

In-house, University-based work experience versus off-campus, work-experience

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Abstract

Purpose: To investigate students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of ~~internal (in-house,)University-based work experience~~ versus ~~external-off-campus, workwork placements experience~~.

Design/methodology/approach: Three focus groups, one consisting of students who had undertaken ~~an external work placementwork experience off-campus at an employers' workplace~~ (n=6), one consisting of students who had undertaken ~~an work experience internal placementin-house with a University-based employer~~ (n=6), and a third mixed ~~placement~~ group (n=6,)~~consisting of students who had undertaken both types~~, were formed. Focus group data were supplemented by interviews (n=3). Data were transcribed and analysed thematically.

Findings: Based on student perceptions, both types of ~~work experience placement~~ were thought to: enhance future employment; provide career insight; enable skill/experience acquisition and application; and be useful for building relationships. ~~Internal placementsWork experience that occurred in-house was were~~, in addition, perceived to: be cost effective; enable students to be more closely supervised and supported; be good for relationship building between and within students/staff; be beneficial for increasing student attainment; and enable students to see the link between theory and practice more clearly. ~~Internal placementIn-house work experience was were~~, however, deemed to be restricted in terms of variety, and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders.

Research limitations: The study is limited in that it is based on the perceptions of students undertaking unique ~~placements-types of integrated work experience within one faculty~~ at one university.

Practical implications: When deciding on whether ~~internal-in-house~~ or ~~external-off-campus work experiences placements~~ are offered, consideration should be given to level of support, supervision, observation, and travel and time costs.

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7 **Originality/value:** Original views of students regarding ~~internal placements~~in-house work
8 experience have been gathered, which can be used to inform ~~placement choice~~in-course
9 workplace practices.

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12 **Key words:** work-based learning; placements; internships; employability; workplace
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1 Introduction

2 Students who undertake relevant work experience, such as a work placement or internship,
3 are not only more likely to receive a good degree (upper second or first class award),
4 compared to those who do not (Brooks and Youngson, 2016; Jones *et al.*, 2015; Mansfield,
5 2011; Patel *et al.*, 2012), but are also more likely to gain competitive advantage in the job
6 market (Harvey *et al.*, 1998; Helyer *et al.*, 2014; Langworthy and Turner, 2003; Tomlinson,
7 2008). Placements-Work experience have has been found to improve student progression
8 and retention rates (Langworthy and Turner, 2003), and to motivate the student for further
9 learning (Moore &-and Workman, 2011). Placements-Work experience also improves
10 students' perception of their academic experience (Kettis *et al.*, 2013), which could impact
11 on overall student satisfaction scores.

12
13 Reasons for why students undertake a placementwork experience, and the perceptions of
14 their placement experience have been explored through qualitative research. One perceived
15 benefit of placements-a work experience is that they-it provides insight into a particular
16 industry or type of employment (Little and Harvey, 2006), to the extent that students are
17 more able to identify with their intended profession (Kettis *et al.*, 2013). Placements-Work
18 experience isare also thought to supplement learning (Little and Harvey, 2006), enable the
19 student to see how theory is applied in practice (Bullock, Gould, Hejmadi and Lock, *et al.*,
20 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006), and improve personal and transferable skills, such as
21 communication, confidence, perseverance and empowerment (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Helyer *et*
22 al., 2014).

23
24 Despite these reported advantages, there are several limitations concerning work
25 experience-placements. Inappropriate placements-work places or not being able to place
26 students with an appropriate employer are common challenges (Nduna, 2012). Students
27 may be obliged to find placement-work themselves, which presents problems such as
28 students having to cold-call employers, and then having to face rejection (Aggett and Busby,

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1 2011). Bullock *et al.* (2009) found that some students were not organised or confident
2 enough to arrange their own work placement experience. There are also cost implications for
3 the University (Nduna, 2012), as well as cost implications for the student, since time spent in
4 work-placement experience, which ~~are-is~~ generally unpaid, means that time in paid
5 employment has to be reduced (Bullock *et al.*, 2009). There is also considerable diversity of
6 placement-work experience. Students are, for instance, not always visited in the workplace
7 by their University supervisor due to time and travel constraints of staff (Nduna, 2012).
8 Barriers for employers to providing placement-relevant work opportunities also exist, such as
9 the costs and time associated with supervision and managing projects (Wilson, 2012). For
10 these reasons, there has been a decline in the number of students who undertake external
11 work experience at an employer's workplace placements (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Nduna,
12 2012). Universities have, therefore, been considering alternatives to the traditional work
13 placementwork experiences that occur offsite at the employers' worksite, such as
14 experiential learning, project-based learning (Nduna, 2012), extracurricular activities (Wilson,
15 2012), virtual placements (Cornelius *et al.*, 2008), and community-based learning projects or
16 'science shops' (Gamble and Bates, 2011).

17
18 Internal (in-house work) placements may experience may be one way of providing all the
19 benefits of the a traditional placement-off-campus work experience but without the resource
20 implication, and the difficulties of trying to secure suitable placement-workplace
21 opportunities. Internal-In-house placements-work experience may also be suitable for
22 students who are not confident enough to work externally. Internal-In-house work placement
23 opportunities are common in a number of settings, including medical, law, and sport, where,
24 In such situations, often a subsidised, commercial clinic or service is available on campus,
25 often-subsidised, which provides an opportunity for students to gain unpaid work placement
26 experience.

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7 1 | There are certain disadvantages with ~~internal an in-house work experiences~~placements.
8 2 | They decrease external employer engagement, reduce opportunities for knowledge transfer,
9 3 | and decrease other benefits associated with employer engagement and links with external
10 4 | stakeholders (Mansfield, 2011; Tallantyre, 2010). Nduna (2012), however, suggests that
11 5 | there was little or no proof of enhanced collaboration with industry as a result of external
12 6 | work experiences that occur at the employers' workplaceplacements. A further disadvantage
13 7 | of internal in-house placements work experience is that students might not be able to
14 8 | develop their identity by observing a 'real' community of practice (Wenger, 1998).The
15 9 | advantages and disadvantages of work experience that occur internal in-house, on campus
16 10 | versus ~~external work that which occurs at an employer's workplace placement~~warrants
17 11 | further investigation. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate students'
18 12 | perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house, University-based
19 13 | work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based experience external versus internal
20 14 | work placements.
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1 **Methods**

2 Undergraduate students ~~within one faculty offrom one-a~~ university in the United Kingdom
3 were informed about the study through advertisement (email, virtual learning environment,
4 and verbal announcement in lectures). Students who expressed an interest were contacted
5 to ensure they met the inclusion criterion (undertaken a relevant ~~placement~~work experience),
6 and were invited to participate. All participants gave their written and informed consent
7 having been fully ~~informed~~briefed of on the study procedures. The study was approved by
8 the University's research ethics committee.

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10 Students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house,
11 University-based work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based work experience
12 ~~external versus internal work placements~~ were explored through focus groups and
13 interviews. ~~All of the students who volunteered were studying for an undergraduate degree~~
14 within sport and exercise, and were enrolled on a module, in which they were obliged to
15 complete between 75 and 150 hours of unpaid work placement experience. The work
16 experience was integrated within the module, and the module took place in the third year of
17 the students' study. There were approximately 100 students who met the inclusion criteria at
18 the time of data collection, from which volunteers were obtained.

