

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

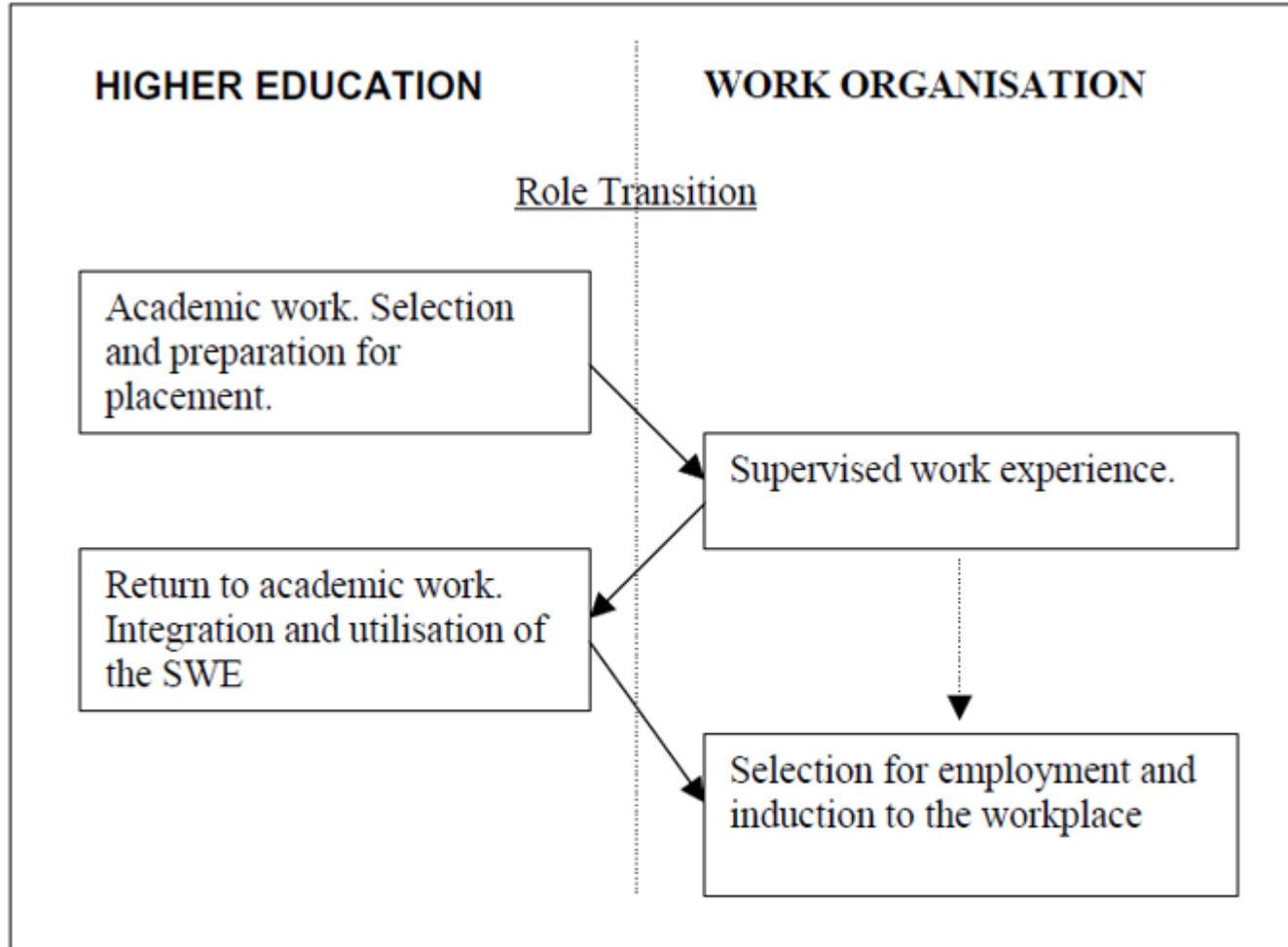
My name is Holly Andrews, and I am a placement coordinator



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



Transition Model of Placement Experience. Source: Auburn et al. (1993), cited by: Auburn (2007)

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

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

Findings

Final Themes Template, highlighted text indicate a priori themes

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

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?