted that they chose the applied degree course to gain experience and improve chances of gaining a job; developing generic skills and workplace-specific skills (including leadership development, administrative responsibilities, as well as role-specific skills and tasks). Students felt that doing a placement for a year introduced an interruption into their social relations with friends etc. In the 3rd year. However, apart from a minority of students, students did not tend to consider that doing a placement would help improve their attainment. Doing a placement also helped students express their research experience in a more concrete way. There is a reference to another study suggesting that employers were not happy with how psychology graduates marketed their skills (Hugh-Jones, 2008 in: Mahmood et al.,

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[48] López-Moreno, C. (2017). *The year abroad: Understanding the employability skills of the global graduate.* Research-publishing.net, La Grange des Noyes, 25110 Voillans, France. Retrieved from Social Science Premium Collection Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/docview/1913348985?accountid=14888

[49] Mahmood, L., Slabu, L., de Moura, G. R., & Hopthrow, T. (2014). Employability in the first degree: The role of work placements on students' perceptions of graduate employability. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 20(2), 126-136.

2014).[50] The authors suggest using personal development planning to allow students to reflect on their work placement could be useful.

The importance of developing one's employability has also shown through in participation in exchange programs in order to undertake placements, such as the Erasmus work placement scheme. While participants often highlight the development of intercultural understanding as a motivational factor, a study by Deakin (2014)[51] argued that the main reason that UK students participate in Erasmus disproportionately compared to students from other countries is for employability-related reasons, operating in the 'neoliberal agenda' in UK HE. The paper also highlighted that there are different drivers operating for people who move abroad to do a work placement and for those who move to study.

Deakin (2014) took as a starting point the position the overrepresentation of UK students in the Erasmus work placement programme since the programme was introduced to the Erasmus programme of study exchange in 2007. One of the issues that the paper discusses is the extent to which experience gained in work placement activities abroad can be transferred to the UK. Student work placements play a key role in bridging academia and industry.The project used a mixed-methods research approach including secondary statistics, and qualitative interviews and reports from 40 students on their work abroad Erasmus placement. The study found that placement students highlighted employability as a driver (possibly more so for men than for women), in contrast to other research that found that students wanted to go abroad to gain access to the labour market in their chosen country. Other drivers towards working abroad were failures to get placement opportunities in the UK (including for recession-related reasons), and to improve language skills through total immersion (although for some students, languages were a barrier). Some students who wanted to develop their language skills were motivated to do so for employability related reasons (e.g. to make their CV stand out). The financial aspect (Erasmus fee waiver and the opportunity to earn money) were other drivers, although it could also be the case that students would earn money working in the UK.

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[50] Hugh-Jones, S. (2008). The graduate – are we giving employers what they want? The Psychologist, 21(12), 1050–1051 in: Mahmood, L., Slabu, L., de Moura, G. R., & Hopthrow, T. (2014). Employability in the first degree: The role of work placements on students' perceptions of graduate employability. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 20(2), 126-136.

[51] Deakin, H. (2014). The drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students, Children's Geographies. 12(1), 25-39, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2013.851063

4.2.4 Route to professional practice

Hasson et al. (2013)[52] explored nursing students' work experience. The paper highlighted that it is generally well-established that a significant proportion of nursing students work in nursing-related jobs while studying for their degree. It then considered the **perceived effects of these previous work experiences on subsequent placements and on the transitions to working as a nurse**. The interview and focus group data showed that while students who had worked as healthcare assistants felt more confident when participating in subsequent placements, some of them also considered that clinical staff would assume that they could work with less supervision, and through this, be exposed to fewer learning opportunities. Furthermore, there was some potential for role confusion, wherein participation in clinical placements was affected by students' previous work experience of working as a healthcare advisor.

The blurring of boundaries and professionalisation aspects were also visible in a news article in trade magazine reporting on the introduction of a new policy among Welsh HEIs to measure/monitor caring and ability to show compassion in their work placements[53]. Starting in 2010, all applicants to nursing degrees will be asked to provide a statement of character from a care work employer, community figure or teacher attesting to their ability to be caring and show compassion. Once studying and working in a work placement, their supervisor will be asked at regular points to rate students on a scale of 1-7 on a range of standards, including: "Is always polite", "Happy to accept constructive criticism" and "Shows a caring disposition towards others". The measure is a response to criticisms that nurses sometimes do not show a high level of compassion.

Crabtree et al. (2014)[54] explored **how students encountered new challenges in a new social work setting, and how this would contribute to their understanding of UK social work norms**. The students recruited for the study were specifically selected by the researchers on the basis of their mental and physical resilience and good academic performance. The article also pointed out that some non-British students encountered visa problems and could not undertake their placement. Students stated that their motivation to participate was to develop a richer, more comparative understanding of social work-related issues in relation to children. The eight students whose experience was evaluated in this article raised issues that were both similar and different to children's social work in the UK – e.g. the use of corporal punishment, levels of poverty

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[52] Hasson, F., McKenna, H. P., & Keeney, S. (2013). A qualitative study exploring the impact of student nurses working part time as a health care assistant. *Nurse education today*, 33(8), 873-879.
[53] Santry, C. (2010, April 20). First students tested on compassion. *Nursing Times*. April 2010. Accessed on 18th July 2019 from https://www.nursingtimes.net/first-students-tested-on-compassion/5013629.article
[54] Crabtree, S. A., Parker, J., Azman, A., & Mas'ud, F. (2014). A sociological examination of international placement learning by British social work students in children's services in Malaysia. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 5(1), 133-154.

and resources, different cultural values – which led to the students questioning, though usually falling back on, their own values and facing ethical dilemmas. The conclusions suggest that further preparation should be offered to students undertaking international placements.

Other work on social work courses found that increasingly, social work students participate in 'non-traditional' social work placements, where they are not working in a typical social work organisation and are not interacting with other social workers [55]. Such placements also provide learning opportunities. Students, however, may view that such placements do not offer them the same advantages as more traditional social work placements. Using a mixed-methods research approach (surveys, as well as focus groups and telephone interviews with the young people that the students were working with, students, project leaders, and HEI placement staff), the research investigated **how the non-traditional placement initiative benefits social work students** and how it could be improved. The findings suggest that the role of the practice educator is key, that students tended to enhance young people's experiences of the programme, and that students valued building relationships with the young people. However, there were some organisational issues for the HEIs and placement organisations. Not all students were able to start as the project started, missing out on residential activities, however, it was not clear as to why the start dates were delayed. There may be issues in coordinating HEI placement periods with the placement organisation dates. Furthermore, not all students received the necessary induction material and that training (MH and FA) was not always undertaken (if at all) at the best time. Project leaders felt time pressures and a lack of support from partner HEIs. In general, the relationship between the HEI and the placement organisation is key. A limitation of the study is, however, that it does not compare outcomes of traditional (statutory) and non-traditional social work placements for students, and as such, claims about this are limited.

Professional work experience can help students **become professionals in their transition to employment**. Using longitudinal semi-structured interviews with nine psychology students from a UK university (18 interviews) from a phenomenological perspective, research by Reddy and Shaw (2019)[56] explored the role of work experience in the process of becoming a professional, and found that placements were 'transformative'. In the interviews, students mentioned improved confidence, personal development, and competence. However, few connections were mentioned between what participants did on their course and what they did at the work placement.

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[55] McLaughlin, H., Scholar, H., McCaughan, S., & Coleman, A. (2015). Are non-traditional social work placements second-best learning opportunities for social work qualifying students? *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(5), 1469. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu021

[56] Reddy, P., & Shaw, R. (2019). Becoming a professional. *Education & Training*, 61(2), 272-288. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ET-10-2018-0210

Supervision was again highlighted as being important, similar to other findings in the literature. Students also mentioned that the placements made them more open about career options, helped them develop their skills, and that they were viewed as 'professionals' rather than students by members of staff. Some students were on unpaid placements, however, but this theme was not picked up in the literature. An interesting, subject-specific point is that few psychology students become professional psychologists – there are more (unpaid) clinical psychology placements available than jobs, which can lead to misaligned expectations when students graduate and start looking for work.

Similarly, a 2012 study[57] suggested that professionalism is highly influenced by work experience. The research was based on cases of three UK schools of pharmacy and data was collected by analysing curricula, observing classes, interviews with staff and focus groups with students. The study emphasised the importance of practice-based learning in students' learning of 'professionalism.' **The attitudinal and behavioural attributes that students and teachers identified as related to 'professionalism' were predominantly based on students' work experience**, with role models identified as particularly influential. These approaches appeared valuable within the constraints of an otherwise artificial university environment. It was mentioned that work placements are difficult to organise but students found them very beneficial. Teacher practitioners were also important role models for students.

4.3 Challenges students face in organising or taking up work placements/work experience

Among some of the challenges we found were wider issues of socioeconomic disadvantage and the broader economic context, as well as issues relating to disability, and ethnicity and nationality reasons. We also came across examples of why students decided to opt out of placements.

4.3.1 Social disadvantage

A major challenge for working-class students remains the unequal access to economic, social and cultural capital that consequently affects their chances of participating in outcome-boosting activities, such as internships and extra-curricular activities[58] that have become increasingly valued currency in the transition to work as the value of a degree credential is diminished.

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[57] Schafheutle, E. I., Hassell, K., Ashcroft, D. M., Hall, J., & Harrison, S. (2012). How do pharmacy students learn professionalism?. *International Journal of Pharmacy Practice*, 20(2), 118-128.
[58] Bathmaker, A.; Ingram, N. and Waller, R. (2013) Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: recognising and playing the game, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (5-6), 723-734

The importance given to the development of competences through participation in extra-curricular activities and internships can also discriminate against disadvantaged students. Bathmaker et al. (2013) found that working-class students were aware of their differential access to capitals compared to their middle-class peers and the differential opportunities that this offered in terms of access to extra-curricular activities and internships, but were unable to do much to change this, which was sometimes a source of frustration. Unpaid placements were a particular problem.

Though not an explicit theme, several papers highlighted the issue of the fee regime and its potential impact on students' uptake of work placements. Students dislike having to pay tuition fees while undertaking a work placement[59]. There was some conjecture that the different tuition fee arrangements under the Erasmus work abroad scheme made it more financially lucrative to students than finding a placement in the UK.

4.3.2 Economic context

The recession may have made it more difficult for students and graduates to undertake work placements. Knowledge of employment outcomes may be affecting students' subject choice, which suggests that information about the employment of graduates and graduate-level jobs is reaching applicants[60]. However, whilst information is available, there is evidence that prospective students may not look for it. Ensuring that information is available and readily interpreted remains a challenge.

Parker's (2012)[61] article also picks up the impact of the recession, and focusses on graduates from planning courses, but is quite general. It discusses that universities are undertaking different kinds of theoretically employability-enhancing initiatives, such as mentoring schemes, career support workshops and work experience opportunities, and that more could be done. It highlights that planning organisations value generic skills (e.g communication) soft skills (e.g. negotiation), problem-solving and analytical skills, value adaptable graduates, and prefer those who had some work experience (evidence in this article to support these claims is minimal).

Financial issues were also reported by Balta et al. (2012),[62] who looked at students' reasons behind their choice to enrol on a placement or non-placement course. The

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[59] Bullock, K., Hejmadi, M., & Lock, G. (2012). Work placements for bioscience undergraduates: are they really necessary? *Journal of Biological Education,* 46(1), 4-11.
[60] UUK and HEFCE. (2010). *Changes in student choices and graduate employment*. London: Universities UK.
[61] Parker, G. (2012, Oct 05). Developing planning graduates' employability in the downturn. *Planning*, 24.
[62] Balta, M. E., Coughlan, J-L & Hobson, P. (2012). Motivations and Barriers in Undergraduate Students' Decisions to Enrol in Placement Courses in the UK. *Journal of International Education Research*, 8(4), 399-413.

research found that reasons for choosing to do a four-year placement course were related to the effect it might have on their final year project, the opportunity to earn money whilst doing a placement and improving their employability. Reasons for not doing a work placement tended to be related to wanting to focus on studies and finish their degree sooner. The research involved a self-completion online survey of 71 placement and 117 non-placement students from three schools (business, engineering and design, and information systems, computing and mathematics) applying to one post-1992 university in England (Brunel University). For those enrolled on degrees with work placements (four-year degrees with either one 1-year placement in year 3 or two 6-month placements in years 2 and 3):

- The most common (main) reasons for doing a placement were to gain business or industry experience (61%), or to gain an edge over other graduates (28%).[63]

- Hoping to gain a job with the placement employer and engaging in a placement because they thought that it is something other employers are looking for was only cited as a reason for enrolling on a placement course by a relatively small number of graduates (3 and 4% respectively).

