



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *How academics can play a more influential role during a year-in-industry placement: A contemporary critique and call for action*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/196746/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Donald, WE and Hughes, HPN orcid.org/0000-0001-8454-8206 (Accepted: 2023) How academics can play a more influential role during a year-in-industry placement: A contemporary critique and call for action. *Industry and Higher Education*. ISSN 0950-4222 (In Press)

This article is protected by copyright. This is an author produced version of an article accepted for publication in *Industry and Higher Education*. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>



How academics can play a more influential role during a year-in-industry placement: A contemporary critique and call for action

Journal:	<i>Industry and Higher Education</i>
Manuscript ID	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Viewpoint
Keywords:	curriculum, higher education, placement, self-perceived employability, students, viewpoint
Abstract:	Universities worldwide are tasked with producing employable graduates capable of operating in evolving, complex, and global labour markets. Research into the effectiveness of year-in-industry placements to facilitate such objectives often portrays the dominant actors as students, employers, managers, and (de)centralised placement teams. Framing this as our point of departure, we propose that academics can play a more influential role. Our essay discusses the challenges for academics of designing, delivering, and assessing a year-in-industry placement module. Next, we consider the opportunities for students to enhance their self-perceived employability. We conclude with a call for innovative thinking, knowledge sharing, and empirical research.

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

How academics can play a more influential role during a year-in-industry placement: A contemporary critique and call for action

Universities worldwide are tasked with producing employable graduates capable of operating in evolving, complex, and global labour markets. Research into the effectiveness of year-in-industry placements to facilitate such objectives often portrays the dominant actors as students, employers, managers, and (de)centralised placement teams. Framing this as our point of departure, we propose that academics can play a more influential role. Our essay discusses the challenges for academics of designing, delivering, and assessing a year-in-industry placement module. Next, we consider the opportunities for students to enhance their self-perceived employability. We conclude with a call for innovative thinking, knowledge sharing, and empirical research.

Keywords: Curriculum, module design, assessment, academics, higher education, year-in-industry, placement, students, self-perceived employability.

Submission Type: Opinion/Viewpoint

Word Count: 2,954

Setting the scene

Universities are paying significant attention to how engagement activities can enhance student satisfaction and experience (Mooney, 2022). A dominant theme is the increased focus on graduate employability metrics during the degree (Langan and Harris, 2019). From the student perspective, self-perceived employability is defined as, “the individual’s perception of his or her possibility of obtaining and maintaining employment” (Vanhercke et al., 2014: 594). Moreover, self-perceived employability has been empirically shown to be influenced by six forms of capital (social, cultural, psychological, scholastic, market-value, skills), career advice, and career ownership (Donald et al., 2019). However, there is an acknowledgement of the interplay between personal and structural factors of self-perceived employability (Vanhercke et al., 2014), captured via person, context, and time dimensions of a sustainable career (De Vos et al., 2020).

1
2
3 One approach to enhancing students' self-perceived employability is a year-in-industry
4 placement (herewith referred to as a placement) (Otache and Edopkolor, 2022). The placement
5 forms part of a sandwich degree, whereby a traditional 3-year undergraduate course is
6 supplemented by an additional placement year before the final year of study. A placement is
7 an augmented work experience whereby the university supports their students, and module
8 completion contributes towards the final degree classification or title. Jones and Wang (2022:
9 1) observed how such placements have, "a more powerful impact on student performance
10 compared to international study placements abroad". However, not all placements offer the
11 same value to subjective career outcomes of students (Inceoglu et al., 2019), and transitions to
12 remote and hybrid working in response to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions posed socio-digital
13 challenges for many placement students (Dewi, 2022; Hughes and Davis, 2021).

14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28 Another challenge is that the dominant actors of placements are often portrayed as the
29 students, employers, managers, and (de)centralised placement teams (Vélez and Giner, 2015).
30 Students typically view their primary relationship during the placement as with their employer,
31 meaning they can often be unwilling or resistant to engage with the university during this phase
32 of their degree. Inceoglu et al. (2019) suggest that students feel this way because they view the
33 placement as a career transition and an opportunity for career identity construction. Yet, we
34 believe academics can play a more influential role since the interaction between different actors
35 can determine placement success and students' self-perceived employability outcomes
36 (Narayanan et al., 2010; Vélez and Giner, 2015).

