WARWICK INSTITUTE *for* EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH IER

THE IMPACT OF GRADUATE PLACEMENTS ON BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND: *a longitudinal study to run alongside the Graduates for Business Project*

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Graduates for Business Scheme and the Impact project

The Graduates for Business (G4B) programme aimed to increase retention of graduates in the South West Region, and to ensure that graduates were appropriately skilled and employed in suitable jobs that allowed them to use these skills effectively.

The 'Impact of graduate placements in businesses in the South West of England' project assesses the impact of the G4B programme, to discover the factors associated with more and less successful placements. Through this, effective ways to develop and promote graduate employment opportunities are identified.

The Impact study involved interviews with 100 employers who had taken someone on placement. Of these employers, 91 were participants in the G4B programme, and nine were other employers in the South West who had taken someone on placement outside the scheme. Fifty-two interviews were conducted with graduates and undergraduates who had been on placement, of which 50 had undertaken placements supported by the G4B programme.

HEIs in the South West were allocated funds to enable them to institute or build on work experience programmes. The objective of these programmes, along with other networking activities, was to increase contacts between HEIs and local employers, enabling employers to understand the benefits of employing graduates, and graduates to gain experience of graduate level work while enhancing their employability skills. As the programme developed, undergraduate placements were added, and these placements were seen as having similar benefits. They allowed employers to understand the skills students developed in HE, and that graduates might therefore be expected to have, and to anticipate the advantages these skills might bring to the organisation. There was a particular focus on work placements in SMEs and on graduates who might be expected to find it difficult to find suitable graduate-level employment in the South West.

The focus of the G4B scheme on SMEs highlighted the important, and distinctive, role these types of organisation have to play in the region. Previous work on the placements in SMEs and micro-businesses has shown that it can be difficult to establish a culture of work experience in very small organisations, particularly when they have little or no history of graduate employment, and this was evident in the G4B project. Extra work was needed to convince these organisations that it is worthwhile to offer work experience to graduates and students, and to demonstrate that time costs, which can be a major deterrent, can be off-set by gains in skills and productivity. Additionally, previous research has shown that graduates are often unwilling to undertake placements in SMEs because they do not understand the potential of these placements when they are unlikely to lead to a full-time job, and when full-time jobs in SMEs tend to be regarded as less desirable in general. The placements in SMEs instituted as part of the G4B scheme were found to have given both graduates and undergraduates a new perspective on this issue, and there was evidence that several would now be much more likely to consider the benefits of working in an SME during their career. This was most evident in PR and Marketing and IT, which are industrial sectors where new, often niche organisations are being established in the South West. Other sectors with a large

proportion of small organisation in the survey included Arts and Media, Publishing and Tourism and Leisure.

Deriving benefits from work placements

There was a large variety in the activities people on placement undertook, depending on the sector and size of the organisation where they did their placement. Some differences between the work given to graduates and undergraduates were observed. Graduates tended to be given more challenging work that required more specialist skills and was seen as making a definable contribution to the organisation. The work undertaken by graduates was more likely to be similar to that undertaken by existing employees and consequently, to be regarded as equivalent to a job by both the employer and the graduate. Undergraduates were more likely to engage in a variety of tasks, some of them quite routine. They were also more likely to be involved in activities that were unlikely to be carried out by members of staff, but which were more traditional placement activities, such as work-shadowing. Although this generally worked well, there was evidence in some of the interviews with graduates that they saw learning about different roles in an organisation and having the opportunity to try some of them out as one of the benefits of doing a placement, as this was one of the unique features of placements that distinguished them from other jobs. It was also found that when undergraduates were not engaging in the kind of work that would commonly be done by employees of the organisation, they found it hard to understand the job and to identify the contribution they were making to the organisation. Despite this, there was a high level of satisfaction with the placements amongst both employers and graduates and undergraduates.

The reasons employers gave for taking someone on placement focussed on both seeing benefits for the person on placement and for the employer. Those who had taken undergraduates on placement, and organisations in competitive sectors, were more likely to focus on the benefits the person on placement might derive from the experience, while those employers who had taken graduates on placement were more likely to stress the benefits the organisation gained from the experience, for example in filling identified skills gaps.

Graduates and undergraduates focussed on the ways in which the placement could give them different types of work experience, and 48 of the 50 respondents who had done a placement through the G4B scheme said this was one of their main reasons for wanting to do a placement. Clarifying career ideas and earning money were the other reasons commonly given for undertaking a placement.

Payment of people on placement was found to be a particular issue, both for employers and graduates and undergraduates who were considering doing a placement. Particularly for small employers, having to pay someone on placement was very difficult, and even in cases where the placement was not paid, the resources devoted to the placement in terms of work hours of existing staff could result in a financial loss for an organisation. Employers noted that if they were required to pay the person on placement as well as account for this lost time, engaging in further placement activity would be impossible. For people who went on placement, particularly graduates, little or no pay was a concern, especially when they had no other financial support. There was a limit to how long someone could spend on placement if they had no other income, and there was anecdotal evidence that some

graduates had not been able to take part in the scheme because their placement would be unpaid. It was suggested by several employers, primarily those that were small or in sectors like the Voluntary sector, that some kind of support from the regional development agency or a similar organisation would help to ensure that a full range of employers and graduates were able to benefit from the scheme.

Employers identified a range of benefits from the placements. There were benefits that came from the actual work carried out by the person on placement. These included freeing up of staff time; having things done that other staff had not got around to; the implementation of new procedures; and the completion of specific projects. There was evidence that when these tasks utilised the skills of the person on placement effectively, the placements supplemented the existing work of the organisation and contributed to the development of skills both of the person on placement and within the organisation generally. When people were engaged in less skilled work, and were used simply to free staff from 'sub-professional duties' or to carry out routine work that helped the organisation function on a day-to-day basis, this development was less evident, although it was clear that the immediate impact on the organisation was still very important, and in some cases it was this work that enabled the organisation to stay in business, thereby making a contribution to the economy of the South West.

In addition to the impact of the work carried out, organisations benefited from the presence of people on placement. They were seen as bringing an outsider's perspective that challenged existing procedures, making employees think about why they worked in a particular way and whether this was the most efficient or effective way of completing particular tasks. There was little evidence of direct financial benefits, such as an increase in turn-over or profitability, but these may be a long-term consequence of the placement that it is not possible to measure over a relatively short timescale.

Among the graduates and undergraduates who had been on placement, the most frequently mentioned benefit was gaining experience. In some cases, this was simply to have the experience to put on their CV, but in general the experience of work, and learning about different industries and employers was valued highly. This enabled the graduates and undergraduates to make decisions about their careers, and around half of the respondents said that their career ideas had become clearer as a result of the placement. The development of confidence and maturity was also evident amongst the graduates and undergraduates who had been on placement, and this was particularly the case when they had little or no previous work experience. Finding out that the skills they learned during their time in HE transitioned well into the work place, and identifying those skills that they needed to improve, had increased the self-belief of graduates and undergraduates who had been nervous and de-motivated by the current recession.

The benefits experienced by the HEIs focussed on the development of networks with local employers and the establishment of a culture of placement activity in institutions where this had not previously existed. Although there were few cases where the placement had established new links between the HEI and the employer, there was evidence that the placement played a role in cementing existing relationships and extending them into new areas of activity. Continuity of staff plays an important role in this, and is an issue for HEIs and funders who plan to continue placement activities.

Recommendations for increasing the impact of placements

Recommendations suggested by employers, graduates and undergraduates and HEIs about what made a successful placement focussed primarily on the need for planning and negotiation between all concerned before the placement started and as it progressed. It was felt that everyone should be clear about what they could expect to get from the placement, so that there was no disappointment later.

This finding was one of the few recommendations that was applicable to all placements. Aside from this, it was felt that there could not be a 'one size fits all' approach to placements, and that different employers and different graduates and undergraduates would have different aims for the placement, and as long as the aims of the individual employer and person on placement coincided, then the placement could be considered as success. In this respect, a year-long paid graduate placement which involved a high degree of responsibility, and a two-week undergraduate placement that was primarily focussed on work-shadowing could be equally successful if they both met the needs and expectations of those concerned.

For funders, the key finding was that placements, and in particular placements that focus on groups that are difficult to engage, such as SMEs and graduates who have experienced difficulty finding employment, are time consuming and real gains cannot be achieved without adequate funding. The process of deriving benefits for the region, as well as the employers and HEIs involved, requires a sustained commitment. The networks established between HEIs and local employers through programmes like G4B require maintenance, which cannot be achieved when the networks are disrupted due to changes in staff or funding procedures.

1.   BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

1.1   The Graduates for Business Programme

The Graduates for Business (G4B) Programme was launched in November 2006 with the aim of increasing the number and effectiveness of graduates employed in South West England. Resources were allocated by the South West Regional Agency (SWRDA) in a programme to be managed on its behalf by the Higher Education Regional Development Association- South West (HERDA) – now Universities South West[1]. HEIs in the region were encouraged to apply for funds to allocate time and resources initiatives designed to increase the uptake and impact of 'working with business' programmes to enable more businesses to appreciate the benefits of graduate level staff and allow more graduates to enhance their experience of graduate level work and their employability skills. In addition to established 'work experience' objectives, the additional funding provided by the scheme to HEIs could be used to assist graduates having difficulty in the SW job market. Such initiatives might include providing training, guidance or mentoring to help them identify strengths and weaknesses, encourage them to develop entrepreneurial skills and undertake an appropriate 'working with business' programme and for employers to be encouraged to take them on as employees.

Although it has a substantial HE sector, the South West is a net exporter of graduates (Perryman *et al* 2003, Evans and Whalley 2004). Recent trends indicate that two thirds of students who study in the South West leave the region within three years of graduation (SLIM, 2004) and improved retention of graduates and their skills in the region is considered a key policy priority to ensure regional prosperity and growth. A further core objective of the G4B programme was to stem the flow of graduates away from the region and enable those who remain to realise their potential contribution to its industries and communities.

SWRDA concluded that parallel to this programme, a research project should be conducted to map and evaluate the efficacy of these initiatives and the obstacles encountered by HEIs in meeting the programme's objectives. By mapping their successes and failures in relation to current employer and HE collaborative activities, effective ways to develop and promote appropriate graduate employment opportunities in the South West to inform future regional policy, practitioner and graduate stakeholder efforts and investment would be identified. This report summarises the research that has been undertaken to carry out this impact evaluation. It was anticipated at that outset that the IER research team would work closely with the G4B team and the Employer Liaison Officers to discuss priorities, the scope of placement activities and organisations concerned and the relative value of possible methodologies and sampling approaches to determine the most effective possible use of resources on the proposed project which, by definition, would inevitably be exploratory and innovative.

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[1] See http://www.universitiessouthwest.ac.uk/

1.2. The Impact Study

1.2.1. Overall aims and objectives on behalf of SWRDA and HERDA

The overall aims specified at the outset were detailed and ambitious, but are encapsulated under these two headings:

- to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and to establish which factors in were associated with successful and less successful outcomes for employers, students, Higher Education Institutions(HEIs) and potential impact on the regional economy;
- to assess how G4B placements supplemented and compared with traditional placements (*e.g.* sandwich courses, summer placements as a preliminary to recruitment, special projects). Had it added value?

1.2.2. Objectives for the research team

In order to achieve these outcomes, the research team needed to investigate the perspectives of both employers and graduates and as the project progressed, to build in comparative investigation of the experiences of undergraduate students on work placements and employers' evaluations of these, since the HEIs, faced with the challenge of involving local employers in the programme, negotiated successfully with the sponsors to modify the original specification to include pre-graduation placements for students who would be likely to experience difficulty in obtaining employment in the region as graduates[2].

To assess the impact on regional employers, the objectives were to identify the long-term impact (if any) on the organisation employer providing the placement, to ascertain the factors associated with more and less successful placements and to understand the relationship with particular HEIs and whether this leads to other forms of HEI-employer engagement, and the extent to which it might have led them to modify their recruitment practices and consider employing more graduates, or to employ graduates where previously they had not done so. In the South West, the majority of graduate development programmes are designed to place graduates in local SMEs, supported by higher education institutions.

From the graduates' perspectives, the objectives were to identify the impact of placements on their perceptions of the extent to which the experience had enabled them to improve or develop skills, inform their early career decision-making and lead to employment opportunities or a greater probability that they would be able to obtain employment, and the likelihood that they would develop careers that would make use of and value their HE experience in the South West.

Evaluation of the relative values of different employer/higher education (HE) collaborative activities to identify in the extent to which they met the objectives set, to inform future

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[2] The changes in the operation of the G4B scheme and this project were fully discussed in the interim report (Purcell *et al* 2009, April 2009) and some of these are discussed in context below.

interventions and initiatives related to graduate employment and retention in the region, employers' use of highly-qualified labour to contribute to regional innovation and prosperity were consequently at the core of the research brief. Which initiatives had been successful, and which less so, and why? What made a placement more or less valuable, for both graduates and employers, and in terms of the regional policy objectives?

1.2.3. The Research Methods

The aim at the outset, to address the research questions, was to use the following 'mixed methods' quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- a two-stage census survey of employers participating in G4B plus others engaged in student placements (identified via SW HEIs in consultation with Careers Service and other key informants with industry liaison roles), conducted early in the project and around 18 months later;
- a series of longitudinal case studies of employer/placement partnerships, to monitor 'exemplar' placements from the point of view of both graduate placement candidate and employing organisation and explore issues arising from the surveys;
- comparison of the new data generated with SW-specific and national data in existing data sets to provide an indication of the extent to which the population of employers with placements differs from that of the population of graduate recruiters, and how far the early labour market experience of graduates in placements is similar to, or different from, that of graduates generally.

In the event, the research team, like the HEI G4B representatives with the brief to implement the programme and use the resources well, were faced with difficulties that led to modification of the original research design. Difficulties encountered reflected the obstacles experienced at local level by the regional representatives, who found many employers in the region largely suspicious of HE interventions and reluctant to consider the potential of the scheme from the point of view of their organisations. The team was consequently faced with considerable challenges in making contact with all the parties: the (mainly part-time) G4B representatives, who in doing their jobs, were clearly working under considerable pressures with a difficult brief to meet, the employers and the placement graduates and students. The HEI representatives, having invested enormous energy in locating suitable organisations for placements and persuading employers to participate were reluctant, understandably, to do anything that might jeopardise these relationships and were concerned that further demands should not be made on them, or their confidentiality breached. This meant;

- there were relatively few graduate employers to contact (single employers have multiple placements and a high proportion of those identified have turned out to be for undergraduates);
- there had been a slow start and, due to the reluctance of HEIs to divulge contact details of employers to us, we were unable to establish whether and when they contacted the employers on our behalf providing a link to the online questionnaire;
- there was consequently a very low response to the online questionnaire, despite promotion of the link by SWRDA and HERDA contacts, which raised the questions:

- did all the G4B employers receive the invitation to participate, or were they unwilling to complete an online questionnaire?
- records of placements were often not kept by the employer (particularly of short placements).

- the G4B placement database at HERDA was updated retrospectively and the research team found it very difficult to obtain information about placements until, often, they had already been completed (sometimes, long-completed) rather than, as planned, as placements had been arranged.

Consequently, semi-structured telephone interviews were used as the primary method of data collection. Ninety-one employers who had taken someone on a placement supported by G4B were interviewed, as were nine employers in the South West who had taken someone on placement outside the G4B scheme. In addition, 50 interviews with graduates and undergraduates who had been on placement through the G4B scheme were interviewed, along with two people who had been on placements outside the G4B scheme. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. In addition to the data in each chapter, case studies are presented at the end of each chapter. These case studies illustrate particular issues that were discussed during the interviews, highlighting both good and less good practice.