- Those doing a work placement indicated that the main value of the placement was that it provided them with experience for their final year project (38%), it gave them the opportunity to earn money (30%) or it provided the opportunity of a possible graduate job (20%).

- Relatively few placement students indicated that networking (7%) or learning new skills (1%) were the main value of a work placement. Among those on non-placement courses, the main reason for not opting for a work placement course were: wanting to concentrate on getting a first or 2:1 (23%), wanting to finish their degree as quickly as possible so that they could get a job and earn money (20%), the expected time and effort needed to complete CVs and apply for a placement (10%) or that they were not thinking about their future career yet (9%).

However, more than one-fifth (21%) of non-placement students responded 'none of the above' to the above options, indicating that there may be other reasons for not doing a placement that were not covered by the survey. The researchers also suggest that a lack of confidence about securing a job after graduation as a factor for not engaging in a work placement, with just 27% of non-placement students being 'confident' or 'very confident' about the future, although they do not report the corresponding proportion of placement students who were confident about the jobs market.

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[63] Single-item response (not multi-modal),

4.3.3 Disability

Howlin et al. (2012)[64] highlighted some of the modifications that could be made for nursing and midwifery students with disabilities so that they can complete a placement. A related paper discusses the students' experience. The work was largely done on the basis of a literature review and discussion with expert groups, however, it focuses on the Irish context and so is outside the narrow scope of this review.

Riddell & Weedon (2014)[65] focused on identity formation among disabled students, in tandem with looking at professional identity formation for those students who do work placements in vocational areas of study. The article uses an in-depth case study with one teacher training student, which included five interviews, interviews with lecturers, and observations of the student in different learning environments. In particular, with relation to placements, the student did a five-week placement in a nursery, where she did not disclose her disability (dyslexia). For a second placement, disclosing her dyslexia led to a poor experience resulting from some of the actions of the other staff, and then withholding it from others. The main discussion point appears to be that the student considered that there as a danger in disclosing her disability, as it may lead to others being suspicious and undermining her confidence. The discussion also suggests that the majority of disabled students feel reluctant disclosing their disability in their transitions to employment. Although this article is relevant in terms of disabled students' experience, the insight limited owing to the research design of just one case study with one person.

A study by Georgiou et al. (2012)[66] conducted a survey of disabled students' placement experiences, focusing on students attending a university in the London suburbs. Forty two out of 51 students completed the study. The research found that, in general, disabled students had similar experiences compared to non-disabled students. The study found that the students' most important positive experience reported was 'gaining experience/knowledge' and the most reported negative experience was 'demanding expectations.' There was also some indication that disabled students' experiences may have more of an impact on students' abilities to cope with the placement compared to non-disabled students. However, it is not clear whether other factors that may affect placement experiences are disproportionately likely to have more of an impact on disabled students' experiences than on non-disabled students' experiences. While the

[64] Howlin, F., Halligan, P., & O'Toole, S. (2014). Development and implementation of a clinical needs assessment to support nursing and midwifery students with a disability in clinical practice: Part 1. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 14(5), 557-64. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2014.07.003

[65] Riddell, S., & Weedon, E. (2014). Disabled students in higher education: Discourses of disability and the negotiation of identity. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 63, 38-46. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2013.02.008

[66] Georgiou, C. E., Espahbodi, S., & De Souza, L.H. (2012). Preparing for the world of work: an exploratory study of disabled students' experiences of work placement. *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(5), 523-536, doi: 10.1080/13639080.2011.598143

study made a contribution towards covering disabled students' placement experiences, it did not attempt to control for any selection issues. It also did not look into labour market outcomes or any other outcomes beyond students' own rating of their skills. The scope of the study was also limited as it was carried out at one university and had an over-representation of female respondents.

4.3.4 Nationality and ethnicity

Goodwin and Mbah (2019)[67] focus on the experience of international students in undertaking a work placement as part of their course and the challenges they face. International students' experience tends to be under-represented in the literature and in employability frameworks. The article conducted a questionnaire with 41 and a focus group with four international students from the Faculty of Management in a UK University. The findings suggested that international students encounter a lack of information about work placement and visa requirements (e.g. international students may not be able to attend open days easily, institutional knowledge about this seemed patchy). Second, international students felt they needed to engage more with UK students to experience more cultural integration. Third, students considered that the placement did not enable them to apply their academic knowledge into practice. There was a potential concern that students may have experienced a negative impact of the placement on their academic writing ability, but it is not clear whether this is a temporary or lasting effect, and it may also be mitigated by regular reflective writing practice. The article then concludes that international students need additional support and that different actors (e.g. careers services, course curriculum, etc.) could be designed in such a way as to minimise negative experiences for international students.

Students studying in the UK on particular types of visa may also find that they have to do additional paperwork to participate in a work placement (or that they cannot participate in a work placement at all[68].

Ethnicity is another demographic factor known to be associated with the likelihood of a students taking an optional placement. A study at Aston University found that the reduced likelihood of BME students taking placements means that, if placement experience can act to reduce achievement gaps, the students that may benefit most from

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[67] Goodwin, K., & Mbah, M. (2019). Enhancing the work placement experience of international students: Towards a support framework. *Journal of further and Higher Education*, 43(4), 521-532. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1377163

[68] Crabtree, S. A., Parker, J., Azman, A., & Mas'ud, F. (2014). A sociological examination of international placement learning by British social work students in children's services in Malaysia. Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology, 5(1), 133-154.

this experience are also those least likely to use the opportunity [69]. Encouraging BME students to participate in optional placement experience may be one way of helping to reduce the BME achievement gap.

The findings were somewhat corroborated by a study [70] which looked at whether work placements impact the academic performance of Chinese students in finance and accounting. There is substantial evidence that Chinese students tend to underperform academically compared to UK and to other foreign students. This study carried out regression analysis on Chinese (103), Other foreign students (77) and UK students' (134) participation in placements and their outcomes (total N = 314) over four student cohorts at one UK university. The results found that Chinese students who undertake placements are 7 times more likely to obtain a 'good' degree than those who do not. However, it is not clear to what extent this result is affected by the self-selection of more academically able students into placements. Furthermore, UK students undertaking work placements were 12 times more likely to have gained a 'good' degree than UK students who did not. Ultimately, it is not clear from the paper whether the 'likelihood' for degree class refers to the marginal probability or to odds ratios – if the latter, the results suggest that while the odds of getting a good degree for Chinese students undertaking work placements are seven times as large as for those Chinese students who did not undertake a work placement, the actual probability would be lower. Furthermore, the specification of regression models selected are questionable (e.g. the models include both 3-As and non-3As dummy variables). The most that could be taken away from the paper is that placements are positively associated with degree marks and 'good' degree classifications, and the association is perhaps stronger for UK students than for Chinese students.

4.3.5 Reasons for opting out

However, not all students are so convinced about the employability benefits of doing a work placement. Aggett and Busby (2011)[71] investigated students' reasons for choosing to opt out of a placement year as part of an undergraduate course in tourism, hospitality and events. The researchers contacted students who failed to attend a work placement preparation session aimed at all students on a BSc tourism, hospitality and events course at a university in the south west of England and asked them to reply by email outlining

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[69] Moores, E., Birdi, G. K., & Higson, H. E. (2017). Placement work experience may mitigate lower achievement levels of black and asian vs. white students at university. *Frontiers in Psychology,* 8, 1518. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01518

[70] Crawford, I. & Wang, Z. (2015). The effect of work placements on the academic performance of Chinese students in UK higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20(6), 569-586, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2015.1045860

[71] Aggett, M. & Busby, G. (2011). Opting out of internship: Perceptions of hospitality, tourism and events management undergraduates at a British University. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*, 10(1), 106-113.

their reasons for not wanting to do a placement. The researchers received responses from 33 students. A range of reasons were given. Some respondents pointed out that they **already had a number of years' experience in the industry and so did not need to gain additional work experience, while other reasons ranged from wanting to finish their course as soon as possible and not wanting to disrupt their studies, a lack of interest in the positions that were available, to difficulties (or expected difficulties) in applying for placements**. For those who did not already have significant experience, the authors argue that the responses given suggest that students either: a) did not understand the value and importance of gaining experience in the industry, or b) lacked the drive and determination of those who had secured a placement. However, the data was a small opportunistic analysis of email responses to an email asking why students did not want to do a placement and so may not be representative of students' motivations across the UK as a whole.

5 Benefits and costs to students who do work placements/experience

> **What benefits/costs are realised by students who undertake a placement / work experience opportunity? How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement?**

Work placements during undergraduate study in UK higher education tend to be linked to a variety of positive outcomes for students, supported by a broad range of research in the UK and internationally. Outcomes can be related to the labour market, skill development, academic attainment and career development. For example, research has mentioned the positive impact of sandwich placements on attainment and employment outcomes in terms of getting a graduate job. However, there is a question of (1) whether the type of work placement (voluntary or compulsory) affects outcomes and (2) whether the issue of *self-selection* (where students can opt-in to do the placement) has an impact on results. There is also a further question about why some students view that their work placement was useful, but why this does not always translate into labour market outcomes.

In this section, we discuss what we might expect the costs and benefits to students undertaking placements to be based on theoretical insights, and compare this to the main benefits and costs identified in the literature.

5.1 Theoretical mechanisms

There are two main competing theoretical explanations for how placements may affect graduates' employment outcomes: (1) the human capital/skills development effect and the (2) signalling effect. In both cases, the effect of undertaking internships on outcomes (e.g. wages, likelihood of employment, being well-matched in the job) is likely to be positive.

1.   Human capital or skills development / employability discourse . Undertaking a work placement will lead to students' skills development that will improve their productivity, their degree performance, their employability, and better employment outcomes and higher wages.

2.   Signalling/screening . High-ability students undertake work placements to signal their ability to employers, placements do not necessarily need to develop skills. This approach assumes that ability cannot be observed directly, and that undertaking a work placement is correlated with ability. If placements are compulsory, then the value of the

placement as a signal decreases, asthe signal dilutes and no longer distinguishes students by ability.

Other mechanisms by which work placements may be able to affect students' outcomes include:

3. Positioning. Undertaking a work placement will demonstrate to firms that the potential employee may require less training than someone who has not undertaken a placement.

4. Social and cultural capital. Undertaking a work placement may demonstrate to an employer that a prospective employee will be able to 'fit' into an organisation (either into the same organisation as the one that offered the placement, or, by virtue of developing transferable 'work-related' skills, into a different organisation).

5. Deeper 'learning' – development of lateral thinking and problem-solving skills, and the ability to connect course content to practice. This may improve academic attainment and understanding of the course. This explanation can be viewed as a part of the human capital explanation.

In UK higher education, student work placements can be compulsory or elective (voluntary – not to be confused with doing voluntary work). Placements are compulsory if everyone doing the course must also do a work placement, and such placements are usually part of the course curriculum. Placements are voluntary if students choose whether to undertake a work placement, which may or may not be part of their course curriculum. Institutional support regarding arranging placements varies irrespective of whether placements are voluntary or compulsory, however, arranging placements is usually the responsibility of the student. Typically, more vocationally-orientated courses used to offer the option of undertaking work placements, although increasingly, more academic courses now also offer placements as a module option.

There is not much available literature on whether the type of work placement (compulsory or voluntary, integrated in the course curriculum or not) affects outcomes for the UK, although more international literature is available. Furthermore, it may be that different types of students see different costs and benefits to undertaking a work placement. As noted by Brookes and Youngson (2016, p. 1576), '[i]t must be questioned **if placements were compulsory whether all students would see the same benefits** or whether the current system of opting-in attracts better candidates who have the desire and ability to maximise their personal benefit from the experience' (emphasis added).

In relation to the above theoretical explanations for how placements might affect outcomes, consideration of the type of placement leads to the following hypotheses:

1. The human capital effect or skills development / employability discourse: it doesn't matter whether a placement is compulsory or voluntary, the skills accumulated during a work placement will positively affect employment outcomes for graduates.

2.   The signalling effect: students want to distinguish themselves from their peers to stand out in the labour market and do so through undertaking a placement. In this case, a voluntary placement may count for more than a compulsory placement, and the reputation of the employer offering the placement is likely to matter. However, depending on the arrangements of the placement scheme, the reputation of the employer may come into play if placements are compulsory.

If placements are compulsory rather than voluntary, arguably, students would be more uniformly prepared for employment. If the human capital/skill development hypothesis holds, this would suggest that compulsory placements would result in better outcomes for students, especially for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The outcomes would also depend on the extent of HEI involvement and support in arranging such placements. If placements were compulsory but students were still fully responsible for arranging them, it may be the case that students from more socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds would struggle to secure the most attractive placements.