37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49 Framing this as our point of departure, our essay discusses (i) module design, delivery,
50 and assessment, (ii) challenges for academics, (iii) opportunities for students, and (iv)
51 concluding thoughts calling for innovative thinking, knowledge sharing, and empirical
52 research.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Module design, delivery, and assessment

A feature that distinguishes placements from other kinds of work experience is that students are assessed in some way, usually by completing a corresponding university module. However, deciding what is to be assessed depends on the goal(s) and learning outcomes that the placement is considered to deliver. Module design, delivery, and assessment subsequently rely on context-specific ways to achieve authentic assessment (Manville et al., 2022). For example, securing and fulfilling the placement might be considered the primary goal in competitive labour markets, so placement completion is assessed on a pass-or-fail basis. Other popular approaches are underpinned by similarly objective perspectives of placement ‘success’, often involving assessing the student *post*-placement through tools such as portfolios and presentations that showcase achievements (Perusso and Baaken, 2020). While such approaches have value because they encourage students to recognise accomplishments and identify self-perceived employability, they also have limitations.

First, they rely on post-hoc rationalisation of experiences, which can be affected by cognitive bias (Walentynowicz et al., 2018) and overall satisfaction with the placement experience. Poor role specification, lack of opportunity, misalignment of personalities, or a clash in student-organisation values, can all negatively influence a student’s post-placement perceptions of their employability. That can mean that the employer ‘actor’ plays a disproportionately influential role in swaying a student’s perceptions of their employability (along with their associated module outcome!). Second, they overlook a vital opportunity to ‘engage pedagogy’ in the placement (Greenwood-Hau, 2021).

Consequently, we propose an alternative approach to module design, delivery and assessment, underpinned by the view that placements can contribute to students’ subjective employability in different ways. For some students, placements provide vital work experience for a CV or disciplinarily relevant achievements. For others, they help them shortlist future

1
2
3 career directions, surface skills, or highlight development needs. For others, they serve a
4 combination of purposes (Jackson, 2020). Subsequently, our alternative approach focuses on
5 the placement journey and the learning that occurs through consolidating experience with
6 knowledge (Greenwood-Hau, 2021). One way to approach this is to measure students'
7 perceptions of their competencies, goals, confidence, and achievements at different points in
8 the placement (e.g., pre-, mid-, and post-placement) through questionnaires and associated
9 reflective exercises. 360-degree feedback opportunities from workplace colleagues can be
10 incorporated into the process, and students can be encouraged to use this feedback and their
11 reflections to benchmark and track their progress, think about successes alongside development
12 needs, and consider tangible actions that they can take *during* the placement itself (see Hughes,
13 2022, for an example).

14
15 Additionally, embedding reflective assessments into placement modules can help re-
16 establish reluctant relationships between students and their academic tutors because the
17 assessment offers a purpose for reconnecting, which students value. Through formative
18 assessment feedback and the allocation of an academic 'placement tutor', academics can help
19 students identify *what* they have learned and achieved, *how* they have learned it, and *where*
20 they can develop further. We believe that ongoing assessment and guidance throughout the
21 placement can help students to digest feedback and (re-)evaluate development needs, career
22 plans, and/or next steps. In contrast, waiting until the end of the placement misses intervention
23 opportunities that can change the course of a placement experience.

24
25 Against this assessment backdrop, academics can play a valuable mentoring role during
26 the placement journey. Academics have disciplinary expertise that can help students consider
27 how placement tasks align with course knowledge. They can also help normalise common
28 experiences (e.g., the use of specialist jargon or workload fluctuations). Moreover, academics
29 with personal experience in a particular field can use their knowledge to help broker
30

1
2
3 conversations between students and managers about possible in-placement opportunities such
4 as secondments or particular projects. We, therefore, believe that module design, delivery, and
5 assessment are pivotal in influencing students' self-perceived employability and that academics
6 can play a fundamental role by using such tools to shape a student's cognitive rationalisation
7 of the placement experience. However, we also need to consider the challenges that academics
8 might encounter when attempting to play a more significant role during the placement year.
9

