

Work experience benefits essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

INTRODUCTION The importance of work placement as a part of higher education can not be disputed. A number of studies (Bennett, Dunne & Carre, 2000; Arnold, Loan-Clarke, Harrington & Hart, 1999) have proved that skills gained at work placements are very important and sought after by employers.

Students with work placement experience become more attractive as future employees. (Arnold et al. 999) However Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragnoilli (2004) believe that higher education institutions should advertise work placements not only for employment prospects, but for the development of the whole person throughout the degree program and even beyond. This research will try to identify the key generic skills, which may be gained at work placements and to what extent may these affect the student's performance in their final year. **LITERATURE REVIEW** In today's world, new graduates have to face many more challenges when entering the graduate recruiting market, in comparison to what predecessors had to face.

Many of them work for international organisations and are required to be flexible, cooperative, work longer hours and to be aware of inter- cultural differences (Crebert et al. 2004). Harvey (1999) believes that the reason behind it is that most organisations have undergone significant change in the last decade and most are developing structures and practices to enhance their flexibility for further change. Traditional ' job for life' securities that characterised the workplace some time ago are disappearing and graduates have to be prepared for uncertainty in their future career. On the other hand a lot of young people don't even know what they want to do with lives, so they just continue studding at university after they finish a college. ' What

career? How many undergraduates know what they want to do, and what is the likelihood of them getting those jobs anyway? The object of a degree is further study, not three years to pick a job.

‘ (Student’s response to questionnaire about career. Bennett et al. 2000 p. 84) This general upskilling of the work force together with fewer potential graduate jobs available creates an oversupply of graduates. Harvey, 1999) Some of these graduates, when put into a real working environment tend to prove, that they are not ready to take on the responsibilities and pressure which comes with each particular graduate position because of the lack of skills.

The unreadiness has been noticed by employers, which criticise the higher educational system, because it is failing to deliver ready to work graduates out of the university. This critics are mainly based on assumptions that universities are responsible for equipping graduates with all the skills and knowledge necessary for the workplace. Crebert et al. , 2004) In Crebert’s study, employers in focus group discussions had strong views on the ways in which students should be prepared at university for all kinds of situations, from problem solving, making decisions, working in a team and learning for themselves. On the other side in the graduates’ eyes, employers were sometimes guilty of not providing the learning opportunities that would enable them to be developed.

Employers usually find the team working skills as the most important generic skill, because their business success normally depend up on the team succeeding. A team is more than a number of brilliant advisers. It is a group

of people who understand each other, who know individual strengths and weaknesses and who co-operate with one another. (Margerison & McCann, 1990) The study of Competence development in undergraduate business-related degrees, conducted by John Arnold et al.

(1999), investigated the development of 15 major competences in academic studies and work placements as perceived by business undergraduate students. Arnold has found that perception of competence development in both, academic studies and work placements were overall positive, however work placement was believed to be better than academic studies in terms of competence development, by both, graduates and employers as well.

Universities have also noticed the unreadiness of new graduates and as the reaction to this, Competence development is now more often seen as a central goal in business and management degrees. (Arnold et al. 1999) Despite increasing use of group work activities, case studies and projects, graduates often see higher education mainly as the place for acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and general academic development.

According to Bennett's (2000) research these two purposes account for 75% of graduate's perceptions of higher education. Only 11% of graduates see university as the place for acquiring career and job related skills. Harvey (1999) believes, that the use of work placements as part of programs of study helps to provide a wider view. According to his study (New Realities: The relationship between higher education and employment, 1999, p 25) Danish students feel that the work placement is a very valuable experience, which challenges students to think carefully about their attitude to work, themselves and their future careers and personal development. Work

placements give graduates opportunity to test the knowledge gained in higher education and in the real working life environment.

‘ It seems, than, that most students used reflection to ‘ upgrade’ from the ‘ making sense’ stage of learning to that of ‘ making meaning’. Smith, Clegg, Lawrence & Todd 2007, reaction to what benefits students see in work placements) In the UK work placements are widely used among business and management degrees, in order to develop generic competences. Placements normally last for one year and take place between second and final year. When students join the work placement, employers often see them as having heads full of theories, principles and information , and by implication, as requiring intensive training before they can be useful to the organisation. Crebert et al. 2004) Employers can see the knowledge, but they also see that graduates are very often unable to transfer that knowledge in to practice.

A number of studies (Smith et al. , 2007, Crebert et al. , 2004, Bennett et al. , 2000) found that positive benefits of work placements are significant and undeniable.

Most of these studies focused on graduates as employees and how they would benefit from the work placement experience in their new jobs, but this research will try to prove something else. It will try to prove whether the work placement experience after second year and all generic skills gained, could be transferred back to higher education and have an impact on students’ performance in their final year!

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES This research aims to provide up-to-date information on changes of student academic performance in their final year

of studies, after experience gained in work placement programme.

RESEARCH QUESTION This research aims to provide up-to-date information on changes of student academic performance in their final year of studies subsequent to experiences gained in work placement programme. In addition, research intends to provide employers and academic staff with current issues of student perceptions of work placement and academic programme. Consequently, academic staff and employers will be able to identify key factors that need to be improved in academic and placement programmes.

1) Are the work placements as beneficial as theory states? 2) Does breaking the flow of studies appear to be too challenging for students?) What are students' motivation factors and to what extent motivation influences their performance? 4) Do students understand theoretical and practical meaning of generic skills? 5) Does work placements help students to become more successful team workers? **KEY VARIABLES** **DEPENDANT VARIABLES** 1)

Changes in student academic performance 2) Changes in student attitude 3) Changes in motivation factors 4) Changes in work placement programme 5) Changes in level of importance of team working 6) Changes in learning experience **INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**) Type of work placement 2) Duration of work placement programme **INTERVENING VARIABLES** 1) Motivation 2)

Skills 3) Learning 4) Traits **MODERATING VARIABLES** 1) Gender 2) Age 3) Knowledge 4) Initiative **METHODOLOGY** This study is aimed at final year students at University of Bedfordshire, therefore our study will be conducted at this university only. The study will take place once the first semester has finished when students are aware of their results. The main data collection

for this research will be an anonymous questionnaire followed by small focus group sessions. Both groups of students, with and without work placement experience will be given the questionnaire to fill in, but only the students with work placement experience will be invited to focus group session. The reason for implementing focus group data collection is that it is also important to include student's subjective perceptions about the work placement in order to identify a positive outcome of work placements.

The study will require at least 50 students to participate otherwise the outcome may be distorted. ACCESSABILITY One of the main issue with data collection, will be access to student's grades, as student's grades are very confidential. To overcome this issue the questionnaire will be anonymous and an incentive scheme will be implemented as well. Another problem which may occur is that students, as they are in final year, will be too busy working on their dissertation projects and they won't have enough time to take part in this research. REFERENCES Arnold J.

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