5.2 Self-selection into placements

The literature widely reports that if placements are voluntary, students with lower levels of motivation or ability may be less likely to do them. Potential selection effects may result in the data, whereby high-achieving students may be over-represented in the results, which may in turn lead to positive bias in attempting to estimate the impact of doing a placement on outcomes.

While a number of studies report the positive association between doing a placement and attainment (substantive and growing body of work which suggests that the taking of a work sandwich placement year or internship is associated with better final year degree performance, other studies report the possibility that selection effects are present in the students who are doing placements, (notably, the authors find self-selection present among UK students and not international students)). Almost all the literature looking at selection effects on outcomes tends to focus on students' outcomes rather than focussing on employers or HEIs.

Typically, in the research literature, selection of more 'able' students into placements is measured by students' prior attainment. Studies have attempted to correct for self-selection by including controls for prior attainment, such as scores at A-level or equivalent, or university attainment prior to commencing the placement, and/or by statistical modelling techniques (e.g. by taking into account the probability of doing a placement before estimating its effect on outcomes).

Reddy and Moores (2012)[72] used university records from 2003 to 2009 (over 12,000 students) who studied at the University of Aston to look at whether sandwich year placements improved students' academic achievement in their final year. While the data included information on whether placements were required as part of the course or not, the authors did not use this data to examine the question of whether requiring work placements reduces the effect. They did, however, look at the question of self-selection into work placements among those with higher levels of ability by incorporating an interaction into their analysis (low/high ability by placement/no placement). The findings suggested that while higher-achieving students were more likely to undertake a placement, contrary to expectations, of those who undertook a placement, students with lower levels of prior ability actually benefitted more than those with higher prior ability in terms of final year academic attainment.

Driffield et al. (2011)[73] corrected for sample selection, first, by modelling who participates in work placements and second, by building in the probability of participation when modelling the outcomes of doing a work placement (Heckman approach). The results suggested that, once selection was accounted for, the effect of doing a placement on academic attainment was not significant. This implied that more able students opt in to do placements and these students' ability is what leads to improved performance in final year exams, rather than the effect of doing the placement per se. However, there is a methodological issue that calls the results into question. To account for self-selection successfully, it is necessary to find a variable that affects the probability of choosing to do a placement, but not the outcome of academic attainment in the final year after having done the placement (i.e. no impact on ability). In thispaper, the authors used students' socioeconomic background (parental occupation) and type of school attended, which may not have been the most suitable variable to use.

Saniter and Seidler (2014)[74] investigated the wage returns of having completed a work placement (voluntary or compulsory) while studying, using compulsory placements as an

[72] Moores, E., & Reddy, P. A. (2012). No regrets? Measuring the career benefits of a psychology placement year. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, *37*(5), 535-554. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.553668

[73] Driffield, N., Foster, C. and Higson, H. (2011). *Placements and Degree Performance: Do Placements Lead to Better Marks or do Better Students Choose Placements?* In ASET annual conference 2011. D. Siva-Jothy (ed.) Sheffield: ASET.

[74] Saniter, N., and Siedler, T. (2014). *Door opener or waste of time? The effects of student internships on labor market outcomes*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 8141. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2432425

instrument to address the problem of self-selection in a German context. The researchers used data from a national survey of graduates (DZHW) involving a random sample of the student population of German universities, carried out at one and five years after graduation, for 2001, 2005 and 2009 (first wave only) graduating cohorts. The findings suggested that completing a work placement led to a robust estimate of around a 6% increase in wages, largely driven by a higher propensity for those who completed a placement to work full time, a lower propensity to have been unemployed during the first five years after university and a lower propensity to engage in doctoral study. The analyses also suggested that the positive effects of work placements were particularly pronounced among graduates from subject areas with a weaker connection or linkage to the labour market. However, little evidence was found to support the effects of work placements on improved job match or occupational choices.

In the US context, Nunley et al. (2016)[75] investigated the issue of self-selection by using a randomised controlled trial of sending fictitious resumes to employers to analyse employer decisions of whether to invite candidates to interview, varying resumes by whether fictitious candidates did a work placement (internship) while doing their degree and whether they did a business-related degree or not. This experimental set-up eliminates self-selection by carefully constructing the sample of fictitious resumes to only vary based on the variables of interest. The results suggested that while there was no significant difference on the likelihood of being invited to interview by whether or not fictitious candidates did a business-related degree, mentioning internship experience during undergraduate level increased the likelihood of being invited to interview by 14%, all other things remaining equal. Moreover, the effect of doing an internship on the likelihood of being invited to interview was higher for fictitious candidates who did non-business-related degrees, and who indicated higher ability (academic attainment). The results lent more support to the signalling hypothesis of work placements during HE rather than the human capital hypothesis, because there was a lower association between the impact of work experience undertaken after graduation (one of the resume controls) and the likelihood of being invited to interview compared to doing an internship. Furthermore, there was no positive interaction effect on the likelihood of being asked to interview on doing an internship during HE and doing post-graduation work experience, that would have supported the human capital perspective.

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[75] Nunley, J.M., Pugh, A., Romero, N., and Seals Jr., R.A. (2016). College major, internship experience, and employment opportunities: Estimates from a résumé audit. *Labour Economics*, 38(2016), pp. 37-46. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2015.11.002

Jones et al. (2017)[76] compared the outcomes of students who did and did not undertake placements, using propensity score matching to construct groups of people similar to each other except in whether or not they undertook a placement. The findings suggested that although there was some self-selection present in the data (that more able or more motivated students did tend to opt to do placements), once this was accounted for, placements still had a positive and significant effect on attainment, leading to an improvement in academic performance in the range of 2 to 4%.

Although this study explicitly controlled for self-selection, as is the case with PSM-type approaches, students were matched only on observable characteristics. Therefore, it may still be possible that there is some unobservable factor that is influencing students' decision to undertake a placement and that may also affect their academic and employment outcomes. Second, while the results held across more than one institution, further analysis could explore the extent to which such results hold across the UK as a whole. Third, other work could look at whether there is a difference in outcomes for students doing placements that are compulsory compared to those that are voluntary (a propensity-score matching approach on that issue would be very interesting). Overall, the strength of the evidence of the impact of self-selection on the outcomes of doing a work placement is medium-to-high – there is a research area on this question, and the findings are supported by numerous studies and different methodological approaches.

Taylor and Hooley (2014)[77] looked at whether students undertook an optional work placement (extending the length of the degree course by a year and introducing a career development learning module). The literature review in this paper pointed to the advantages that sandwich placements have on labour market outcomes. Around 28% of the business school penultimate year student cohort participate in the placement. Students had the opportunity to practice their career management skills (self-management and career-building) throughout the module. The research participants were split into three groups: those who did the module and the placement; those who did the module but not the placement; and those who did not do the module. However, there were no attempts to control for self-selection.The descriptive statistics suggested that employment rates were highest for graduates who did a placement and module, then for those who did the module and then for those who did neither. Similarly, the data suggest that there was a similar pattern with the likelihood of being in 'graduate-level' employment. Correlation does not imply causation, however.

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[76] Jones, C.M., Green, J.P. & Higson, H.E. (2017). Do work placements improve final year academic performance or do high-calibre students choose to do work placements?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(6), 976-992, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2015.1073249

[77] Taylor, A. R., & Hooley, T. (2014). Evaluating the impact of career management skills module and internship programme within a university business school. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 42(5), 487-499. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2014.918934

Patel et al. (2012)[78] looked at whether students undertaking placements are more academically able than those who do not, focusing on computer science students. The authors looked at the average difference in course attainment scores before students undertook the placement (but after they had chosen which 'stream' they would be in that affected their option for doing the placement) and found a marginal difference that was not statistically significant. MANCOVA and ANOVA analyses further showed that second year marks were not significantly associated with final year marks, but placements were. The results suggested that doing a placement improved the likelihood of getting a 'good' degree and the academic performance on both compulsory and optional modules, notwithstanding any initial differences in abilities. This chimes in with the findings by Jones et al. (2017) that suggest that the effect of placements on academic performance is still positive, but lower, when prior ability is taken into account. The discussion also summarises the benefits to universities – in terms of potentially better financial and reputational gains, and to employers, in terms of cheap labour, new/fresh perspectives, and a 'long interview' / trial period before committing to hiring the employee. The authors also suggest that even firms that do not offer placements would still benefit from graduates who had done placements with other firms – a classic illustration of the free rider problem.

More recent evidence suggests that the more prestigious, elite paid work placements tend to be filled more on a meritocratic basis than on social advantage (Wang and Crawford, 2019).[79] The authors suggest that paid placements provide a 'level-playing field for students' (p. 10) and that this can help working-class students access professional occupations. This finding has not always been supported in the literature more widely, with other issues, such as the perceived lack of cultural and social capital fit of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the prevailing cultures in elite organisations offering placements being a potential barrier to participation.Indeed, Chillas et al. (2015)[80] found that social skills and motivation tended to play a more important role in securing degree-embedded ICT placements, rather than ability, and that, viewed in this way, placements may exacerbate social disadvantage in graduate outcomes rather than ameliorate its effects.

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[78] Patel, N., Brinkman, W. P., & Coughlan, J. (2012). Work placements and academic achievement: Undergraduate computing students. *Education + Training*, 54(6), 523-533.
[79] Wang, Z., & Crawford, I. (2019). Who are gaining the highly paid elite placements in UK higher education?. *Studies in Higher Education,* 44(11), 1960-1974.
[80] Chillas, S., Marks, A., and Galloway, L. (2015). Learning to labour: an evaluation of internships and employability in the ICT sector. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 30(1), 1-15.

The literature widely reports that if placements are voluntary, low-motivation or low-calibre students may opt not to do them. This may lead to potential selection effects in the data where high-calibre students may be over-represented in the results.

5.3 Benefits and costs to students

5.3.1 Compulsory placements

Research in the context of Germany (which has specific labour market and education system configurations), found no such positive effect of compulsory placements for students from disadvantaged backgrounds[81] . The authors used the Hochschul-Informations-System Graduate Panel 1997 survey carried out in Germany of over 6,000 graduates who were asked about their education and employment experiences one and five years after graduation. The authors selected just over 2,500 cases for analysis and conducted propensity score matching to control for remaining variation between groups of people who did the compulsory placements and those who did not. The analysis compared the differences in outcomes (search time to first significant employment, complexity of employment history, and wages) for matched groups depending on whether participants did or did not do a compulsory work placement. These findings suggested that for participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds, taking part in a compulsory placement did not lead to a statistically significant difference in mean scores on the three different outcomes. Put another way, compulsory placements neither improved nor worsened outcomes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. One explanation may be that compulsory placements do not serve as effective signals as do elective placements.

The strength of the evidence for this paper is medium, as the authors use appropriate statistical techniques to address some of the main issues in the data (e.g. selection). However, as the research was carried out in a German education and labour market context and the data are now around twenty years old, the implications of this research for the UK are called into question. Comparative research at the European level suggests that the impact of work experience during HE may have a more limited effect in Germany than in Italy or Spain, which highlights the role of socio-economic and cultural contexts

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[81] Klein, M., and Weiss, F. (2011). Is forcing them worth the effort? Benefits of mandatory internships for graduates from diverse family backgrounds at labour market entry. *Studies in Higher Education*, *36*(8), 969-987.

and suggests that international experiences in the literature should be critically assessed before being compared with the UK context.

More recent work by Silva et al. (2018)[82] addressed the effect of work placement structure on post-HE outcomes more explicitly, looking at the Portuguese context. The findings suggested that both compulsory and curricular placements tended to have a positive impact on integration into work, measured by unemployment rate difference (the difference between graduates' unemployment rates before and after the introduction of placements (2007 and 2013), taking into account the average graduate unemployment rate in Portugal for young graduates in those years), with curricular placements potentially having a stronger impact, although the findings are not clearly discussed. The multivariate regression model suggests that placement type does not tend to significantly affect outcomes in the shorter-term or longer term (less than 12 or more than 12 months after graduation. The strength of the evidence for this paper is medium: the dependent variable of unemployment rate difference has been constructed to take into account the impact of the national graduate unemployment rate, but the regression sample size is rather small, other key characteristics are not included in the controls, and the implications of the types of placements on outcomes are not always clear.

5.3.2 Academic attainment

Substantial research highlights the positive association between undertaking a work placement and academic attainment, although the selection problem is often not well-addressed. For example, Brooks and Youngson (2016)[83] found that undertaking a sandwich placement was positively associated with final marks, the likelihood of gaining employment and wages compared to opting not to do a placement. However, the study does not attempt to address the selection issue of whether more able students are more likely to opt into placements. On the other hand, the study finds positive associations for students on a range of courses. The research conducted a quantitative analysis on around 1,500 students, roughly half of whom did a placement and half – not. Around 50% more placement students than non-placement students were in graduate-level jobs (SOC 1-3), and placement students also tended to have a somewhat higher starting salary. However, the analysis was mainly limited to descriptive statistics and comparisons of

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[82] Silva, P., Lopes, B., Costa, M., Melo, A. I., Dias, G. P., Brito, E., and Seabra, D. (2018). The million-dollar question: can internships boost employment?. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(1), 2-21.