1.3 HE expansion and employment: the historical and political context of higher education in the UK

It is necessary to consider the background to the G4B initiative. The extent to which the graduate supply meets the nation's demand, and the value of higher education (HE) to individuals and the economy has been a strong policy theme throughout its evolution from the start, as has the preparedness of graduates for employment. Particularly in the in the light of the current recession and concern to maintain skill upgrading, graduate employability has become an increasing concern for UK policy makers, as well as for graduates themselves. Consequently, bodies like HEFCE have called upon the HE sector to collaborate more effectively and frequently with employers, and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)'s Graduates for Business (G4B) initiative, managed by the Higher Education Regional Development Agency was one of the means by which this challenge has been addressed regionally.

1.3.1 Changing perceptions of the relationship between higher education and employment

It is useful to consider the G4B programme and change in the demand for high level skills and educational qualifications in the context of changing perceptions of the relationship between tertiary education and labour market change. As far back as the 1950s there were concerns about matching the supply of graduates to the economy's demand for them. Studies conducted during the 1960s and 1970s revealed, given that they continued to constitute a relatively small proportion of labour market entrants, the relative ease with which graduates were integrated to the labour market, although studies of young graduates in the first few years of their careers, even of 1960s cohorts, indicated that significant proportions claimed to be under-employed and in jobs that did not directly use their higher education experience (Belfield *et al*. 1997, Dolton and Makepeace 1992, Tarsh 1992). Reported under-use of the skills developed by graduates in HE and difficulty in finding 'graduate jobs'

is consequently not a new phenomenon. Dolton and Vignoles (2000) estimated on the basis of survey evidence that 38 per cent of 1980 graduates were 'overeducated' for their first job and, even six years later in 1986, 30 per cent reported evidence suggesting that this remained the case[3]. Nevertheless, until recently, research findings have indicated that obtaining a degree increased the propensity of individuals to obtain better jobs and higher earnings than otherwise comparable workers without degrees, both in the short and long term (Elias and Purcell, 2004; Brennan *et al*, 2001; Elias *et al* 1999a; Dearden *et al*, 2000). Unemployment of graduates has remained low, and considerably lower than that of the less well-qualified population.

It is not surprising, given diversification of the population, that the graduate premium has decreased somewhat since the millennium, but variations in the ease of labour market integration and financial returns to HE among degree subjects and disciplines, always an aspect of the graduate labour market (Purcell *et al*. 2005, Walker and Zhu 2003), appears to have been increasing recently (Green and Zhu 2008). Nonetheless, employers have continued to pay for (and invest in) applicants with degrees (Green and Zhu *ibid*, Elias and Purcell 2009) and this trend, taking account of projected changes that will inhibit growth, even on the most pessimistic estimates, has been projected expected to continue for the next 20 years (Bekhradnia and Bailey 2008). The current recession is undoubtedly presenting greater difficulties for graduates, as with others, in the short-medium term, but this is expected to be a relatively short-term phenomenon rather than in indication of a longer-term decline in demand (Wilson *et al.* 2009).

Successive analyses of the relationship between government policy and employer-HEI links and economic development show the impact of the consistent belief that through improving skill levels, higher education institutions have a significant role to play in the development of 'the knowledge-based economy' (EU 2004, Rodrigues (2004), OECD 2004, DfEE 1998, Leadbeater 1998, Reich 1992) and increased productivity (Knight and Yorke, 2001, 2002a; Simm and Hogarth 2000; Jackson, 1999; Jones and Jenkins, 1999; Linde, 1999; Coopers and Lybrand, 1998; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Shepherd and Cooper, 1994, Haywood and Maki, 1992). Economic restructuring, technological development from in the mid-20th century onwards generated questions about the appropriate balance of undergraduate subjects and degree curricula to meet the changing needs of the economy, and the approach to HE policy and practice became increasingly 'instrumentalist' than 'idealistic' (Charles 2003). As UK HE policy developments from the mid-20th century have shown, the recognition that HEIs have a strong role to play in economic development is well-established. Alongside periodic revival of concern that too few highly-educated labour market entrants were entering engineering, manufacturing and commerce, and the private sector generally.[4]

All of the most recent relevant reports and policy documents address the implications of the *Leitch Report* (HM Treasury 2006) which stated that the skills base in the UK has

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[3] It has to be said that economists base such statements on very limited evidence that takes little account of the subjective perceptions, career choices and the different options available to those with degrees in different disciplines and different performance and potential. Even so, the concept of 'underemployed' is perhaps preferable to 'over educated'.

[4] See PEP 1957, the Committee of Higher Education (1963) Robbins Report, Dainton (1968), CBI (1970), Hunter (1981), through to the recent DTI (1991), DfEE (1998), HEPI (2003), Royal Society (2006, 2008), DIUS (2008, 2009) Wilson *et al.*(2009a, 2009b), Royal Society of Chemistry (2009).

fundamental weaknesses which will be key factors in limiting productivity and growth. In contrast, it seemed, other countries had been advancing more rapidly, to the extent that even if the UK meets current skills targets set by the government, skills will still lag behind competitor countries in 2020. The report attributes this in part to growth in the quality and volume of education provision in these countries. However, although the longer term implications of UK and EU high skills policies and the socio-economic impacts of HE expansion has been critically reviewed by the research community (e.g. Brown *et al.* 2008, Keep *et al.* 2006), and the most recent government reports, notably *Skills for growth: the national skills strategy* (DBIS 2009) and *Higher ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy* (DBIS 2009), both just published, have followed the recommendations in the Leitch Report that emphasis on employer engagement and workforce development should be enshrined in the targets faced by HEI, moving them away from their current central focus on participation rates.

1.3.2. *Changing perceptions of graduate skills mismatches*

In this process of evolution, concern about shortfalls in specialist discipline-based graduate skills and knowledge have remained constant, but the characteristics of the perceived lack of fit between the supply and demand about the *ranges* of skills being developed across the spectrum of subjects, including the STEM ones, has been progressively amplified, initially by more stress on transferrable professional and technical skills to – increasingly – concern about 'employability skills'[5] (Keep *et al.* 2008, E. Brown and Hesketh 2004). In general, these are implicitly more generic than specialist ones and constitute difficult-to-define 'soft skills' – often as part of wider range of skills required for 'hybrid' jobs that include the need for management and communication of skills as part of a complex job less important comment of the job being done. Graduates fill a considerably wider range of roles than in previous generations, in jobs where the work process and skills and knowledge have changed a result of technological or organisational change, and simply in completely new managerial, administrative, communication and technical jobs that simply did not exist in previous generations (Elias and Purcell 2004) and it is certainly the case that the extent to which their skills and knowledge have been used in recent years varies by sector, particularly in service sector employment (Mason 2002). The challenge of job-seeking for current and more recent graduate labour market entrants is that the graduate labour market is larger, more competitive, amorphous, and overlaps with and merges into the non-graduate labour market more than has been the case in the past. These challenges are currently exacerbated by the economic recession.

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[5] For current UK HE policy views about the role of HE in developing employability skills in undergraduate courses, http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/employability

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMY AND THE GRADUATE LABOUR MARKET IN THE SOUTH WEST

2.1 The South West Economy

The South West economy has several unique features which derive from its location. The key question is whether it is different from other regions with respect to employer behaviour such that national policy aimed at promoting graduate employment needs to be tailored to the specific conditions which prevail in the region or, alternatively, policy needs to be developed at the regional or local level. If employers in the South West behave much as employers in the other regions then this suggests, other things being equal, that national rather than local policy should suffice - and this is one of the questions we asked. The National Employers Skill Survey (NESS) 2007 provides information about employers' recruitment of graduates over the last twelve months. The data reveal that apart from London and the South East, which record relatively high levels of graduate recruitment, the percentage of employers taking on graduates is more or less equal in all other regions (see Table 1) and relatively low in comparison.

If the NESS data are disaggregated by local Learning and Skills Council area, local differences begin to emerge, and show sub-regional differences in some structural characteristics. Employers recruit graduates straight from HEIs at the same level as employers in the other regions outside the South East because employers in the Bristol area (which falls within the West of England LSC area) have a relatively high recruitment rate (see Table 2). Employers outside the Bristol area are less likely to recruit and less likely to recruit HEI graduates than employers on average across the region. The data provided by NESS give no indication of the number of graduates taken on within regions. Given the number of company headquarters situated in the South East – each of which may recruit numerous graduates - the data may underestimate differences between this region and the rest of the country because it does not reflect the volume of graduates being taken on. Indicative evidence from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) suggests little regional difference in employment or unemployment rates amongst graduates, with the exception of London and the South East. Though it does not include information about recruitment, it provides an indication of the total volume of graduates employed in a region, by (see Table 3). The percentage of the working age population who are graduates is more or less the same in the South West as in the country as a whole and the 10 per cent change from 1995-2009 in the South West is the same as the change recorded across the country as a whole. It is the South East including London that stands out as different, and increasingly dominant.

Table 1:   Recruitment Activity amongst Employers by Region

Column percentages

	England	East of England	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire and Humberside
% employers recruiting over past 12 months	26	26	26	25	28	28	25	**25**	25	28
% of recruiters taking on graduates straight from HEIs	40	36	35	55	37	40	42	**34**	36	39
% of all employers taking on HEI graduates over last 12 months	10	9	9	14	10	11	10	**9**	9	11
% of all graduate recruiters who think graduates well prepared	85	82	87	83	81	86	86	**84**	87	84

Source: *Derived from* National Employers Skill Survey 2007 data

Table 2:   Recruitment Activity amongst Employers by Local Learning and Skills Council Areas in the South West

Column percentages

	Devon and Cornwall	Somerset	Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	West of England	Wiltshire and Swindon	Gloucestershire
% employers recruiting over past 12 months	25	24	24	29	25	24
% of recruiters taking on graduates straight from HEIs	33	30	32	42	30	33
% of all employers taking on HEI graduates over last 12 months	8	7	8	12	7	8

Source: *Derived from* National Employers Skill Survey 2007 data (*ibid.*)

Table 3: **Working Age Population who are Graduates, 2009**

Column percentages

	East of England	Inner London	Outer London	South East	South West	UK
Higher degree	6	15	9	7	**7**	7
NVQ level 5	0	0	0	0	**0**	0
First/Foundation degree	12	25	16	15	**12**	13
Other degree	1	1	1	1	**1**	1
NVQ level 4	1	0	0	1	**1**	1
Total	20	41	27	24	**21**	22
Total without NVQs	19	41	27	23	**20**	21
% Difference between 2009 and 1995	**8**	**17**	**12**	**10**	**10**	**10**

Source: Labour Force Survey 2009 Q2; 1995 Q2

Where graduate employment does vary between the South West and the UK as a whole is with respect to industrial composition of graduate employment which is more reliant upon public sector employment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: **Industrial Distribution of Graduate Employment in the UK and South West, 2009**
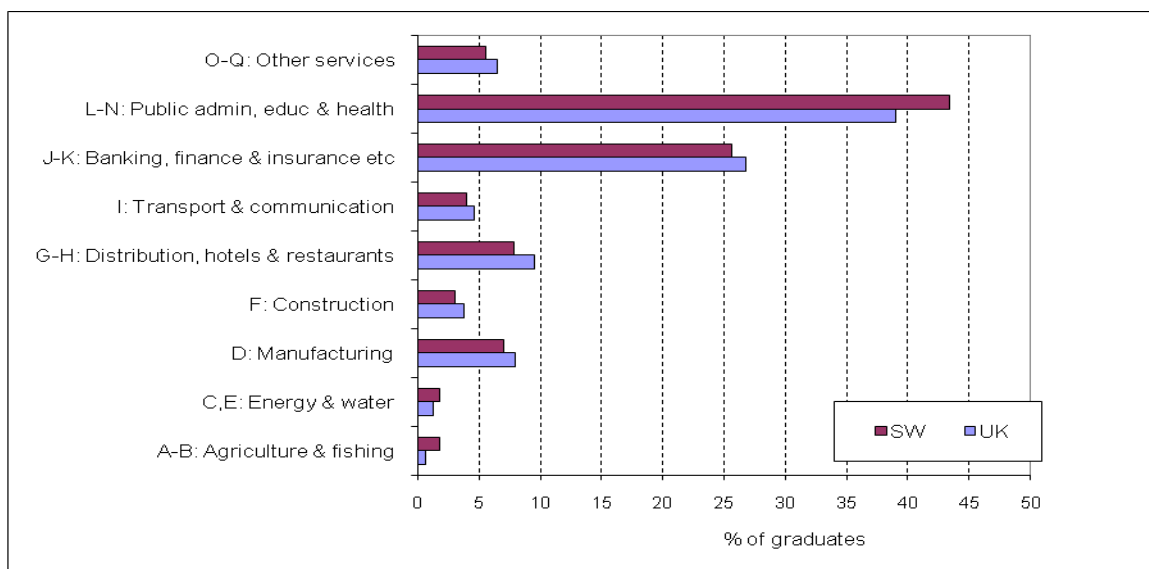
Source: Labour Force Survey 2009 Q2

As an illustration of this that shows one aspect of internal regional diversity, Turner (2004) found that in Devon and Cornwall, 60 per cent of in graduate-intensive sectors were in the

public sector. This is one of the highest figures in the UK. Overall, the South West was ranked 8th out of 12 regions, with 50 per cent of its knowledge-intensive jobs being in the public sector. The summary evidence provided above suggests that the graduate profile of the South West is similar to that found in most other regions, but analysis at the regional level may paint an overly optimistic picture of the situation outside of the Bristol area. The evidence suggests that graduate recruitment levels are relatively low in the more rural areas such as Devon and Cornwall.

The structure of employment in terms of the size distribution of organisations in the region relative to other regions outside London and the South East is like this too: broadly similar to others, but internally diversely distributed in the same way – and the industries in the more rural areas tend to be those with little experience of graduate employment, particularly in the small and medium sized enterprise sector (SMEs). It is in this area of the labour market where the mismatch between graduate and employer expectations is becoming the most evident (Hogarth *et al*, 2007). Traditional, and larger graduate employers often have formal structures and polices in place regarding career advancement, professional development and training, *etc.*, whereas smaller employers, especially those with little or no history of taking on graduates, are less likely to offer these because of either a lack of awareness of the need to do, or because they are not confident that the employer will reap any reward because the graduate may leave. Graduates, on the other hand, expect their employment to both deploy and develop their skills linked to some form of career progression. This point is particularly apposite to the South West with its large population of SMEs often operating in sectors with a low density of graduates. In addition, self-employment has historically been significant in the South West. In 2003, Perryman *et al* found that the region had the highest proportion of self-employed workers in the UK, and the second highest proportion of self-employed graduates (both at 10 per cent). Work placements are important for those who go on to become self-employed because they provide an opportunity for them to gain business experience before launching out on their own.

2.2   Previous research findings on graduate employment in the South West

Perryman *et al* (2003) found while students would like to stay in the area, they were leaving because they felt that job opportunities were limited. While the quality of graduate jobs was similar to the national average, graduate earning were relatively low and some graduates were unaware of the range of job opportunities available to them. Despite this, the South West has a well-qualified workforce, with an average rate of graduate employment (South West Regional Observatory, various dates) and, in 2005, had the lowest unemployment rate of the English regions (HEFCE, 2007). However, Williams and Tackey (2004) found that productivity in the South West was much lower than would be expected considering the region's highly qualified workforce. Evans and Whalley (2004) therefore identify the problem as being one of underutilisation of skills and underemployment, particularly whether the South West gets comparable value from its graduates compared to other regions. This analysis is echoed by the findings of Spilsbury (2004) who reported that 17 per cent of graduates in the South West believed themselves to be over-qualified. In addition, Perryman *et al* (2003) found that key employers in the region's key sectors were looking outside the region for graduates, in part because the students who wanted to remain in the South West

were studying subjects that were not suited to employers in the key sectors. This was particularly a problem in the biotechnology and advanced engineering priority sectors.