19
20 Three focus groups were formed: one group consisted of students who had undertaken ~~an~~
21 ~~external work~~their work placement experience at a school or within a local council setting
22 (n=6) that was external to the University; another group consisted of students who had
23 undertaken ~~an internal placement in-house work experience~~, which was within a commercial
24 sports science support service (n=6); and a third, mixed ~~placement~~ group, consisted of
25 students who had undertaken ~~both external~~their work experience both with an employer
26 external to the University (in a sports therapy or physiotherapy clinic or with a sports club)
27 and ~~internal with placements as part of~~ a commercial sports therapy service that was an in-
28 house, University-based setting (n=6). For the purposes of this paper, the three groups are

1 referred to as: 'in-house', 'off-campus', and 'mixed'. The term 'work experience' is used in
2 this context to represent the learning from and application of knowledge and skills to a
3 relevant working environment. The work experience was integrated into the learning of a
4 module. Students used the term 'placement' since this is how the work experience was
5 described in their module. Students referred also to 'internal placements', which were the in-
6 house work experiences, and 'external placements' that were the off-campus work
7 experiences. All participants were nearing the end or had recently finished their work
8 experience. Focus group data were supplemented by interviews with two students who had
9 undertaken the ~~internal-in-house~~ only ~~placements work experience~~ and one student who had
10 undertaken ~~the external-off-campus~~ only ~~placement work experience~~, giving a total of 21
11 participants. Interviews were felt to be necessary following focus group data collection as an
12 attempt to achieve data saturation. The number of participants in each focus group followed
13 recommendations of Carlson and Glenton (2011). Interviews and focus groups lasted
14 between 30 and 45 minutes, and took place at a time and location convenient to the
15 participants. The duration of the focus groups/interviews was such that they continued until
16 the researcher felt that data saturation point had been reached. ~~All participants were nearing~~
17 ~~the end or had recently finished their placement.~~ Focus groups were chosen as the
18 predominant method of data collection due to their ability to provide an understanding and
19 deeper exploration of the views and ideas of the specific groups of participants under
20 investigation (Wilkinson, 1998).

21
22 A topic guide was used to explore perceptions, which included the following: what students
23 thought about their work ~~experience-placements~~ generally (e.g., likes/dislikes and
24 appropriateness); perceptions of the value and impact of the work ~~experience placement~~ on
25 their learning ~~experience~~, degree classification, job prospects and professional identify; and
26 whether or not the ~~placement-work experience~~ had allowed them to develop links with
27 industry. At the end of the focus group/interview, the topic guide was checked to ensure that
28 all areas had been covered. The topic guide reflected the broad research question. The

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7 1 focus groups and interviews were conducted by an independent researcher, who was
8 2 recruited specifically because of her experience in focus group conduction and data
9 3 analysis. The researcher did not know any of the students, was outside of their programme
10 4 of study, and also had not been part of the study conception; these factors were put in place,
11 5 in order to reduce bias in how the focus groups/interviews were conducted, and also how
12 6 coding was carried out.
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19 8 The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to facilitate
20 9 analysis. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (following procedures from
21 10 Braun and Clarke, 2006), allowing for exploration and interpretation of the relevant
22 11 placement issues more widely (Marks and Yardley, 2004). This method involved two of the
23 12 researchers reading transcripts independently and devising their own coding, key concepts
24 13 and themes. Codes and themes were based on the broad research question, which was on
25 14 the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of the in-house and off-campus work
26 15 experiences. All data that met the broad research question were coded. Themes were
27 16 constructed based on meaningful and coherent patterns in the data, relevant to the research
28 17 question. The researchers ~~then~~ met to compare and contrast their findings, and to agree a
29 18 set of themes and subthemes. In reporting of the findings extracts, pseudonyms have been
30 19 used to protect identity. Extracts were selected if they were thought to reflect the themes and
31 20 subthemes particularly well.
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44 22 A qualitative research design was used, since others had used such approaches to examine
45 23 students' perceptions of work placements (e.g., Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock *et al.*,
46 24 2009;), and because we wished to explore and examine the degree of commonality and
47 25 disparity of views, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences within and between the off-campus and
48 26 in-house students.
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1 Findings and discussion

2 Perceptions of placements-work experience were diverse, ranging from those who reported
 3 negative experiences (*I haven't learnt anything* [Trevor, external-off-campus placement
 4 group]), to very positive experiences (*I loved it. Absolutely, completely love it, wish I could go*
 5 *back and do it all over again* [Bob, mixed placement-group, talking about his external-off-
 6 campus placementwork experience]). These perceptions, however, did not depend on the
 7 placement type-location of the work experience (internal-in-house versus externaloff-
 8 campus), but were more to do with the particular individual's placement-work experience.

9
 10 Six main themes, which were common to both placement-types of work experience,
 11 emerged from the data: future employment; career insight; skills and experience; support;
 12 time; and relationships.

13 14 15 *Future employment*

16 Regarding future employment, there were two subthemes: enhancing employer perceptions
 17 and career links. All participants thought that their placement-work experience would 'look
 18 good' on their curriculum vitae, and would make them seem more employable (enhancing
 19 employer perceptions).

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 21 *...when you leave Uni, there's a lot of talk about how a degree's not enough*
 22 *anymore...I think that the more work experience you do, the more volunteer stuff you*
 23 *do, then you're definitely going to help other people's views...when it comes to looking*
 24 *for a job* [Jenson, internal-in-houseplacement]

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 26 This perception was apparent even when the placement-work experience was deemed
 27 lacking in other areas:

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7 1 ...just having the experience...even though it might not be a positive experience, it's
8 2 | experience [Trevor, ~~external-off-campus placement~~]

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11 4 | In the mixed ~~placement~~-group, it was felt that the ~~external-placement-work experience that~~
12 5 ~~took place at the employer's worksite~~ would enhance employer perceptions more so than
13 6 ~~that undertaken the internal-in-house placement~~:
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18 8 ...I think overall external placement will probably make me look better when you go for
19 9 | a job after uni[versity]...than just the internal [Becca, mixed~~placement~~]
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24 11 According to previous researchers (Harvey *et al.*, 1998; Langworthy and Turner, 2003),
25 12 ~~placements-undertaking a work experiences are-is~~ more likely to lead to students gaining a
26 13 competitive advantage when it comes to gaining employment. Based on the current data, the
27 14 competitive advantage could be because ~~placements-the work experience~~ enhances
28 15 the perceptions of employers, this point being supported by Eagle *et al.* (2008), who reported
29 16 that ~~placements-work-experience placements~~ were generally viewed as favourable by
30 17 employees. In the current study, although students thought that their ~~placementwork~~
31 18 ~~experience~~, irrespective of ~~placement-type~~where it took place (~~internal-in-house~~ versus
32 19 ~~external-off-campus~~) and suitability, enhanced employer perceptions, there was a tendency
33 20 for ~~external-off-campus placementswork experience~~, when being compared to ~~internal-in-~~
34 21 ~~house placementswork experience~~, to be thought of as enhancing employer perceptions to a
35 22 greater extent.
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24 | The mixed ~~placement~~-and ~~external-off-campus~~ students valued the links to ~~the external~~
25 25 employers, ~~who were external to the University~~ (subtheme, career links):
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27 | ...it's not what you know, it's who you know. [Bob, commenting on his ~~external-off-~~
28 28 ~~campus placementwork experience~~].

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8 2 *If you go in with the right attitude and everything there is a chance that you can get*
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10 3 *employed at the end.* [Jason, ~~external-off-campus placement~~]

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13 5 For those students who were in the ~~internal-in-house placement~~ group, career links were still
14 6 valued. This particular ~~placement-work experience~~ involved external clients coming into the
15 7 University to use the service; students felt that links with external clients in this way were
16 8 valuable for their career. In the ~~external-off-campus placement~~ group, it was stated by one of
17 9 the participants that the links were of no value, since this particular student was not intending
18 10 to go back to ~~the-that-particular-placement-workplace~~, owing to a negative experience. It
19 11 seems, therefore, that career links are important in ~~a placement-work experience~~ if they
20 12 are perceived to be of value, but are not dependent on ~~placement-location type where the~~
21 13 ~~work experience takes place~~, the latter finding contradicting observations by others
22 14 (Mansfield, 2011; Tallantyre, 2010), who reported that ~~internal-in-house placements-work~~
23 15 ~~experiences~~ might decrease links with employers.

16 17 18 *Career insight*

19 Students in all three groups talked about career insight, within which emerged two
20 subthemes: gaining real-world experience, and reinforcing and re-evaluating career
21 aspirations. All students, regardless of whether they were doing ~~internal-in-house~~, ~~external~~
22 ~~off-campus~~ or mixed ~~placement types of work experience~~, found that the ~~placements-work~~
23 ~~were-was~~ useful in gaining real-world experience (*...you can't really gain that through sitting*
24 *in a classroom* [Dave ~~external-off-campus placement~~]).