[83] Brooks, R., & Youngson, P. L. (2016). Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of the effects on career progression. Studies in Higher Education, 41(9), 1563-1578.

averages, so cannot be taken to mean the causal effect of placements on outcomes. However, the paper provides further tentative evidence towards positive outcomes.

Jones et al. (2017)[84] aimed to directly tackle the selection problem using a propensity-score matching (PSM) approach. Matching was done on university attainment in years 1 and 2, students' sex, age, type of secondary school and social class as defined by parental occupation. The authors looked at the effect of placements on attainment in Aston University (N=6,645) and at Ulster university (N=737). The data for Aston University allowed the authors to look at the impact of placements within different broad subject groups. Their results suggested that when accounting for selection, undertaking an optional placement still has an effect on attainment, but the effect is lower than reported in other literature. According to Jones et al. (2017), broadly speaking, the literature tends to find a positive association of around 3-4% improvement in academic performance as a result of undertaking placements during study. In contrast, the authors found a slightly lower impact, ranging between 2-4%, depending on subject area. This paper provides reasonable evidence that, even attempting to control for self-selection, optional placements were associated with an improvement in academic attainment. However, it is still possible that the matching is inexact, leaving some degree of self-selection unaccountable.

Yung et al. (2015)[85] conducted a regression analysis to explore the effect of work placement on academic performance using data from one UK university and undergraduate courses in Quantity Surveying and Construction Management. The data on the study mode (full time, sandwich and part time) and academic performance of students graduated in 2010 and 2011 for both courses were collected through university records. The findings suggested that sandwich course students performed better than full-time students after their placement. Second, part-time students perform better than full-time students in their year 1 and year 2, despite the fact that they were also working full time. Yung et al. suggest that while in the past, students were encouraged to pursue university degree right after secondary education, a better approach may be to combine part-time study with a full-time job. However, these results may be degree-specific and some literature problematises the tension between academic study and employment. Furthermore, it is not clear that the results arise owing to the selection problem of more able students undertaking placements or combining work and study, which means that they may have performed better even in the absence of work experience.

[84] Jones, C.M. Green, J.P., & Higson, H.E. (2017). Do work placements improve final year academic performance or do high-calibre students choose to do work placements? *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(6), 976-992, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2015.1073249

[85] Yung, P., Lam, K. C., & Yu, C. (2015). Impacts of placement and work experience on construction education. *International Journal of Construction Project Management,* 7(1), 33-44.

In relation to ethnicity, in particular the black and minority ethnic (BME) attainment gap, some research has found that placement experience was associated with a reduced gap in the final year between those with higher vs. lower entry tariffs – a finding particularly true for males (Moores et al., 2017).[86] The study analysed performance across three academic years of study of 3,051 Black, Asian and White students from Aston University. Students who undertook placements improved their marks by more in the final year compared to those who did not. The study suggests that placement experience is associated with reduced achievement gaps – for both BME students and for students entering University with different levels of prior achievement. Placement experience may therefore offer a mechanism to help bridge the BME achievement gap, although it does not eliminate it.

5.3.3 Skill development

This was perhaps the best populated area of the literature review. A study by Lucas and Tan (2014)[87] aimed to identify how students' epistemological beliefs or ways of knowing (comprising cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects) develop during work-based placements. The study focusses less on outcomes, and more on the ways in which the work placement can act to support developing reflective practitioners, using accounting and business undergraduates' experiences. The authors use the concept of 'ways of knowing' (beliefs about knowledge, K) , namely: (1) absolute (K is right/wrong); (2) transitional (K is certain in some areas but not in others); (3) independent (K is uncertain and all opinions are equally valid); and (4) contextual (K is uncertain, but evidence can be assessed in a context). Typically, for students, a lower proportion of students approach knowledge from a contextual view (although the proportion tends to increase as students progress through the educational system). The sample in the study are UK students in business and accounting programmes at a post-92 HEI, who may do an optional sandwich work placement in the third year of their course. 15 students were interviewed at the commencement and later stages of their placement. Two students were interviewed just once (then withdrew from the study), leaving a total of 17 participants and 32 interviews. The authors found that placements provided an opportunity for students to take responsibility for their learning (because they had to deliver), develop their interpersonal relationships (meeting more diverse people), and develop their relationship with themselves (intrapersonally, e.g. learning how to manage a workload, etc.). However, the authors did not find support for placements affecting

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[86] Moores, E., Birdi, G. K., & Higson, H. E. (2017). Placement work experience may mitigate lower achievement levels of black and asian vs. white students at university. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1518. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01518

[87] Lucas, U., & Tan, P. L. (2014). Developing the reflective practitioner: Placement and the ways of knowing of business and accounting undergraduates. Teaching in Higher Education, 19(7), 787-798. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.901954

students' cognitive development. This may be owing to the distance between their studies and their placement, in terms of time and in terms of content, and partly owing to the more contained nature of the placement, where students had limited opportunities to make decisions or other cognitive-related issues).

A qualitative study by Shreeve and Smith (2012)[88] found that Work-Related Learning (WRL – broadly defined to include voluntary work and work placements) while studying could provide a fruitful source of knowledge and creativity transfer in multiple directions. Drawing on the theory of 'transfer' and of situated learning the authors argued that creative students engaged in various types of voluntary work, including some on work placements, were able to both apply knowledge and practice from their courses and learn through engaging in a range of activities from working on design briefs to helping young people to plan and make their own film. The authors also proposed some conditions that facilitate transfer, such as personal agency, whether they were afforded certain opportunities or freedoms and the extent to which they saw value in the experience. The research drew on qualitative accounts, in the shape of video-recorded interviews, of 19 students from University of the Arts London (UAL) and Arts University College Bournemouth (AUCB) who had engaged in some form of WBL in the voluntary sector. The majority of experiences discussed (n=19) were deemed as 'extra-curricular', three were a formal part of the students' undergraduate degree programme and three were work placements. From the transcripts, the authors identified two kinds of transfer occurring: (1) subject-related transfer (e.g. technical skills, procedural knowledge, theories) and (2) creative transfer (e.g. extending disciplinary skills, problem solving using existing knowledge, using skills and knowledge in new ways, adapting university teaching approaches in new ways). They found that these forms of transfer could work in multiple directions, from students to community participants or host organisations and vice versa, and that the extent and success of transfer depended upon the confluence of three main conditions:

1. Individual agency – initiative, motivation, commitment, demonstrating expertise, taking responsibility;
2. Affordances in the work context – the extent to which students were afforded certain opportunities or conditions, such as: that the work was perceived as 'real life' work and not college work; support, training and encouragement from others; being given responsibility, recognition and space to act; being exposed to new concepts of disciplinary working; and increased exposure to cultural diversity;
3. Value to the student – the perceived value that the engagement in WRL had for the individual and society (e.g. skills acquired, self-awareness, sense of

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[88] Shreeve, A. & Smith, C. (2012). Multi-directional creative transfer between practice-based arts education and work. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 539-556.

satisfaction in helping others, improving the conditions of community participants, and creating wider societal change).

The researchers note that when students moved between education and work environments they did not simply apply existing knowledge to new situations, nor did they simply learn new skills. Rather they "re-fashioned, re-invented or appropriated different forms of knowledge and previous experiences as they deemed relevant in new social settings" (p. 552). As such, they suggest that understanding the true value of WRL needs to move beyond simple skills-based conceptions of creative learning and incorporated wider notions of the development of creative identity.

A qualitative study by Ridley (2014)[89] looked at criminology students experiences of engaging in a work placement at a prison while studying. The research found that completing a work placement in a prison gave criminology students a better appreciation of the issues around imprisonment and of the wider impact of a prison sentence on the families of prisoners and on prison staff. Ridley notes that this is particularly important given that current media discourse about prisons not only distorts the reality of prison life but leave the reader with the impression that they are well informed about the subject, with little desire to question such representations. Ridley argues that these discourses "profoundly influence not only public attitudes, but also political rhetoric and subsequently criminal justice policies" (p18). Apart from giving participants first-hand work experience and helping to develop their employability, it was reported that the programme had wider benefits for fellow students and for the employer. The work placement programme involved 25 students who participated in work placements out of 80 who expressed interest. Students took part during the first term of year three after going through a formal selection process, much like a formal job application process, and a comprehensive security assessment and induction programme. Students were placed in one a variety of areas within the prison including psychology, health care, offender management units, resettlement and safer custody, and were fully 'key-trained' to carry their own keys within the prison as a genuine prison officer would do. Students worked two days a week in the prison for a period of ten months performing a variety of tasks, such as taking minutes in meetings, collecting data from wing observation books and transferring confidential files. Prisons gained students who could work in areas of the prison that were affected by resource shortfalls, or to do research that hard-pressed prison staff had little time to perform. Students gained first-hand experience and knowledge of imprisonment while developing employability and 'graduateness'.

Ridley noted that the students gained much more from the experience than anticipated, with some regarding the experience as life changing. Not only did it transform their view

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[89] Ridley, L. (2014). No Substitute for the Real Thing: The impact of prison-based work experience on students' thinking about imprisonment. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 53(1), 16-30.

of prisons, prison staff and prisoners, students considered themselves as better equipped to 'stand out' from other graduates in the graduate labour market. The experience also gave students insight into issues around imprisonment and in some cases inspired a passion to "counteract some of the misinformation about imprisonment that shapes public opinion" (p. 26). The timing of the placement (before the final year) also helped inform their final year dissertations and to be able to relate their experiences to prior theoretical and academic knowledge as well as challenging populist conceptions in the media. The placements also had a wider impact on fellow students on the course as those taking part in placements were able to draw on their experiences in seminar discussions adding a level of insight and animation to seminars that would otherwise not have been there. In addition, as line managers and prison governors attend students' presentations as part of their final assessment, they reportedly often left with new ideas about improving and developing the placement scheme for the next cohort of students. Ridley argues that, in effect, the programme resembles a knowledge-exchange partnership rather than a traditional work-experience model.

Poon et al. (2012[90]) explored the views of students/graduates, employers and universities about the importance of different kinds of skills for working in real estate. The authors invited almost 4,000 graduates and around 1,200 employers to participate in the study, however around 640 graduates and just 62 employers actually participated (response rates of 18 and 6.5% respectively). The authors designed a questionnaire with 72 graduate attributes, a list developed from the literature. The survey results were augmented with interviews with selected course providers and human resource managers. The interviews drew on the survey results as a basis for discussion about perceived graduate readiness for working in industry. Based on the survey skills list, the researchers compared different skills' employer ranking with their student/graduate ranking. The employers perceived that graduates' skills exceeded their (employers') expectations only in research methods, and were deficient in other areas of skills. However, the frame of reference of the Likert scale (1=strongly disagree … 5 = strongly agree) likely differs between employers and graduates, so their responses are not directly comparable (see Allen and van der Velden (2005)[91] about the use of external anchors in the research about the use of different kinds of skills). The interviewed course directors commented on the tension between the requirements of RICS accreditation, emphasising the role of technical skills, and the employers' demand for soft skills, and the problem of a fixed amount of time available to develop all of these skills at HE. HRM managers were not surprised by the results either – in part, they supported the views

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[90] Poon, J. (2012), Real estate graduates' employability skills : the perspective of human resource managers of surveying firms, Property management, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 416-434.
[91] Allen, J. P., & van der Velden, R. K. W. (2005). The role of self-assessment in measuring skills. (REFLEX Working Paper Series; No. 2). Maastricht: Researchcentrum Onderwijs & Arbeidsmarkt.

espoused by academics – that leadership skills were not yet developed by graduates who were likely in fairly entry-level positions, and highlighted that certain other attributes, such as willingness to accept responsibility, integrity, etc., are also important. The course providers mentioned that employers should offer more training and support to graduates to develop their employability skills, and that they offer 'simulated practical experience' to students. But the conclusion of the article suggested that there was a skills gap and that HEIs should 'endeavour to meet the needs of the employers of their graduates' (p. 486). However, the paper does not raise the question about the role of employers in training their workers.

