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Developing interest in year-long work placements

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Citation: HARTY, A.S. and PIMLOTT-WILSON, H., 2016. Developing interest in year-long work placements. Sheffield: ASET.

Additional Information:

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Metadata Record: <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/23137>

Version: Submitted for publication

Publisher: ASET, Sheffield

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DEVELOPING INTEREST IN YEAR-LONG WORK PLACEMENTS

Prepared by Ami Sophia Harty

Supervised by Dr Helena Pimlott-Wilson*
Department of Geography

* Corresponding author
Department of Geography, Loughborough University, Loughborough, LE11 3TU
H.Pimlott-Wilson@Lboro.ac.uk

Executive Summary

This report details the results of a project entitled 'Developing interest in year-long work placements' undertaken in the summer of 2016 in the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences at Loughborough University. It was funded by the ASET Exploration and Enhancement Student Bursary 2016.

This research used data from eight online questionnaires, compiled using Bristol Online Survey. There were a total of 206 student respondents made up of first year, second year, placement year students and recent graduates of the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences at Loughborough University.

The report details students' motivations to (not) undertake year-long work placements; how to encourage take up; how to promote year-long work placements to students; students concerns; and the support they require to complete year-long work placements.

The key findings suggest that although students are already aware of work placements before they begin their course at Loughborough University, they want information about placement opportunities early in their University career. They particularly favour face-to-face methods of communication, rather than emails and social media and value subject-specific resources, including a dedicated School-based Placement Officer. Students appreciate hearing about the experiences of their peers who have already completed a work placement. In a School where students tend to have a variety of career options available to them and develop a strong set of transferable skills to support this broad range of occupational choices, participants were keen to have the relevance of their degree, and the relevance of placement opportunities to their degree, clearly articulated.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank ASET for the Exploration and Enhancement Student Bursary 2016 which has enabled us to undertake this valuable research. We also acknowledge the support and assistance of Sarah Lafferty, the Placement Officer for the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences. Our thanks go to the students who took the time to respond to the questionnaires.

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Glossary

ABC – Three year degree route consisting Year 1 (Part A), Year 2 (Part B) and Year 3 (Part C).

ABIC – Four year degree route consisting of Years 1 (Part A) and 2 (Part B) at University, Year 3 (Part I) out on a year-long work placement and then returning to University for Year 4 (Part C).

DPS – Diploma in Professional Studies.

LEARN – The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used at Loughborough University.

Part A – The first year of an undergraduate degree at Loughborough University.

Part B – The second year of an undergraduate degree at Loughborough University.

Part C – The final year of an undergraduate degree at Loughborough University.

Part I – A year-long industry work placement typically occurring in Year 3 at Loughborough University.

PHIR – The Department of Politics, History and International Relations.

SSPGS – The School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences at Loughborough University.

UCAS – The University and Colleges Admissions Service.

Year-long work placement – An industry placement typically lasting 45 weeks (excluding holidays).

1 Introduction

This research project was undertaken in the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences (SSPGS) during the summer of 2016. The research was funded by the ASET Exploration and Enhancement Student Bursary 2016. The main aims of the study were to:

1. Investigate the motivations for undertaking a placement amongst SSPGS students on 4 year courses;
2. Explore the factors which influence other students to take a 3 year route;
3. Document the expectations of SSPGS students with regards the placement process;
4. Explore methods of promoting work placements to Part A and B SSPGS students not currently enrolled for work placements, to effectively target resources towards students' requirements and increase the uptake of work placements;
5. Devise recommendations for stimulating interest in work placements amongst Part A students.

To explore students' motivations for embarking on a course where placements are integral, we wanted to understand the factors which are significant to their decision-making. It also looked at their expectations of the placement process to help anticipate the support needs of these students and identify any gaps that the SSPGS can address in the future. Whilst investigating the factors which influenced the growth in uptake of 4-year courses, the project also explored the best channels of communication through which placements can be promoted amongst students not currently signed up to work placement. By engaging with those studying for 3 and 4 year courses, it additionally uncovered the motivations for those who choose not to undertake a work placement and the factors influential in their decision-making.

This project will assist the institution, but also members of ASET, in understanding the key factors which influence the decision-making of prospective SSPGS students in relation to placements. In addition, the research with existing students explored the most effective ways of

promoting placements, which will enable the School to channel resources to the most effective mediums.

1.1 Context

At Loughborough University it is possible to undertake an industry placement year during 99% of degrees. The School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences consists of three Departments; Social Sciences; Politics, History and International Relations; and Geography.

In the three Departments we investigated, it is not compulsory to complete a year-long work placement on any pathway. Currently, students are able to register for a year-long work placement before they apply to University using their UCAS application, or they are able to add one at a later stage if they wish to do so. This means students are able to begin their degree on a four year route, known as an ABIC route. Alternatively, they can sign up to a three year route, known as an ABC route. The letters A, B and C correspond to Years 1, 2 and the final year respectively, with the letter I representing the year in industry, or what we refer to as a year-long work placement. Please see the Glossary for a full list of the terms used during the report.

A year-long work placement typically lasts 45 weeks (excluding holidays), usually starting soon after Part B finishes for the summer. Whilst out on placement, students are required to undertake an amount of academic, assessed coursework during the year. This results in the award of a Diploma in Professional Studies (DPS) as a component of the final degree, meaning that students are able to leave University gaining an additional qualification to their degree.

Since December 2012, the number of students undertaking work placements in the School Social, Political and Geographical Sciences has been increasing. Across all three Departments, numbers have doubled during this time period and look set to continue to rise.

This project aimed to talk to students in the SSPGS and find out how uptake of year-long work placements can be increased and in addition, identify any gaps in existing provision that can be addressed in the future.

2 Methodology

The aims of the study meant that both quantitative and qualitative information was needed, both to determine the amounts of students indicating their levels of satisfaction or opinions regarding our areas of enquiry, but also to identify their reasoning for providing those particular responses. Therefore we needed a method that could encompass elements of both qualitative and quantitative explanatory power.

Qualitative methods generally involve asking open-ended questions intended to elicit data from the viewpoint of the interviewee, as naturally as possible, in order to get “inside the particular social world in question” (Redman, 2005, p. 21). This is the opposite to quantitative research, which aims to produce knowledge that is “untainted by social values” and “an asocial product untouched by human hand” (Parr and Silva, 2005, p. 72) and simply aims to quantify amounts as answers to questions. This positivist approach uses a numeric format and is often displayed using visual graphs and tables to show the ‘what’ and ‘how many’, rather than the ‘why’ (Redman et al. 2005, p.xi). There are advantages and disadvantages to both qualitative or quantitative methodologies in research, as a result it may be considered that neither is superior; they are simply different, but when used together they can complement each other to present a rounded picture of the data.