25
26 By gaining this experience, students' career aspirations were either reinforced or re-
27 evaluated. In other words, some students found that the ~~placement-work experience~~ had
28 made them realise that they did not want to continue with their previously intended

1 | profession, whereas for others, the placement work experience had confirmed that their
2 | career choice was the right one. Again, these observations were independent of placement
3 | type:

4 |
5 | *I think you've got to understand what exactly they do before you can kind of make a*
6 | *decision on what it is that you're dead set on, 'cos once you commit to something you*
7 | *commit to something. [Jenson, internal-in-house placement]*

8 |
9 | *It's making you see whether you want to get involved in it after. 'Cos if you don't*
10 | *enjoy it after this, you won't enjoy it going into it, whereas if you still enjoy it after this,*
11 | *you're probably gonna carry on. [Dave, external-off-campus placement]*

12 |
13 | *...it sort of confirms to you that it is what you wanna do...instead of realising sort of*
14 | *afterwards, 'cos it's a big risk doing three years and then realising it's not what you*
15 | *wanna do, but doing the placement helps confirm that. [Paige, mixed placement]*

16 |
17 | These opinions and perceptions regarding career insight reinforce those found by Little and
18 | Harvey (2006), although in the current study, unlike that of Kettis *et al.* (2013), students did
19 | not say that the placement work experience had helped them specifically to identify with their
20 | intended profession, or developed their identity as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).
21 | Gaining career insight and reinforcing and re-evaluating career aspirations were, however,
22 | important aspects of all placement types types of work experience, irrespective of location, in
23 | the current study.

24 | 25 | 26 | *Skills and experiences*

27 | For all three groups, students identified a number of skills and experiences. Subthemes
28 | were: job-specific skills, putting into practice, confidence, variety, and getting a better grade.

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8 2 Apart from communication skills, which were identified by all students regardless of
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10 3 ~~placement~~ the location of their work experience ~~type~~, the job-specific skills identified were
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12 4 unique to the particular employment type ~~placement~~, such as teaching-related skills, and
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14 5 specific technical skills. All students identified these skills as being an advantage of
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16 6 ~~placements~~ a work experience.

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19 8 Confidence was highlighted as an important skill acquired, irrespective of ~~placement type~~ the
20
21 9 location of the work experience:
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23 10

24 11 *...one of the biggest barriers you have to overcome doing your placement is*
25
26 12 *definitely confidence.* [Becca, mixed group, ~~placement~~ talking about ~~external-off-~~
27
28 13 ~~campus~~ placement work experience)
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31 15 *...it makes you more confident....knowing that you can actually perform what you*
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33 16 *say, so your confidence helps you progress.* [Sophie, internal-in-house ~~placement~~]
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36 18 Similar to the findings of others (Bullock *et al.* ~~(~~ 2009; Helyer *et al.*, 2014), where students
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38 19 perceived ~~placements~~ work-based learning placement experiences and internships as
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40 20 improving their confidence, and their personal and transferable skills, students in the current
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42 21 study, regardless of ~~placement type~~ work experience location, highlighted job-specific skills
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44 22 and confidence as being important skills acquired as a result of their ~~placement~~ work
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46 23 experience.
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49 25 The subtheme, putting into practice, was about how students were able to put their skills and
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51 26 experiences that they had learned in the classroom into practice 'in the field'. Such
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53 27 comments were particularly apparent among the ~~internal-in-house~~ placement ~~group of~~
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55 28 students, possibly because the ~~internal-in-house~~ work experience ~~placement~~ (which was a
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1 sports science support service) had been specifically set up for this purpose. Students
2 remarked how they had learnt and understood more in-depth information by doing this
3 internal-in-house placement experience than they had in their normal, scheduled teaching
4 sessions (laboratories and lectures):

5
6 *...I feel like I've learnt a lot more in the clinic than in the labs* [Rob, internal-in-house]

7
8 *I think I've learnt more in them few hours than I did in those labs* [Jackie, internal-in-
9 house]

10
11 Students, who did-were in the external-off-campus placements-onlygroup, also commented
12 on how they were able to put their skills into practice:

13
14 *...it's like behaviour management...you won't really understand in terms of someone*
15 *telling you what to do, you can only learn that through it actually happening.* [Dave,
16 external-off-campus placement]

17
18 These viewpoints support those of other researchers, regarding the value of placements
19 work experiences in supplementing learning, and in enabling students to see how theory is
20 applied in practice (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006). Although it seemed that the
21 internal-in-house placement students could see the link between learning and practice more
22 clearly, all students valued this aspect of their placementwork experience, regardless of
23 placement type where the work took place.

24
25 Regarding variety, there was a tendency for internal-placement students who had done their
26 work experience in-house to say that the skills they acquired were not varied (*...we always*
27 *come and do the same sort of testing* [Bruce, internal-in-house placement]; *...in clinic, you*
28 *just do a load of massages and that's it.* [Becca, mixed placement talking about internal-in-

1 | ~~house work experience~~placement]), owing perhaps to a lack of equipment (...within a
2 | professional sport they obviously have the budget for bigger medical facilities. [Bob, mixed
3 | placementgroup]). A lack of variety, was also mentioned, however, by those who were doing
4 | external-off-campus placementswork experience, owing to the placement-work experience
5 | being restricted in some other way, such as it being on the same day each week, having to
6 | work with the same group of children (for those on work experience placements in a school),
7 | or not being allowed to do all aspects of the job (...on external er I couldn't go pitch side 'cos
8 | I didn't have a first aid qualification. [Dan mixed placement-group commenting on the
9 | external-off-campus work experienceplacement]). The mixed placement-group of students
10 | appreciated the variety that both the internal-in-house and external-off-campus placements
11 | work experience gave them (...you do need to experience both sides [clinic and sport]
12 | [Becca, mixed-placement]. Variety, whether positive or negative, could, therefore, be
13 | dependent on placement-work experience locationtype.

14 |
15 | Most students felt that the placement-work experience enabled them to get a better grade,
16 | particularly highlighted by students in the internal-in-house placement-group (I've been
17 | getting better marks and percentages on my assignments. [Jenson]). The placement-work
18 | experience formed was-part of the students' study, which contributed directly to their grade,
19 | which students acknowledged. These findings confirm-support observations made by other
20 | researchers (Brooks and Youngson, 2016; Mansfield, 2011; Patel et al., 2012), in that
21 | students undertaking a work placement are more likely to obtain a good degree. There were,
22 | however, also some reservations regarding enhancement of grades, since the placement
23 | work experience was felt to be, in some instances, so time consuming that it was actually
24 | taking the students away from other aspects of their study. Further follow-up research on
25 | whether the internal-in-house and external-off-campus placements-work experiences do, in
26 | fact, lead to a better degree classification could be undertaken.

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7 1 Support

8 2 Subthemes identified under the theme of support included: finding placementswork
9 3 experience; level of supervision; and observation.
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11 5 Finding placements-work experience was unique to those who were doing external-off-
12 6 campus placementswork. The mixed group specifically identified the struggles that they had
13 7 had in finding an appropriate placementemployer:
14 8

15 9 *...if you can't find a placement but you're looking every single day, you've then got*
16 10 *more pressure just to basically take a placement anywhere, although maybe you*
17 11 *don't wanna go there.* [Bob, mixed placement-group talking about external-off-
18 12 campus placementwork experience]
19 13

20 14 Some of the students, for whom aoff-campus placement-work experience had been found,
21 15 said that they wished that they had been able to find their own placementemployer, since
22 16 they were not happy with the placement-oneworkplace experience that they had been given.
23 17 Inappropriate placements-work placements and internships or not being able to find a
24 18 suitable work placements have been identified in previous research as a limitation to
25 19 external-off-campus placements-experiences (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock et al., 2009;
26 20 Nduna, 2012). Finding a placement-work experience was not an issue for those who were
27 21 only-doing-anworking internal-in-houseplacement.
28 22

29 23 Students in all groups talked about the level of supervision they received on their
30 24 placementwork experience. For internal-in-house placement-students, the fact that tutors
31 25 were there to support them was viewed positively:
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33 27 *First day of a job you're gonna be in the deep end either way aren't you, whereas this*
34 28 *is sort of middle ground still.* [Chuck, internal-in-houseplacement]
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8 2 *...I think when you go in, you're a little bit nervous because...you're worried that you*
9 3 *won't know how to perform a certain task but you've got the back up from whoever's*
10 4 *in the lab helping you...so you progress at your own speed. [Sophie, internal-in-*
11 *houseplacement]*
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17 7 *...if you haven't done something quite right on placement, you can do it again [Alice,*
18 8 *mixed placement-group talking about internal-in-house placementwork experience]*
19
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22 9
23 10 In the group of students who could compare their internal-in-house and external-off-campus
24 11 placement-work experience, students seemed to appreciate the level of supervision of the
25 12 internal-in-house placementwork experience, but also felt that the external-off-campus
26 13 placement-work experience put them under pressure, which was thought to be both a
27
28
29
30 14 positive and a negative thing:
31
32