In the region, Hesketh (2000) found that the majority of employers were happy with the role of HEIs. The exception to this was the consumer services sector, although Evans and Whalley (2004) attribute this unhappiness to the recruitment of unsuitable graduates into this sector rather than the provision of HEIs. It is, however, the case that the changing South West economy requires to upgrade the overall skills level of employees and requires an increasing number of graduates, and a core objective of the G4B programme to stem the flow of graduates away from the region and enable those who remain to realize their potential contribution to the South West.

The South West region has one of the most diversified regional economies in the UK (Little 2004). The key sectors of employment in the South West constitute a diverse range, covering hi-tech manufacturing and a range of production and service industries: Advanced Engineering, Biotechnology, Creative Industries, Environmental Technology, Food and Drink, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), Marine Technologies and Tourism and Leisure, requiring a wide range of skills. All require high-level skills to some extent.

As has been previously mentioned, SMEs are an important source of employment in the South West and this is the case across the full range of sectors. Perryman *et al* (*op. cit*) found that around 90 per cent of companies employed fewer than 50 people, and the data presented by Little (*op. cit*) suggests this proportion may be even higher in the key sectors. Conversely, the South West was the region with the second lowest proportion of employees in large firms with 200 or more employees. Problematically for student placements and graduate employment, the South West also had the second highest proportion of employment in firms with ten or fewer employees, the kind of micro-businesses that have been identified by Greenbank (2002) as being particularly resistant to student placement activity.

Despite such evidence and recommendations by subsequent researchers (e.g. Evans and Whalley 2004) and efforts on the part of HEIs, HERDA and SWRDA to build partnerships with a wider range of employers in the SW, which has paid considerable dividends in many cases, recent evidence suggests SMEs have not engaged systematically with HEIs to take on these excess graduates to fill these recognised skills gaps. Pittaway and Thedham (2005) found that despite this established need, total graduate recruitment tends to be clustered in a small number of SMEs. Previous analysis has indicated that employers in SMEs often have no experience of recruiting or employing graduates or see no potential to utilise graduates within their organisations (see for example Bradford, 1999; Williams and Owen, 1997) and previous research has found evidence of graduates not having been effectively deployed in SMEs apart from specialist examples in small organisations such as professional and technical consultancies and specialist organisations (Purcell *et al.* 2002).

It is perhaps not surprising that these findings are mirrored by research that has revealed that graduates tend to be unfamiliar with the SMEs as potential employers, and that they generally see such organisations as less prestigious and offering fewer opportunities than larger organisations. Authors such as Hesketh (2000) and Pittaway and Thedham (2005)

have noted that what is sometimes taken to be a general skills gap in the economy, particularly in relation to highly qualified personnel, is to a considerable extent a reflection of the problems SMEs have in recruiting these types of graduates. Hesketh (2000) has argued that a perception of 'under-supply' of graduates to the economy is the result of employers in the SME sector not competing effectively for those graduates who are available. Similarly, Pittaway and Thedham (2005) note the problems smaller companies have in attracting graduates because the opportunities they offer are indeed less desirable than the alternatives in larger organisations. Work by Jameson and Holden (2000), Johnson and Tilley (1999), Johnson and Pere-Verge (1993), and Johnson (1991) echoes this finding. It was found that work in SMEs is considered by graduates to be more stressful, unchallenging, ambiguous, isolating and likely to result in an unfavourable work-life balance. These studies, together with Arnold *et al* (2002), also found that graduates perceived employment in SMEs to be badly paid and lacking in potential for career development.

Authors such as Neill and Mulholland (2003), Huntington *et al* (1999) and Ellis and Moon (1998) suggest that some of the onus on building links between SMEs and HEI must lie with the HEI, although Peacock and Ladkin (2002) point out that some HEIs may be resistant to this as the financial rewards to the HEI for the time and effort involved in setting up a working relationship with an SME are usually considerably less than those it receives from working with a larger organisation. In relation to work placements, larger organisations have also generally been found to provide a more appropriate learning environment than SMEs (Simm and Hogarth, 2007). This reflects Cooper and Shepherd's (1997) concerns that the provision of a substantial period of work experience is not an option for many small and medium-sized businesses. Furthermore, Cooper and Shepherd found that 20 per cent of companies did not see the benefits of getting involved in these activities.

Conversely, graduate placements might be expected to be found attractive by SMEs because they often need new employees to be ready for work and take initiatives and responsibilities. While larger organisations may be able to offer structured introductions or early-employment training programmes, these activities are often neither feasible nor affordable for SMEs, which means that some SMEs who have graduates amongst their staff have employed them only after they have gained experience in another organisation. This suggests that graduate placements could give graduates the necessary experience to find employment in the SME sector, Stewart and Knowles (2000) found that even on placements, students and graduates had often been expected to make an immediate contribution to the business, often with little direction, and when they are had not been able to do so, the employer evaluated the placement experience negatively.

2.3 The value of work experience placements to students, graduates and employers

The impact of successive reforms of higher education discussed – much of which has been concerned with increasing participation rates – has resulted in the range of jobs done by graduates has widened. Whereas back in the 1950s a university education was a preparation for a life in public service graduates now fill jobs across industry, but as with students, a more heterogeneous mix of employers is drawn into graduate recruitment. In the past, this has been found to promote result in unrealistic expectations from both sides.

Employers new to graduate recruitment have sometimes expected too much from their graduates, and similarly graduates have been recorded as having often have inflated expectations of salary and career progression. It is against this backdrop that sandwich courses, internships, and placements have the potential to increase engagement between employers and HEIs to develop beyond graduate recruitment, and graduates to gain valuable experience to enable them to experience the reality of workplaces where they might obtain employment, develop employment-related skills and values, to tailor their expectations of early career development.

A survey of graduates, conducted in 1966 and followed up in 1968 (Daniel and Pugh 1975), demonstrated that not only were the expectations of sandwich students more attuned to the world of work, but they were able to turn this to their advantage in that they were more likely to find work and obtain higher earnings than their non-sandwich graduate counterparts. This finding is important in the context of placements in that it demonstrates that where graduates have prior experience of employment their entry into the labour market upon completion of their studies is relatively effective compared to those who do not have work experience. Similarly, the evidence points to employers being able to obtain a better match between their graduate jobs and the expectations of the graduate they recruit. Graduates expectations of graduate employment have been found to be more realistic about the realities of career development where they have some experience of work. Evidence from the 1960s, following the reforms of the Robbins Report, demonstrated that students on sandwich courses had much more realistic expectations of what employment could offer than their non-sandwich counterparts (Daniel and Pugh 1975) and a study from the 1970s revealed that the expectations of graduates were more realistic where graduates had studied on sandwich courses which required a period in full-time employment (Mabey 1986).

As late as 1998, Bourner and Ellerker were able to state that the appeal of sandwich education was undiminished nationally. However, since then, the proportion of students on sandwich degrees has fallen (King, 2007). Little and Harvey (2006) found that overall numbers had fallen by a third between 1999 and 2005, from 29,000 to 20,400. Most of this decline was in post-1992 universities and had resulted in a number of institutions the placement element of courses had changed from compulsory to optional with decreasing numbers of students choosing to take the option. HEFCE (2005) found that institutions had begun to report that it was hard to find placements with employers and that students were preferring shorter courses for financial reasons. Many of these students are still experiencing employment, working on a casual basis to support themselves while studying (Bibby *et al*, 2000) or undertaking gap years and other forms of work prior to entering higher education (Finch *et al.*2006), but while the numbers of sandwich courses fell over the years, the importance attached to work experience for graduates remained undiminished, seen as increasingly important by employers in selection and recruitment.

Following the demise of many sandwich courses at under-graduate level, placements provided to either HE students or graduates are now one of the primary means through which work experience may be obtained. The importance of placements was highlighted in the recent Future Fit report from UK Universities and CBI:

> *'Employability skills are a top priority for business. Over three quarters (78%) of the firms who responded to the CBI's education and skills 2009 survey said it was one of*

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the most important factors when recruiting graduates, along with a positive attitude (72%) and relevant work experience/industrial placement (54%)'
(UKK 2008:11)

2.4   Recent trends in employer engagement with HE

There are a substantial number of employers in the UK who have developed strong links with HEIs in relation to recruitment, innovation partnerships, provision of professional development and engagement with degree –level programmes, and some of these have been established for decades, but for the majority of employers there is little or no engagement. Recruitment is the principal form of contact between employers and HEIs but as the NESS data reveal, a majority of employers do not recruit graduates or do not employ them graduate roles (Dolton and Vignoles 2000, Belfield *et al.* 1997, Daniel and Pugh 1975). Government policy is clearly directed at increasing and strengthening engagement between employers and HEIs – e.g. *New Industry, New Jobs* (Building Britain's Future 2009) – and recognises that the current level of engagement is sub-optimal, c.f. the *Lambert Review* (HM Treasury 2003).

A recent study of engagement between higher education institutions and employers in the early 2000s (Hogarth *et al.* 2007) revealed that student and graduate placements of one kind or another were among the principal means by which employers – especially SMEs – engaged with universities. Two distinct types of placement were in evidence from the study:

i.   placements which were part of the knowledge transfer process between universities and employers, whereby a student (typically post-graduates but not always) would spend a extended period of time working for the employer on a task or research related issue. In many instances this might be regarded as form of post-graduate sandwich course;

ii. placements which were to some extent more ad hoc, in that an employer would require a particular task completing and would offer a placement – to either under-graduates or graduates – in order for it to be carried out.

Increasing the number of graduates working in SMEs has been a longstanding policy goal for many public agencies. Provision of placements in SMEs is one means of persuading smaller employers of the benefits to be obtained from taking on a graduate. The extent to which previous initiatives to increase the number of graduates subsequently recruited by SMEs is unclear and it is one of the variables that this project addressed.

Case Study 1

E22: Small PR and Marketing employer who took one graduate and two undergraduates on placement

The company was a small organisation, employing 12 staff. It was a relatively recent start-up, and had been operating for less than five years. They took three people on placement, one starting in November 2007, one in April 2008 and one in summer 2009.

As a relatively new company, their initial concern had been to get their computer system and online presence fully established. The first person they took on placement was an undergraduate history student who had learnt computer programming in her spare time and was now keen to develop this as a profession.
The second and third placements were as account managers and planners. The first of these was a graduate and the second an undergraduate. As the business grew and developed, more staff were needed in this area, and the organisation saw placements as a good way of finding people to fill these positions.

After the initial placement period, two of the people on placement had become full-time employees of the company, and it was hoped that this would also be the case with the latest placement. One of the people who had been on placement is now responsible for managing the placement activities of the company.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- It could be difficult to assess who had an aptitude for this kind of work in an interview, and having someone with the organisation on placement initially meant that both parties were able to spend longer finding out if they would be suitable, rather than making a blind commitment.
- To establish a relationship with good candidates while they were still in education, which they hoped would encourage them to come to work for the organisation when they graduated.
- To save on recruitment fees.
- To bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm to the company.

Why were the placements successful?

- The placements were an appropriate length. The employer saw three months as the ideal length of placement. It was enough time for someone to learn what they are doing and get on with it so they could be observed doing their job, but it was not so long that they could get stuck with an 'unsuitable' person.
- The placements were flexible in terms of timing. Particularly in the case of the first placement, the organisation worked hard to ensure that the placement fitted around the student's academic commitments and priorities. Initially, the placement had been for two hours per day, but as the student realised she could take on more work, she was offered more hours.
- There was a clear programme for the person on placement. As the company took more people on placement, this was refined further through consideration of what did and did not work, and the company now has an official planned scheme. An identified individual was responsible for monitoring them, and they now set aside an hour a week to talk specifically about the placement.
- The placements involved a variety of tasks. The organisation made sure that as the placements progressed, both the graduate and the undergraduates had opportunities to take on suitable additional responsibilities which enabled them

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to make further contacts in the industry. They consulted the people on placement to find out the areas they were interested in and the training they wanted. The people on placement felt that they had developed appropriate, usable skills, including both job-specific and generic employability skills.

- The people on placement felt like part of the team. The company was a small, new company that was growing rapidly, and the people on placement were involved in this development, giving input on how the company was run.

> *"I feel, in a sense, like it's my company. I have a stake in it. I have had input in how things are run, the direction we take, because I have been there from virtually the beginning."* [Placement 1]

- The size of the company and its evolution gave opportunities to learn about different roles or activities and to try them out. This helped them to refine their ideas about what they would like their career to entail.

> "*I know more about what I want to do, and I think might want to do more work with clients. I had never considered that before, that it might be something I would want to do, or that I could do, but now it is something that I would like to be more involved in, alongside my other work."* [Placement 1]

> "*I had done a placement before, so I knew what to expect. From that one, I knew that I wanted to work in advertising and I had made some contacts. So this placement, it was more about confirming that, getting more experience, and I knew, I hoped, that I would get a job from it. […] I know I want to work in a smaller, more personal agency now, so it's been fantastic for me. I've been really lucky."* [Placement 2]

- The placements gave the undergraduates in particular useful industry experience before they had finished their degrees.

> "*It was not a shock when I graduated, because I had already eased into working full-time. I knew what it was like to work, to manage my time."* [Placement 1]

How could the experience be improved?

- As the company has developed and learnt from earlier placements, the programme has become more structured and organised. In the earlier placements, although the flexibility had suited the student well, there were times when more planning would have been appreciated.
- Until the placements became jobs, there was a limit to the responsibility people could be given. They were not able to be project leaders and or do a lot of work with clients, so there was a lack of ownership. To overcome this, it was felt that there should be clear communication about the possibility of the placement becoming a job, so that everyone understood that this period was in some respects a period of training and that the situation could change.
- Financial concerns were raised by both the employer and the people on placement. The placements were paid. This was felt to be important but deciding upon an appropriate level of pay had been difficult. The organisation was still relatively new and developing and did not have a lot of money to spare, but the graduate and students felt that a longer placement would be impossible on the money they were receiving. The current economic climate has meant that they are unlikely to take more people on placement in the immediate future because they cannot afford to take on more overheads now.

3. THE G4B PLACEMENTS

3.1 Types of placement

At the planning stage, the predominant focus of this impact study had been on graduate placements, as the G4B programme had been, but it was necessary to modify our research design to reflect the addition of undergraduate placements to the G4B scheme. The interesting finding, however, is that there was virtually no overlap between employers who took undergraduates on placement and those who took graduates.

Table 4: A comparison of the total G4B placements and the achieved sample by sector

	Number of placements in SWRDA database up to G4BQ10[6]	Number of organisations where employers provided information	Number of G4B placements covered in these workplaces*	Number of graduates or students who provided information
Agriculture	17	7	14	4
Arts and media	105	19	45	5
Banking, finance and insurance	20	1	5	3
Building and Architecture	2	1	1	1
Education	16	4	8	2
Engineering and manufacturing	32	9	12	7
Environment	15	4	4	1
Food and beverage	8	3	6	3
Government	14	1	1	-
Medical, veterinary, social care	19	-	-	2
IT	39**	8**	13**	9
Legal	14	5	13	1
Marketing and PR	31	10	15	6
Publishing	9	5	7	-
Retail	2	-	-	-
Sales	3	1	1	1
Tourism and hospitality	19	4	4	2
Voluntary sector	19	9	10	3
unknown	1	-	-	-
[Non-G4B organisations]	-	9	[20+****]	2
Total in each category***	404***	100	166	52

* NB Employers were often not clear which placements were included in the G4B scheme and which were not, so in some cases this number is likely to include placements that were not counted for G4B. The total does not include the non-G4B employers' placements

** Excluding the Incubator placements

*** We understand that 600 placements were ultimately covered but these were the only details provided to the research team by HERDA.

**** Some of the Non-G4B organisations were recorded as having 'more than four' placements at the time of the interview

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[6] We understand that 600 placements were ultimately covered but these were the only details provided to the research team by HERDA.