Research by Eden (2014)[92] suggests that the primary benefits of taking part in a work placement may go beyond simple notions of the development of skills, with students' accounts of their experiences showing that the primary development was more emotional and holistic in nature. Eden's research draws on qualitative data in the shape of the reflective essays of 26 undergraduate geography and environmental management students who engaged in part-time, unpaid work placements as part of a 20-credit module in their final year of study in 2011/12. The placements, run by the University of Hull since 1997, were hosted by large private and public sector organisations, social enterprises and charities, and were mostly set up by the course tutor (although between a third and a quarter were set up by students themselves). The nature of the placements and activities involved ranged considerably from a regular on day a week at the host organisation to more sporadic project work. As part of the assessment, students were required to write a 1,500 word reflective essay at the end of the placement, usually two to three weeks after students' last visit to the host organisation. Reflective essays were marked by university staff and were also subject to feedback from placement line managers. As such, the author notes, accounts are not contemporaneous and may tend to overemphasize the positive learning aspects of placements. In addition, as the placement module was optional those taking part are self-selecting and may be more proactive than those not opting to take part. However, the accounts provide rich information on the learning outcomes of the work placements engaged in. Eden noted that, contrary to expectations and prevailing discourse in the literature, students' reflections focused less on skills and more on 'whole-person' conceptions of employability. Accounts tended to focus on emotionality, such as fear, worry, or embarrassment, of feeling 'out of their comfort zone', and of excitement, pride and confidence of pushing themselves. In the author's words: "Placements pushed students beyond their safe understandings of university skills, knowledge and social context, and

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[92] Eden, S. (2014). Out of the Comfort Zone: Enhancing work-based learning about employability through student reflection on work placements. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 38(2), 266-276.

forced them to become more proactive. This led them to tackle unfamiliar activities and ideas, develop emotionally and engage more fully in their work experience." (p. 274).

The research also found that **students who were more proactive and exercised a greater level of agency tended to get more out of their placements**. That is not to say that students did not mention the development of skills, knowledge and contacts as outcomes of their placement experiences, but that these tended to be secondary to the emotional development. In this sense, the author argues that employability should be seen as more than just development of skills but as development of the whole person, akin to what some have called 'graduateness'.

5.3.4 Entrepreneurship

Some research has connected student placements with action learning and with entrepreneurship and creativity (Rae, 2012).[93] It discusses the SPEED programme, aimed to encourage students to engage in entrepreneurial activities as an alternative to placements. Around 770 student ventures were supported between 2006 and 2008, around two thirds of which were set up by male students. The article focused on creative entrepreneurial ventures, and developed a model of how entrepreneurial learning can be fostered (e.g. through using course-related learning; through using course-related knowledge in an innovative way, and through learning without much connection to the course content).

Other research (Manning and Parrott, 2018)[94] looked at the role of work placements on the development of entrepreneurial skills (self-reported entrepreneurial attitude) among third year students who had undertaken a compulsory year-long placement. The students attended a university specializing in the land-based sector (e.g. agriculture, rural estate management, etc.). The survey asked students about their experience and their entrepreneurial attitudes after the placement was completed and 461 students responded to the survey. However, the baseline entrepreneurial attitudes were collected after the placement had taken place. The general findings were that undertaking a placement did increase students' entrepreneurial attitudes, but that this varied across different courses and by gender.

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[93] Rae, D. (2012). Action learning in new creative ventures. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 18(5), 603-623. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13552551211253955
[94] Manning, L., & Parrott, P. (2018). The impact of workplace placement on students' entrepreneurial attitude. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 8(1), 56-69.

5.3.5 Employability

Research by Allen et al. (2013)[95] uses HE work placements in the creative sector as an example to investigate how students construct themselves as 'employable' in the neoliberal context, particularly paying attention to the reproduction and persistence of social inequalities. Among HE creative subjects there has recently been increased emphasis and action to open access to WP students, and to encourage students to undertake course placements – though usually unpaid. Students who are presented as 'enterprising' in that they pursue extra-curricular activities and work placements must also have access to a variety of economic, social and capital resources – those who do not have access to such resources are systematically marginalised in the neoliberal construction of the employable student. The authors conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with students from five HEIs in the UK, from BAME backgrounds, with disabilities, with those aiming to work in an industry sector dominated by another gender and those from working class backgrounds. Students participated in a variety of WIL activities, including sandwich placements, internships, short placements, etc., both linked to a course and not linked to a course of study, paid and unpaid (see pp.436-7 for a summary). Not all HEIs had the resources to support students on placements, but it was widely accepted that students should 'take responsibility 'and do placements to improve their career prospects (p.438). However, working-class students found it challenging securing 'good' placements, through a lack of (comparatively 'good') social networks. When working class students *were* able to find placements through their contacts, the placements were typically not as 'prestigious' as that of their middle-class peers (e.g. placement in a school rather than in a fashion firm). Working class students also tended to select placements in relation to their financial situation because they were often juggling placements with other work commitments and could not afford to work unpaid for long. This was further complicated by the fact that some unpaid placements with top employers were perceived by some to be more prestigious than paid ones. Finally, working class students sometimes also felt a lack of fit at the employing organisation (see also discussions on habitus and cultural capital).

An article, Jackson and Wilton (2016)[96] looked at the role of WIL in the development of Australian and UK undergraduates' career management competencies (CMCs). The authors argue that CMC should not be overlooked in the employability debate as they enable graduates to navigate and progress in the labour market and make informed career choices. The authors position WIL as a way of reflecting on work experience and

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[95] Allen, K., Quinn, J., Hollingworth, S., & Rose, A. (2013). Becoming employable students and "ideal" creative workers: Exclusion and inequality in higher education work placements. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(3), 431-452. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2012.714249

[96] Jackson, D. and Wilton, N. (2016). Developing Career Management Competencies among Undergraduates and the Role of Work-Integrated Learning. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(3), 266-286

as an enhancement of work-readiness (arguably through developing non-technical skills, as well as more specific career-related competencies). The study focuses on undergraduates doing business degrees (UK N = 136, 1-year sandwich course, Australia N = 344, shorter 16-week placements), where 110 students (UK 52, Australia 58) undertook a placement as part of their studies (unclear whether placement was optional or compulsory). Data collection was done through a survey (N=110). Using ANOVA & MANOVA analysis, the authors found that participating in a placement had significant effects on certain competencies – e.g. learning to make decisions (when filtering out students who were working). The authors consider that students' current employment status had a stronger effect on CMCs than placements. Analysis of the qualitative survey responses suggested that students developed self-awareness, benefits of the placement recruitment process, working alongside professionals, improving confidence in their capabilities, and developing networks. However, poor placement design (e.g. too short, low training, poor mentors) could be a barrier to CMCs. The authors conclude that WIL can develop CMCs, especially in the absence of other employment, and that WIL should be integrated into the course curriculum and be designed with a reflective component in mind.

However, the impact of employability on labour market outcomes may be limited. Wilton (2014)[97] examines the opinions of employers providing student work placements in terms of employability, conducting interviews with 30 employers across a range of industry sectors and of varying sizes providing placements to students from Engineering & Technology and Business & Law from a post-1992 HEI. The main interview themes included selection of placement students, perceptions of their work-readiness, process of 'assimilation' into employment practices, any benefits of placements, opinions about post-placement outcomes, and about the roles of HEIs. Having said this, the employers also held the HEI in high regard for recruiting placement students. Wilton discusses the notion of employability from the perspectives of Hillage and Pollard (1998) focussing on (1) human capital, (2) employability in a specific context, and (3) and the ability to articulate the possession of desired attributes (construct the desired narrative) (p. 248). Employers look for types of human capital including "strong work ethic, computer literacy, willingness and ability to learn and to ask questions, confidence, pro-activity, problem-solving ability, time management and communication skills" (p. 248), as well as more subjective criteria (e.g. 'charm' – other research has found that such attributes tend to be mapped onto socioeconomic and cultural advantage). Employers were also looking for a good 'fit' with the job or with the organisation (in the latter case, this tended to be defined in relation to social attributes). Employers were also keen that the students were able to present their 'self' in a way that demonstrated their understanding of the professional

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[97] Wilton, N. (2014). Employability is in the eye of the beholder. *Higher education, skills and work-based learning*, 4(3), 242-255.

environment and on what the employers wanted. Furthermore, employers often made their decisions looking at the type of HEI – some HEIs were more preferred than others. Some of these issues could be made clearer to students in preparing them for employment.

An analysis of the factors that lead to increases in perceived employability among undergraduates found that among students at a UK university having engaged in a sandwich placement whilst studying was positively associated with increased perceived employability after controlling for age, gender, year of study, current employment status and career management competencies (Jackson and Wilton, 2017)[98]. The research was based on a self-completion online survey of business undergraduates from two new vocationally-based universities, one in the UK (n=136) and one in Australia (n=344). The survey asked students a series of questions about perceived employability, the DOTS model of career management (21 items measured on a five-point scale from very poor to very good) and some background characteristics. The researchers carried out a regression analysis looking at the effect of the various factors on perceived employability. The researchers found that, for UK students, age (standardised Beta of .24), opportunity awareness (a facet on the career management scale, standardised Beta of .23) and work placement experience (standardised Beta of .33) were significantly associated with perceived employability (all else being equal). However, the researchers failed to find a statistically significant association between work placement experience and perceived employability in the Australian sample, which may be affected by the shorter placement modules at the Australian university, lasting just one term and not a full year.

Curtis (2012)[99] gave examples of reflections from students that showed how they had gained practical skills, such as how to word emails carefully to achieve certain ends or how being given responsibility by their placement host to reply to letters and emails addressed to the MP had given them confidence in their abilities. Students reflections showed how their self-efficacy had grown from the knowledge that they could do tasks effectively, that their work and opinions were valued, and through realising that the knowledge from their studies could be applied effectively in a real-life setting. In addition, some remained in contact with their placement provider after the placement had finished and in some cases the placement was seen as a 'stepping stone' to longer placements or internships. Moreover, some students felt that it gave them something 'extra' over and above their degree that would give them an advantage in the jobs market and one reported that feedback from subsequent employers said that being able to draw on their

[98] Jackson, D. & Wilton, N. (2017). Perceived employability among undergraduates and the importance of career self-management, work experience and individual characteristics. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(4), 747-762.
[99] Curtis, S. (2012). Politics Placements and Employability: A new approach. *European Political Science,* 11(2), 153-163.

experiences at interview had given them the edge over other candidates with better grades from more prestigious universities. In this sense it was felt that, even short placements, such as those included in the programme could help contribute to a narrative of employability. The author thus argues that it is important to 'break away' from equating employability with work-related skills, that are often assumed to be developed through extended exposure to the workplace, and instead incorporate wider conceptions of self-efficacy, personal development and higher order academic skills. Placements were felt to have improved students' understanding of the subject and to have given them an improved appreciation of the political process and sense of empowerment. Placements were also felt to have improved employability by:

- Helping to develop work-related skills and abilities;

- Giving them a better understanding of how their studies could be applied in practice, enhancing self-efficacy;

- Providing practical experience of the world of politics and advice about career paths open to them;

- Raising awareness of the qualifications and experience needed to embark on a career in politics;

- Increasing drive in relation to their careers and a sense of the sorts of jobs they did and did not want to do;

- Broadening their horizons about jobs and awareness of career options.

Research by Shaw (2012)[100] adds an important longitudinal dimension. The paper followed the experiences of 34 students on an Education degree programme, looking at the role of their previous experience on their qualifications, and on the role of work experience on their labour market and other outcomes, using a mixed-methods approach. However, the findings are fairly small-scale. The paper reports that a combination of academic and vocational learning is useful for students to get jobs. There is also little obvious emphasis on the longitudinal nature of the study, and little direct reflection on the role of work experience developed during a degree.

5.3.6 Types of placement activities

Limited research was available that compared different types of work-related activities to each other. However, while most types of work placements or work experience are likely to improve graduates' own skills, not all types of work experience may be associated with

[100] Shaw, A.J. (2012). The value of work experience in outcomes for students: an investigation into the importance of work experience in the lives of female undergraduates and postgraduate job seekers. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 64(2), 155-168, doi: 10.1080/13636820.2011.628756

the same kinds of outcomes in the labour market. For example, if work experience is used as a signal or a screen or a form of positional advantage, then some types of work experience may be seen as more desirable – e.g. with a big name employer, voluntary rather than compulsory/part of a course, etc. Often, this kind of analysis is difficult to do because of data availability, or the selection problem.