33 16 *...you've got the real world professionals watching you do everything, so there's a bit*
34 17 *more pressure to get it right the first time....rather than internal, there's always*
35 18 *someone there to help you. [Dan, mixed placement]*
36
37
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40 20 *...I think when you're working internally you can get a bit of a safety net where if you*
41 21 *don't know anything, you can just pop up and ask the supervisor, but when you're in*
42 22 *that [external-off-campus] environment, if you don't know it, you have to go away and*
43 23 *learn it....I feel an external placement is better because you don't have that safety*
44 24 *net, there's a more pressurised environment. [Bob, mixed placement]*
45
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51 26 In the external-off-campus placementgroup, the level of supervision varied according to the
52 27 particular placementwork experience, either being viewed as inappropriate to the extent that
53 28 the placement-hostemployer did not know the student was coming on-placementto the
54
55

1 | workplace, to those where organisation and level of supervision were thought to be good.

2 | The level of supervision, therefore, might be dependent on the student, and how much
3 | support they feel they need. Providing ~~internal placements in-house~~ work experience may
4 | help those students in the early part of their University life, or may help students who lack
5 | the confidence to be 'thrown into the deep end'.

6 |
7 | Regarding the subtheme of observation, there were both benefits and barriers identified.
8 | Some students appeared to have benefitted from observing only (rather than doing):

9 |
10 | *Even though I've sat back and observed a lot, I have learnt stuff like...behaviour*
11 | *management.* [Trevor, external-off-campusplacement]

12 |
13 | *...I still learnt a lot just by shadowing.* [Paige, mixed placement-group talking about
14 | her external-off-campus placementwork experience]

15 |
16 | Other students wanted to have a more active role:

17 |
18 | *...it's kind of annoying...just sitting in the corner just watching,* [Jess, external-off-
19 | campus placement]

20 |
21 | These benefits and barriers seemed to be specific to the placementwork experience and
22 | student preferences, rather than whether or not the work took place in-house or off-campus
23 | the its placement of the work experience type.

24 |
25 |
26 | Cost

27 | For the theme of cost, subthemes identified were: time and travel. The placement work
28 | experience being viewed negatively, in terms of how it meant that their time was away from

1 studying, or was too time consuming in general, was identified by all students, regardless of

2 placement typework experience location:

3

4 *I could be doing my dissertation right now [Bruce, internal placement in-house]*

5

6 *...you have to be the one to decide, right, which day am I gonna lose to do my*

7 *placement and then work basically everything around that. [Becca, mixed placement]*

8

9 The internal placement in-house work experience, however, was viewed more positively, in

10 that time was less of an issue, due to the placement work being more flexible (as the internal

11 placement in-house work experience was specifically designed to accommodate students

12 when they were free on their timetable).

13

14 Travelling to and from the placement work experience was specific to the external off-

15 campus placement students only, and was viewed both positively and negatively:

16

17 *...it takes an hour and a half to get to the training ground and two hours to get to the*

18 *stadium but I do it with ease now because I love what I do. [Bob, mixed placement*

19 *group talking about his external placement off-campus work experience]*

20

21 *...getting there has been a bit of a nightmare... [Trevor, external off-campus*

22 *placement]*

23

24

25 Travel time was understandably not an issue for those students undertaking internal in-

26 house work experience placement.

27

1 These observations on time and travel identified in the current study support those of others,
 2 (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Nduna, 2012), although were not always viewed as negative, and were
 3 less of an issue for ~~internally students undertaking in-house work experience~~ placed
 4 ~~students~~.

7 Relationships

8 A final theme that emerged from the data was about relationships, which included the
 9 subthemes of social side and tutor relationships. The ~~internal placement~~ students, ~~who were~~
 10 ~~undertaking in-house work experience~~, talked about the social side ~~of the placement~~
 11 ~~experience~~, where they were able to chat with others in the course (*...I got to talk to a few*
 12 *people on my course that I wouldn't normally talk to.* [Jenson]). Students who had ~~done~~
 13 ~~undertaken external-off-campus work experience placements~~ also talked about the social
 14 side: (*...it's just like the team spirit and the team banter. I love it.* [Dan, mixed ~~placement~~
 15 ~~talking about external experience~~placement]).

17 Unique to ~~internal placements~~ ~~in-house work experience~~, was the subtheme of tutor
 18 relationships. Students commented on how they had been able to build good, positive
 19 relationships with their tutors with whom they worked (*...you get to see like a different side of*
 20 *them* [Rob, ~~internal placement~~ ~~in-house~~]), which transferred, it was highlighted, into the
 21 classroom.

24 Conclusions

25 ~~Based on student perceptions, placements work, regardless of whether they were internal in-~~
 26 ~~house or external off-campus:~~

27 • ~~Enhanced future employment, because:~~

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7 1 ○ students felt that employers were more likely to view their placements work
8 2 favourably, irrespective of the placement experience;
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10 3 ○ placements work provided career links with valued external employers and
11 4 individuals
12
13
14 5 ● Gave students career insight, since:
15 6 ○ real world experience was gained, and
16 7 ○ the placement work provided students with an opportunity to reinforce or re-
17 8 evaluate their career aspirations
18
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21 9 ● Allowed students to gain and put into practice a variety of skills and experiences*
22 10 (such as job-specific skills, confidence, communication skills, and gave them the skills
23 11 needed to enhance their grades), and
24
25
26 12 ● Allowed students to build relationships.
27
28 13 Work experience, regardless of whether in-house or off-campus, was perceived by the
29 14 students who took part in this study to enhance future employment, not only because they
30 15 felt that employers were more likely to view their work experience as favourable, but also
31 16 because the work experience provided career links with valued, external employers and
32 17 individuals. Students also felt that the work experience, regardless of its location, provided
33 18 them with career insight via real-world experience, through which they were able to re-affirm
34 19 or re-evaluate their career aspirations. Students thought that both in-house and off-campus
35 20 work experience allowed them to gain and put into practice a variety of skills and
36 21 experiences (such as job-specific skills, confidence, and communication skills), enhanced
37 22 their university grades, and allowed them to build relationships.
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49 25 Issues (viewed positively and negatively) that arose for both internally placed in-house and
50 26 externally placed off-campus students work experience included: the level of support in
51 27 finding a placement work; the level of supervision during the placement work experience; the
52
53
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1 amount of observation versus 'hands-on' experience involved in the placementwork
2 experience; and travel and time costs.

3
4 When comparing internal-in-house and external-off-campus placementswork experiences,
5 based on the data collected in the current study (which was limited to students undertaking a
6 limited number of placementswork-based learning experience that was integrated, short in
7 duration (75 to 150 hours) and specific to one faculty of one university), internal-in-house
8 placements-work experience were was deemed advantageous in that students did not have
9 to find their own placementwork, and was deemed cost effective in terms of travel and
10 possibly, to some extent, time. In addition, internal-in-house placements-work experience
11 allowed students to feel supported, and allowed them to develop relationships with their
12 tutors and other students. The internally-in-house placed students specifically identified how
13 their placement-work experience enabled them to see clearly the link between theory and
14 practice. External-Off-campus work experiences placements were, however, deemed to
15 'look' better to the employer than were internal—in-house
16 experiencesplacementsexperiences, but if the internal-in-house placement-work experience
17 involved some kind of external clientele, then career links were believed sufficient. A lack of
18 variety seemed to occur with internal-placementsin-house work experience, but also with
19 external-off-campus placementsexperiences, which were restricted by, for instance, time.