Practical considerations for both participants and researchers should always be at the forefront of research design as to minimise negative impact or disruption to everyone involved. The timing of the research project (June – September 2016) meant that targeting student cohorts was particularly difficult as students are all on their summer break. To counteract this, and as there were few students present on campus, it was decided that all data collection would be done online. Therefore the method of data collection chosen was online questionnaires. By using this method, respondents were able to participate in the research using their chosen electronic device, from a remote location, at their leisure. Our survey provider, Bristol Online Survey (BOS) is compatible with smartphones and tablets as well as computers. This means that if a student received an email from us with the questionnaire link they would have been able to take part at any time of day or night. According to Mann and Stuart (2000), the main benefit of online techniques, is that it can cut costs significantly compared to face-to-face methods as no travel needs to be done by either party. As long as an internet connection is present, it can be done anywhere, and across time zones if needed. When designing questions, these can be prepared and typed in advance and saved on different media so they can be

accessed quickly if needed. For our open text qualitative responses, time and money can also be saved at the transcription stage, as the data will already be in text format so the need to write up audio or visual recordings is eliminated. This approach had particular merit when conducting research over a short time period outside term time.

Furthermore, online questionnaires were selected as they provide an opportunity to gain open and closed responses. The use of closed questions, where students selected a preferred answer from a selection we provided, enabled us to be able to report on frequencies. Conversely by including many free text open questions we were also able to ask students about their reasoning. This way, we were able to determine the factors involved in their decision-making processes to gain a fuller picture. According to Denscombe (2010, p.135) it is possible to gain a “fuller description and/or more complete explanation of the phenomenon being studied by providing more than one perspective on it”. A further benefit is the efficiency of this method. Each participant would not have needed more than 10 minutes to fully complete one of the questionnaires.

To encourage our students to take part in the research, we offered a small financial incentive in the proposal of a prize draw to win a £50 Amazon gift voucher. If student respondents wished to opt in to this draw, they were asked to provide their email address at the end of each questionnaire so we were able to contact them if they won the prize draw. The majority of our respondents took up this offer and left an email address. Very few students chose not to, possibly as they were concerned about revealing their identity.

The questionnaires were drafted in Microsoft Word using one master questionnaire that incorporated the majority of questions we wished to ask to all the student groups. This was revised a number of times to ensure the questions were correct. From our starting survey, we generated a further seven questionnaires that were modified to include relevant questions for each cohort. In some of the questionnaires (particularly Part I and Part C students), participants were asked to comment on their experiences retrospectively. For questionnaires aimed at students who have not yet reached their work placements the tense of the questioning was changed. This questioning aimed to give valuable insight into how the School can adapt practices to fit the needs of students and better promote year-long work placements.

To build the questionnaires we used Bristol Online Survey. This platform was selected as the optimum provider for us as it gives a balance of features with an in-built, sophisticated analysis tools and also functionality for exporting into SPSS for statistical analysis.

Each questionnaire contained a variety of multiple choice and open ended free text questions enabling us to gain quantitative and qualitative response data through the same method.

2.1 Sample

For this research project there were eight different groups of students in the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences that we wished to target. Each group are currently at a different point in their University career and for this reason eight iterations of a master questionnaire had to be generated. This ensured consistency of comparisons to be drawn across groups, whilst also being relevant to the stage in their academic careers.

Individually tailored online questionnaires were sent to the following groups:

- 1) Final year students who have completed a year-long work placement (Part C students/ recent graduates on an ABIC route);
- 2) Final year students who did not undertake a year-long work placement (Part C students/ recent graduate on an ABC route);
- 3) Students who are nearing completion of their year-long work placements (Part I students on an ABIC route);
- 4) Second year students about to go on a year-long work placement (Part B students on an ABIC route);
- 5) Second year students not undertaking a year-long work placement (Part B students registered for ABIC route but who did not secure a work placement);
- 6) Second year students not registered for a year-long work placement (Part B students on an ABC route);
- 7) First year students registered for a year-long work placement (Part A students on an ABIC route)

- 8) First year students not registered for a year-long work placement (Part A students on an ABC route).

2.2 Lines of enquiry

The key questions in our enquiry were:

- What are students' views about year-long work placements?
- What are students' main motivations for undertaking a year-long work placement?
- Do students think their employability is affected by undertaking year-long work placements?
- What are students' concerns about year-long work placements?
- What support is most valuable to students to ensure successful completion of year-long work placements, and what is currently missing?
- How can we encourage more students to do a placement?
- What is the most effective way of promoting year-long work placements to students across SSPGS?

Copies of a sample questionnaire are included in the Appendix of this report.

2.3 Distribution

The questionnaires were distributed via student email addresses. These lists had to be drawn up from larger student cohort databases to prevent multiple emails being sent to the same student. Separate databases were requested from the different departments involved

All of the questionnaire links were sent out between 7th and 14th July 2016. Emails were also resent to each cohort on the 22nd and 31st July to increase the response rate as much as possible.

The only group in our sample that were harder to target were our Finalists, who had graduated the week the questionnaires went live. As a result of this we knew it was unlikely that students would be checking their University email accounts, which closed shortly after graduation. We were able to set up the later reminder emails to be sent to final year students via the personal email address that they had provided to the University during enrolment.

To further boost response rates the research project was advertised on the Social Media pages of the School Placements Team, including Facebook. In addition we compiled some flyers advertising the study and these were distributed within each Department on graduation day. They were placed so students and their parents would see them when attending the graduation drinks reception.

2.4 Analysis

After the questionnaires were closed on the 8th August 2016, the data was exported to both pdf. files and SPSS files (.sav).

Although we have completed the data collection for 2016, The Bristol Online Survey links remain active should anyone wish to repeat the research in the future.

Using the in-feature BOS analysis tools, frequencies were recorded for any closed questions and all of the data copied into Excel. Additionally, the data from our open questions was coded and analysed in Excel.

For many of the questions, it was possible to bring together data for all of the different cohorts. Taking students motivations as an example, this question appeared on all of our questionnaires. Students had a closed question where they were able to select as many reasons as applied to them. Following this, they had an open text question where they could specify their primary motivation for (not) undertaking a year-long work placement. As these were open responses they all had to be coded individually but could then be collated for analysis.

3 Key Findings

Over our eight questionnaires we gathered responses from a total of 206 Loughborough students and recent graduates. When analysing the data we split our investigation into five main areas of study. These are as follows.

- Students' motivations to (not) undertake a year-long work placement;
- Encouraging students to undertake year-long work placement;
- Benefits of year-long work placements;
- Promoting year-long work placements to SSPGS students;
- Concerns of SSPGS students;
- Supporting students.

3.1 Students' motivations to (not) undertake a year-long work placement

Although all of our student cohorts were at different stages of their degrees, common themes emerged from the data. To establish students' motivations they were asked two questions. Firstly a closed question, 'what motivated you to undertake a year-long work placement?' with nine options to select from (please see Appendix, question 8). The next question (9), asked them to select their main motivation and was a free text open question enabling the respondent to add any alternative options that we had not provided. For students that did not do a placement or have not yet added one, they were asked their motivations for 'not' doing a placement. Most students still repeated one of our pre-selected options as their 'main' motivation for either doing or not doing a placement.

Motivations for undertaking a year-long work placement

In all of the questionnaires the two key motivations were to 'increase employability' and 'gain practical experience'. Employability appeared in our results as both the main motivation for, and benefit of, completing a work placement, according to SSPGS students.