A study by Irwin et al. (2019)[101] investigated how students, academics and employers viewed different types of work experience (type: internship or voluntary work; location: curricular or extra-curricular; and duration (6 months to 2 years). The study was focused on Scotland and looked at work experience in the social sciences. Participants included 62 students, 57 employers and 56 academics (175 total). The researchers asked participants to respond to open-ended questions about graduate employability, to review two (fictional) job adverts and eight fictional CVs, and to rank each of the eight CVs for each job role in terms of its employability. The CV excerpts were designed incorporating elements of work experience type, duration and location. The study suggested that all stakeholders tended to view extra-curricular work experience more favourably than curricular placements. Moreover, stakeholders viewed placements more positively when the role was a 'high level graduate role'. Further qualitative data showed that both relevant experience and the degree topic were important for employability, as well as professional and interpersonal skills. This study is useful because it examines differences between stakeholder perceptions of the different types of work experience activities. The vignette design methodology enables the views on different kinds of work experience activities to be separated. However, while the study problematises the different notions of employability (strategy vs. identity), it seems to somewhat unquestioningly settle on employability being a part of individual identity and therefore supporting the position that individuals should take responsibility for their employability. On the other hand, that academic stakeholders were suggesting that others also be responsible for graduates' development of employability (i.e. employers) it did not seem that employers held the same view. The study seemed to support the view that HEIs have the sole or the most responsibility for developing student/graduate employability.

5.3.7 Problems

However, there are also some drawbacks to undertaking work placements. A study focusing on the experiences of placement students of an Accountancy and Finance Department at one UK university aimed to **problematize the concept of the 'benefits'**

[101] Irwin, A., Nordmann, E., & Simms, K. (2019). Stakeholder perception of student employability: Does the duration, type and location of work experience matter? *Higher Education*, 78(5), 761-781.

of a placement year (Anderson and Novakovic, 2017).[102] The study also asks how placement is to be theorised: is it additional or integral to the education experience? This conceptualisation can in turn influence how educators prepare students for their return to study in their institutions. The study carried out focused discussion groups with students who completed their placements. Twelve students took part in three groups. The discussions were recorded for later transcription and thematic analysis. Students were asked about their experience of applying for placements, about their placement itself, and about their return to their final year. Students spoke about the challenges of returning to final-year study, a transition often overlooked or ignored in empirical research on placements. Students reported that they found the transition from placement to the final year of study (unexpectedly) challenging, even difficult. Students utilised two competing narratives to make sense of their difficulties: the first foregrounded individual deficiencies while the second highlighted systemic and circumstantial factors, such as course structure and a failure to recap and review previous learning. Students relied on the first of these narratives to a greater degree than they did on the second. The authors also found that there may be a disconnect between placement learning and academic learning. Students attempted to theorise from their experiences by differentiating between underlying academic, personal and social reasons for their challenges. They mentioned the problems of re-integration into the social world of academia as well as the limitations of memory and recall as contributory factors in the problems of transition.

Other problems may occur where there is a failure to complete the placement (Procter, 2011).[103] The paper discusses the placement options for students in a University in the UK. It includes comments on problems for students, such as employers no longer being able to host the student, when the placement is not appropriate, and when the student is not able to carry out the work. Interestingly, the article mentions that "In 2008 the Business School secured external accreditation for the placement scheme through the City and Guilds institution" (p. 4). It further discusses room for improvement, legality/quality of work placements, having sufficient quality placements, and ensuring that there is sufficient take up of the placements.

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[102] Anderson, P., & Novakovic, Y. (2017). Listening to student views on the transition from work placement to the final year. *Accounting Education*, 26(4), 377-391.
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2017.1315604
[103] Procter, C. (2011). Employability and entrepreneurship embedded in professional placements in the business curriculum. *Journal of Chinese Entrepreneurship*, 3(1), 49-57.
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17561391111106025

6 Benefits and costs to institutions that encourage work placement/experience opportunities

> **What benefits/costs are realised by institutions that encourage placement / work experience opportunities? What is the role of HE institutions in organising these opportunities? How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement? What do universities do to encourage the widest possible participation? What are the main challenges that institutions face in providing these opportunities?**

From the perspective of HEIs, offering voluntary or compulsory placements as part of work-based learning has particular considerations. In England, the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2017 has meant that graduate employment outcomes have come under increasing scrutiny. HEIs with a TEF award can charge the maximum of £9,250 annual fees whereas those without the TEF can charge a maximum of £9,000. The TEF has embedded employability measures in its assessment of teaching quality, including the proportion of students working in graduate-level ('highly-skilled') employment after graduation as a core TEF employability measure, and the proportion of graduates in sustained employment or above median earnings threshold as supplementary measures.[104] This means that, if work placements and work experience are associated with better outcomes, HEIs can use these to improve their employability performance.

6.1 Benefits and costs to HEIs

We found examples of the following main types of benefits and costs of offering work placement and work experience opportunities to HEIs.

Spillover effects and community reputation, largely from collaborative work with other local organisations. The benefits of introducing a compulsory placement scheme in a HEI may enhance the reputation of the department organising the placement in the business community, with potential spillover benefits related to fundraising and other collaborative activities Divine et al., 2007).[105] However, there is no conclusive research about the magnitude of these spillovers.

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[104] https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/choosing-course/teaching-excellence-framework-tef-what-you-need-know
[105] Divine, R. L., Linrud, J. K., Miller, R. H., and Wilson, J. H. (2007). Required internship programs in marketing: Benefits, challenges and determinants of fit. Marketing Education Review, 17, 45-52.

HEI may need to consider the extent to which compulsory placements align with the HEI's strategic vision, values and culture . If this is done well, this could potentially improve the strategic direction of the HEI.

Developing in-house employment activities to provide placement opportunities to students could also become a revenue stream for the HEI . While the paper recommends considering setting up such initiatives (they have the potential to generate revenue), it should be emphasized that not all subjects have such direct commercial application. Second, creating such initiatives takes time (and academic and support staff are under increasing time pressures). Third, not all initiatives will pay off (it was fortunate that the studio managed to get the connection to Microsoft, but it is not possible to say what would have happened had the team done less well in the competition).

The strength of the evidence in the above papers is low-to-medium, as the research tends to summarise existing literature and/or developing the arguments at a conceptual level or carrying out a small survey of HE staff perceptions rather than carrying out a larger-scale, more robust statistical analysis or a well-designed interview study.
A major cost is the resource use to ensure that work experience and work placements are delivered well, as well as maintaining employer relationships so that placement opportunities are available to future generations of students. The role of faculty support to ensure effective university-industry collaboration is important (Rawlinson & Dewhurst, 2013).[106]

If HEIs facilitate work experience or work placement schemes, there is likely to be greater demand on departmental time and resources, both in terms of arranging such opportunities, developing and maintaining contact with employers and ensuring that students on placements are well-treated. An internship director may be needed to help coordinate such a module in an effective way . Finding enough internship opportunities to offer to students is another challenge (this is one of the reasons that some HEIs turn to simulated or virtual placements), but there is some evidence that employers are increasingly becoming open to the idea of taking on interns. The institution should also be able to ensure that students on internship placements are treated well, e.g. through visits, which is another use of resources.

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[106] Rawlinson, S., & Dewhurst, P. (2013). How can effective university-industry partnerships be developed? Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 5(3), 255-267.

For example, in some cases of students' experiences of WIL programs, a lack of HEI resources and a lack of *recognition* of these resources was observed (Smith et al., 2017). [107] Universities should aim to structure the WIL experience so that students both recognize and engage with them. Alerting students to the employability content of modules and promoting the advice and mentoring provided by the university, could help to align the opportunities available with student aspirations, but such alerts are resource intensive. On the other hand, without such signposting, an investment in curricular employability experiences may not achieve the intended return .

For HEIs that are developing new modules or simulated placements, the resource intensity of the exercise should not be underestimated. For example, Taylor and De Luca (2014)[108] highlighted that as they were setting up the in-house computer games company and negotiating with external employers, the university 'structural capital' was unfamiliar with this kind of activity, creating delays around issues to do with contractual agreements and IT security. This was a learning process for the team, and over time, with the development of new networks across the university, managing such obstacles became easier. Developing the necessary structural capital is often political and requires support. Over time, the academics also obtained training from a variety of sources, including an MBA to boost their credibility.

Similarly, in the case of a virtual placement carried out partly through a VLE and partly through SecondLife, long hours, unusual hours and the increased workload were also noted by the academic in charge of organising the scheme (Paul, 2015).[109]

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[107] Smith, S., Smith, C., Taylor-Smith, E., & Fotheringham, J. (2017). In search of graduate employability: An exploration of student identity. Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 18(1), 15-24.

[108] Taylor, R., & De Luca, D. (2014). Theory to practice: Canalside Studio, a case study. Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning, 4(1), 5-16.

[109] Paul, P. (2015). Virtual placements to develop employability skills for civil and environmental engineering students. Education Sciences, 5(2), 47-64.

6.2 What is the role of HE institutions in organising these opportunities?

Although HEIs can have as much or as little involvement as they wish in organising work experience / work placement opportunities, there are some areas where HEI involvement is particularly key to ensuring that all stakeholders get the most out of placements. The main ones we came across are:

- Placement design. There are roles for HEIs to ensure that placements are well-planned and that the WIL learning is aligned with the course, that students are briefed and prepared, that placements are 'authentic', and that undertaking a placement is assessed in a logical way. The literature related to this issue is discussed in more detail below.

- Relationship with employers. Some of the literature mentioned that arranging work placements should be viewed as a partnership between the stakeholders. While undergraduate students are usually registered on their courses for 3-4 years, HEIs have a longer institutional presence and memory that they can use to develop ongoing relationships with potential employers. Doing so may also improve employer reputation in the community.

- Equity. If left to their own devices to arrange placements, it may be the case that students with most social and economic capital would gain access to more lucrative placements compared to students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. This issue was also mentioned in the section above (Divine et al., 2007, mentioning that all students would be equally well prepared for employment). There may be an issue of compulsory placements having less positive outcomes than voluntary placements, however.

6.2.1 Placement design

6.2.1.1 Planning, preparation and communication

Smith and Worsfold (2014; 2015) [110] [111] found a 'cascading effect' where the alignment of teaching and learning activity with integrative learning influenced the authenticity of WIL (see below), possibly through the 'priming mechanism' which then affected students' employability skills of self-efficacy, team skills and work-readiness. Though the

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[110] Smith, C., & Worsfold, K. (2014). WIL curriculum design and student learning: a structural model of their effects on student satisfaction. *Studies in Higher Education,* 39(6), 1070-1084.
[111] Smith, C., & Worsfold, K. (2015). Unpacking the learning–work nexus: 'priming' as lever for high-quality learning outcomes in work-integrated learning curricula. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(1), 22-42.

associations are not causal, these findings support other research that emphasises the role of 'priming' and student support.

Their research also looked at WIL and student satisfaction. The results found that there were two main sub-dimensions to student satisfaction with WIL – (1) satisfaction with the university and (2) satisfaction with the work. The paper's **key finding was that 'priming' – induction and preparation activities – were the most important individual predictors for university-focussed satisfaction**. In contrast, students' satisfaction with work was more influenced by generic learning outcomes.

Clark and Zukas (2016)[112] looked at the factors affecting the quality of sandwich placements, focusing especially on how learning and skill development takes place. The authors used a Bourdieusian approach looking at the fit between students' habitus and the sandwich placement field, and the horizon for learning that emerges from the interplay of the field and habitus. They found that placements tended to go smoother if students were accepted at the initial stage (recognised by the employers as being a 'legitimate player') and if there was a broad horizon for learning. Whether students are accepted would depend on the fit between their habitus and the professional field, and the habitus will be influenced by socialisation. It is not clear therefore, what room there is for improving the fit, unless students recognise the rules of the game and the strategically learn to play in order to fit.

As part of a Graduate Employability Project that ran in a UK university between 2012 and 2015, new courses were also developed but it was not clear whether students felt employable (Smith et al., 2017)[113]. The authors conducted a survey of students from the following schools: Film and Television (n=14); Graphic Design (n=61) and Vet Nursing (n=28) (103 participants in total). 84% were aged between 17 and 22 years old; 76% were female and 81% were white UK. Work-related learning (e.g. study abroad, work placement or a studio-based live project) was a mandatory component of these students' program of study. However, students did not always recognize the work-related elements within the newly developed courses. Of those design students who had applied for specific work-related learning activities, 80% recognized that work-related learning was part of their program; of those who had not applied only 61% recognized it as part of their program. There was some confusion about the purpose and nature of these activities: 26% of the design students said that a "work-related or work-based module" was not offered and 13% did not know whether this was part of their course or not. However, some had accurately understood the course structure, answering: *"We are doing*

[112] Clark, M., & Zukas, M. (2016). Understanding successful sandwich placements: A Bourdieusian approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(7), 1281-1295.
[113] Smith, S., Smith, C., Taylor-Smith, E., & Fotheringham, J. (2017). In search of graduate employability: An exploration of student identity. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 18(1), 15-24.

placements next semester". The university also drew on alumni to speak to students about their work and it also runs an optional mentoring program for all direct entry students. These types of activities did not appear to impact to any great extent on this group of students.