Of the 100 employers who participated in the study, 26 of the G4B employers had taken graduates on placement and 65 had taken undergraduates on placement. This suggests that the HEIs had succeeded in recruiting employers in both cases who had not previously, or would not otherwise at this particular time, work with them in providing work experience for their students – or were placing different kinds of students that they previously would not have been prepared to take on. The remaining nine employers were organisations in the South West who had taken people on placement outside the G4B scheme, and these cases act as comparators for the G4B placements. In these cases, all had graduate placements, and in a couple of cases, work experience schemes that could also be obtained by undergraduates who might subsequently be potential employees. Twenty one of the people surveyed who had been on G4B placements were graduates, and 29 were undergraduates. One of the people who had undertaken a placement outside the G4B scheme did so as an undergraduate, and one as a graduate.

Figure 2:   Sectors represented in interviews
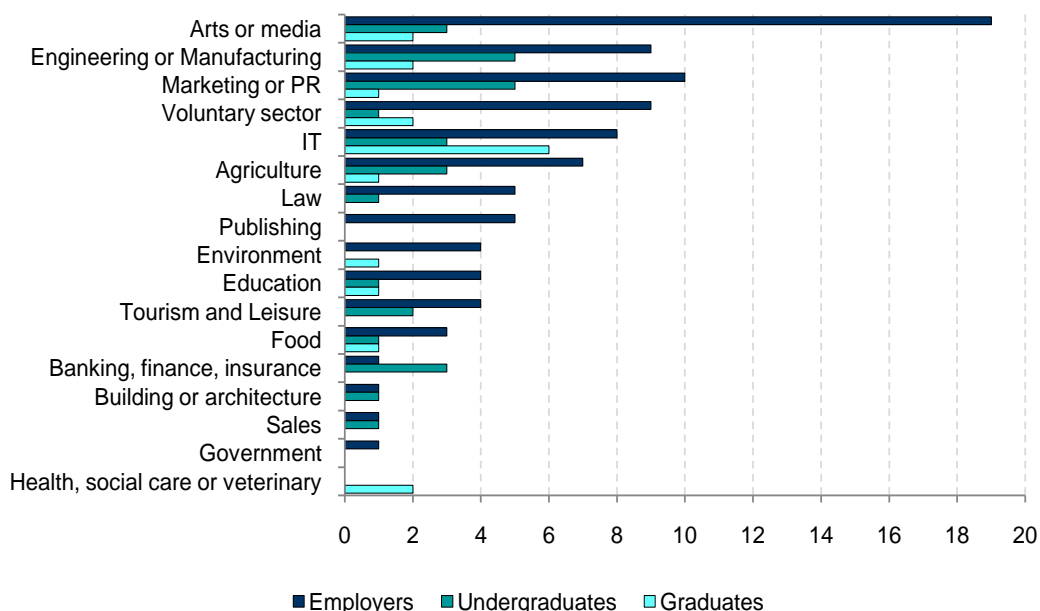
Both the HEIs and the research team were keen to cover organisations in the key SW sectors: Advanced Engineering; Biotechnology; Creative Industries; Environmental Technology; Food and Drink; Information and Communications Technologies (ICT); Marine Technologies; Tourism and Leisure, and as Figure 2 shows, the majority of the G4B placements surveyed fell into these sectors. However, placements in less dominant but still regionally important graduate labour market sectors were also represented, reflecting the diversity of graduate employment in the environmentally-diverse South West.

The organisations which had placed graduates were more likely than those who took undergraduates on placement to be in key sectors, particularly Engineering or Manufacturing and Food and Drink, while organisations taking undergraduates were less likely to be in key sectors, with the exception of the Creative Industries. Among the graduates and

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undergraduates interviewed the pattern is less clear. Five of the 29 undergraduates interviewed had done placements in Engineering and Manufacturing, and a further five in Marketing and PR, while six of the 21 graduates interviewed had done placements in IT.

Figure 3 shows, the size distribution of the establishments taking people on placement. Where an organisation had several branches, this is the size of the branch in which the person on placement did most of their work. Typically, organisations in Arts and Media, Publishing and Tourism and Leisure were small, and in the Marketing and PR and IT areas, there were also a number of small, relatively new organisations. Organisations in Engineering or Manufacturing, Banking, Finance and Insurance were larger, and in Building and Architecture, the Environment and Government, the individual branches in the South West tended to be smaller, but they were more likely to be part of a national or international company with other branches elsewhere.

Participating SMEs, which were one of the types of organisation targeted by the G4B programme, were mostly in Arts and Media, Publishing, Tourism and Leisure, and in the Marketing and PR and IT areas, a number of small, relatively new organisations were also included. Organisations in Engineering or Manufacturing, Banking, Finance and Insurance were larger. Although Building and Architecture, the Environmental organisations and Government participating establishments, the individual branches in the South West tended to be smaller, but they were more likely to be part of a national or international company with other branches elsewhere.

Figure 3:   Size of organisations surveyed
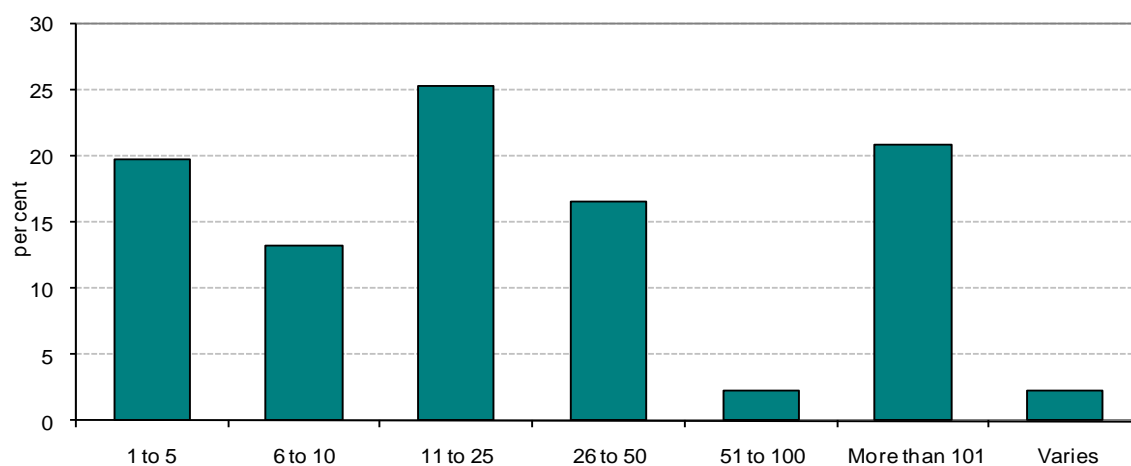
The HEIs managing the placements of the employers surveyed are shown in Figure 3. Three institutions (the Universities of Exeter, Plymouth and Bournemouth) concentrated primarily on graduate placements, while the other HEIs had a mixture of graduate and undergraduate placements. In the survey, only the University of Gloucestershire is not represented amongst the employers taking graduates on placement, and the University of Plymouth is not represented amongst the employers taking undergraduates on placement. Marjon, which withdrew early from the G4B scheme, is not represented at all, and it was not possible to speak to any employers or graduates and students from the Arts Institute Bournemouth (AIB).

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Figure 4:   Higher education institution managing the placement
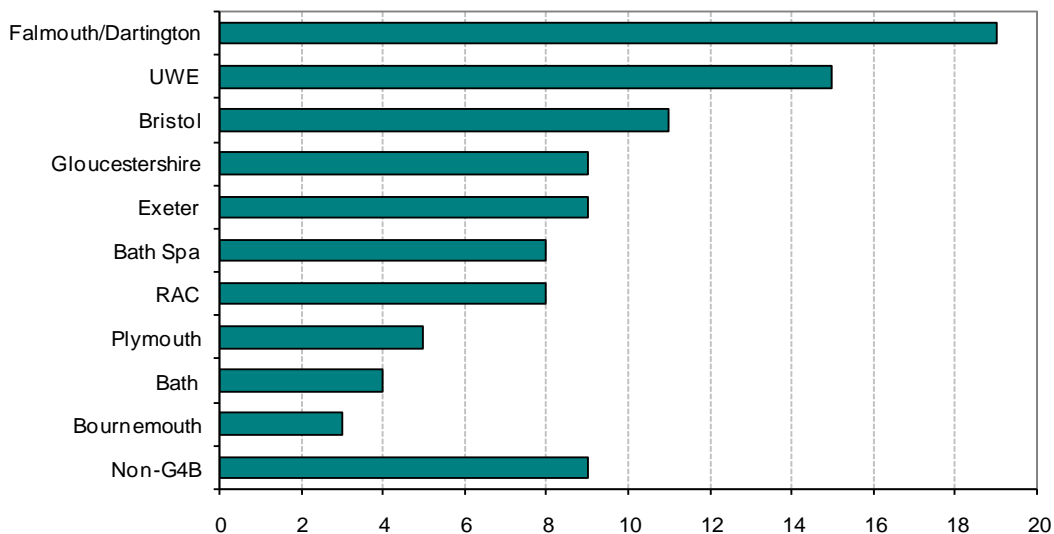
In Figure 5, the distribution of the duration of the placements is shown. When a placement was extended or became a full-time job, it is classified according to the original proposed duration, as is also the case when a placement was terminated before completion. The 'various or other' category is composed of placements that were not for a block of time, but instead ran for a certain number of days per week, and, in one case, an employer who had taken several people on placement for different periods of time, but whose placements were in all other aspects identical.

Figure 5:   Duration of the placement
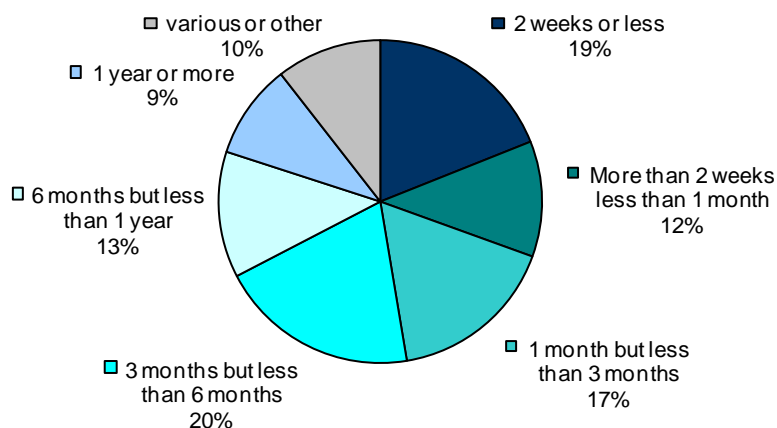
The graduate placements were heavily concentrated in the three months to six months category (54 per cent), which reflects the criteria mainly set out by the HEIs for graduate placements. Two of these institutions specified that they preferred that a placement should be a minimum of 10 weeks in duration. The duration of undergraduate placements reflected the structure of the academic calendar. A quarter of the undergraduate placements were for two weeks or less, and there was a second cluster at one to three months, which were placements undertaken during the summer vacation. This meant that 60 per cent were for

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less than three months. There is another group of undergraduate placements in the six months to one year category, and these placements are those that ran for one academic year and were part of the students' course.

Placements in different industries also tended to be clustered in terms of placement duration. Placements in the Arts and Media were typically short, with three quarters being for less than three months, and 37 per cent being for two weeks or less. Placements in Law and Publishing also tended to be short: all of the placements surveyed in these were for less than one month, and the majority were for two weeks or less. Placements in Engineering and Manufacturing clustered in the one to three month and three to six months categories (eight out of 12), reflecting the proportion of these placements that were undertaken during university vacations. Five of the eight placements in IT were for more than six months, as were two of the three placements in the Food and Beverage sector.

Figure 6 shows the number of placements employers had during the period of G4B's operation. The majority (62 per cent) had taken only one person on placement, but multiple placements were common in arts and the media and agriculture in particular.   Multiple placements were also more common in larger organisations that took undergraduates on placement, although in these organisations, only a minority of the placements were those that fell under G4B's remit. It was more common for an organisation that took undergraduates on placement to have multiple placements, usually several at the same time, while those taking graduates tended to have only taken one person, suggesting that the scheme did enable HEIs to involve a wider range of employers than hitherto in the provision of placements.

Figure 6:   Number of placements employers had during the period of G4B's operation
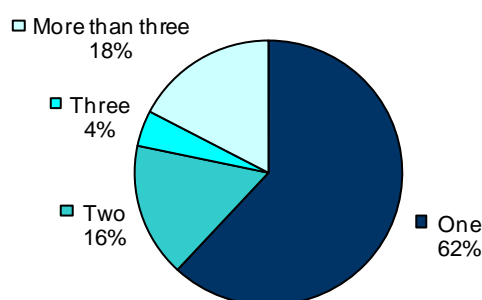
The students and graduates surveyed had often undertaken several placements, although not necessarily within the G4B period. The largest number of placements undertaken by a single interviewee was four, all in the Finance, Banking and Insurance sector. Doing a placement each summer, or an undergraduate placement followed by a graduate placement was also common, and 14 of the graduates interviewed had done this. Respondents noted that having done one placement, they had realised the value of it, and so had sought opportunities to do further placements, and for some the G4B scheme had provided this.

"*I did a placement with* [insurance company] *and, I mean, it was OK, I didn't hate it or anything, but I suppose I realised that it's not really something I want to do, insurance, pensions, so I had the idea that I would like to go into consultancy, but I think I was more unsure, you know, having done something and thought "well…" so that's why* [I did other placements]. *It's all good really. I mean, you get something on your CV anyway and it's good to show you have experience in different areas, if I do want to go into consultancy - and yes, I might find there is something else and look for something in that instead.*"

[P46: Undergraduate who had done a placement for 1 to 3 months with an organisation in Banking, Finance and Insurance]

3.2   Differences between the scope and complexity of work experience allocated to graduates and undergraduates on the G4B programme

There were some clear differences between the activities undertaken by undergraduates and graduates, in terms of the nature of the activities and the challenge they represented. In general, graduates were given more responsibility, both to manage their own work, and to undertake tasks that were regarded as being important for the organisation. Their work was more likely to be regarded as integral to the organisation, involving a job that needed to be done, and to be similar to work that existing members of staff in non-routine jobs would undertake. The activities graduates undertook tended to by much more specific and focussed in one particular area, for example, the implementation of new environmental regulations or a new IT system.

Undergraduates were more likely to be engaged in more routine tasks, but to do a greater range of tasks in the course of their placement, for example, more than a third of the undergraduate placements involved some form of office work, compared to 15 per cent of the graduate placements. They were also more likely to be involved in activities that were not particularly commonly done by staff at the organisation where they did their placement. For example, undergraduate placements were more likely to involve research (37 per cent of undergraduate, compared to 19 per cent of the graduate placements), and a period of work-shadowing (23 per cent of undergraduate placements, compared to 8 per cent of graduate ones). The types of organisation where the person on placement did the greatest range of tasks were small organisations and those in the voluntary sector. They were therefore regarded as particularly suitable for undergraduates.

"*We are a very small organisation, so I think they got more of an experience. They had more autonomy, and just because of the nature of what they were doing, they had to deal with people at senior level. They did a bit of everything, again because we are such a small organisation. They were writing press releases, working on the website, negotiating about events. They learnt about the whole process of working with local government really, you can't really avoid it.*"

[E1: Small environmental sector employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

3.3   Reasons employers provided placement opportunities

The majority of respondents had several reasons for taking someone on placement, as the following quote illustrates:

> "There are several reasons. Firstly, we just didn't have the skills within the organisation to do that kind of software development. We also saw it as an opportunity to work with [G4B HEI]. Finally, we saw them as a fresh set of eyes. They are not constrained by the rules and regulations of the organisation. You know, people get stuck in the same way of doing things, and they don't ever think "why am I doing it that way?" So that's another reason, it's opening our eyes to new ways."