18 **Challenges for academics**

19 Academic placement tutors must understand that some students sign non-disclosure
20 agreements prohibiting the sharing of sensitive information. Placement students also have
21 significantly different experiences from each other, which need to be accounted for to ensure
22 equity in the assessment process (Inceoglu et al., 2019), and in tutor-student matching.
23
24

25 Additionally, students often pay a lower tuition fee during their placement year than for
26 their other undergraduate study years (Rogers, 2022). University management may then
27 perceive an increased availability of academics for other student cohorts, which could be a
28 barrier to delivering high-quality curriculum content and tutoring support to placement
29 students. However, we posit that additional resource investment is worthwhile for three
30 interrelated reasons.
31
32

33 First, the students who need career-related support the most are those least likely to
34 proactively seek it from university career services (Donald et al., 2018). Second, the mandatory
35 nature of the placement module, when combined with specific learning outcomes and
36 assessment methods, can help to enhance social mobility efforts by increasing the self-
37 perceived employability of all students (Jackson, 2020). Third, placement schemes of this kind
38 can lead to academic engagement with organisations that can foster serendipitous research
39 collaborations and knowledge transfer partnerships, which can yield symbiotic benefits for
40 universities, employers, and students alike (Franco et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2021).
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Another challenge is knowledge sharing and collaboration between different actors
4 with competing agendas. Buckholtz and Donald (2022) highlight how universities compete for
5 league table rankings linked to student satisfaction and employability outcomes; whilst
6 employers compete for early career talent and reputational status. We agree with their call for
7 win-win partnerships and believe that academics have a role to play in this ecosystem.
8 Furthermore, the kinds of tutor roles advocated in this essay will likely suit academics
9 interested in engaging with organisations, which may necessitate skills training (Hughes et al.,
10 2021). Our focus now shifts to the opportunities the placement module delivery can yield for
11 students.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24

25 **Opportunities for students**

26 Donald and colleagues (2018; 2019) showed that the year of study impacts students' self-
27 perceptions of employability, whereby perceptions are lower in the final year of study
28 compared to the penultimate year of study on a three-year undergraduate degree. Students
29 reported via interviews that this was caused by increased awareness of external labour market
30 factors (e.g., competition for jobs, rejected applications, etc.). Similarly, Hughes (2022)
31 captured challenges with poor person-organisation fit and critical feedback during placements.
32 These findings suggest the influence of social cognitive career theory, which "emphasises that
33 career- and study-related decision making are influenced by feedback and feed-forward
34 mechanisms and by intra- and inter-personal, historical, and cotemporaneous dimensions"
35 (Bennet et al., 2020: 750).
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

50 The placement module can potentially normalise these experiences by fostering
51 dialogue between students. The development of personal resources in the classroom can
52 enhance students' ability to learn and develop outside the classroom (Case et al., 2022). Peer
53 learning as supplemental instruction could also complement the curriculum to enhance social
54 mobility and self-perceived employability (Donald and Ford, 2022). There is an opportunity
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 for students to take ownership of brokering the relationships between different parties (e.g.,
4 lecturers, placement teams, organisations), which we believe has the potential to provide a
5 sense of agency, increased confidence, and leadership capabilities (all determinants of self-
6 perceived employability).
7
8
9
10
11

12 Academics could map student trajectories across the placement (e.g., pre-placement,
13 mid-placement, end of placement) via a mixture of self-reported and manager-reported
14 questionnaires, whereby data could be accumulated over time at the student and cohort levels
15 (Hughes, 2022). The opportunity would then exist for students to compare their performance
16 and employability markers against benchmark data from their peers or previous cohorts.
17 Comparing manager scores with self-perceived scores of employability markers can also be
18 beneficial since 360-degree feedback has been shown to enhance student learning (Salvador,
19 2022). The impact may also be significant since an empirical study involving circa 3,000
20 managers and 200 organisations found that students completing a placement reported lower
21 self-perceived employability levels than their manager's assessment (Hughes, 2022).
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 Another opportunity for students comes from the chance to author reflective essays as
36 part of the module assessment. Reflective essays can encourage students to embrace a growth
37 mindset, whereby the actions they take for improvement based on feedback they receive is of
38 greater significance than the feedback itself. Storytelling via personal narratives can also help
39 students reflect on feedback, construct a personal development plan, and communicate their
40 learning experiences to prospective employers (Sherwood, 2020). The sharing of these
41 narratives, when combined with the quantitative benchmarking data, can also help students
42 who might perceive their abilities in a specific area to be low, whilst the data shows they are
43 'above average'. Alternatively, self-perceptions that are overestimated can be adjusted
44 accordingly. These opportunities further emphasize the influence of social cognitive career
45 theory on career- and study-related decision-making (Bennet et al., 2020).
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The output from the placement module of the personal development plan, combined
4 with industry experience, can then enable the student to pursue self-improvement either on
5 their own or in partnership with the university careers service or a mentor from industry during
6 their final year of undergraduate study. Academics could also share the cohort results with the
7 university career service to highlight areas where students are predominantly struggling. The
8 career service could then run sessions for students targeting these aspects or communicate these
9 gaps to the industry and ask for support in recognition that university career services are
10 currently struggling to meet the increased demand for their services caused by the Covid-19
11 pandemic (Donald et al., 2021). There is also an opportunity to promote other university
12 support services, given that three in four students and recent graduates reported reduced levels
13 of self-perceived well-being, with additional concerns about their future employment prospects
14 (Donald and Jackson, 2022).

