What are the Costs and Benefits of Completing a Work Placement?

An overview of the research conducted by Georgia Witton as part of the BA(Hons) Business Management course
My name is Holly Andrews, and I am a placement coordinator.
Context

- Placements were first introduced at the end of the 19th century.

- Placement provision re-emerged as a significant issue in 1997 following the publication of the Dearing report.

- A clear body of research indicates that placements support improved skills, employability, and attaining a higher degree classification.

- Despite the researched benefits, the number of students choosing to participate in a placement year has fallen.

- “Why should I complete a work placement?” (Prospects, 2015)

- From an organisational viewpoint, High Fliers Annual Report for Employers (2014) found that a record 37% of recruiters’ entry-level positions were expected to be filled by graduates who had already worked for the organisation.
Key Research

Business Management and Engineering Students

- No studies attempt to compare subject courses

- Particularly significant considering the relative outlook:
  - In 2013 3,800 students graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering compared to 20,135 Business and Management students (HECSU, 2014)
  - STEM skills considered to underpin the UK’s ability to compete and grow in a range of industries
  - 43% of employers currently have difficulty recruiting full-time staff with STEM degrees, expected to rise to 53% in three years (CBI, 2011)

- Will students from Engineering disciplines view placements as positively as Business Management students?
Research Question

Do the reported costs and benefits of completing a work placement differ between Business Management and Engineering students?

Objectives

1. To explore the students’ perceptions of the benefits of undertaking a work placement in regards to skills developed, transition back to university and graduate employability
2. Understand the perceived costs, if any, of undertaking a placement
3. Compare the experiences of Engineering and Business Management students
Method

- 12 participants were selected using self-selection sampling

- Semi-structured interviews conducted in March 2015

- Interviews transcribed in full and thematic content analysis used

- Themes based on research by Little and Harvey (2007) and Auburn model (1993)
# Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>University Attended</th>
<th>Degree Title</th>
<th>Position held whilst on placement</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMP1</td>
<td>University of Worcester</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Business Management and Marketing</td>
<td>Digital Marketing Executive/Sales</td>
<td>Marketing SME</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP2</td>
<td>University of Worcester</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Business Marketing and Public Relations</td>
<td>Sales and Marketing Assistant</td>
<td>Automotive Franchise</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP3</td>
<td>University of Worcester</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Business Accountancy and Marketing</td>
<td>Marketing and accounts Administrator</td>
<td>Digital Marketing SME</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP4</td>
<td>University of Worcester</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Business Management</td>
<td>Financial Assistant</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP5</td>
<td>University of Newcastle</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Business Management</td>
<td>Corporate Supply Chain Placement Student</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMP6</td>
<td>University of Bournemouth</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Business Studies</td>
<td>Corporate Supply Chain Placement</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<td>EP1</td>
<td>University of Huddersfield</td>
<td>BEng(Hons) Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Customer Support Engineer</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<td>EP2</td>
<td>University of Swansea</td>
<td>MEng(Hons) Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Manufacturing Engineer</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<td>EP3</td>
<td>University of Coventry</td>
<td>BEng(Hons) Motorsport Engineering</td>
<td>Application Engineer</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>EP4</td>
<td>Oxford Brookes University</td>
<td>MEng(Hons) Motorsport Engineering</td>
<td>Design Engineer within Cost Reduction department</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<td>EP5</td>
<td>University of Central Lancashire</td>
<td>MEng(Hons) Motorsport Engineering</td>
<td>Product Resolution Engineer in Customer Support</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>EP6</td>
<td>University of Bradford</td>
<td>MEng(Hons) Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Design Engineer</td>
<td>Global Engineering Organisation</td>
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</table>
## Findings

*Final Themes Template, highlighted text indicate a priori themes*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme I: Skill Development</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>Personal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
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<td>Theme II: Employability</td>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
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<td>Enhanced CV</td>
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<td>Theme III: Improved Self Awareness</td>
<td>Improved awareness of own skills and capabilities</td>
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<td>Insight into desired role</td>
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<td>Theme IV: Experience of Transition back to University</td>
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<td>Lifestyle changes</td>
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<td>Change of cohort</td>
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<td>Additional year of study</td>
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<td>University support</td>
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<td>Motivation toward study</td>
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<td>Academic work</td>
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Theme I: Skills Development

- Findings corroborates Little and Harvey’s (2007) results, skill development remains an important factor for students learning over placement.

- *Time Management* was the most cited skill by students.

- Students referred to the ability to integrate theory and practise.

- Interpersonal skills were cited by almost all Engineering students and not Business Management students.
Theme II: Employability

- Employment opportunities as a result of undertaking a placement were cited more frequently by Business Management students.

- Two of the Business Management participants (BMP’s) stated that their placement had allowed them to gain relevant part-time employment in their final year.

- Two BMP’s stated that they had graduate jobs as a result of their placement.

- Fewer Engineering participants (EP’s) mentioned graduate opportunities though two acknowledged building a professional network.

- All participants interviewed acknowledged that their placement year had enhanced their CV.
Theme III: Improved Self Awareness

- The study broadened the original A Priori theme of “Improved self awareness” to include: *improved self awareness of skills and capabilities and insight into desired job role*

- Skills and capabilities insight was mentioned by three BMP’s

- Almost all participants in the study described how their placement had allowed greater insight into their desired career
Theme IV: Experience Transitioning Back to University

- Financial difficulty when returning to university was mainly determined by the type of organisation the student had worked for on placement.

- Change of cohort was cited as a difficulty both for the students socially and academically when they were unfamiliar with new colleagues with whom they were required to work with in group work.

- Engineering students generally looked upon a year out favourably compared to BMP’s.

- BMP’s acknowledged difficulties when transitioning back to university and completing academic written work.

- Students were mixed in their opinions towards whether they were more or less motivated to study upon their return to university.
Conclusion

“If you wanted a conclusion, it’s that if anyone was thinking of doing a placement I would recommend it, no matter what course you’re doing.”

Engineering Participant 6

- Research supports the consensus that work placements are beneficial in the eyes of those who complete them
- Engineering students in particular mentioned interpersonal skills as a benefit
- Business Management students included improved self awareness and employment opportunities as incentives to completing a placement
- There were some negative responses attached to students’ transition back to university
Implementation in WBS
Coaching
Facebook
Academic Support

- Project support
- Enhanced induction
Paid Placements
International Placements
Outcomes

Student Satisfaction
- Last year 50% students satisfied with placements preparation
- This year 98% students satisfied with placements preparation

Placement Outcomes
- As of end of March last year 16 students had secured placements.
- This year as of end of March 22 students had secured placements.
- 37.5% increase in placement numbers
Suggestions for future research

- Research examining the reasons cited by students who do not complete a placement for not doing so.

- Comparing the perceptions of placement students from other degree areas, for example Science, the third largest contributor to placement students, and degree subjects with significantly lower participation rates.

- Completing the research with a cohort of students who commenced their university studies post 2012, subject to higher tuition fees.
Thank you for listening are there any questions?