> [E18: Large engineering and manufacturing employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

The reasons for taking people on placement tended to fall into main two areas: first those related to seeing the value of work experience for graduates and undergraduates, and offering them the opportunity to gain this experience; and second, those related to a need to get a job done, i.e. seeing the value of the placement to the employer. As Figure 7 shows, and it was common for employers to give reasons that fell into both categories.

Figure 7:   Reasons for taking someone on placement by type of placement
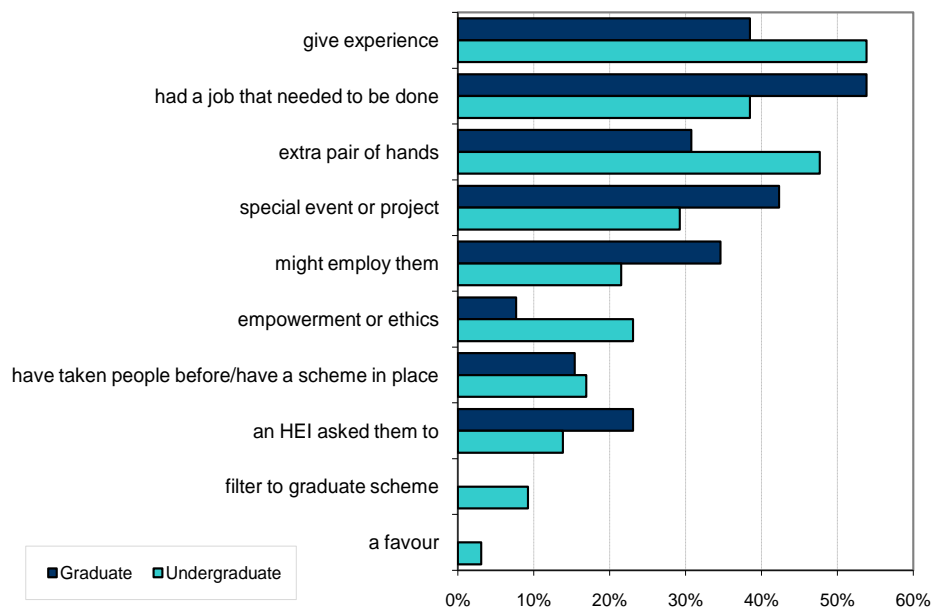
3.3.1. Seeing the value of work experience for graduates and students

To give work experience, played a part in the decision to take both graduates and undergraduates on placement, although it was more common among the employers who

took undergraduates on placement. It was a particularly common reason given by employers in Arts and the Media and Publishing. These are competitive sectors for graduates to find work in, and the particular importance of having work experience as an undergraduate or graduate was noted as a way to set applicants apart. The quote below is typical of the reasons given by employers in these sectors.

> *"I can remember what it was like starting out, so I feel sort of that I owe it to people starting out now. It's a difficult industry to get into. Their grasp of the theory is great, and they've done technical courses, but they need to experience the real thing, the pressure."*
>
> [E15: Very small Arts and Media employer who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks or less]

This was also given as a reason why placements in these sectors tended to be relatively short. Employers felt that giving a lot of people a small amount of experience was more ethical, and produced the most benefits, than giving only a few people a lot of experience, and that having experience and the name of a particular company of their CV was beneficial in itself. They also noted that it was not uncommon for these short placements to result in the undergraduate or graduate being offered freelance work after the placement was completed, which gave them further experience in the industry.

Having an organisational mission to promote empowerment or ethics was most commonly given by employers in the Legal and Voluntary sectors. It was also more common amongst employers taking undergraduates on placement.

> *"It is part of our basic philosophy. We want to give experience to people who might be less familiar with law in general. That is why we are involved in this scheme, because the emphasis is on diversity. The girl we have had with us, she was Asian, the first person in her family to go into law, even to go to university, first generation, so it's giving her that opportunity, to introduce her to the environment, the people, make some contacts, because that's often what is missing. Also, legal aid is not a very attractive area, so it's an introduction to that, you hope that, you hope they find they like it, and you get a chance to find out if they are good at it, if you can keep them on."*
>
> [E7: Small employer in law who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks or less]

However, as this example shows, there was often an element of self-interest along with more altruistic motivations. Two other areas related more clearly to the interests of the graduate or student, rather than the employer, were mentioned in a few cases. First, there were two placements that took place as a personal favour to the student who had asked someone known to them whether they could do a placement in the organisation where they worked. Among placements as a whole, it would be expected that this reason would be more prevalent, but among the G4B placements, it was relatively uncommon, largely because of the nature of the G4B scheme and the role it envisaged for HEIs. The second reason was where an HEI had asked the employer to take someone on placement and the employer had been convinced that it would be a good idea to help students from a local HEI. Some employers who fell into this category essentially meant that contact from an HEI had prompted them to think about whether they wanted to take someone on placement, or had reminded them that they usually took people on placement and they should begin to start the process for the current round.

3.3.2. Seeing the value of work experience for the employer

Reasons in this category included those related to getting a specific job done, as well as having work done more generally. As Figure 9 shows, getting work done generally, i.e. having an extra pair of hands available, was more commonly given as a reason by employers doing undergraduate placements. This reason was most commonly given by employers in the Arts and Media sector (13 of the 19 employers in this sector said this was one of their reasons for taking someone on placement). It was also commonly mentioned by employers in Agriculture (six out of seven employers). It was less commonly mentioned in industries such as Engineering and Manufacturing, Food and Beverages, and Banking, Finance and Insurance.

In most of the cases where needing an extra pair of hands was given as a reason for taking someone on placement, the person on placement was there to help in periods that were particularly busy, as was the case in most of the agricultural placements, or to cover for staff absence over the summer. The exception to this was the Arts and Media sector, where rather than taking students to cover particularly busy periods, several employers noted that they were quite reliant on a continual stream of undergraduates to keep their business operating on a day-to-day basis.

> *"To be perfectly honest, I am desperate for people to do work."*
>
> [E12: Very small arts and media employer who took two undergraduates on placement]

It was also most commonly mentioned as a reason by employers in very small organisations. Overall, needing an extra pair of hands was mentioned by 43 per cent of the organisations surveyed, but it was given as a reason by 14 of the 18 (78 per cent) organisations that employed between one and five people. It must be remembered, however, that the very small organisations tend to be in the Arts and Media sector where not being able to afford to pay additional staff, regardless of need, was also common. When someone was taken on as an extra pair of hands, they tended to do a wider range of tasks, but also to be doing less skilled work, such as basic IT and office work, as examples provided later in the report show.

> "*It helps us because it gets a job done. It frees everyone else up to do more long-term projects, while the interns do the day-to-day work. All our offices rely on interns for day-to-day running. That's why it's such a problem* [that people only want to do placements at particular points in the year]. *We are very busy at the moment, but no-one wants to do it. We could do three at once, we don't turn people down. The London office has too many people, but the South West doesn't.*"
>
> [E3: Small employer in the Arts and Media sector who took 3 undergraduates for between 2 weeks and 1 month]

Getting a specific project completed or event organised was more common in graduate placements. Related to this was the idea that if this particular job was completed successfully, further employment might be found for the graduate. The placement was seen as a way of testing out both whether there was a need for someone to do a particular job on a continuing basis, and also whether a graduate was the right level of recruit to do it.

The exception to this was when the specific project was related to a particular event, such as putting on an exhibition or festival. In these cases, there was little expectation that the placement would turn into paid employment, and these placements were more likely to be undertaken by undergraduates.

With the exception of these placements related to specific events, when an employer took someone on placement with a particular job in mind, the work to be conducted by the person on placement was related to identified gaps in the existing skills available in the organisation or simply a lack of time available among existing staff to undertake the project. Skills gaps were most commonly related to ICT, and this was identified by employers as a growth area in organisations in various sectors and one that was particularly suited to both undergraduates and graduates because they were more used to working with computers.

> *"I wanted someone who was strong in areas where I am weakest, so in technology, computer skills. Someone who knew about databases, Access."*
>
> [E13: Very small arts and media employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

In some cases, this IT work was regarded as a one-off, for example in cases where the person on placement was responsible for setting up a website (which was a particularly common activity undertaken by people on placement), but it was also an area where employers were likely to note that it was an opportunity for someone to prove that there was an enduring need for an IT specialist within the organisation, and so had the potential to result in longer-term employment.

3.3.3   Other motivations

Having an idea from the beginning that the placement would probably result in a job with the company (rather than that in some circumstances it might), was more common among the graduate placements. This is expected given that the undergraduate placements most commonly took place between the penultimate and final years of the student's degree, and few organisations wanted to make a commitment this far in advance.

Finally, there is no doubt that programmes such as G4B are sometimes seen by some employers as a way of gaining access to graduates who are keen and interested in the work, but without the commitment or cost of employing them, and several respondents were honest about this.

> *"They are cheap. We wanted to get a temp, but the agency fees are high, and you are probably not going to get a graduate, not for such a short project. By working with* [university], *we get a keen graduate wanting to build their CV."*
>
> [E76: Large voluntary sector employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]
>
> *"It allows you to try it out without the commitment. It takes the pressure off a bit in that sense, because if you end up with someone who isn't suitable, for whatever reason, then you are stuck with them for 6 weeks, not 6 months, 6 years, however long it takes to go through the process of getting rid of them. It's try before you buy, if you like."*

From these motivations, three questions emerge:

- Is the benefit to the graduate or student sufficient to justify their use as essentially as cheap or free labour?
- Would these employers find it necessary to create more graduate level employment to meet their labour needs if such schemes did not exist?
- Are the graduates and students contributing positively to upgrading of skills and organisational practices and to longer term regional stability or growth or are they simply displacing less well-qualified or highly-educated job applicants and, possibly, contributing to unemployment for such citizens and shifting the costs of their survival to the government and community?

Among the data collected from employers and those who obtained such work experience, we find some evidence to support the first case, and we present this evidence in subsequent sections. We find little evidence to support the second case, and indeed find evidence to the contrary – that employers are creating graduate-level jobs as a result of placements. There are a small number of cases where the third may be answered positively. Generally, the placements that were used as substitutes for employing relatively unskilled workers involved work that would have been insecure, seasonal, casual or part-time. It is more likely that the alternative would have been a weakening of the likelihood of survival of the small organisations concerned or an intensification of the work done by those already working there. We discuss this later in the sections on the costs and benefits to employers and those who experienced placements.

3.4.   Reasons graduates and students took on placements

As in the case of the employers, most of the graduates and undergraduates interviewed had multiple reasons for wanted to go on placement. The majority of their reasons fell into two areas: wanting to get experience, and the related issue of wanting to clarify their career ideas; and financial reward.

Wanting to get experience was mentioned as a motivation for going on placement by 48 of the 50 respondents. Wanting to clarify career ideas, which was, for many respondents, related to wanting to get experience, was mentioned by 31 respondents, and wanting to earn money was mentioned by 18 respondents.

3.4.1 Experience and clarification of career ideas

The experience sought by respondents was at various different levels: They wanted experience of work in general; of particular industries or jobs within an industry; of particular sizes of organisation or operating methods within an industry; and of a particular organisation, as the following quotes demonstrate:

"*I didn't really have a lot of work experience. I worked in* [shop] *but that was just for a few weeks over Christmas, it isn't much. So now I have something a bit better. It isn't much longer, but it's another thing, and it's a bit more like for a career, you know, serious, like if*

you are an employer, I don't think you would just think "oh they did it for money.", you know, it's like a commitment to a career."

[P23: Undergraduate who did a placement for 1 to 3 months in the Environmental Sector]

"*I wanted to find out more about insurance, as an industry, because that is something that I have recently got an interest in. On my course I've enjoyed those modules probably more than anything. I was reasonably set on accountancy before but it got me thinking, so I figured I'd get a look at it from the inside, see what goes on there, because on my course, it all seemed pretty easy, I seem to be good at it, but it could have been completely different. It wasn't so bad, but I'm still a bit up in the air, not sure, but it's an option that's on the table."*

[P46: Undergraduate who did a placement for 1 to 3 months in Banking, Finance and Insurance]

"*Being a small organisation, you know, it's just a different way of doing things. More freestyle, more kind of open, you know, which, it's more me. You can get caught up in the whole game of like "I want to work in the biggest and best company." and that does suit some people, but for me, I was into that whole thing too, but, well you could call it a bit of an epiphany, I guess, it was like coming into final year, you know, thinking about options and all that, and you know, actually, it was like dread. I just couldn't see it, couldn't see myself doing it, being happy in this, of course really prestigious but at the same time big, anonymous company, you know, and it was like "well either you turn you back on the whole thing now." or you know, just find something that I could do in the same sort of area, like I needed to make that jump one way or the other. So I went down you know, seeing what the options were, different types, different people, all that, and so when I saw this come up, it was like "well this is something I don't know about." and if I think about myself, it is, yeah, like I said, more, you know, my environment, somewhere that's like more open, not so controlled and bureaucratic."*

[P36: Undergraduate who did a placement for 1 to 3 months in Marketing and PR]

Experience was seen as important not only because it presented an opportunity to learn, but also because it demonstrated to prospective employers that the graduate or student had a familiarity with, or understanding of, a particular environment, set of skills or knowledge.

The majority of respondents acknowledged that any experience to put on their CV was useful, and for eight respondents, this was the experience they were primarily looking for. These eight respondents in particular had no, or very limited, previous experience of work. While they preferred that the work was relevant to their chosen career, this was of secondary importance. Three of these respondents were graduates who had been out of work for some time, one of whom commented,

"*I just want it to look like I have been doing something. You know, if you are applying for a job, potential employers want to see what you've been up to. I've been doing courses, but it's not really the same. I wanted something else there, on my CV, a job."*

[P32: Graduate who did a placement of 6 months to a year with a large IT employer]

Experience of a specific industry was of greater importance than general experience to the majority of respondents. When looking at the level at which they hoped to gain experience, experience of a particular industry that they hoped to work in was given by 25 of the 48 respondents who said one of their motivations for going on placement was to gain experience. There were two reasons given for this: respondents thought that having work

experience related to the industry they hoped to work in would make them more employable in that industry, that they wanted to learn more about the industry itself, which would help them clarify their career ideas. This second point will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Experience of a particular sector to become more employable in *that* sector was of particular importance to respondents who were hoping to find work in competitive industries, such as Arts and Media, and PR and marketing occupations.

> "*I'm a freelancer, so I'm always trying to add to my CV, to add to my experience. You see some people's CVs and they are so long, it's really intimidating when you are starting out, but they have been around for a while and that's what I have got to build up, bit by bit, so I'm just doing anything I can.* […] *It's not just having the name of the company, but it's being able to say that I have experience of doing different types of job, and that I am picking up more responsible positions, I am developing. There is a learning element, because you naturally deal with different things as your role gets more formalised, and I can list those things in the skills section.*"
>
> [P38: Graduate who did a placement for 2 weeks to 1 month in an Arts and Media organisation]

This point was also raised by employers in these labour market areas, but respondents doing placements in all industries and occupational areas noted that this was one of their motivations for doing a placement.

Experience of a particular size of organisation or operating method was mentioned by seven respondents. Most commonly, these respondents had already done at least one previous placement, and this had been with a large organisation, and they were now looking for experience with a smaller organisation to see if this working environment would be preferable or to demonstrate versatility. This reason was more commonly given by graduates (five of the seven respondents giving this reason), and by respondents whose placement was in PR and Marketing (four respondents) and Engineering and Manufacturing (two respondents).

> "*When I was an undergraduate, I did an internship with* [large PR company] *in London. I was really glad to get that experience, but I didn't really enjoy it all that much. It was, well you know they are a really big company, and you feel, well I felt, a bit insignificant really. I suppose you are like a cog in a machine, but it doesn't even feel like that really. And I think it would be the same working there. I mean that's what I saw with the people there. It was a bit soulless.*"
>
> [P18: Graduate who did a placement of 3 to 6 months in a small PR and Marketing organisation]

Finally, experience in a particular company in which the student or graduate was interested in working was mentioned by eight respondents as what they really wanted from the placement. All except one of these respondents was an undergraduate, and it was also more commonly given as a reason by students whose placement was with a relatively large, well-known organisation. Two of the students who said that in terms of experience, their aim was to get experience of a particular organisation knew someone who had previously done a placement at the same company and who had recommended the placement to them.