31 **Concluding thoughts**

32 We believe academics can be more influential in enhancing students' self-perceived
33 employability and satisfaction outcomes during a placement. The time has come for innovative
34 thinking and knowledge sharing around the design, delivery, and assessment of placement
35 modules. Empirical data can help to determine the effectiveness of interventions compared to
36 benchmark metrics. Moreover, accumulating data across cohorts can enable students to
37 compare their performance against their peers while helping academics identify areas for future
38 module improvement. We hope this essay will act as a catalyst for academics to enhance
39 placement modules for the benefit of all stakeholders.

52 **References**

53 Bennet D, Knight E and Bell K (2020) Graduate employability and the career thinking of
54 university STEM students. *Teaching in Higher Education* 25(6): 750-765.
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Buckholtz TJ and Donald WE (2022) Direct outcomes and win-win relationships between
4 university careers advisors and graduate recruiters. *GiLE Journal of Skills Development*
5
6 2(1): 9-25.
7
8
9

10 Case JM, Agrawal A, Abdalla A, Pitterson N and McArthur J (2022) Students' experiences
11 of the value of lectures for their learning: A close-up comparative study across four
12 institutions. *Teaching in Higher Education*. Epub ahead of print.
13
14
15
16
17
18 DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2022.2101096.
19

20 De Vos A, Van der Heijden BIJM and Akkermans J (2020) Sustainable careers: Towards a
21 conceptual model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 117: 103196.
22
23
24
25

26 Dewi R (2022) Adapted work placement delivery method under COVID-19 towards
27 students' job preparatory behaviours. *Industry and Higher Education* 36(6): 716-729.
28
29

30 Donald WE and Jackson D (2022) Subjective wellbeing among university students and recent
31 graduates: Evidence from the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Environmental*
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Donald WE and Ford N (2022) Fostering social mobility and employability: The case for
peer learning. *Teaching in Higher Education*. Epub ahead of print.
DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2022.2145467.

Donald WE, Ashleigh MJ and Baruch Y (2018) Students' perceptions of education and
employability: Facilitating career transition from higher education into the labor
market. *Career Development International* 23(5): 513-540.

Donald WE, Ashleigh MJ and Baruch Y (2021) The university-to-work transition: Responses
of universities and organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Personnel Review*.
Epub ahead of print. DOI: 10.1108/PR-03-2021-0170.