This directly compares with students' qualitative answers to the questions where they were asked to state the key benefits of doing a work placement.

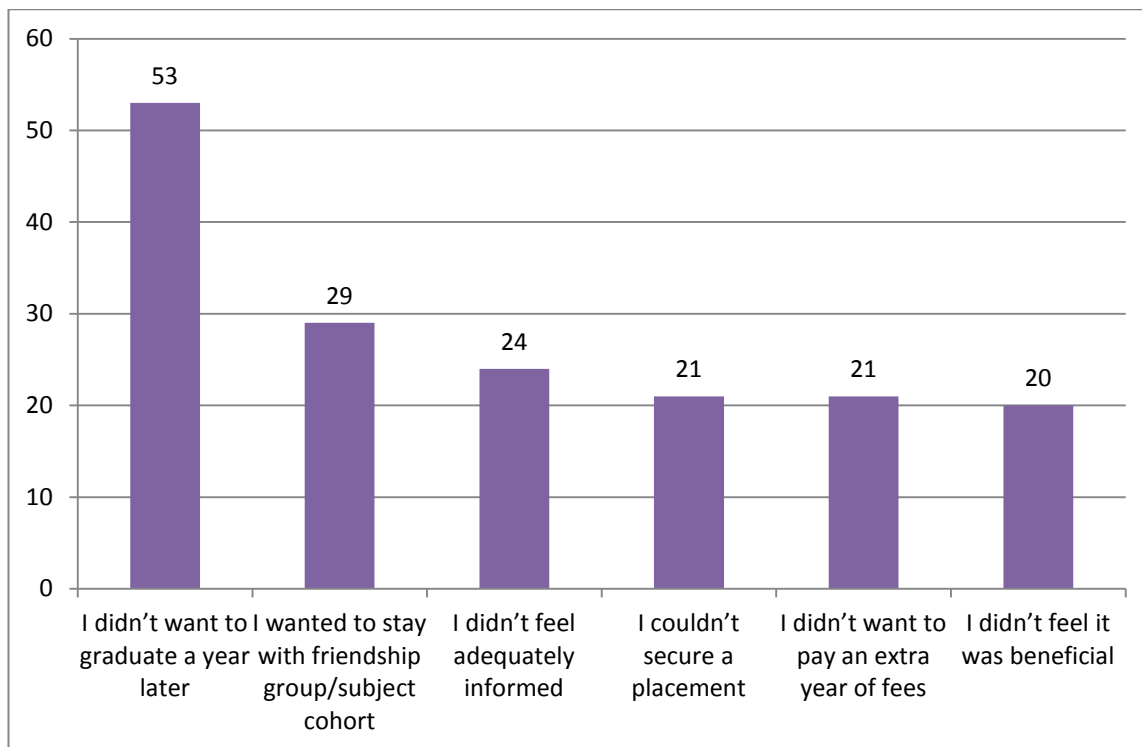
Chart 1: Motivations for undertaking a work placement (Responses from: Part A, B, I and C students on ABIC route)



Motivations for not undertaking a year-long work placement

For students that decided *not* to undertake a work placement the main three reasons were that they did not want to graduate a year later, they wanted to stay with their friendship group or they did not feel adequately informed. The most common answer overall was that students 'did not want to graduate a year later'. These findings coincide with those of Bullock et al. (2009) who discovered that one of the key reasons for students not undertaking a placement was lack of information, along with lack of confidence.

Chart 2: Motivations for not undertaking a work placement (Responses from: Part A, B and C students on ABC route)



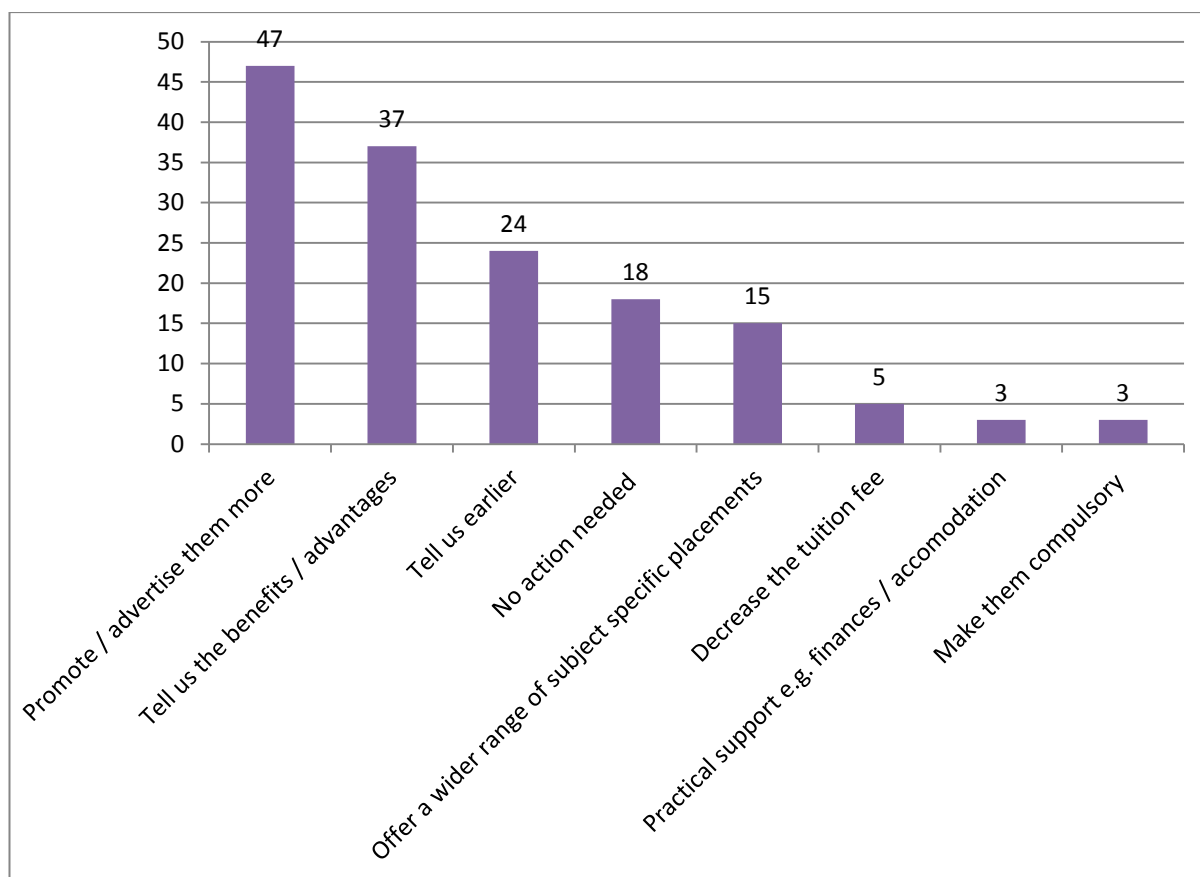
3.2 Encouraging students to undertake a year-long work placement

All of our student cohorts were asked the open question 'What do you think Loughborough could do to encourage more students to take a year-long work placement?'