20
21 The study is limited in terms of sample size and cohort. There was, however, an appropriate
22 size of participants in each focus group, and the focus group participants were segmented,
23 following recommendations regarding qualitative data collection (e.g., Carlson and Glenton,
24 2011). Sampling was from one cohort of students (those who were studying for an
25 undergraduate degree in sport and exercise), who met the inclusion criteria, which also
26 restricted, to some extent, the number of focus groups that were achievable, as well as the
27 generalizability of the findings. Although the study is limited in these aspects, based on the
28 findings of the students in the current study, further evaluation of in-house and off-campus

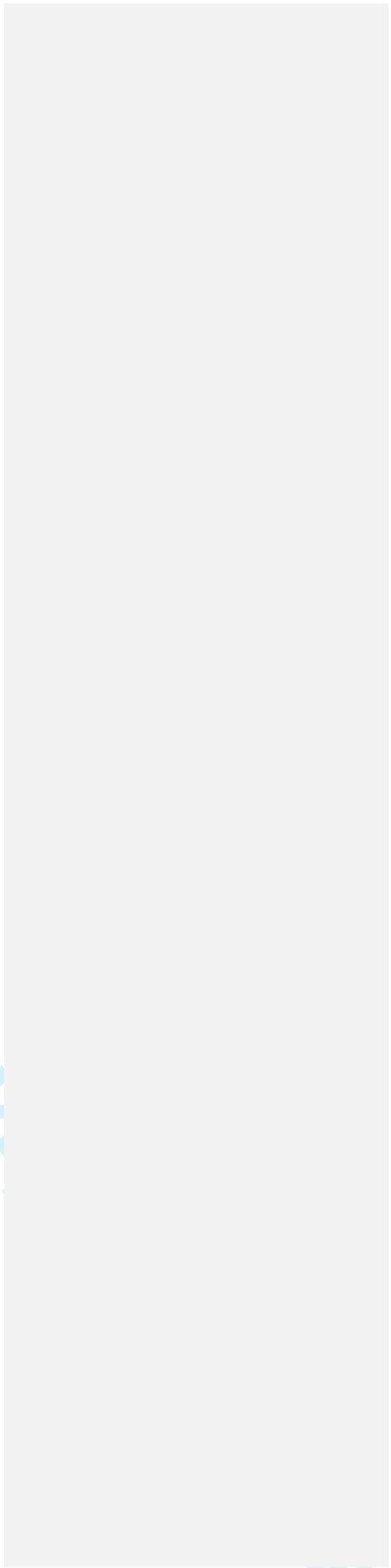
1 work experience is warranted, since perceptions of their relative value revealed some
2 differences. That said, there may have been other reasons for the differences that were
3 found between the in-house and off-campus work experiences. For instance, the in-house
4 group was unique in that the student knew (or knew of) the employer, which may have
5 influenced students' perceptions. In addition, all students volunteered for the study, which
6 may have influenced findings, since students may have volunteered for their own motives,
7 such as wishing to share their frustrations or conversely, to express their gratitude over their
8 work placement experience. Undertaking a study on a larger and more diverse cohort of
9 students, and attempting to control for potential confounding variables, is required.

11 *Practical implications and recommendations*

12 Based on the findings of the current study, recommendations are to offer placement when
13 offering work experience opportunities for ~~all~~ students, ~~but~~ consideration should be given to
14 level of support, supervision, observation, and travel and time costs. ~~Internal in-house~~
15 ~~placements work experiences should be encouraged~~ are recommended, since, in the current
16 study, they ~~are~~ were perceived to be as beneficial as ~~external off-campus work~~
17 ~~experiences~~ placement, having the added advantages that they ~~are~~ were cost effective,
18 allowed students to be more closely supervised and supported, ~~are~~ were good for
19 relationship building between and within students/staff, and, if set up specifically to enable
20 students to put theory into practice, ~~are~~ were beneficial for increasing student attainment.
21 However, if offering internal in-house work placements, tutors should be mindful, however,
22 that variety, and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders may be compromised
23 when offering in-house work experiences that are similar to those investigated in the current
24 study. Further research on the value, impact, advantages and limitations of off-campus and
25 in-house work experience could be undertaken, by not only investigating perceptions of a
26 greater number and diversity of students, but also by gathering quantitative data regarding
27 the value of such work experience for degree and employment success.

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Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning

1 Abstract

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1 **Purpose:** To investigate students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house, University-based work experience versus off-campus, work-experience.

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1 **Design/methodology/approach:** Three focus groups, one consisting of students who had undertaken work experience off-campus at an employers' workplace (n=6), one consisting of students who had undertaken work experience in-house with a University-based employer (n=6), and a third mixed group (n=6, consisting of students who had undertaken both types), were formed. Focus group data were supplemented by interviews (n=3). Data were transcribed and analysed thematically.

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1 **Findings:** Based on student perceptions, both types of work experience were thought to: enhance future employment; provide career insight; enable skill/experience acquisition and application; and be useful for building relationships. Work experience that occurred in-house was, in addition, perceived to: be cost effective; enable students to be more closely supervised and supported; be good for relationship building between and within students/staff; be beneficial for increasing student attainment; and enable students to see the link between theory and practice more clearly. In-house work experience was, however, deemed to be restricted in terms of variety, and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders.

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1 **Research limitations:** The study is limited in that it is based on the perceptions of students undertaking unique types of integrated work experience within one faculty at one university.

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1 **Practical implications:** When deciding on whether in-house or off-campus work experiences are offered, consideration should be given to level of support, supervision, observation, and travel and time costs.

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1 **Originality/value:** Original views of students regarding in-house work experience have been gathered, which can be used to inform in-course workplace practices.

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1 **Key words:** work-based learning; placements internships; employability; workplace
2 experience

1 Introduction

2 Students who undertake relevant work experience, such as a work placement or internship,
3 are not only more likely to receive a good degree (upper second or first class award),
4 compared to those who do not (Brooks and Youngson, 2016; Jones *et al.*, 2015; Mansfield,
5 2011; Patel *et al.*, 2012), but are also more likely to gain competitive advantage in the job
6 market (Harvey *et al.*, 1998; Helyer *et al.*, 2014; Langworthy and Turner, 2003; Tomlinson,
7 2008). Work experience has been found to improve student progression and retention rates
8 (Langworthy and Turner, 2003), and to motivate the student for further learning (Moore and
9 Workman, 2011). Work experience also improves students' perception of their academic
10 experience (Kettis *et al.*, 2013), which could impact on overall student satisfaction scores.

11
12 Reasons for why students undertake work experience, and the perceptions of their
13 experience have been explored through qualitative research. One perceived benefit of a
14 work experience is that it provides insight into a particular industry or type of employment
15 (Little and Harvey, 2006), to the extent that students are more able to identify with their
16 intended profession (Kettis *et al.*, 2013). Work experience is also thought to supplement
17 learning (Little and Harvey, 2006), enable the student to see how theory is applied in
18 practice (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006), and improve personal and
19 transferable skills, such as communication, confidence, perseverance and empowerment
20 (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Helyer *et al.*, 2014).

21
22 Despite these reported advantages, there are several limitations concerning work
23 experience. Inappropriate work places or not being able to place students with an
24 appropriate employer are common challenges (Nduna, 2012). Students may be obliged to
25 find work themselves, which presents problems such as students having to cold-call
26 employers, and then having to face rejection (Aggett and Busby, 2011). Bullock *et al.* (2009)
27 found that some students were not organised or confident enough to arrange their own work
28 placement experience. There are also cost implications for the University (Nduna, 2012), as

1 well as cost implications for the student, since time spent in work-placement experience,
2 which is generally unpaid, means that time in paid employment has to be reduced (Bullock *et*
3 *al.*, 2009). There is also considerable diversity of work experience. Students are, for
4 instance, not always visited in the workplace by their University supervisor due to time and
5 travel constraints of staff (Nduna, 2012). Barriers for employers to providing relevant work
6 opportunities also exist, such as the costs and time associated with supervision and
7 managing projects (Wilson, 2012). For these reasons, there has been a decline in the
8 number of students who undertake work experience at an employer's workplace (Aggett and
9 Busby, 2011; Nduna, 2012). Universities have, therefore, been considering alternatives to
10 the traditional work experiences that occur offsite at the employers' worksite, such as
11 experiential learning, project-based learning (Nduna, 2012), extracurricular activities (Wilson,
12 2012), virtual placements (Cornelius *et al.*, 2008), and community-based learning projects or
13 'science shops' (Gamble and Bates, 2011).