- 1
2
3 Donald WE, Baruch Y and Ashleigh MJ (2019) The undergraduate self-perception of
4
5 employability: Human capital, careers advice and career ownership. *Studies in Higher*
6
7 *Education* 44(4): 599-614.
8
9
- 10 Franco M, Silva R and Rodrigues M (2019) Partnerships between higher education
11
12 institutions and firms: The role of students' curricular internships. *Industry and Higher*
13
14 *Education* 33(3): 172-185.
15
16
17
- 18 Greenwood-Hau J (2021) Teaching facts or teaching thinking? The potential of hooks'
19
20 'engaged pedagogy' for teaching politics in a 'post-truth' moment. *Teaching in Higher*
21
22 *Education*. Epub ahead of print. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2021.1965567.
23
24
25
- 26 Hughes HPN (2020) Understanding the value of internships. Report, University of Leeds,
27
28 UK, July. Available at: [https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/202/
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60](https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/202/understanding_the_value_of_work_placements)
understanding_the_value_of_work_placements
- Hughes HPN (2022) The Work-Integrated Opportunity and Development Tool (WIODT): A
practical approach to maximise the value of work-integrated learning. *International
Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Epub ahead of print.
- Hughes HPN and Davis MC (2021) Starting your career during a pandemic: The experience
of remote and hybrid working. Report, University of Leeds, UK, October. Available at:
[https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/247/starting_your_career_during_a_
pandemic_-_report](https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/247/starting_your_career_during_a_pandemic_-_report)
- Hughes HPN, Davis MC, Robinson MA and McKay A (2021) The pursuit of organizational
impact: hits, misses, and bouncing back. *European Journal of Work and
Organizational Psychology*, 30(3): 339-354.

- 1
2
3 Inceoglu I, Selenko E, McDowall A and Schlachter S (2019) (How) do work placements
4 work? Scrutinizing the quantitative evidence from a theory-driven future research
5 agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 110(B): 317-337.
6
7
8
9
10 Jackson D (2020) Applying academic selection criteria to work-integrated learning
11 programmes: Risk management or perpetuating inequality? *Teaching in Higher*
12 *Education* 25(1): 98-115.
13
14
15
16
17
18 Jones C and Wang Y (2022) The performance effects of international study placements
19 versus work placements. *Higher Education*. Epub ahead of print.
20
21 DOI: 10.1007/s10734-022-00861-5.
22
23
24
25
26 Langan AM and Harris WE (2019) National student survey metrics: where is the room for
27 improvement? *Higher Education* 78: 1075-1089.
28
29
30
31 Manville G, Donald WE and Eves A (2022) Can embedding authentic assessment into the
32 curriculum enhance the employability of business school students? *GiLE Journal of*
33 *Skills Development* 2(2): 73-87.
34
35
36
37
38
39 Mooney R (2022) Dart triad traits, engagement with learning, and perceptions of
40 employability in undergraduate students. *Industry and Higher Education*. Epub ahead
41 of print. DOI: 10.1177/09504222221140829
42
43
44
45
46 Narayanan VK, Olk PM and Fukami CV (2010) Determinants of internship effectiveness: An
47 exploratory model. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 9(1).
48
49
50
51 Otache I and Edopkolor JE (2022) Work placement learning and student employability: Do
52 student satisfaction, commitment and achievement matter? *Industry and Higher Education*
53
54
55
56 36(6): 730-741.
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Perusso A and Baaken T (2020) Assessing the authenticity of cases, internships and problem-
4 based learning as managerial learning experiences: Concepts, methods and lessons for
5 practice. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 18(3): 100425.
6
7
8
9
10 Rogers S (2022) University tuition fees and financial support in England. Report, Complete
11 University Guide, UK, March. Available at: [https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.](https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/finance/university-tuition-fees-and-financial-support-in-england)
12 [co.uk/student-advice/finance/university-tuition-fees-and-financial-support-in-england](https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/finance/university-tuition-fees-and-financial-support-in-england)
13
14
15
16
17 Salvador R (2022) Challenges and opportunities for problem-based learning in higher
18 education: Lessons from a cross-program industry 4.0 case. *Industry and Higher*
19 *Education*. Epub ahead of print. DOI: 10.1177/09504222221100343.
20
21
22
23
24
25 Sherwood G (2020) Am I missing something by not using story-telling? Why we should ask
26 university students to use story-telling to evaluate their learning experiences. *Teaching*
27 *in Higher Education* 25(3): 321-333.
28
29
30
31
32
33 Vanhercke D, De Cuyper N, Peeters E and De Witte H (2014) Defining perceived
34 employability: A psychological approach. *Personnel Review* 43(4): 592-605.
35
36
37
38 Vélez GS and Giner GR (2015) Effects of business internships on students, employers, and
39 higher education institutions: A systematic review. *Journal of Employment Counseling*
40 52(3): 121-130.
41
42
43
44
45 Walentynowicz M, Schneider S and Stone AA (2018) The effects of time frames on self-
46 report. *PLoS One* 13: e0201655.
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60