Many of our students discussed promotion techniques within this question in their answers, but overwhelmingly students said they wanted the School to increase our promotion and inform them about what the benefits of doing a placement are.

The following chart depicts the encouraging responses across our entire student population.

Chart 3: Encouraging more students to undertake a year-long work placement (All respondents/cohorts)



In the questionnaire, students were asked whether the amount of information supplied about work placements is too much, about right or too little. Over all the eight questionnaires, students had indicated they thought the amount of information provided by the School is 'about right' yet

Chart 3 suggests that students would still like further advertising and promotion. As in other areas of the results, recurring themes have surfaced such as explaining the benefits, informing students early on in their degree and clarifying the relevance of placements to students.

Increase promotion / advertising of placements

Some of the students used this space to talk about specific methods of promotion, such as talks, presentations or placement fairs. Similarly to our promotion data, they often mentioned hearing from returning placement students as beneficial:

“Feedback talks from previous students who have done a placement, and also make people aware of the benefits placements can provide such as extra qualifications & practical experience. Also more info(rmation) in general about the placement process & how it works & how to go about applying etc, plus support through all this” (Part A, Social Science, ABIC route)

A few students also suggested it would be useful to have more presence from employers, and to try and include this in face-to-face promotion methods. One student requested “More departmental awareness and encouragement, getting companies on campus frequently, reaching out to students” (Recent PHIR placement graduate).

Benefits

As in Section 3.3, students explicitly want to be told the benefits of doing a year-long work placement. This was the second most popular answer for how we can successfully encourage students to undertake year-long work placements.

Timing

When we asked students if information was getting to them too early, about right or too late, the majority indicated they thought current provision was ‘about right’. However on closer inspection, the prevailing message coming through in our open response data was that students wish to be told about placements early in their University career. In many of the responses students asked for more information to be provided in their first year of study:

“Make them aware earlier” (Geography Part B student, ABC route).

“Explain the benefits of a placement in first year to give time to think and apply” (Social Science Part B student, ABC route).

Relevance

Some of the participants claimed that they were unsure whether placements were something that is relevant to their degree subject. They would like “more information regarding relevance of placements to courses” (PHIR, Part A student ABC) and “Perhaps offer more advice of what sort of placements one could do that is involved within their course subject, and also offer more guidance of how to go about finding a suitable placement” (Social Sciences, Part A student ABC). As students in the School study a variety of degree pathways that can open up a huge amount of career options, it seems that students need support making connections between their discipline, acquired skillsets and the requirements of employers by highlighting the relevance and diversity of work placements available to their subject area.

Students would like “better visibility of the success stories/examples of students succeeding as a result. More exposure to related work placement opportunities - it is heavily weighted around banking and engineering!” (PHIR, Part I student, ABIC) and for the School to “advertise about it more - especially within social sciences department. You hear a lot about it on business related courses etc however as a social sciences student I felt I had to really look for information on how to get a placement etc” (Social Sciences, Part I student, ABIC). Throughout the data it was clear that for some students, there was a level of uncertainty about firstly where they fit in to the placement job market and specifically what sort of job roles they could fill. This highlights the importance of reiterating to SSPGS students the diverse and valuable skillset they gain when studying these degrees.

3.3 Benefits of work placement

SSPGS students' views of year-long work placements.

Throughout the majority of the questionnaire responses, views are overwhelmingly positive about year-long work placements. Those students who had completed placements, our recent graduates and Part I students, unanimously agreed that they would recommend the placement year to others. For example, 100% of students who completed a placement felt others should follow suit and they would do it again if given the choice..

“Great experience, would recommend it to all students” (Social Sciences graduate)

SSPGS students feel that doing a work placement is ‘worthwhile’ as well as enjoyable.

“I found the experience invaluable, and really enjoyed having a practical year out of studying” (PHIR graduate)

Employability

All students who had undertaken, or planned to undertake, a year-long work placement perceived their employability to increase as a result. Students consider their employability to be the primary motivation for undertaking a year-long work placement.

We asked our recent graduates that had completed a work placement if they had been offered a job yet, whether that was with their placement provider or elsewhere. This student directly attributed their job offer to their year-long work placement: “The experience I gained was invaluable, and I now have a graduate job because of the work I carried out” (Social Sciences graduate). Another student simply stated: “It is the reason I have a grad job” (Geography graduate). Existing literature (Bullock et al., 2009; Tymon, 2013; Eden, 2014; Brooks and Youngson, 2016) found that work placements have a positive effect on employment outcomes. Our students also concur with these findings.

Benefits

A common trend that emerged in our data was students requesting to be explicitly told what the ‘benefits’ are of doing a year-long work placement. Our recent graduates told us that they consider the main benefits of year-long work placements to be gaining “hands on experience”

(Geography student) and an “increase in employability” (PHIR student). They also listed answers such as “learning about the real world in a safer environment” (Social Science student), “confidence booster in every area” (Geography Student) and “improved degree mark” (PHIR student). Another student stated:

“Placements are the best ways to improve your chances to employment before the end of final year, improve your interview technique and academic performance. You simply don't gain the exposure or experience doing anything else” (PHIR graduate)

Students who have undertaken a work placement believe that it enhances the University experience.

Impact on studies

Students who completed a work placement reported that the placement had a positive impact upon their degree:

“I found the whole experience invaluable - it helped me achieve a First in my degree, as I had renewed enthusiasm for my studies after a year away, I was also more disciplined with using my time and planning for deadlines etc. I would recommend placement years to students of all departments!” (PHIR graduate).

Another student told us:

“it increased my employability significantly, improved my confidence and gave me experience outside university life. I came back far more focused and as result I increased my percentage by 10% and achieved a first. I would not have achieved this without placement” (PHIR graduate).

These results correspond with those of Brooks and Youngson (2016) who found that not only do work placements have long term impacts on career progression and employment but also that completing work placements improved academic performance for students.