14
15 In-house work experience may be one way of providing all the benefits of a traditional off-
16 campus work experience but without the resource implication, and the difficulties of trying to
17 secure suitable workplace opportunities. In-house work experience may also be suitable for
18 students who are not confident enough to work externally. In-house work opportunities are
19 common in a number of settings, including medical, law, and sport. In such situations, often
20 a subsidised, commercial clinic or service is available on campus, which provides an
21 opportunity for students to gain unpaid work experience.

22
23 There are certain disadvantages with in-house work experiences. They decrease external
24 employer engagement, reduce opportunities for knowledge transfer, and decrease other
25 benefits associated with employer engagement and links with external stakeholders
26 (Mansfield, 2011; Tallantyre, 2010). Nduna (2012), however, suggests that there was little or
27 no proof of enhanced collaboration with industry as a result of work experiences that occur
28 at the employers' workplace. The advantages and disadvantages of work experience that

1 occur in-house, on campus versus that which occurs at an employer's workplace warrants
2 further investigation. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to investigate students'
3 perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house, University-based
4 work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based experience .
5

1 **Methods**

2 Undergraduate students within one faculty of a university in the United Kingdom were
3 informed about the study through advertisement (email, virtual learning environment, and
4 verbal announcement in lectures). Students who expressed an interest were contacted to
5 ensure they met the inclusion criterion (undertaken a relevant work experience), and were
6 invited to participate. All participants gave their written and informed consent having been
7 fully briefed on the study procedures. The study was approved by the University's research
8 ethics committee.

9
10 Students' perceptions of the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of in-house,
11 University-based work experience versus off-campus, worksite-based work experience were
12 explored through focus groups and interviews. All of the students who volunteered were
13 studying for an undergraduate degree within sport and exercise, and were enrolled on a
14 module, in which they were obliged to complete between 75 and 150 hours of unpaid work
15 experience. The work experience was integrated within the module, and the module took
16 place in the third year of the students' study. There were approximately 100 students who
17 met the inclusion criteria at the time of data collection, from which volunteers were obtained.

18
19 Three focus groups were formed: one group consisted of students who had undertaken their
20 work experience at a school or within a local council setting (n=6) that was external to the
21 University; another group consisted of students who had undertaken in-house work
22 experience, which was within a commercial sports science support service (n=6); and a
23 third, mixed group, consisted of students who had undertaken their work experience both
24 with an employer external to the University (in a sports therapy or physiotherapy clinic or
25 with a sports club) and with a commercial sports therapy service that was an in-house,
26 University-based setting (n=6). For the purposes of this paper, the three groups are referred
27 to as: 'in-house', 'off-campus', and 'mixed'. The term 'work experience' is used in this context
28 to represent the learning from and application of knowledge and skills to a relevant working

1 environment. The work experience was integrated into the learning of a module. Students
2 used the term 'placement' since this is how the work experience was described in their
3 module. Students referred also to 'internal placements', which were the in-house work
4 experiences, and 'external placements' that were the off-campus work experiences. All
5 participants were nearing the end or had recently finished their work experience. Focus
6 group data were supplemented by interviews with two students who had undertaken the in-
7 house only work experience and one student who had undertaken off-campus only work
8 experience, giving a total of 21 participants. Interviews were felt to be necessary following
9 focus group data collection as an attempt to achieve data saturation. The number of
10 participants in each focus group followed recommendations of Carlson and Glenton (2011).
11 Interviews and focus groups lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and took place at a time
12 and location convenient to the participants. The duration of the focus groups/interviews was
13 such that they continued until the researcher felt that data saturation point had been
14 reached. Focus groups were chosen as the predominant method of data collection due to
15 their ability to provide an understanding and deeper exploration of the views and ideas of the
16 specific groups of participants under investigation (Wilkinson, 1998).

17
18 A topic guide was used to explore perceptions, which included the following: what students
19 thought about their work experience generally (e.g., likes/dislikes and appropriateness);
20 perceptions of the value and impact of the work experience on their learning, degree
21 classification, job prospects and professional identify; and whether or not the work
22 experience had allowed them to develop links with industry. At the end of the focus
23 group/interview, the topic guide was checked to ensure that all areas had been covered. The
24 topic guide reflected the broad research question. The focus groups and interviews were
25 conducted by an independent researcher, who was recruited specifically because of her
26 experience in focus group conduction and data analysis. The researcher did not know any of
27 the students, was outside of their programme of study, and also had not been part of the

1 study conception; these factors were put in place, in order to reduce bias in how the focus groups/interviews were conducted, and also how coding was carried out.

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The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to facilitate analysis. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (following procedures from Braun and Clarke, 2006), allowing for exploration and interpretation of the relevant placement issues more widely (Marks and Yardley, 2004). This method involved two of the researchers reading transcripts independently and devising their own coding, key concepts and themes. Codes and themes were based on the broad research question, which was on the value, impact, benefits and disadvantages of the in-house and off-campus work experiences. All data that met the broad research question were coded. Themes were constructed based on meaningful and coherent patterns in the data, relevant to the research question. The researchers met to compare and contrast their findings, and to agree a set of themes and subthemes. In reporting of the extracts, pseudonyms have been used to protect identity. Extracts were selected if they were thought to reflect the themes and subthemes particularly well. A qualitative research design was used, since others had used such approaches to examine students' perceptions of work placements (e.g., Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock *et al.*, 2009), and because we wished to explore and examine the degree of commonality and disparity of views, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences within and between the off-campus and in-house students.

1 Findings and discussion

2 Perceptions of work experience were diverse, ranging from those who reported negative
3 experiences (*I haven't learnt anything* [Trevor, off-campus]), to very positive experiences (*I*
4 *loved it. Absolutely, completely love it, wish I could go back and do it all over again* [Bob,
5 mixed group, talking about his off-campus work experience]). These perceptions, however,
6 did not depend on the location of the work experience (in-house versus off-campus), but
7 were more to do with the particular individual's experience.

8
9 Six main themes, which were common to both types of work experience, emerged from the
10 data: future employment; career insight; skills and experience; support; time; and
11 relationships.

12 13 14 *Future employment*

15 Regarding future employment, there were two subthemes: enhancing employer perceptions
16 and career links. All participants thought that their work experience would 'look good' on their
17 curriculum vitae, and would make them seem more employable (enhancing employer
18 perceptions).

19
20 *...when you leave Uni, there's a lot of talk about how a degree's not enough*
21 *anymore...I think that the more work experience you do, the more volunteer stuff you*
22 *do, then you're definitely going to help other people's views...when it comes to looking*
23 *for a job* [Jenson, in-house]

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25 This perception was apparent even when the work experience was deemed lacking in other
26 areas:

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1 ...just having the experience...even though it might not be a positive experience, it's
2 experience [Trevor, off-campus]

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5 4 In the mixed group, it was felt that the work experience that took place at the employer's
6 5 worksite would enhance employer perceptions more so than that undertaken in-house:

7 6
8 7 ...I think overall external placement will probably make me look better when you go for
9 8 a job after uni[versity]...than just the internal [Becca, mixed]

10 9
11 10 According to previous researchers (Harvey *et al.*, 1998; Langworthy and Turner, 2003),
12 11 undertaking a work experience is more likely to lead to students gaining a competitive
13 12 advantage when it comes to gaining employment. Based on the current data, the competitive
14 13 advantage could be because the work experience enhances the perceptions of employers,
15 14 this point being supported by Eagle *et al.* (2008), who reported that work-experience
16 15 placements were generally viewed as favourable by employees. In the current study,
17 16 although students thought that their work experience, irrespective of where it took place (in-
18 17 house versus off-campus) and suitability, enhanced employer perceptions, there was a
19 18 tendency for off-campus work experience, when being compared to in-house work
20 19 experience, to be thought of as enhancing employer perceptions to a greater extent.

21 20
22 21 The mixed and off-campus students valued the links to employers, who were external to the
23 22 University (subtheme, career links):

24 23
25 24 ...it's not what you know, it's who you know. [Bob, commenting on his off-campus
26 25 work experience].