> "*Someone on my course, the same course but a year ahead, did the placement last year and said it was really good, it was a really good one to do and why didn't I go for it this*

year? So I did. It gives you more confidence if someone has recommended it. You know it's not going to turn out to be really dubious."

[P19: Undergraduate who did a placement lasting between 1 and 3 months in an Engineering company]

Clarification of career ideas was a more introspective process for many of the graduate and undergraduate respondents. It involved reflecting on their experiences, rather than simply using the placement experience to illustrate to demonstrate specific experiences and competences. Some respondents, particularly those who were studying or who had studied relatively vocational subjects, had reasonably clear ideas about their future career, and were seeking confirmation that they had been correct in their initial decision-making, while others, primarily undergraduates who did summer placements, were hoping to use the placement to try out different, sometimes unrelated, areas as they sought to discover the industry or type of work that would suit them.

"I've done work experience before, every summer. I've worked for magazines, done travel journalism, this summer I've tried out PR."

[P16: Undergraduate who did a placement for more than one month but less than three months with a small PR company]

Many respondents hoped that the placement might ultimately result in the offer of a job with the organisation where the placement had taken place, and this was common among respondents who were looking for different types of experience. It was mentioned by nearly all of the graduates, but amongst the undergraduates it was only commonly mentioned by those whose placements were in industries like IT, Food and Beverages, and Engineering and Manufacturing, where it is relatively common for placements to feed into graduate schemes or the offer of employment after graduation. It was not mentioned by any of the undergraduates who were doing placements in Agriculture, and it was rarely mentioned by students whose placements were in the more competitive fields like Arts and the Media, Publishing and PR and Marketing. This fits with the pattern shown by the interviews with employers, where those in the more competitive sectors were less likely to say that they had taken someone on placement with the expectation that it might lead to permanent employment in the future.

3.4.2. Financial reward

As might be expected, immediate financial reward was mentioned as a motivation by the graduates and undergraduates who had done paid placements. There was no evidence that respondents expected the placement to result in a higher salary once they were employed, although there was an assumption that having done a placement would make finding employment easier in the future.

When employers were asked whether, to their knowledge, the person on placement was paid, 35 per cent of the G4B employers said they did not pay the people who came to them on placement and as far as they were aware they received no other financial assistance, a further 10 per cent of employers said the people on placement received only travel expenses (seven per cent said they were not paid but had their expenses paid by the employer, and

three per cent said the person on placement was not paid but had their expenses paid by their HEI). In contrast, in 2006, the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) found that 70 per cent of the 235 AGR employers surveyed employed and paid placement students. Only 12 per cent of the AGR sample did not pay interns (ARR 2006). Likewise, all the non-G4B organisations interviewed in this project paid the person on placement.

Although almost all respondents acknowledged that being paid was appreciated, payment was most likely to be mentioned as a specific reason for doing a placement by graduates and by undergraduates who did summer placements. As Figures 8 and 9 show, the two characteristics that were strongly related to the likelihood that a placement would be paid were firstly, the length of the placement, with longer placements being more likely to be paid, and secondly, whether the person on placement was a graduate or undergraduate.

Figure 8: Whether the placement was paid by length of placement
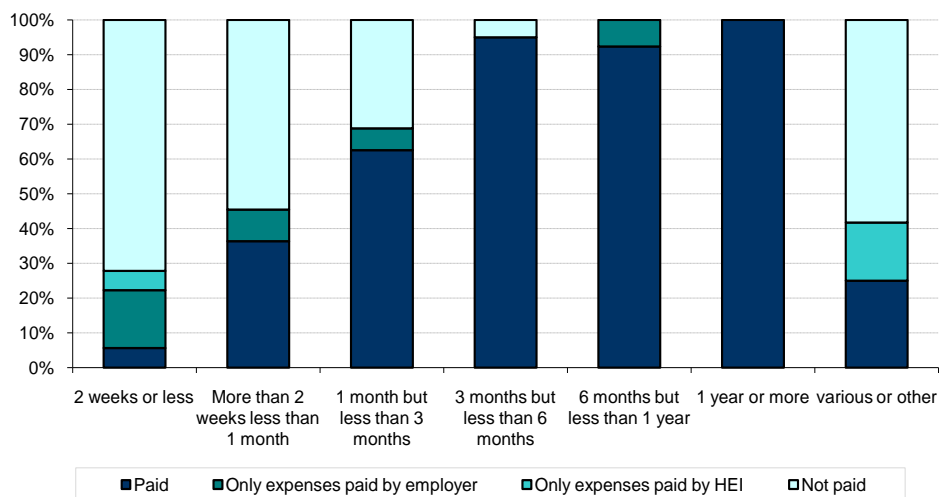
As a general rule, undergraduates who were working for most of their summer vacation period were being paid, as were those who were working for one academic year as part of their course. The exceptions to this were summer placements in the Arts and Media and Publishing which were unlikely to be paid.

In the Arts and Media sectors, 13 out of 18 placements had no payment or financial support and a further four provided only expenses; in Publishing, three out of the five placements were unpaid and the remaining two offered expenses only; and in Law, five out of the five placements were unpaid. In addition to being the sectors that were most likely to have unpaid placements, these also were the sectors that tended to offer shorter placements and, notably, were sectors where there was no shortage of applicants wishing to obtain such experience. Conversely, all 14 placements in Engineering and Manufacturing were paid, as were all eight of the placements in IT, all three of the placements in the Food and Beverage sector, eight out of the ten placements in PR and Marketing, and six of the seven placements in Agriculture. Placements in these sectors tended to be longer, typically for an entire summer or academic year for undergraduates and at least two months for graduates.

Figure 9:   Whether the placement was paid by type of placement
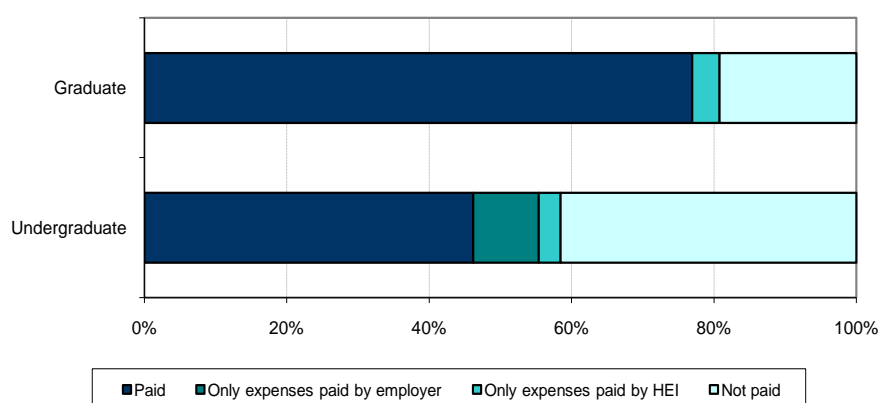
Graduates were more likely to be paid than undergraduates. In part this is because some of the placement scheme that focussed on graduates specified that they should be paid. Additionally, undergraduate placements were more likely to be regarded by employers as weighted towards benefiting the student rather than benefiting the employer, and consequently there was a feeling among some employers that they were doing the student a favour, and if anything the employer should be paid to compensate them for the time they were giving up. Conversely, amongst the graduate placements, employers were more likely to regard the placement as a job, and therefore something that merited expenditure on their part.

Placements in larger organisations were also more likely to be paid, although there were notable exceptions to this, particularly among the graduate placements. The primary reason why placements were not paid was simply that the organisation could not afford to pay someone. If the placement had to be paid, the majority of organisations which were not paying people said they would not have been able to take anyone on placement. Even when an organisation was not paying the person on placement the costs associated with taking someone on placement, particularly in terms of staff time, were regarded as a significant consideration by these organisations. While inability to pay is a normal state of affairs in the Creative industries and the Voluntary sector, the Tourism and Food and Beverage industries tend to have perishable services, operate with low profit margins and are vulnerable to fluctuations in demand, including currency changes and socio-economic pressures. These sectors are not able to create paid employment opportunities and generally, the need to practice financial stringency was affecting all sectors of activity as a result of the recession which, paradoxically, makes the operating of a scheme like G4B both more difficult and more necessary.

Amongst the graduates, being paid helped them to live day-to-day, while the undergraduates used the money they earned to pay course fees and to remain in the South West during the summer. All these respondents saw the placement as being in essence the same as any other temporary job, and mentioned that they had been looking for more conventional employment when they had found out about the placement.

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It was clear that while being paid was a motivating factor, lack of payment, or low pay, made it difficult and sometimes impossible for graduates, in particular, to consider work placements. G4B organisers in HEIs commented on the difficulty they experienced convincing graduates that working for a few months for minimum wage or no pay would increase their chances of getting a well-paid job afterwards, but also that they understood that without existing resources or family support this could be very difficult. One of the aims of the G4B programme was to use placements to improve the employment outcomes of groups who found it particularly difficult to find graduate-level employment in the South West, and the potential exclusion of graduates who have the least social and economic capital to begin with raises the question of whether placements of this type help to meet this aim.

3.4.3. *Other motivations mention by those on placements*

A desire to learn practical skills related to their course, or to put into practice skills these skills, was given by 12 respondents as a reason for doing a placement. It was particularly mentioned by undergraduates who were currently studying IT and engineering subjects. Respondents mentioned being unsure how well their skills would translate into the workplace, and whether they would find that ways of working would be very different to those they had experienced while in HE.

> "*It's something that you hear, isn't it? "Oh they know all the theory but put them here and they couldn't even turn the machine on. Blah, blah." It's like a stereotype of students. Just read it all in a book.*"
>
> [P30: Undergraduate who did a placement in Engineering lasting for between 6 months and a year]

Some of these respondents were concerned at the lack of opportunities they had on their courses to learn about how the theoretical knowledge and skills they were acquiring on their courses were used 'in the real world', and wondered if, despite studying subjects that were in relatively high demand, they were going to be as employable as they had previously imagined. The placement was regarded as a way of reassuring themselves that they had usable skills, identifying areas where they had specific weaknesses, and demonstrating to employers that their skills did, after all, transition well into the workplace.

Not having anything else to do, or having some time available, was mentioned by eight respondents. Of these, four were graduates, two were students who did summer placements, and two were undergraduates who did long-term placements with flexible hours that fitted in around the demands of their course.

Having, or being expected to do, a placement as part of their course was mentioned by respondents who had done longer placements, particularly those that lasted more than six months. Despite this being the primary impetus for undertaking the placement, all the respondents who gave this as a reason had other motivations, and hoped to get more from the placement than simply credit for their degree.

Case Study 2

E77: Large engineering employer who took five people on placement, including one undergraduate as part of the G4B scheme

The company is a large organisation, employing around 10,000 staff across the UK. They have a graduate scheme taking around 50 people per year, of which around one in five are from universities in the South West. They target 15 universities across the UK in recruiting for the scheme, based on their reputation for producing suitable graduates. In the past year, they have taken 28 people on summer placements and 14 on year-long placements. Approximately 70 per cent of people who have been on placement with the organisation are offered a place on the graduate scheme, and around 75 per cent of these accept.

The placement was for 12 weeks in the summer of 2008. Half way through the placement, the person on placement was offered a job for when they graduated, conditional on his final year grades on his aerospace engineering course, and he has since returned to the company as a graduate.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- They regarded the placement as an extended interview, and there was an expectation that it might lead to the offer of employment.
- They had a piece of work that needed to be done.
- If undergraduates gain work experience, and in particular work experience in the organisation, they make the transition to work more easily. In this sense the benefits outweigh the time invested because they do not need to retrain them as graduates.
- They saw the placement as giving someone experience to put on their CV and an opportunity to put theory into practice.
- The person on placement hoped to learn whether he wanted a career in aerospace and in particular with the company where he did the placement. He hoped to be offered a job as a result of the placement.

Why was the placement successful?

- Before the placement started there was discussion about what it might involve and the appropriate dates.
- The placement was part of an existing successful scheme. Someone from the same HEI had done a placement with the organisation the previous year, so the person on placement knew what to expect and was able to prepare adequately.
- The placement was very well organised and planned, and there were opportunities to get involved in various different areas. The work involved a high degree of responsibility, not only in terms of the person managing their own work, but as it was in the area of safety, a lot of trust was placed in the person on placement to deliver something meaningful and usable.
- There was an appropriate level of feedback and monitoring, and the person on placement always felt that he had someone he could talk to.
- They treated the person on placement as an employee. They made an effort not to give them things that would not challenge them or that existing employees did not do.

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- The placement was paid (£14,000 p.a. pro rata), and the company expect to be able to continue recruiting at this rate as they are in a sector that has not been badly affected by the recession.
- The minimum placement length is ten weeks, which is long enough for them to do a substantial piece of work that they feel a sense of ownership over.
- As the company had a large number of people on placement, there were opportunities for networking between them, and they were able to pool their knowledge of the organisation.
- They go through a very thorough recruitment process including a review of their CV, verbal and numeracy tests, review by the business area that may take them and an interview day in which they are also shown the organisation. This is the same recruitment process as graduates they are recruiting onto their graduate scheme. This means they are sure that they have selected an appropriate person for the job and they do not have to re-interview them if they decide to take them onto the scheme as a result of their performance on the placement.
- There was a complimentary relationship between the placement and the person on placement's course. He was able to use the skills he had learnt on his course during the placement, and when he returned to university, he was able to use his experience in his coursework. It also motivated him to work harder in his final year to ensure he got the grades he needed to take up the job he was offered.
- The placement helped to confirm his career ideas which gave him confidence to move forward with his career plans.

> "*The direction I was heading in turned out to be the right one, so it confirmed what I already knew. But I think I did learn more about myself, what I enjoy, how I like to work and so on.*"
>
> [Placement 1]

- Since the person on placement graduated and started working for the company, he has been doing similar work, so has been able to build on his placement experience. He knew he wanted to remain in the South West and was able to ask that he was placed at a branch in the region when he graduated.

How could the experience be improved?

- Particularly in the case of summer placements, there is a tendency for people to find themselves without enough work if they are not willing to put themselves forward and ask for it.
- The connection between the person on placement's course and the placement was largely coincidental. Although it worked well in this case, the lack of contact between the employer and the HEI, particularly in the case of summer placements, could limit the extent to which it is possible to derive benefits from the placement.
- The person on placement felt that a more formal approach to placements in his HEI could produce longer-term benefits.

> "*It would have been good if they had collated the experiences of everyone who had been on placement, so that everyone knew what and where was good and bad.*"
>
> [Placement 1]

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4. CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACEMENTS

4.1 What did those on placement do?

For employers, a key to understanding how placements might improve organisational performance lies in understanding how the technical and generic skills learned on degree courses can most effectively be employed in the workplace. In this section, we outline the kinds of activities undertaken by people who were on placement, and the skills used in these activities, looking particularly at the extent to which graduates and undergraduates were employed to do different types of work.

Figure 10 shows the activities undertaken during the placement. The activities undertaken inevitably varied by sector. Some activities, such as ICT, and public relations and marketing, as well as sales which fell into the 'other activities' category, while being associated with specific sectors, were actually undertaken by people on placements in various other sectors, although generally not as the main activity undertaken on placement. Research, work shadowing and the completion of a specific project were also activities undertaken in various sectors, and were more often the main activity undertaken. Placements in Engineering and Manufacturing, IT and Agriculture tended to be the most specialised in terms of the activities undertaken, largely because of the specific technical skills required in these industries, but at a micro-level the majority of placements in these areas did not involve a single activity, but a range of activities that fell under a single heading, for example, in the Agricultural sector, all the activities undertaken tended to be related to agriculture, but a single placement might involve working with animals, planting or harvesting and cooking.