Confidence

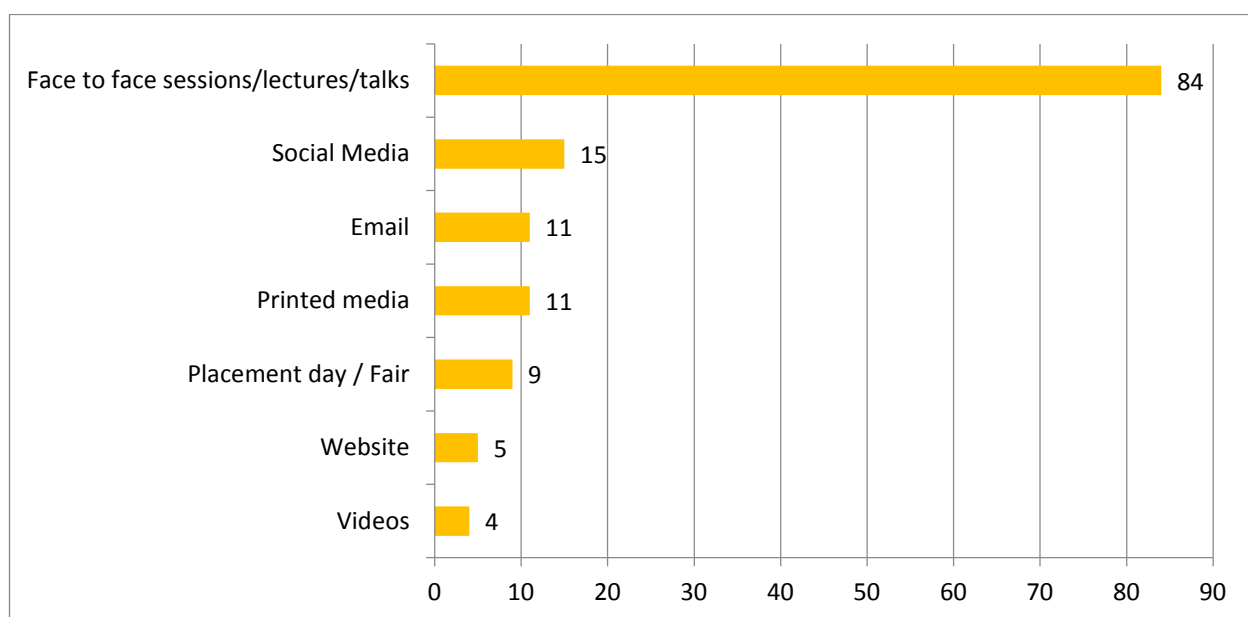
In our data, the theme of confidence came up a number of times. It was raised as a reason for students' not undertaking a work placement due to their own lack of confidence acting as a barrier to them making applications, or even considering a placement route to begin with. This directly mirrors the 2009 findings of Bullock et al.

Conversely, students who completed a placement reported increased levels of self-confidence as a direct result. Again, our findings concur with those of Thompson (2016) and Bullock et al. (2009) who found that confidence increased in all areas for work placement students compared with students who did not undertake work placements.

3.4 Promoting work placements to students

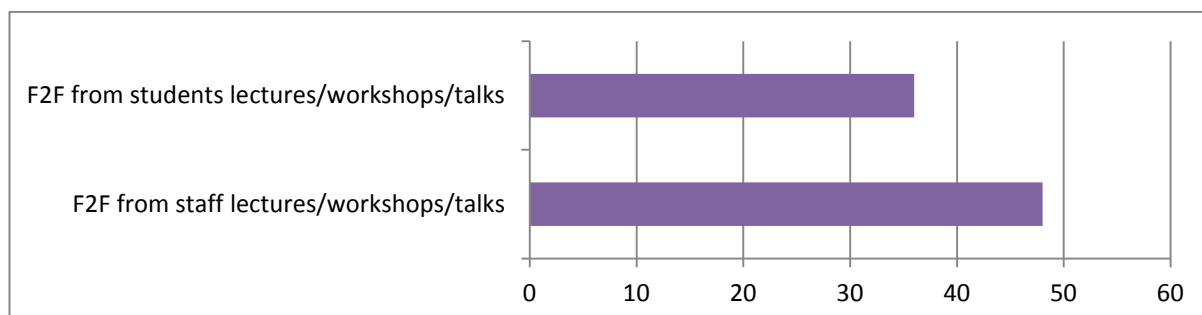
When asked the most effective method of promoting work placements, our analysis showed that overall, students much prefer being given information about placements in person. Over 60% of respondents who answered this question indicated a preference for real life promotion. This can be during lectures, workshops, talks or presentations. Just 11% of students stating a preference for online or digital methods of promotion.

Chart 4: Suggested methods of promotion (All respondents/cohorts)



Participants suggested that they would like face-to-face sessions to be delivered by both students and staff (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Face-to-face methods popularity (All respondents/cohorts)



Even though face-to-face methods of promotion from staff is participants' most preferred method, it is closely followed by face-to-face methods from returning placement students.

Social Media

Very few students stated a preference for this method of communication but the ones who did mentioned using it to provide links to other resources. There was a slight increase in popularity with students in Part A, but the face-to-face options still remain dominant.

Email

Some of the students who requested to be informed by email stressed the importance of avoiding email inbox bombardment as it leads to important information being lost. A recurring idea was to produce a weekly email (separate to a jobs bulletin) about work placements.

Timings

Earlier in the analysis it was found that students thought that the amount of information provided about placements and the time that it is provided is 'about right'. However in our responses about promotion, some students stated that they would like the information to reach them earlier so that they can begin making plans. It was suggested that we start to promote placements to the students during Part A and increase the amount of talks provided (both from returning students and staff) early in Part B. The few students that stated a preference for printed leaflets, posters and prospectuses mentioned that there could be made available at any careers fairs, fresher's events or day-long fairs specifically relating to placements.

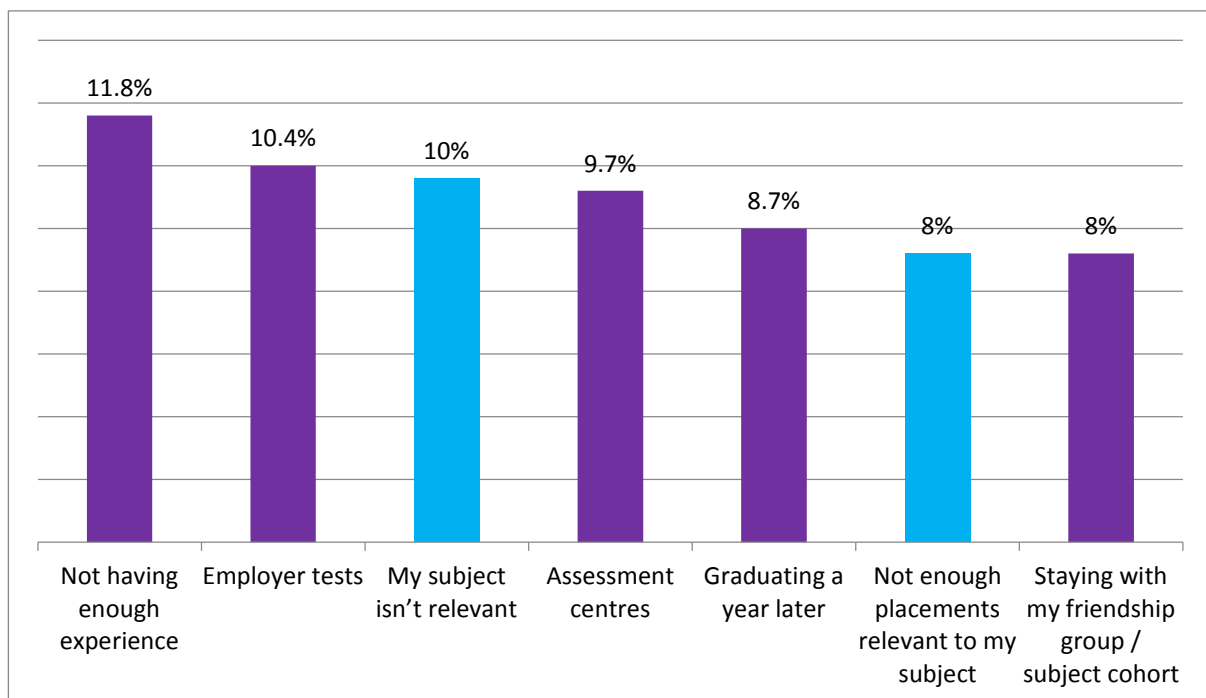
3.5 Students' concerns about year-long work placements.