27 26
28 27 If you go in with the right attitude and everything there is a chance that you can get
29 28 employed at the end. [Jason, off-campus]

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5 2 For those students who were in the in-house group, career links were still valued. This
6
7 3 particular work experience involved external clients coming into the University to use the
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9 4 service; students felt that links with external clients in this way were valuable for their career.
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11 5 In the off-campus group, it was stated by one of the participants that the links were of no
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13 6 value, since this particular student was not intending to go back to that particular workplace,
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15 7 owing to a negative experience. It seems, therefore, that career links are important in a work
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17 8 experience if they are perceived to be of value, but are not dependent on where the work
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19 9 experience takes place, the latter finding contradicting observations by others (Mansfield,
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21 10 2011; Tallantyre, 2010), who reported that in-house work experiences might decrease links
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23 11 with employers.
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31 14 *Career insight*

32 15 Students in all three groups talked about career insight, within which emerged two
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34 16 subthemes: gaining real-world experience, and reinforcing and re-evaluating career
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36 17 aspirations. All students, regardless of whether they were doing in-house, off-campus or
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38 18 mixed types of work experience, found that the work was useful in gaining real-world
39
40 19 experience (...you can't really gain that through sitting in a classroom [Dave off-campus]).
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42 20 By gaining this experience, students' career aspirations were either reinforced or re-
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44 21 evaluated. In other words, some students found that the work experience had made them
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46 22 realise that they did not want to continue with their previously intended profession, whereas
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48 23 for others, the work experience had confirmed that their career choice was the right one.
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50 24 Again, these observations were independent of placement type:
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54 26 *I think you've got to understand what exactly they do before you can kind of make a*
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56 27 *decision on what it is that you're dead set on, 'cos once you commit to something you*
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58 28 *commit to something.* [Jenson, in-house]
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It's making you see whether you want to get involved in it after. 'Cos if you don't enjoy it after this, you won't enjoy it going into it, whereas if you still enjoy it after this, you're probably gonna carry on. [Dave, off-campus]

...it sort of confirms to you that it is what you wanna do...instead of realising sort of afterwards, 'cos it's a big risk doing three years and then realising it's not what you wanna do, but doing the placement helps confirm that. [Paige, mixed]

These opinions and perceptions regarding career insight reinforce those found by Little and Harvey (2006), although in the current study, unlike that of Kettis *et al.* (2013), students did not say that the work experience had helped them specifically to identify with their intended profession. Gaining career insight and reinforcing and re-evaluating career aspirations were, however, important aspects of all types of work experience, irrespective of location, in the current study.

Skills and experiences

For all three groups, students identified a number of skills and experiences. Subthemes were: job-specific skills, putting into practice, confidence, variety, and getting a better grade.

Apart from communication skills, which were identified by all students regardless of the location of their work experience, the job-specific skills identified were unique to the particular employment type, such as teaching-related skills, and specific technical skills. All students identified these skills as being an advantage of a work experience.

Confidence was highlighted as an important skill acquired, irrespective of the location of the work experience:

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5 2 *...one of the biggest barriers you have to overcome doing your placement is*
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7 3 *definitely confidence.* [Becca, mixed group, talking about off-campus work
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9 4 experience)

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13 6 *...it makes you more confident....knowing that you can actually perform what you*
14
15 7 *say, so your confidence helps you progress.* [Sophie, in-house]
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19 9 Similar to the findings of others (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Helyer *et al.*, 2014), where students
20
21 10 perceived work-placement experiences and internships as improving their confidence, and
22
23 11 their personal and transferable skills, students in the current study, regardless of work
24
25 12 experience location, highlighted job-specific skills and confidence as being important skills
26
27 13 acquired as a result of their work experience.
28

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31 15 The subtheme, putting into practice, was about how students were able to put their skills and
32
33 16 experiences that they had learned in the classroom into practice 'in the field'. Such
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35 17 comments were particularly apparent among the in-house group of students, possibly
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37 18 because the in-house work experience (which was a sports science support service) had
38
39 19 been specifically set up for this purpose. Students remarked how they had learnt and
40
41 20 understood more in-depth information by doing this in-house experience than they had in
42
43 21 their normal, scheduled teaching sessions (laboratories and lectures):
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48 23 *...I feel like I've learnt a lot more in the clinic than in the labs* [Rob, in-house]
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52 25 *I think I've learnt more in them few hours than I did in those labs* [Jackie, in-house]
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56 27 Students, who were in the off-campus group, also commented on how they were able to put
57
58 28 their skills into practice:
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5 2 *...it's like behaviour management...you won't really understand in terms of someone*
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7 3 *telling you what to do, you can only learn that through it actually happening. [Dave,*
8
9 4 *off-campus]*

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11 5
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13 6 These viewpoints support those of other researchers, regarding the value of work
14
15 7 experiences in supplementing learning, and in enabling students to see how theory is
16
17 8 applied in practice (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Little and Harvey, 2006). Although it seemed that the
18
19 9 in-house students could see the link between learning and practice more clearly, all students
20
21 10 valued this aspect of their work experience, regardless of where the work took place.
22

23 11
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25 12 Regarding variety, there was a tendency for students who had done their work experience
26
27 13 in-house to say that the skills they acquired were not varied (*...we always come and do the*
28
29 14 *same sort of testing [Bruce, in-house]; ...in clinic, you just do a load of massages and that's*
30
31 15 *it. [Becca, mixed placement talking about in-house work experience]), owing perhaps to a*
32
33 16 lack of equipment (*...within a professional sport they obviously have the budget for bigger*
34
35 17 *medical facilities. [Bob, mixed group]). A lack of variety, was also mentioned, however, by*
36
37 18 those who were doing off-campus work experience, owing to the work experience being
38
39 19 restricted in some other way, such as it being on the same day each week, having to work
40
41 20 with the same group of children (for those on work experience in a school), or not being
42
43 21 allowed to do all aspects of the job (*...on external er I couldn't go pitch side 'cos I didn't have*
44
45 22 *a first aid qualification. [Dan mixed group commenting on the off-campus work experience]).*

46
47 23 The mixed group of students appreciated the variety that both the in-house and off-campus
48
49 24 work experience gave them (*...you do need to experience both sides [clinic and sport]*
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51 25 *[Becca, mixed]. Variety, whether positive or negative, could, therefore, be dependent on*
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53 26 work experience location.
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1 Most students felt that the work experience enabled them to get a better grade, particularly
2 highlighted by students in the in-house group (*I've been getting better marks and*
3 *percentages on my assignments.* [Jenson]). The work experience formed part of the
4 students' study, which contributed directly to their grade, which students acknowledged.
5 These findings support observations made by other researchers (Brooks and Youngson,
6 2016; Mansfield, 2011; Patel *et al.*, 2012), in that students undertaking a work placement are
7 more likely to obtain a good degree. There were, however, also some reservations regarding
8 enhancement of grades, since the work experience was felt to be, in some instances, so
9 time consuming that it was actually taking the students away from other aspects of their
10 study. Further follow-up research on whether the in-house and off-campus work experiences
11 do, in fact, lead to a better degree classification could be undertaken.

14 *Support*

15 Subthemes identified under the theme of support included: finding work experience; level of
16 supervision; and observation.

18 Finding work experience was unique to those who were doing off-campus work. The mixed
19 group specifically identified the struggles that they had had in finding an appropriate
20 employer:

22 *...if you can't find a placement but you're looking every single day, you've then got*
23 *more pressure just to basically take a placement anywhere, although maybe you*
24 *don't wanna go there.* [Bob, mixed group talking about off-campus work experience]

26 Some of the students, for whom off-campus work experience had been found, said that they
27 wished that they had been able to find their own employer, since they were not happy with
28 the workplace that they had been given. Inappropriate work placements and internships or

1 not being able to find a suitable work placement have been identified in previous research as
2 a limitation to off-campus experiences (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Nduna,
3 2012). Finding a work experience was not an issue for those who were working in-house.