6.2.1.2 Authenticity

It is important that WIL be 'authentic' – similar to the 'real world' – to improve development of employability skills (Smith and Worsforld, 2015)[114]. Some of this also connects to the research by Taylor & DeLuca (2014) about the in-house computer games company and the authenticity of that experience. As well as authenticity, it is important that learning activities are aligned with learning outcomes. Academic support and adequate preparation of students for their WIL activities are also important. The authors carried out a quantitative analysis looking at which of these variables was most effective for developing employability skills: work readiness, self-efficacy and team skills. The study compared Australia (N=158) and the UK (N=79), running hierarchical regressions on which factors affected each of the three operationalisations of employability skills. The authenticity of WIL had the largest effect on the outcome variable in each case compared to the other variables. Alignment of assessments with learning outcomes was important for work-readiness, while alignment of learning activities with learning goals and access to supervisor support were also important for developing self-efficacy. **Authenticity of the placement was the main driver behind developing team skills.** The authors suggest that priming students adequately before WIL may help them view the WIL as more authentic, and therefore have a greater impact on the outcome measures.

In another study, **authenticity of placements was highlighted as a factor providing rich learning contexts, enabling taking on responsibility for a project, and providing space for reflection** (Bullock et al., 2012)[115]. Using a mixed-methods research approach, the authors found that, for Bioscience students, there were particular aspects of broad learning that can only be gained through a placement and not elsewhere. The results suggested that students undertaking placements were more likely to rate improvements in transferable skills more highly than students who did not (except in team working, communicating with a wider range of people, confidence and critical thinking). Degree-integrated placements also provided a vehicle for developing autonomy and potentially for developing a professional identity, in contrast to the way that learning was perceived to take place at the university. Students made statements such as: 'My

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[114] Smith, C., & Worsfold, K. (2015). Unpacking the learning–work nexus: 'priming' as lever for high-quality learning outcomes in work-integrated learning curricula. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(1), 22-42.
[115] Bullock, K., Hejmadi, M., & Lock, G. (2012). Work placements for bioscience undergraduates: are they really necessary? *Journal of Biological Education*, 46(1), 4-11.

project was very satisfying. You get formative feedback. I felt like a biochemist on placement – I don't in university' (p. 10).

6.2.1.3 Assessment

Lasen et al. (2018)[116] conducted a review of the literature looking at the quality the design of WIL assessment. This study looked at research evaluating WIL in HE looking at studies published between 1990 and 2015, published internationally. Ultimately, 102 studies out of an initial 400 articles were selected for further review. The systematic review found that the majority of the literature tended to be qualitative or mixed-methods, with an under-representation of quantitative research. Much of the research design quality was rated weak to moderate, although there was some indication that the quality of the research design had improved over time, being somewhat better rated in the period 2000-2015. The researchers found that papers tending to score higher also tended to contain themes related to relevance, flexibility and teamwork. However, although the paper focuses on international research, there is little discussion of the situation in the United Kingdom. Moreover, there is no consideration of labour market outcomes of students engaging in WIL.

Different types of assessment may be considered for different situations. Jung (2011)[117] considers the assessment of employability-type modules and the tensions within the notion of assessment (for instance, some may be viewed as 'easy' or as 'demanding'). The paper discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using a 20-minute 'assessed interview' with WIL participants focusing on their learning outcomes rather than assessing a reflective portfolio. The interview was subsequently redeveloped to be more adaptable and less 'scripted' and to allow students to think on their feet more. The paper then discusses how the interview may be best assessed.

Smith (2012)[118] developed a framework for evaluating different types of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) using six dimensions: (1) authenticity, (2) support for integrated learning (at university and at work), (3) alignment of assessments with and (4) alignment of teaching / learning activities with integrative learning objectives, (5) supervisor access and (6) induction / preparation processes. The framework was confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis and data from a convenience sample of 219 students at one UK and one Australian university: Criminology (n = 24), Engineering (n = 102) and Film

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[116] Lasen, M., Evans, S., Tsey, K., Campbell, C., & Kinchin, I. (2018). Quality of WIL assessment design in higher education: a systematic literature review. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(4), 788-804, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2018.1450359

[117] Jung, J. (2011). Assessing learning from a student community engagement project. *Education & Training,* 53(2-3), 155-165. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00400911111115690

[118] Smith, C. (2012). Evaluating the quality of work-integrated learning curricula: A comprehensive framework. *Higher Education Research and Development,* 31(2), 247-262. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.558072

(n = 14) in Australia, and Business (n = 79) in the UK. The paper concluded that the tool "provides a useful framework for understanding and focusing evaluation of the key aspects of WIL curricula" (p. 259).

6.3 What do universities do to encourage the widest possible participation?

We found no information about this specific question in the literature search.

6.4 What are the main challenges that HEIs face in providing these opportunities?

In the US context, Devine et al. (2007) summarised the following challenges of HEIs in organising internships – in the case of the paper, internships that were required as part of the course:

- Internships that are required as part of a course place more of a commitment on departmental time and resources. An internship director may be needed to help coordinate such a module in an effective way.
- Finding enough internship opportunities to offer to students is another challenge, but there is some evidence that employers are increasingly becoming open to the idea of taking on interns.
- The institution should also be able to ensure that students on internship placements are treated well, e.g. through visits, which is another use of resources.
- The authors suggest that a department consider whether a required internship module is a good fit for its values, culture and vision.

There may sometimes be a tension between applying academic content to the 'real-world' situation. For example, Cresswell et al. (2013)[119] looked at how 'patient safety' was taught and learned. The key point was about how to deal with differences between 'academically correct' and 'real life' practice. Many respondents noted that such differences were not always explored by placement supervisors or formally acknowledged by academics, and this left learners unclear about what was acceptable variation versus unsafe practice, e.g. *"…the stranger moving into an established group of people, and they very quickly find out how best they can…feel secure in the group. If they challenge what is unacceptable behaviour, if they say: "in college we were taught this"*

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[119] Cresswell, K., Howe, A., Steven, A., Smith, P., Ashcroft, D., Fairhurst, K., . . . Patient Safety Education, R. G. (2013). Patient safety in healthcare preregistration educational curricula: Multiple case study-based investigations of eight medicine, nursing, pharmacy and physiotherapy university courses. *BMJ Quality & Safety,* 22(10), 843-854. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjqs-2013-001905

someone will laugh at them, some will decide what they've learned and the student will feel challenged." (Patient focus group, patient, Site B).

Another challenge to effective placement integration is the requirement to work around the academic content. For example, following the evaluation of the University of Huddersfield's new module, Language in the Workplace (Lugea, 2016),[120] the University made important changes to the module, to improve its implementation, including:

- Reducing the required number of hours on placement to 150.

- Increasing the teaching time from 6 hours to 12 hours in the first semester, including lectures and seminars where students could practice interview questions, troubleshot their CVs and discuss readings and theories. Students felt they needed further guidance on both developing their employability skills and exploring the language-related aspects of the module.

- Making the blog-writing the first summative assessments.

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[120] Lugea, J. (2016). Language in the Workplace: Combining Academic Study with Work Experience.

7 Benefits and costs to employers that offer work placement/experience opportunities

> **What benefits/costs are realised by employers that offer a placement / work experience opportunity? How do these vary between students, institutions, employers and different types of placement? What process do employers follow to offer a placement or work experience? What are the main challenges that employers face in providing these opportunities?**

Limited academic evidence was available based on the results of our search. We include some insight from trade journals and other non-academic sources where appropriate, but the evidence from such sources should be treated with caution.

In the context of construction, anecdotal evidence suggests that some construction employers offer a variety of options to students, such as bursaries, 'day release' recruitment schemes, and work experience (Stothart, 2013) [121]. The employers provide these kinds of options to develop a talent pipeline and also to recruit recent graduates at a low salary. This raises the question of contradictory benefits – for firms, an advantage of placements can be that they can save on their recruitment and staff costs by paying the students or graduates a low wage. On the other hand, while a placement may be a foot in the door for graduates, they may also have to weather being paid a lower salary than they would otherwise get in another job.

However, the demand for placements may be higher than placements available. While no comprehensive data on this exist, according to "Charted Management Institute (2014) research of 1,065 organisation members, that only 22% of employers provided student placements or internships while 89% wanted students to have meaningful work experience (in: McMurray et al., 2016).[122]

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[121] Stothart, C. (2013). Graduate intake on the rise. *Construction News*, Nov 26.
[122] McMurray, S., Dutton, M., McQuaid, R., & Richard, A. (2016). Employer demands from business graduates. Education & Training, 58(1), 112-132. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2014-0017

7.1 Benefits and costs realised by employers that offer placement / work experience opportunities

The main benefits and costs to employers of offering work placement or work experience opportunities that were mentioned in the literature include:

- Staffing issues. Employers could cover short-term staffing issues (Forum of Private Business (2011), in: Smith et al., 2015) as well as looking more long-term and developing a pipeline of future employees (CBI, 2009, p. 14: in: Smith et al., 2015). Employers may benefit from the reliability of a compulsory placement programme that would provide them with a source of high-quality and yet lower-cost labour (Divine et al., 2007).

- Cost. Work placements and work experience can be a source of cheap(er) labour for employers (CBI, 2009, p. 14: in: Smith et al., 2015), although there was limited research that looked at an actual cost-benefit analysis.

- Trial. Internships and work placements can be used by firms to 'trial' potential workers without having to commit to an employment contract, almost like an extended interview. This way, employers are able to learn more about the worker without prior commitment (Chynoweth, 2012). E.g.: "An internship is like a nine-week interview. It allows them to see what our business is like and we can see them: their work ethic - whether they are grafters." (Amanda Haig, HR manager for graduates at Allianz, the insurance company, in: Chynoweth (2012, 45)

- Fit. Employers can ensure that students have the skills they need through influencing curriculum design.

- Innovation. Students or graduates on a work placement may be a source of new ideas for the organisation. This can also contribute to employer productivity and profitability (Smith et al., 2015, p. 157)[123].

- Reputation. Through collaborative activities with HEIs and providing opportunities to students in the local area, employers could potentially raise their profile in the community (Hurst and Good (2010), in: Smith et al., 2015),

However, according to the CIPD Learning and Talent Development Survey 2010 (Chynoweth (2012, 45)[124], offering internships for productivity-related reasons was low on the list. Almost 80% of the surveyed employers thought that internships were of benefit to earners, and three quarters thought they were a good way of testing the potential of new
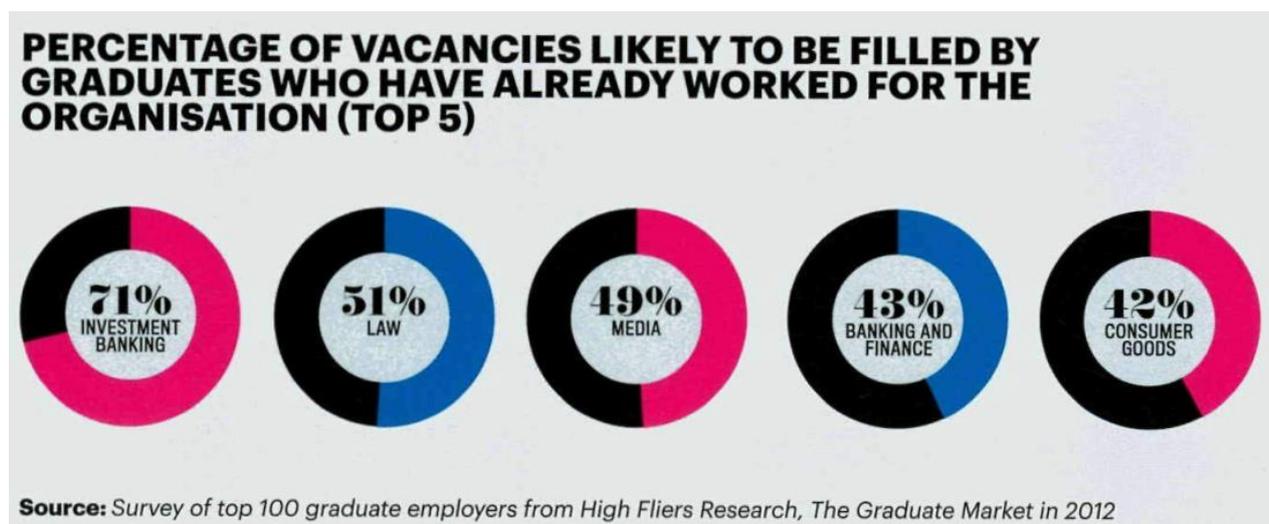
[123] Smith, S., Smith, C., & Caddell, M. (2015). Can pay, should pay? exploring employer and student perceptions of paid and unpaid placements. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 16(2), 149-164. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1469787415574049
[124] Chynoweth, C. (2012). Work the Experience. People Management, 5, 43-46.

staff. However, half of employers thought that internships were cost-effective (potentially undermining the 'source of cheap labour' argument). Just one third of the surveyed employers thought that internships would help improve productivity.