Concerns highlighted

All students were asked about their concerns with regards work placements. This included those who had, or planned to, undertake a work placement and also those who had no plans to do so. This was a closed question with 16 options provided and an additional 'other' option where they could add their own response. Students could select many options in this question, should they wish to. Beyond those designed by the research team, only two other options that were added were 'I wanted to focus on my studies instead' and 'I was worried my grades were not high enough'.

The most reoccurring concerns from students are that they did not have enough experience, are concerned about employer tests and worried about the relevance of their degree and work placements to one another.

Chart 6: Primary concerns (All respondents/cohorts)

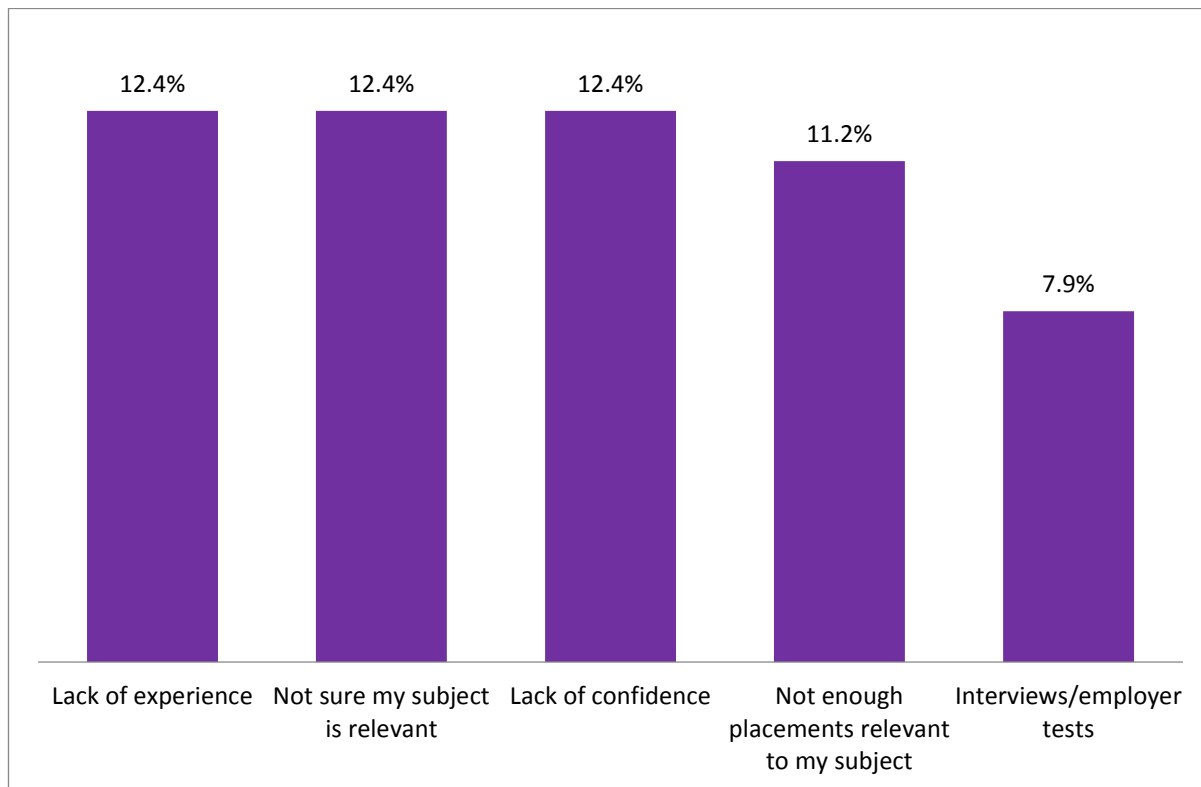


Students' main concern

Students were asked to state their primary concern too.

The three concerns reported most often were 'not enough placements relevant to my subject area', 'lack of experience' and also 'not sure if their subject is relevant'.

Chart 7: Students' number one concern (All respondents/cohorts)



Differences in concerns

Students across the sample tended to have similar concerns. We asked students in all cohorts if they had concerns and for our Part A and Part B students, we asked if their concern had been addressed.

Our Part A and B students both told us they were concerned about doing employer tests and attending assessment centres (despite the availability of mock assessment centres on campus). They were both also worried about having to pay a year of fees to continue their student status

whilst out on placement. Another similarity is that both of these year groups were concerned about graduating a year later and not having enough experience.

When we asked our Part A students if their concerns had been addressed, 69 % of our ABC route students said that their concern had not yet been addressed. Similarly 76% of ABIC route students also said their concern had not been addressed. This is not alarming as at this stage the Part A students have not had access to all of the placement sessions that occur during the next academic year. Due to this, if repeated in a years' time, those numbers should decrease.

In contrast, 80% of the Part B students on the ABIC route who were about to start their year-long work placement indicated that their concerns had indeed been addressed. This is a positive response and makes sense as this cohort have had access to Part B work placement presentations delivered by staff and returning work placement students. Many have since managed to successfully secure employment for a year and are just about to start their placement so they rightly should have resolved their concerns by this stage.

Addressing concerns

We asked our students who have completed a placement (Current Part I students and recent graduates) if they had any concerns before they went out on placement, and if so, how they dealt with these problems. The following table highlights how they resolved their problems in the following explanations.

Table 1: How students addressed their concerns (Current Part I students and recent graduates who did a work placement)

Primary concern	Resolution	Department	Cohort
The amount of responsibility I'd be given or lack of, whether they'd like my work	After a few weeks concerns went away.	Social Sciences	Current Part I student
Accommodation	Contacted [University close to placement] housing to find students looking for a tenant	Geography	Current Part I student
Difficulty in securing one	Applied for quite a few and sought help from careers (service)	Geography	Current Part I student
Getting back into the swing of things for final year i.e. writing a dissertation	I've structured my placement project so that the readings will feed into my dissertation research. I've also got some sessions with [a subject-specific tutor] booked in for the end of summer before returning to Loughborough.	PHIR	Current Part I student
Financial concerns as I signed up for an unpaid placement	I saved up during my second year and chose a placement where I could live at home to avoid paying rent	Social Sciences	Current Part I student
Worried about the change back to university following placement	Have worked harder during placement so that hopefully the transition to studies should actually be easier.	Geography	Graduate
returning to Loughborough and still being motivated to complete my course	Stats on peoples grades upon returning from placement	PHIR	Graduate
I was concerned about going back to studying after my placement	Assignments throughout my placement helped ensure I was never cut off from the university and kept me in an academic mind frame during the year.	Geography	Graduate

3.6 Support mechanisms for students

Across all of the questionnaires we asked students what support they needed and also what they had already accessed regarding existing provision. Various support is already in place for students to encourage and promote year-long work placements.

Existing support offered

We provided students with the following selection of closed responses to see how many reported actually engaging with the support provided. The majority of students who answered this question said they had accessed support for work placements from the Careers Network.