Figure 10: Activities undertaken during the placement
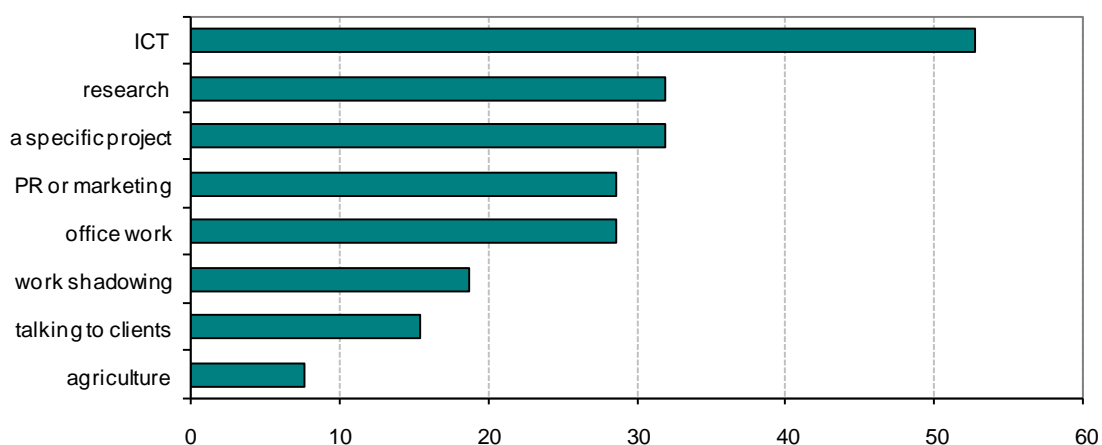
As the Figure shows, use of ICT skills was involved in more than 50 per cent of the placements, although the level of ICT skills required varied depending on the sector, from simple word processing and database skills in sectors such as Government, Law and the Voluntary sector, to graphic and website design in Arts and Media placements and programming skills in sectors including Engineering and Manufacturing and ICT.

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There were some clear differences in the nature of activities undertaken by undergraduates and graduates, and the challenge they represented. In general, graduates were given more responsibility, both in terms of managing their own work, and in being given tasks that were regarded as being the most likely to have an impact on the organisation. Graduate placements were more likely to involve the completion of a specific project (39 per cent of graduate placements, compared to 29 per cent of undergraduate placements), and to involve talking to clients (23 per cent compared to 8 per cent). Their work was more likely to be regarded as integral to the organisation, involving a job that needed to be done, and to be similar to work that existing members of staff would undertake.

Undergraduates were more likely to be engaged in more routine tasks. For example, more than a third of the undergraduate placements involved some form of office work, compared to 15 per cent of the graduate placements. They were also more likely to be involved in activities that were not particularly commonly done by staff at the organisation where they did their placement. For example, undergraduate placements were more likely to involve research (37 per cent of undergraduate, compared to 19 per cent of the graduate placements), and a period of work-shadowing (23 per cent of undergraduate placements, compared to 8 per cent of graduate ones).

Employers who had taken undergraduates on placement were more likely to regard having students do a *range* of tasks as important, regardless of whether this was the way an employee of the firm would work. Employers who had taken graduates were more likely to think that it was important that experience of the person on placement replicated, as far as possible, the experience of other employees. They therefore saw it as important that the graduate knew about the range of activities undertaken within the organisation, but saw it as less important that the person on placement actually had the opportunity to undertake most of these activities. Consequently, the activities graduates undertook tended to by much more specific and focussed in one particular area, for example, the implementation of new environmental regulations or a new IT system. One employer, who had previously taken both undergraduates and graduates on placement described in concise terms the difference in relation to such graduates in his organisation by saying,

> "*well,* [graduates] *have a job title.*"
>
> [E54: Large IT sector employer who took a graduate on placement for three to six months].

Another employer, who had not taken graduates on placement said that he thought the difference between having undergraduates and graduates on placement would be that he would be less likely to regard the graduate as 'a visitor' and that if a graduate came to his organisation, he would assume they had learnt what they needed to know and were ready to work, regardless of whether they were technically on placement or not.

Despite these reflections by employers, many of the graduates interviewed expressed the opinion that they welcomed opportunities to learn more about different areas of the organisations where they were placed. This was most common amongst graduates who came from IT and Arts backgrounds. Graduates doing placements in these industries in particular noted that their HE courses had given them a particular range of technical skills,

but that they lacked experience in associated areas that they were interested in becoming more involved in, particularly marketing and dealing with clients, as is illustrated in Case Study 3 at the end of this Chapter. It was felt by several of these respondents that although they may have been chosen for the placement because of their technical skills, one of the benefits of doing a placement should be the opportunity to find out more about these areas, and, as will be seen later, graduates who had been given these sorts of opportunities were the most likely to say they were satisfied with their placement.

Placements at smaller organisations tended to involve a wider range of activities than those in large organisations, where the jobs tended to be more specialised. Employers in small organisations particularly noted that one of the benefits of doing a placement in a small organisation was the range of activities it was possible to get involved in and the ease with which someone on placement could learn about different parts of the company.

> *"We are a very small organisation, so I think they got more of an experience. They had more autonomy, and just because of the nature of what they were doing, they had to deal with people at senior level. They did a bit of everything, again because we are such a small organisation. They were writing press releases, working on the website, negotiating about events. They learnt about the whole process of working with local government really, you can't really avoid it."*
>
> [E1: Small environmental sector employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

The opportunity to undertake a range of activities was also particularly mentioned by employers in the voluntary sector, who noted that the nature of their organisation meant that there were many different activities taking place within the organisation and generally all would welcome additional assistance if the person on placement indicated an interest.

This importance of the person on placement being proactive and asking to get involved in areas that interested them was raised by many employers. There was a general feeling amongst these employers, and in particular those in small organisations, that people would be very willing to help someone on placement learn more about their work, but that this needed to be initiated by the person on placement, and it was noted that particularly undergraduates on placement lacked the confidence to do this, and so missed out on opportunities.

A graduate who did an arts placement with a small food and beverage organisation

The company is a small organisation, employing 15 people. They work in the food and beverage industry. The graduate, who has a degree in product design, was taken on placement to do graphic design work. She produced a training manual for the organisation and worked on leaflets to advertise their products.

The person on placement had initially been given a three month contract but this had been extended indefinitely when she had not been able to find any other employment. She was currently working two days per week. The hours she was able to work were limited by the regulations concerning claiming job seekers allowance.

She was the only person who had applied for the particular placement. Alongside the G4B placement she was also doing freelance web-design work.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- They had been using an external agency for a lot of their marketing and were trying to gradually bring this in house to save money;
- She worked for free, and was happy to keep working for them while she sought other employment.

Why was the placement successful?

- The person on placement gained experience and filled her time;
- Although the person on placement had done a limited amount of freelance work, the rest of her previous work experience was in retail, and this was an area she did not wish to work in;

> "*I am getting work experience, and looking back, this is something I should have done more when I was a student. I'm really struggling now, because there is so much competition and experience is so important, it hardly matters what your degree is in. I have a portfolio, and I am developing that, but I just don't have the experience, so I am always getting passed over. It is the same for everyone on my course, I know hardly anyone who has a job in design.*"

> [Placement 1]

- She had identified particular areas of weakness and had started learning new software skills in her own time to address this;
- Although she has not had the opportunities she would like, she has developed more insight into the different jobs people do in advertising, and as a result her career ideas have become clearer;
- Despite the problems that she experienced, she would not hesitate to recommend placements as a way of gaining experience. Her only concern was that if more people wanted to do placements, they might compete with her.

How could the experience be improved?

- Although the graduate had a degree in product design, she had struggled to find work in this area and was hoping to use the placement to develop experience in marketing that would enable her to find work in this field, but her opportunities to learn more about marketing were limited because the company was very busy and the person whose job she found most interesting was unable to offer her a great deal of mentoring. She found this disappointing, and also worrying because she learned that the job she aspired to was very stressful;

  > "*I watch her all the time to try and see what she is doing, what her job involves, because that's the job I want. But I am just observing, I don't have any opportunities to talk to her because she is so busy, and I have just been taken on to do this job, they don't have the time or money to help me out, and I don't feel I can ask because it is all so busy and stressful. So I just watch and try to learn. I feel like I am spying on her, but what else can I do?*"

  [Placement 1]

- The placement involved using skills she already had, and she was not given many opportunities to develop new skills. She was concerned that she was not learning very much on the placement;
- There was a lack of organisation and structure to the placement. She had no mentor and received no training;
- The company cannot afford to pay her. Even a part-time minimum wage salary would be helpful;
- She felt that she was not treated as a real employee in terms of the facilities available to her. She was given poor and inadequate equipment and stated that she was developing health problems as a result;
- Problems with insurance and the amount of time she was able to devote to the placement meant that she was not able to undertake the kind of training she wanted to do.

5. COSTS AND BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYER OF PLACEMENTS

This section assesses the costs and benefits to the employer of taking someone on placement. Engaging in a programme like G4B has transactional costs attached to it for employers, in addition to the costs of managing the placement on a day-to-day basis.

Levels of satisfaction with the placements were high. Eighty-nine per cent of the employers were satisfied with the placement overall. Nine per cent said they were partly satisfied, and only two per cent said that overall they were dissatisfied. Satisfaction was slightly lower amongst employers who had taken undergraduates on placement, and all the employers who said that they were partly satisfied had taken undergraduates on placement.

Costs and benefits can be derived in the immediate, intermediate and long-term, and there can be a causal chain between these different benefits, as Figure 11 illustrates:

Figure 11: Causal chain: graduate deployment and organisational performance

Immediate benefits:		*Intermediate benefits:*		*Longer term benefits:*
Acquisition of skills needed in workplace. For instance ability to carry out a current special project	$\Rightarrow$	Organisational capability improved in those functional areas where graduates are used Increased levels of sales /output Innovation	$\Rightarrow$	Improved business performance: higher productivity enhanced profitability moves into higher value-added markets

Source: Adapted from Hogarth, T. *et al., 2007*

The majority of employers, as Figure 12 shows, were able to identify, if not quantify, some kind of impact on their organisation from having taken someone on placement.

Figure 12: Whether there was an impact on the organisation from having someone on a G4B placement

Maybe
3%

No
8%

Yes
89%
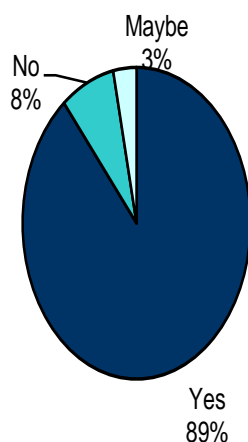
The cases where the employer felt that there had not been any impact did not appear to have any characteristics in common. Two were placements that were regarded by the employer as being unsuccessful, and one had been terminated before the end of the originally proposed period. Two were in Arts or the Media, and there was one each in the Environmental sector, Education, Marketing or PR, Publishing and Tourism and Leisure. Two were graduate placements and five were undergraduate placements. Five were for less than three months, but surprisingly, two were for six months but less than one year.

As will be seen, most impacts identified fall into the immediate category, although in some cases intermediate impacts were also identified. The identification of long-term impacts is more problematic, particularly in relation to 'hard' measures such as profitability, in part because these are subject to many factors unrelated to employment, such as interest or exchange rates, and in part because the duration of this project is relatively short, with placements occurring at different points over a two year period.

Figure 13 shows the impacts identified by employers of having someone on placement.

Figure 13:   Impact on the organisation by type of placement
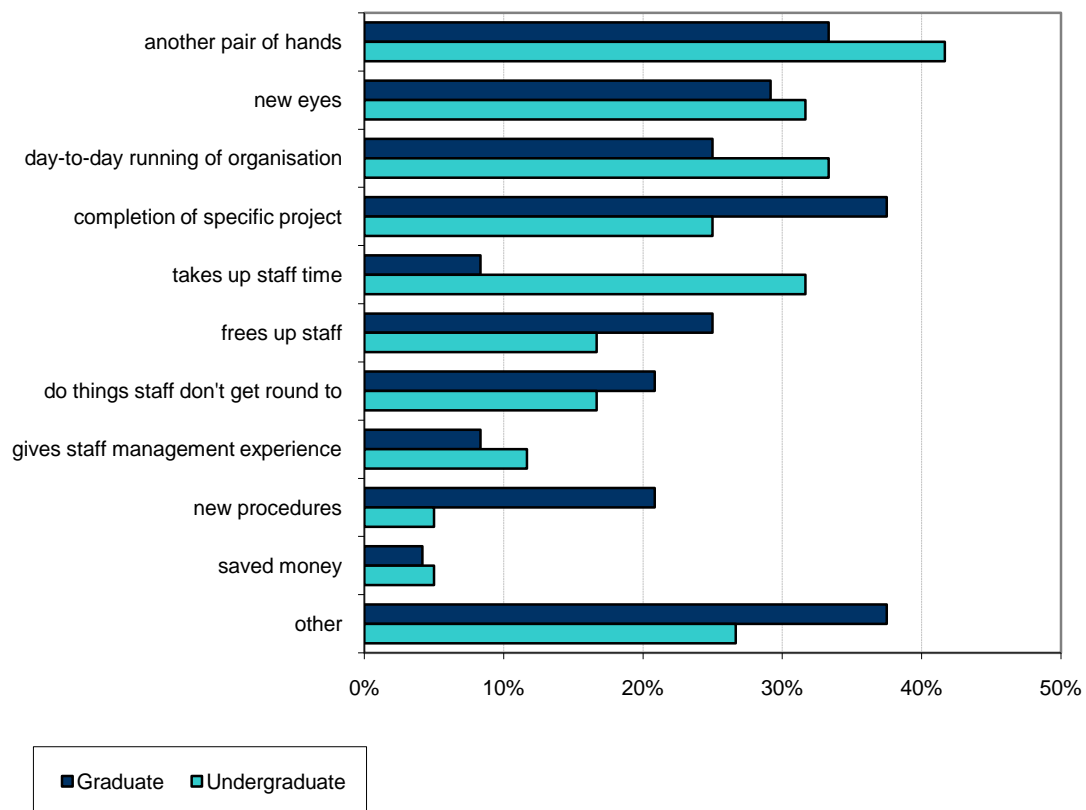
It needs to be remembered that undergraduate placements were more diverse, in that they ranged from very short placements to, essentially, sandwich course experience. As the Figure indicates, the majority of impacts mentioned were beneficial to the organisation and they will be the focus of this section.

5.1   Benefits to the employer

5.1.1.   *Benefits related to the work undertaken by the person on placement*

The first group of benefits identified by employers related to the actual work undertaken by the person on placement and the impact this had on the work of other employees in the organisation. In effect, this meant the placement supplemented the existing workforce in some way, resulting in an increase of skills or time within an organisation. The implications of this for the running of the organisation included: freeing up of staff time; doing things other staff would not get around to; facilitating the implementation of new procedures; and the completion of specific projects.

Figure 13 also shows clearly that two of these benefits were more likely to be associated with undergraduate placements. These were the impact of simply having another pair of hands in the organisation, and the importance of people on placement for the day-to-day running of the organisation. A relatively large proportion of the undergraduate placements involved routine tasks, such as office work and routine IT tasks, that were necessary within organisations on a day-to-day basis, but these immediate benefits were rarely felt by employers to have the potential to develop into more long-term ones. Having another person in the organisation to do various tasks was seen as having greater potential for development, although most of this development was connected to the related impact of freeing up staff to work on other projects or in other areas that were regarded as having a more long-term impact.