The role of internships or placements as a trial interview may differ in different industries. For example, the CIPD Learning and Talent Development Survey 2010 (Chynoweth (2012, 45) showed that around 71% of vacancies in the investment banking sector and 42% of the vacancies in the consumer goods sector were likely to be filled by graduates who worked for the organisation before.

Figure 3: Top 5 industries where vacancies likely to be filled by graduates who have prior experience of working for the organisation

PERCENTAGE OF VACANCIES LIKELY TO BE FILLED BY GRADUATES WHO HAVE ALREADY WORKED FOR THE ORGANISATION (TOP 5)

71% INVESTMENT BANKING · 51% LAW · 49% MEDIA · 43% BANKING AND FINANCE · 42% CONSUMER GOODS

Source: Survey of top 100 graduate employers from High Fliers Research, The Graduate Market in 2012

Source: Chynoweth (2012, p. 44).

Small and medium-sized enterprises may face particular challenges when hosting interns, such as capacity constraints related to physical resources, number of available staff, and an inability to commit to providing internships on a regular basis in times of financial hardship (Pegg and Caddell, 2016)[125]. There is also an issue of SMEs needing support and capacity building to effectively manage a student intern.

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[125] Pegg, A., & Caddell, M. (2016). Workplaces and policy spaces: insights from third sector internships Scotland. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6(2), 162-177.

CIPD GUIDELINES

The CIPD recently produced a guide to help employers run high-quality internship schemes. Building on the institute's Internship Charter - a voluntary code of practice - the guide suggests that interns should be:

- recruited in broadly the same way as "regular" employees - openly and fairly;
- paid in accordance with relevant legislation;
- provided with a proper induction to the organisation;
- treated with the same professionalism as other employees;
- offered appropriate support and supervision;
- given a reference letter detailing what they have done at the end of the internship;
- offered the opportunity to give feedback on their experience.

When it comes to the level at which interns should be remunerated, the CIPD has the following advice:

- if an intern is contributing to your company, has a list of duties and is working set hours then technically they should be paid the national minimum wage;
- even where it Is genuine work experience, there is a strong case for paying interns a bursary or salary due to the contribution that they make, particularly if the internship lasts for three months or more;
- as a bare minimum, the organisation should cover any necessary work-related expenses incurred by the intern. This includes travel to and from work.

Source: Chynoweth (2012, p. 44). Note that there are minimum wage exemptions for students doing the internship as part of a course.

7.2 Main challenges that employers face in providing these opportunities

Some of the main challenges for employers arise from the misalignment of stakeholder expectations. For example, there was some evidence that suggested that employer and student perception of proficiency in certain skills often differed.

Dinning & Ünlü (2017)[126] explored students and employer perspectives on work placements for sports degree students in a UK university and picked up a tension between student and employer views. The article focused on a university in the UK where students in sports business degrees would spend 8 weeks working with a local sports club on a project related to helping the club run as a business (e.g. sponsorship, media campaign, marketing, etc). This module was compulsory. 30 students (29 male) took part in the study. Pre- and post-project questionnaires were distributed to students, and interviews after the project were conducted with the students and with the project hosts. The results suggested that students thought that they had a range of skills at the outset and that the project also contributed to skill development, and thought that the skills were relatively important to them. However, **there were some discrepancies between employer views and student views about the skills they developed. For example, employers commented that students had poor planning and time management, while students commented on setting deadlines**. Part of the explanation could be different bases for comparison and different reference groups for the employers and for the students. There was also evidence of different emphases in terms of skills – e.g. 'creativity' was taken by students to mean the output (e.g. website) and by employers – to mean the process / solutions.

Wong et al. (2014)[127] carried out a content analysis of the course content of logistics and supply chain management (LSCM) undergraduate courses from 18 UK HEIs and from job advertisements from an online recruitment web site during 12 weeks in 2011-2012. The research found a mismatch between the content of courses and the requirements of employers identified in job advertisements at three job levels (using salary as a proxy for seniority and type of job: £18,000-£30,000; £30,000-£40,000; £40,000-£100,000). The research highlighted how professional skills, general management knowledge (rather than subject knowledge) and work experience was often valued by employers and that courses often lacked opportunities for professional experience. While their study did not focus on work placements provided by the institutions in the sample, the researchers did highlight the need for greater inclusion of work experience in HEI LSCM courses.

McMurray et al. (2016)[128] discussed what employers demand in terms of business and management skills from Business graduates in the Scottish context. Employers considered that the role of work experience was 'vital' in graduates' development

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[126] Dinning, T., & Ünlü, H. (2017). Embedding employability and enterprise skills in sport degrees through a focused work-based project; a student and employer viewpoint. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1-14. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1387085
[127] Wong, C. Y., Grant, D. B., Allan, B. & Jasiuvian, I. (2014). Logistics and Supply Chain Education and Jobs: A study of UK markets. *The International Journal of Logistics Management*, 25(3), 537-552.
[128] McMurray, S., Dutton, M., McQuaid, R., & Richard, A. (2016). Employer demands from business graduates. *Education & Training*, 58(1), 112-132. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2014-0017

(Davies, 2012)[129]. The authors contacted 207 employers from the LDLHE dataset and conducted interviews with over 70 organisations. Personal attributes and employability skills were mentioned by employers as the top two factors influencing their decision to recruit graduates, although this may be because the level of technical skills demanded for the job was low. The findings also suggested that employers valued 'good' and 'relevant' work experience, although it was not clear what this meant in practice, with **some employers saying that 'any relevant work experience is good' and also that 'commercial' work experience is 'better than bar work'.**

While 'cheap labour' is often used as an incentive for employers to provide placements, there may be a tension with unpaid internships being barriers to student participation. Unpaid placements may also be unpopular with students. For example, in a study of students' views about placements, two thirds of the students who did a paid placement agreed or strongly agreed that employers should pay for placements, while of those who did an unpaid placement there was also marginal agreement that they should have been paid (Smith et al., 2015)[130].

7.3 What process do employers follow to offer a placement or work experience?

We found no information about this specific question in the literature search.

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[129] Davies, B.,Gore, K., Shury, J.,Vivian, D.,Winterbotham, M. andConstable, S. (2012), "UK commission's employer skills survey 2011: UK Results", Evidence Report No. 45, UKCES, London, May.
[130] Smith, S., Smith, C., & Caddell, M. (2015). Can pay, should pay? Exploring employer and student perceptions of paid and unpaid placements. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 16(2), 149-164. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1469787415574049

8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Conclusions

We note that, among the literature exploring the impact of work placements during higher education on outcomes, the vast majority tended to focus on student outcomes rather than on outcomes for employers or higher education institutions. The lack of evidence on the costs and benefits of offering work placements or work experience opportunities for HEIs and employers constitutes a major gap.

Even in the literature on opportunities, costs and benefits for students or graduates, the research evidence tended to be piecemeal rather than comprehensive. While HESA statistics do collect information about enrolments on sandwich courses that enable breakdown by type of course and type of student, there is no single source of information about other, non-sandwich, placement or work experience activity. Data from survey sources suggest that most students have done some such experience, however.

Most of the available literature does not tend to disaggregate the effects of undertaking a placement by placement type. While there was some evidence pointing to differential labour market outcomes of different types of work placements in some of the research (mostly quantitative but some qualitative as well), research looking at students' own assessments tended to find almost ubiquitous evidence of perceived skill development. There is therefore a question as to why skill development does not always translate into improved labour market outcomes. One tentative suggestion is that not all work placements or work experience develop skills to the same extent. Another possible suggestion, and one that has some support from the literature, is that, as getting a graduate job has become less connected to the development of technical skills and more to positional competition (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004), work experience and work placements tend to serve more of a signalling role in providing information for employers about whom to employ. There may, however, be different mechanisms operating in different parts of the labour market.

There was some literature available looking at the impact of work placements or work experience taking self-selection into account, but the majority of the literature looked at associations without correcting for self-selection. Although compulsory work placements during HE tend to address some of the issues around more able students self-selecting into voluntary placements and may lead to a more uniform experience of the course, it seems that there is no clear impact on students' outcomes, with some studies reporting no significant effect (e.g. Klein and Weiss, 2011; Silva et al., 2018), and other studies reporting more positive effects accruing to voluntary placements. Overall, this lends more support for the signalling hypothesis rather than the human capital development hypothesis of how work placements affect outcomes.

The literature on self-selection tends to find that, once statistical techniques are deployed to take selection based on ability or motivation into account, there is still a positive, albeit possibly smaller, wage return to work placements (Jones et al., 2017; Saniter and Siedler, 2014, to an extent – Reddy and Moores, 2012), as well as a positive impact on employment outcomes such as the likelihood of being invited to interview (Nunley et al., 2016).

It appeared that the degree of 'authenticity' of the work placement was positively associated with outcomes, and that adequate support, preparation and integration of the placements with the academic course content also contributed to the success of the work placement. However, these are all further costs to HEIs and would usually require resource outlay. Advantages to HEIs included reputation, spillover benefits and potentially improved employability outcomes (e.g. as measured by the TEF in England).

One of the advantages of offering work placements and work experience to employers that was mentioned in the literature was the ability to make use of lower-cost employees. However, this argument may go against issues of access to work placements for students from disadvantaged backgrounds for whom cost is a particular issue. Other advantages for employers included access to innovation and new ideas, the development of a talent pipeline and the ability to contribute to the development of the skills employers needed. However, there was no robust evidence underpinning these costs and benefits to employers and to HEIs in the literature we reviewed.

The implications of these findings are:

•   **A gap in the evidence about the impact of different work placements on student outcomes is emerging;**

•   **There is clear under-representation of research on the effects of work placements on HEIs and employers compared to students or graduates;**

•   **The available literature on self-selection tends to confirm that, even after taking self-selection into account, work placements still have a positive, though smaller, effect on outcomes. However, it is not often the case that both type of placement and elf-selection are taken into account;**

•   **There appears to be more support for work placements having more of a signalling role rather than a human capital development role, however, it may be the case that there are different mechanisms going on at different parts of the labour market.**

8.2 Recommendations

- More systematic data should be collected on the types of work placement activities implemented at different HEIs to develop a fuller understanding of what is on offer.

- While many studies investigated the benefits and costs of placements to different groups of students on different courses, it was often difficult to add up all the evidence owing to differences in research designs, methods, data and so on. On the other hand, that the different studies tend to point to an overall positive outcome of work placements or work experience suggests that such activities are useful. However, analysis at a more disaggregated level may reveal different labour market outcomes to different types of placements. Better data would allow more disaggregated and nuanced analysis to take place.

- The devolved nature of HE and the way in which the employability agenda is formalised (e.g. in the TEF in England) as well as the different ways in which HE courses are organised and the tuition fee implications for students should be taken into consideration.

- More information should be made available about the costs and benefits to HEIs of organising work experience and work placement opportunities (e.g. the costs of employing internship coordinators, or extending the function of the careers services, etc.)

- More information should be made available about the costs and benefits to employers of providing work experience and work placement opportunities (e.g. the resources involved in supervising students, students' contribution to the workload, innovation, profitability, etc., as well as the extent to which placements build a talent pipeline)

9 Appendices

Table 4: search strings used

1 - Country	Searched for: AB,TI,SU(Britain OR British OR UK OR "United Kingdom" OR England OR English OR Scotland OR Scottish OR Wales OR Welsh OR "Northern Ireland" OR "Northern Irish" OR UK)
2 Include placements and work experience	Searched for: AB,TI,SU("work experience*" OR "work placement*")
3 Focus on students/ graduates	Searched for: AB,TI,SU("student*" OR "graduate*")
4 Focus on HE	Searched for: AB,TI,SU("higher education" OR "higher education institution*" OR "universit*" OR HE OR "HEIs" OR "HEI" OR "HE sector")
6 Publication date from 2010 onwards	Searched for: PD(2010-2019)
Combine 1,2,3,4,6	Searched for: AB,TI,SU(Britain OR British OR UK OR "United Kingdom" OR England OR English OR Scotland OR Scottish OR Wales OR Welsh OR "Northern Ireland" OR "Northern Irish" OR UK) AND AB,TI,SU("work experience*" OR "work placement*") AND AB,TI,SU("student*" OR "graduate*") AND AB,TI,SU("higher education" OR "higher education institution*" OR "universit*" OR HE OR "HEIs" OR "HEI" OR "HE sector") AND PD(2010-2019)

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