Table 2: Existing support accessed by SSPGS students (All respondents/cohorts)

Support site	No. of students who accessed	%
Careers Network / Careers Department	91	44
Sarah Lafferty (Placements Officer for the School)	61	30
Departmental Placements Director	40	19

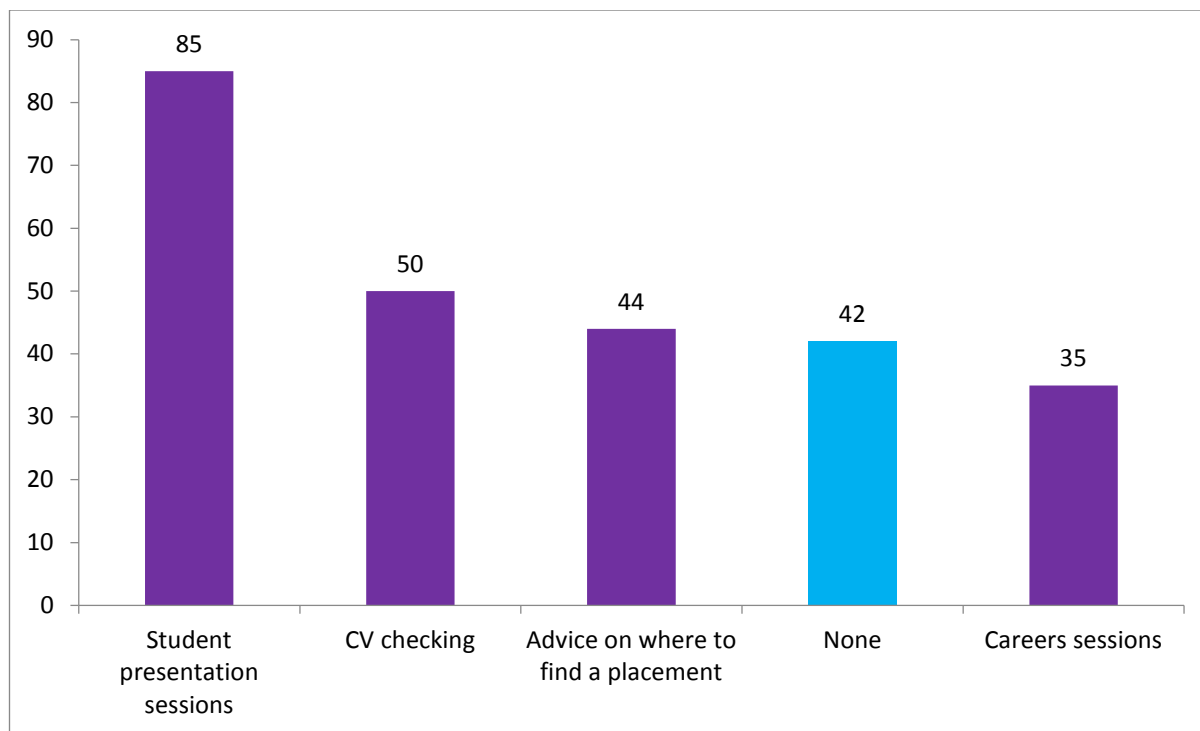
Support students accessed

To determine how popular each method of support is we asked students to select what type of support they had accessed from a selection of closed responses.

The most popular options were the information sessions provided in Parts A and B where the School Placement Officer and Placement Directors for each Department discuss the type of opportunities available to students, the support they can expect to receive and what to expect when on placement. 'CV checking' and 'Advice where to find a placement' were also popular sources of support. These are all services provided by the School.

42 students indicated that they had not made use of any of the University support available to them despite the vast array of services of offer.

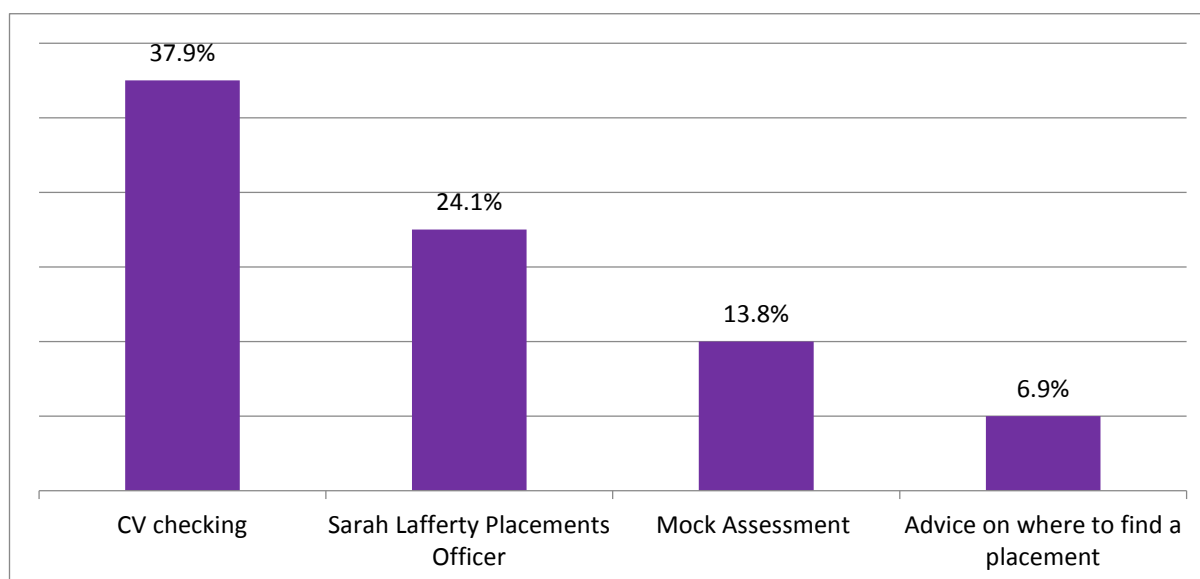
Chart 8: Engagement with existing support (All respondents/cohorts)



Most valuable support

Our students who are just about begin their work placement were asked what they found to be the most valuable support available to them. Our students told us that the CV checking sessions and one-to-one sessions with the School-based Placements Officer were the most useful types of support regarding year-long work placement provision.

Chart 9: What support have you found most valuable? (Part B, ABIC-route students)



4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Students' motivations to (not) undertake a year-long work placement

Students believe that doing a year-long work placement will increase their employability and enable them to gain practical experience. These are the core reasons they gave when we asked students why they decided to add a Part I to their degree routes and also what SSPGS students think the benefits of doing a year-long work placement are.

The School can use this data to inform future students when they are exploring options for their degrees and future career plans.

In terms of the reasons students are deterred from adding the year-long work placement option, we found that as well as students stating there was a lack of information, seemingly time is also really important to Loughborough SSPGS students as they told us that they did not want to graduate a year later and also that they wished to stay with their friendship groups and year cohort. As year-long work placements become more commonplace, we would expect the influence of the 'cohort effect' to diminish.

Students indicated that fees were another reason they did not choose to add a year-long work placement. Whilst it is impractical to think that this fee could be reduced, more could be done to make students aware of the value for money it provides, including the benefits of doing a work placement and the support they receive.