4
5 Students in all groups talked about the level of supervision they received on their work
6 experience. For in-house students, the fact that tutors were there to support them was
7 viewed positively:

8
9 *First day of a job you're gonna be in the deep end either way aren't you, whereas this*
10 *is sort of middle ground still.* [Chuck, in-house]

11
12 *...I think when you go in, you're a little bit nervous because...you're worried that you*
13 *won't know how to perform a certain task but you've got the back up from whoever's*
14 *in the lab helping you...so you progress at your own speed.* [Sophie, in-house]

15
16 *...if you haven't done something quite right on placement, you can do it again* [Alice,
17 mixed group talking about in-house work experience]

18
19 In the group of students who could compare their in-house and off-campus work experience,
20 students seemed to appreciate the level of supervision of the in-house work experience, but
21 also felt that the off-campus work experience put them under pressure, which was thought to
22 be both a positive and a negative thing:

23
24 *...you've got the real world professionals watching you do everything, so there's a bit*
25 *more pressure to get it right the first time....rather than internal, there's always*
26 *someone there to help you.* [Dan, mixed]

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2
3 1 *...I think when you're working internally you can get a bit of a safety net where if you*
4 *don't know anything, you can just pop up and ask the supervisor, but when you're in*
5 2 *that [off-campus] environment, if you don't know it, you have to go away and learn*
6 3 *it....I feel an external placement is better because you don't have that safety net,*
7 4 *there's a more pressurised environment. [Bob, mixed]*
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7 In the off-campus group, the level of supervision varied according to the particular work
8 experience, either being viewed as inappropriate to the extent that the employer did not
9 know the student was coming to the workplace, to those where organisation and level of
10 supervision were thought to be good. The level of supervision, therefore, might be
11 dependent on the student, and how much support they feel they need. Providing in-house
12 work experience may help those students in the early part of their University life, or may help
13 students who lack the confidence to be 'thrown into the deep end'.
14

15 Regarding the subtheme of observation, there were both benefits and barriers identified.
16 Some students appeared to have benefitted from observing only (rather than doing):
17

18 *Even though I've sat back and observed a lot, I have learnt stuff like...behaviour*
19 *management. [Trevor, off-campus]*
20

21 *...I still learnt a lot just by shadowing. [Paige, mixed group talking about her off-*
22 *campus work experience)*
23

24 Other students wanted to have a more active role:
25

26 *...it's kind of annoying...just sitting in the corner just watching, [Jess, off-campus]*
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3 1 These benefits and barriers seemed to be specific to the work experience and student
4
5 2 preferences, rather than whether or not the work took place in-house or off-campus.
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11 5 **Cost**

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13 6 For the theme of cost, subthemes identified were: time and travel. The work experience
14
15 7 being viewed negatively, in terms of how it meant that their time was away from studying, or
16
17 8 was too time consuming in general, was identified by all students, regardless of work
18
19 9 experience location:
20

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22
23 11 *I could be doing my dissertation right now [Bruce, in-house]*
24
25 12

26
27 13 *...you have to be the one to decide, right, which day am I gonna lose to do my*
28
29 14 *placement and then work basically everything around that. [Becca, mixed]*
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31 15

32
33 16 The in-house work experience, however, was viewed more positively, in that time was less
34
35 17 of an issue, due to the work being more flexible (as the in-house work experience was
36
37 18 specifically designed to accommodate students when they were free on their timetable).
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41 20 Travelling to and from the work experience was specific to the off-campus students only, and
42
43 21 was viewed both positively and negatively:
44
45 22

46
47 23 *...it takes an hour and a half to get to the training ground and two hours to get to the*
48
49 24 *stadium but I do it with ease now because I love what I do. [Bob, mixed group talking*
50
51 25 *about his off-campus work experience]*
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53 26

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56 27 *...getting there has been a bit of a nightmare... [Trevor, off-campus]*
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5 2 Travel time was understandably not an issue for those students undertaking in-house work
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7 3 experience.
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11 5 These observations on time and travel identified in the current study support those of others,
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13 6 (Bullock *et al.*, 2009; Nduna, 2012), although were not always viewed as negative, and were
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15 7 less of an issue for students undertaking in-house work experience.
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21 10 **Relationships**

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23 11 A final theme that emerged from the data was about relationships, which included the
24
25 12 subthemes of social side and tutor relationships. The students, who were undertaking in-
26
27 13 house work experience, talked about the social side, where they were able to chat with
28
29 14 others in the course (*...I got to talk to a few people on my course that I wouldn't normally talk*
30
31 15 *to.* [Jenson]). Students who had undertaken off-campus work experience also talked about
32
33 16 the social side: (*...it's just like the team spirit and the team banter. I love it.* [Dan, mixed]).
34
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37 18 Unique to in-house work experience, was the subtheme of tutor relationships. Students
38
39 19 commented on how they had been able to build good, positive relationships with their tutors
40
41 20 with whom they worked (*...you get to see like a different side of them* [Rob, in-house]), which
42
43 21 transferred, it was highlighted, into the classroom.
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49 24 **Conclusions**

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51 25 Work experience, regardless of whether in-house or off-campus, was perceived by the
52
53 26 students who took part in this study to enhance future employment, not only because they
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55 27 felt that employers were more likely to view their work experience as favourable, but also
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57 28 because the work experience provided career links with valued, external employers and
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1 individuals. Students also felt that the work experience, regardless of its location, provided
2 them with career insight via real-world experience, through which they were able to re-affirm
3 or re-evaluate their career aspirations. Students thought that both in-house and off-campus
4 work experience allowed them to gain and put into practice a variety of skills and
5 experiences (such as job-specific skills, confidence, and communication skills), enhanced
6 their university grades, and allowed them to build relationships.

7
8 Issues (viewed positively and negatively) that arose for both in-house and off-campus work
9 experience included: the level of supervision during the work experience; the amount of
10 observation versus 'hands-on' experience involved in the work experience; and travel and
11 time costs.

12
13 When comparing in-house and off-campus work experiences, based on the data collected in
14 the current study (which was limited to students undertaking a work experience that was
15 integrated, short in duration (75 to 150 hours) and specific to one faculty of one university),
16 in-house work experience was deemed advantageous in that students did not have to find
17 their own work, and was deemed cost effective in terms of travel and , to some extent,time.
18 In addition, in-house work experience allowed students to feel supported, and allowed them
19 to develop relationships with their tutors and other students. The in-house students
20 specifically identified how their work experience enabled them to see clearly the link between
21 theory and practice. Off-campus work experiences were, however, deemed to 'look' better to
22 the employer than were in-house experiences, but if the in-house work experience involved
23 some kind of external clientele, then career links were believed sufficient. A lack of variety
24 seemed to occur with in-house work experience, but also with off-campus experiences,
25 which were restricted by, for instance, time.

26
27 The study is limited in terms of sample size and cohort. There was, however, an appropriate
28 size of participants in each focus group, and the focus group participants were segmented,

1 following recommendations regarding qualitative data collection (e.g., Carlson and Glenton,
2 2011). Sampling was from one cohort of students (those who were studying for an
3 undergraduate degree in sport and exercise), who met the inclusion criteria, which also
4 restricted, to some extent, the number of focus groups that were achievable, as well as the
5 generalizability of the findings. Although the study is limited in these aspects, based on the
6 findings of the students in the current study, further evaluation of in-house and off-campus
7 work experience is warranted, since perceptions of their relative value revealed some
8 differences. That said, there may have been other reasons for the differences that were
9 found between the in-house and off-campus work experiences. For instance, the in-house
10 group was unique in that the student knew (or knew of) the employer, which may have
11 influenced students' perceptions. In addition, all students volunteered for the study, which
12 may have influenced findings, since students may have volunteered for their own motives,
13 such as wishing to share their frustrations or conversely, to express their gratitude over their
14 work placement experience. Undertaking a study on a larger and more diverse cohort of
15 students, and attempting to control for potential confounding variables, is required.

16 17 *Practical implications and recommendations*

18 Based on the findings of the current study, when offering work experience opportunities for
19 students, consideration should be given to level of support, supervision, observation, and
20 travel and time costs. In-house work experiences are recommended, since, in the current
21 study, they were perceived to be as beneficial as off-campus work experiences, having the
22 added advantages that they were cost effective, allowed students to be more closely
23 supervised and supported, were good for relationship building between and within
24 students/staff, and, if set up specifically to enable students to put theory into practice, were
25 beneficial for increasing student attainment. Tutors should be mindful, however, that variety,
26 and links with and perceptions of external stakeholders may be compromised when offering
27 in-house work experiences that are similar to those investigated in the current study. Further
28 research on the value, impact, advantages and limitations of off-campus and in-house work

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1 experience could be undertaken, by not only investigating perceptions of a greater number
2 and diversity of students, but also by gathering quantitative data regarding the value of such
3 work experience for degree and employment success.
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