Encouraging students to complete year-long work placements

To encourage more students to add a year-long work placement, they told us that there were some key things that would help.

Firstly, they raised that the School should increase the levels of promotion about year-long work placements. This way, they will be more informed.

Secondly, students wish to be explicitly told the benefits of doing a placement. They want to see statistics and data from returning placement students and also about how it will affect their employability and future career paths.

Lastly students requested that we increase the information available about relevance. This includes telling them specifically how placements are relevant to their degree subject, and also providing what they deem to be relevant placements in sectors that complement their varied skillsets.

These measures can be implemented initially within the SSPGS, but additionally by employers who are interested in recruiting students from subjects such as Social Sciences; Politics, History, International Relations; and Geography.

Promoting year-long work placements at Loughborough

When it comes to promoting year-long work placements to students, our SSPGS cohorts told us that they prefer to get information from face-to-face sessions, rather than via digital communications. Within these real-life methods, students are asking for more presentations from returning students, more dedicated seminars and timetabled sessions specifically related to learning about placements.

There was not much call for printed media and few students requested that we engage with them on social media as the primary means of communication. However, this is not to indicate that there is no place for this; rather it can act as a supplement to information given face-to-face. This indicates that the School can concentrate on developing a programme of placement events and educational events to be delivered to Part A and B students and using social media for information relating to specific placement opportunities. Students suggested that more information and events could be available to them during Part A (their first year of study).

Students' concerns about year-long work placements

For students in the SSPGS some key worries for them when thinking about undertaking a year-long work placement are that they do not have enough experience or they lack confidence. This could indicate that our students are not fully aware of the wide range of skills and capabilities that the degrees within our Departments equip graduates with. The school staff may need to work closely with students to ensure that they understand their own skillsets so they are able to vocalise what they can offer in the workplace.

Support mechanisms for students

With regards to the existing support already offered by the SSPGS, students indicated that they did engage with a variety of support mechanisms.

Students told us that the most useful support already provided to them was 'CV checking'. This is a service provided by University staff, either within the School by a dedicated member of the Placement Team, or by the centrally-located Careers Network. Following this, students highlighted that the other most useful method of support was being able to access a Placements Officer for help. These results indicate that University staffing is very important and a key area to concentrate resource going forward.

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Appendix. Example Questionnaire

Final year students who have completed a year-long work placement

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire about work placements at Loughborough University. This questionnaire is for students who have recently finished studying at Loughborough and completed a year-long work placement as part of their degree.

Please answer the following questions as fully as possible. The information you give to us will be anonymous and will provide significant insight into work placement provision.

1) By ticking the box below you provide your consent for your anonymous responses to be used in our research. Do you agree to take part? * Required

Yes, I am happy to continue

2) Which Department are you a student in?

Geography

PHIR – Politics, History and International Relations

Social Sciences

3) Did you come to University on a

3 year degree (ABC route)

4 year degree (ABIC route to include a placement year)

4) When did you find out that year-long work placements were available as part of your degree?

Before you started your degree e.g. from prospectus/open day information or own research

During your first year at Loughborough

During your second year at Loughborough

5) Who provided you with this information? Tick all that apply

Academic staff

Placement staff (Sarah Lafferty / Department Placements Director e.g. at a presentation or via email)

Friends/family not at Loughborough

Other students at Loughborough

Careers Network/ Careers Department

Social media

Promotional literature (e.g. Prospectus)

Information on LEARN

Loughborough Website / Department website

Other.....

6) Did you hear about placements

Too soon

About right

Too late

7) Was the information provided about placements

Too much. If so, what could be left out? Please explain below

About right

Too little. If so, what else did you need? Please explain below

Sub: Please explain here.....

8) What motivated you to undertake a year-long work placement? Select all that apply

I wanted to increase my employability

I wanted to gain practical experience

I wanted to earn a salary for a year

I wanted to extend the length of my course

I was worried about the economic climate

I wanted to try something new

To gain an extra qualification in addition to my degree (Diploma in Professional Studies / DPS)

My friends/family influenced me

Other

9) If you had to select only one, what was the main motivation for undertaking a year-long work placement?

.....

10) Did you have any concerns about undertaking a year-long work placement?

No

Yes

If yes, please provide details below

.....

11) How did you address this concern?

.....

12) Whilst applying for year-long placement opportunities did you access support from any of these Loughborough University services? Select all that apply

None

Careers Network / Careers Department

Sarah Lafferty (Placements Officer)

Departmental Placements Director (Helena Pimlott-Wilson, Karen Lumsden, Robert Knight)

Accommodation Office

Student Finance

Other Comment.....

13) What support did you access? Select all that apply

None

Advice on where to find a placement

1st year placement information session

Returning placement student presentations (year 2)

Mock assessment centres

CV checking

Careers workshops

Other

14) How much contact did you have with the academic member of staff who acted as your visiting tutor during your placement?

Too much. If so, why? Please explain below

About the right amount

Too little. If so, what else did you need? Please explain below

Sub: Please explain here

15) How could the University have better supported you whilst on placement?

.....

16) Was the level of coursework required for the Diploma in Professional Studies (DPS)

Too much

About right

Too little

Not applicable / I didn't take this qualification

17) Was the DPS coursework relevant to your studies?

Yes

No

Unsure

Did not do DPS

Why?

18) Would you recommend a placement year to other students in your Department?

Yes

No

19) Given the choice again, would you undertake the work placement year? (Either with the same employer or an alternative?)

Yes

No

Don't know

Please explain your answer

20) What do you believe are the three main benefits of undertaking a year-long work placement?

21) By undertaking a work placement has your employability

Increased

Stayed the same

Decreased

Don't know

Please explain your answer.....

22) What do you think Loughborough could do to encourage more students to take a year-long work placement?

.....

23) What do you think would be the most effective method of promoting year-long work placements to Loughborough students? Add as much detail as you can

Comment.....

24) Were you offered a job with your placement provider? (Whether you accepted it or not)

Yes

No

Not applicable

25) What advice would you give a student thinking about doing a year-long work placement?

Comment.....

26) Please add any other comments or information about the year-long work placement below

27) Do you identify as:

Female

Male

Other

Prefer not to say

28) What is your ethnic group?

Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

White British

Any other White background

Any Mixed/Multiple ethnic background

Any Asian background

Any Black background

Any other ethnic group

Prefer not to say

29) Thank you for taking part in this survey. All respondents will be entered into a prize draw to win £50 Amazon vouchers. If you would like to be included in this, please enter your email address below. Please do NOT use your university account as this will close shortly after graduation and we will be unable to contact you should you win. We will not pass your email address to anyone outside of the Research Team.

.....

30) We are also looking for students to take part in a short 5-10 minute chat via Skype. All responses will remain anonymous.

Yes, you can contact me

No, I do not wish to be contacted

FINAL PAGE: Thank you from the Placements Team for taking part in this questionnaire.

If you have any questions about year-long work placements or this questionnaire please contact:

Helena Pimlott-Wilson h.pimlott-wilson@lboro.ac.uk

Sarah Lafferty s.lafferty@lboro.ac.uk