The importance of having another pair of hands to help out in the organisation was most common in the Arts and Media and Agriculture, in small organisations and was most likely to be mentioned by employers who took multiple people on relatively short placements. Eleven of the 19 employers in Arts and the Media mentioned having another pair of hands as an impact of taking people on placement, and nine said that having someone on placement had an impact on the day-to-day running of the organisation. All seven of the employers in the Agricultural sector said that a benefit of having placements was that it gave them an extra pair of hands, particularly at busy times of the year, and five of the seven employers said that having people on placement had an impact on the day-to-day running of the organisation. The Voluntary sector and Publishing were the other areas where these impacts were particularly commonly identified, with four of the nine employers in the Voluntary sector and three of the five organisations involved in Publishing identifying benefits relating to having another pair of hands, and four of the organisations in the Voluntary sector and three in Publishing identifying an impact on the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Two of the remaining benefits that fall into this category, freeing up staff time and doing things existing staff do not get around to were more likely to be associated with graduate placements, although in both cases, a significant proportion of employers who had taken undergraduates on placement also identified benefits in these areas. In some cases, as has been mentioned, freeing up of staff time was achieved by having undergraduates do relatively routine work, what Wilson (1985) has described as 'releasing professional employees from sub-professional duties', but in other cases, the freeing up of staff time was related to the person on placement having expertise that made them more easily able to do

a particular task than existing staff who would need to learn about the task before being able to complete it themselves, as in Case Study 4 at the end of this Chapter, where the graduate on placement had much more up-to-date knowledge of environmental regulations than the employer.

Neither of these benefits was concentrated in specific sectors, but they were more common amongst employers who had taken people on longer placements, with at least a month appearing to be the minimum requirement for most organisations to begin to realise these benefits. Similarly, they were seen across organisations of all sizes.

The remaining two benefits in this category, the implementation of new procedures and the completion of specific projects were more likely to be associated with graduate placements, with this being especially the case in relation to the implementation of new procedures. The implementation of new procedures was most commonly identified as a benefit by employers in Engineering and Manufacturing and the Food and Beverage sectors. These new procedures were usually related to areas where undergraduates and new graduates were thought by the employer to have particular expertise because they were younger and the knowledge or skills they had learnt on their course were more up-to-date. The implementation of procedures related to relatively new developments in environmental regulation and ICT were most commonly mentioned by employers.

Implementation of new procedures was seen across organisations of a range of sizes. It was not mentioned by any employers who had taken someone on placement for less than a month. These benefits were the most likely to be regarded as having the potential to develop into intermediate and longer-term impacts, and in some cases, it was felt that their true value would only be evident in the longer-term.

The benefits that employers derived from the completion of a specific project were varied, depending on the nature of the project and the organisation. Some benefits derived directly from the project itself, while others came from the use of the work done as part of the project in other areas of the organisation's business. For example, one organisation in the Voluntary sector set the graduate on placement the project of researching the implications of setting up a programme relating to one particular subject, but it was planned that the system used to assess the implications in that project would be rolled out for use in other projects in similar areas. Similarly, the quote from a teacher, below illustrates how a project that involved working with school children to make short films had the related impact of improving exam results.

> "The GCSE results in Media were the best ever this year. The input from the students undoubtedly played a part in this."

> [E81: Large employer in the education sector who took undergraduates on placements of 2 weeks to a month]

The completion of a specific project was most commonly mentioned by employers in IT and the Environmental sector, and it was also mentioned by the only employer in Government. Projects in these sectors were initiated by the employer, who had identified a particular piece of work that would benefit the organisation. The projects mentioned by two of the

employers in the Voluntary sector were somewhat different. They were initiated by the student who identified something that was interesting to them and which was related to their course, and through consultation with the employer to ensure that the project would also prove useful to them, the student was able to spend all or part of their time on placement working on the project.

5.1.2 Benefits related to the outlook of the graduate or student on placement

Morse (2006) refers to this as the 'fresh eyes' concept. This is the idea that people who come from outside an organisation bring an external stance and knowledge of different practices and experiences which can stimulate organisations to think about why they do things in a particular way. In the survey, both graduate and undergraduate placements were found to generate this kind of benefit, and it was attributed both to the person on placement coming from outside the organisation, but also to them generally being younger than the existing employees of the organisation, as the following quote demonstrate.

> *"I think placements are a great idea, I really do. I often feel quite isolated, so it's lovely to have bright young people here who have a different take on things, who question what I am doing. It makes me think."*
>
> [E13: Very small arts and media employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

Again, benefits related to having a fresh perspective on the organisation were not confined to any particular sector, although none of the employers in Education, the Food and Beverage sector, Agriculture, Sales, Tourism and Leisure or Banking, Finance and Insurance specifically mentioned it was a benefit of having someone on placement.

A fresh perspective was slightly more likely to be mentioned by employers who had taken people on very short placements. Half of the employers (eight out of 16) who had taken someone on placement for two weeks or less specifically mentioned this as an impact of having someone on placement, compared to around a third of the employers in total, and these employers were the most likely to mention specifically that it was the person's age that was especially beneficial.

> *"Having a young person come in with all their dreams and plans gave a new lease of life to everyone. We've probably all become quite jaded, so having someone new and young around was invigorating. It really shows everyone what you can do if you work hard and have ambitions."*
>
> [E14: Small employer in the voluntary sector who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks or less]

5.1.3 Benefits relating to improved skills, knowledge or experience of existing employees

The most frequently mentioned benefit relating to improved skills, knowledge or experience of existing staff was the management experience gained by employees involved in planning placements or mentoring people on placement, which was mentioned by nine respondents, five of whom were responsible for managing very short placements.

There were also instances where the person on placement passed on particular knowledge or skills to other employees. In some cases, this was academic knowledge, but in other cases, as in the quote below, the person on placement was involved in training other staff in some aspects of ICT.

> *"Previously we paid a supplier to convert documents to .pdf files.* [She] *showed us how to convert files and use them in-house, thus improving our presentation and efficiency since we can now send images to our clients more easily."*
>
> [E79: Employer in the tourism and leisure industry with a variable number of staff who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

Related to this benefit was the general development of a more skilled workforce and the potential placements offered for organisations to identify prospective new staff members. This was mentioned by several employers as a motivation for taking people on placement, as was discussed previously. Employers described the process as an extended interview, through which they were able to identify whether the person on placement's skills would be useful to the organisation.

> *"We couldn't justify taking someone on in a full-time earning position. So we wanted someone with an IT background. You could say it was a 20 week interview, for them and for us. For us to find out if it was justifiable, and for them to prove it was and that they were the right person to do it.* […] *He fitted in very quickly, and we decided quickly that we would offer him a job.* […] *We used to contract out IT – knowledge and techniques, so we have become more self-sufficient."*
>
> [E80: Medium-sized engineering and manufacturing employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

Additionally, two organisations, one in Engineering and Manufacturing and one in Building and Architecture, commented that if a student had been to them on placement, they would already be familiar with the organisation and have developed on the placement the kind of skills the specific organisation was looking for, so if they later joined the organisation as graduates, they would 'hit the ground running' and need less additional training.

> *"The benefits outweigh the time you spend at this stage. We do have an expectation that a lot of them will come back to us as graduates, and we don't need to retrain them then because we have already done it. The pay-off is in the future."*
>
> [E77: Large Engineering and Manufacturing employer who took an undergraduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

In the case of the company in Engineering and Manufacturing, the skills they sought were both technical and softer skills relating to work ethic and expectations of how to deal with people, while the organisation in Building and Architecture was primarily concerned with the development of specific technical skills.

5.1.4. Other benefits to the employer

As Figure 13 showed, direct monetary benefits were mentioned relatively infrequently by employers. Four employers said that having someone on placement had saved them money. In two cases, this was a result of not having to outsource particular processes, in another

case, the employer thought they had probably saved money due to the introduction of a more efficient IT system, rather than paying for a series of temporary upgrades to their existing system, and in the remaining case money was saved from having what amounted to an additional member of staff that was not being paid. Two respondents were able to identify an increase in sales during the placement period, but one thought this was coincidental, rather than a result of having someone on placement. One employer thought that there would be a long-term increase in sales as a result of work done on the placement to help them move into new markets.

> *"Some pages of our website were translated into Chinese so we will have made a saving here, and hopefully when we revamp our website we will try marketing to the Asian market. We already have a growing international market, mostly from Europe and America, but Asia could be another."*
>
> [E79: Small employer in the Tourism and Leisure industry with a variable number of staff who took a graduate on placement for between 3 and 6 months]

As was mention previously, some employers had taken someone on placement with the aim of increasing awareness of their organisation or the particular field that they worked in, and these employers were satisfied that this had been an outcome of the placement.

> *"We saw it as a way of getting word out about the organisation generally, as well as to the specific student who came to us. We are quite dependent on volunteers, and anything that helps us to get our name known, and with students particularly, because they have always formed a good part of our volunteers team. We also wanted to improve our own knowledge of what people are studying, what people do at university, what they do on her course. We would like to have closer contact with the universities, so we have other ways of finding out about what people are learning, but it's a start."*
>
> [E84: Very small voluntary sector employer who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

Developing a relationship with an HEI was mentioned by two employers, and learning more about courses at a particular HEI was given by a further two employers as a benefit of work placements. Through learning more about particular courses and HEIs, these employers felt that they would be able to recruit from a wider range of HEIs, whereas previously they had limited their graduate recruitment activities to a relatively small number of HEIs that they knew produced good quality graduates.

> *"We had not taken any students from* [G4B HEI] *before, and I've come away with a positive view of what they are doing there. We have tended to focus on* [another G4B HEI] *because we know about the course there because it's one of the main training centres, you know what you are getting if you like, but I was impressed. I mean, she was very good, it was easy to find her something to do, and if they are all like her…"*
>
> [E83: Small Building and Architecture employer who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

Three of these employers also hoped to be able to influence or contribute to courses that were particularly relevant at local HEIs to ensure that graduates from these institutions were employable by their organisation. A further employer noted that the development of a relationship with a particular HEI through an initial placement could lead not only to more

placements, but being offered a higher calibre of student the next time they were looking for someone to take.

> *"You need to build a relationship with universities to get good calibre graduates. You can't expect in the first year of doing placements that you will get the best calibre of people."*

> [E2: Large employer in the Food and Beverage sector who took an undergraduate on placement for more than one year]

5.2   Costs to the employer

As has been mentioned, satisfaction with the placements was high among the employers. Of the two employers who said that they were dissatisfied with the placement, one said that this satisfaction was due to personal problems experienced by the person on placement, combined with a lack of support from the HEI involved, while in the other case, the person on placement had left before completing the placement, having realised that they did not want to work in that particular industry, and the employer felt that they had not worked hard prior to leaving. The nine employers who said that they were partly satisfied fell into two groups. Firstly there was a group of employers who had multiple placements and had been happy with some of them but not others, as the quote below illustrates:

> *"It is very labour-intensive. We had five people on placement, and I would say only two of them are good enough to come back. That is a lot of investment for very little reward. There was a lot of time spent running after them, sorting them out, it was basically a lack of work-ethic. They were here to work, it's a job, but they don't seem to understand that. One of them also had really very bad written and spoken English, I don't know how they were coping at university, because they weren't here. […] There are definitely lessons to be learnt in the recruitment process. We only interviewed them, but if we did it again, I would do an assessment centre, the same as we use to recruit graduates, so we might choose better, and I don't think I would ever take so many people again."*

> [E78: Large IT employer who took undergraduates on placement for 6 months to one year]

The second group of employers who said they were partly satisfied were those who felt that there had not been a good match between expectations of the person they had taken on placement and the organisation's own expectations.

> *"The scheme is excellent. The problem was simply a mismatch between what he wanted and what we were looking for. He wanted a structured environment, somewhere he could continue learning. He wanted to move around the company. We had a very specific role in mind for him. Basically, he wanted a graduate scheme, and we wanted someone to do a job. […] I think also, the role was too big for him. It was a responsible role that required a lot of communication skills because the majority of the people he was dealing with are foreign. It can be daunting, of course, and I think he didn't really have the confidence. The role was too big and overwhelming."*

> [E16: Large employer in the food and beverage sector who took a graduate on placement for three to six months. The placement was ended by mutual consent when the graduate was offered a place on a graduate scheme with a different organisation]

"We do struggle to find them something to do. In the first placement, the role was really too junior for her, it's something that could have been done by someone from one of the local schools, but we were a bit unprepared, so we used the same formula that we have used with the school placements, which didn't really work. In the second placement, she was interested in grievances, but we were limited in what we could give her in that area, because it is an area where people don't want someone watching over them."

[E10: Large employer in the legal sector who took undergraduates on placement for 2 weeks or less]

The second example cited above shows how the employer was learning about the potential (as well as the limitations) of placements, given no previous experience of such activities.

As Figure 13 showed, when employers were asked what impact having someone on placement had on the organisation, costs were mentioned infrequently, with the only cost suggested by a significant number of respondents being that taking someone on placement took up staff time, which was mentioned by 21 employers. This was much more frequently mentioned by employers who took undergraduates on placement. It was particularly mentioned by employers in Agriculture and Law, and was the reason some employers in agriculture said that they were unsatisfied by the placement.

It was also especially mentioned by employers who took undergraduates on very short placements, and this is likely to be related to the proportion of the time spent on placement that was devoted to preparing the person on placement before they could start working. Nine respondents said that there were particular problems relating to the ratio of time spent giving the person on placement an adequate introduction to the organisation to time spent by the person on placement doing work that was useful to the organisation. This issue was also particularly mentioned by employers who had taken people on very short placements. Harvey, Geall and Moon (1998) identify this loss of another employee's time as the biggest disincentive for organisations to offer work placements, especially when they feel the benefits are less easy to define or be confident of achieving.

Case Study 4

E6: Medium sized employer in the Food and Beverage sector who took a graduate on placement

Although the company employees a total of 220 staff across two sites, the majority of employees are engaged in factory work on the shop floor. It is a family business and the staff who are engaged in what might be termed 'graduate level' work are not graduates. Positions come up fairly rarely, although there is a high turn-over of lower-level staff, and when a position became available they were in the habit of recruiting internally. The person on placement was the first external graduate appointed in the organisation. Prior to the G4B placement, they had not undertaken any other placements, and their contact with HEIs and experience of graduates was minimal.

They took an environmental science graduate on placement for one year, the contract was extended for a further year and she has since become a full-time employee. She was involved in putting in place measures that enabled the company to conform with new environmental regulations, including waste packaging regulations, recycling and water-wastage.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- The skills and knowledge did not exist within the organisation, and no-one had time to familiarise themselves with what was complicated legislation, so they looked for a specialist graduate who already had some knowledge.

Why was the placement successful?

- They contacted the particular HEI because they have a good reputation for environmental management. In addition to recruiting through the HEI they also advertised on some internet job boards, but the calibre of candidates was not as good as those they received through the HEI;
- The company was aware of the problems the person on placement might face. The company is very male-dominated, and the employer described the environment as "not too P*C.*". Through early recognition of this, they were able to prepare the graduate and to reassure her about whether she would fit in;
- The placement was very successful and the company won awards for the work of the person on placement;
- Through the placement, the company learned more about what recruiting graduates would bring to them, and the ways in which their skills could be utilised effectively. If the need arose in the future, they would not hesitate to take another graduate on placement or to employ them full-time if this was appropriate;
- Through the placement, the employer, who had no previous history of graduate recruitment has learned how to access graduates;

> "*I know [she] will eventually move on, and we will do the same process again. I wouldn't panic about replacing her now, because I know how to do it, and I know that there are good people out there."*

[Employer 7]

50

- The person on placement said that initially she had been concerned that the placement was not in the type of company she aspired to work in, and the employer agreed that they did not work in an attractive area of the industry. As the placement progressed, she had found that despite her initial misgivings, the work she was doing was appropriate and similar to that found in other types of company, and she was learning skills and processes that she could use elsewhere if she chose. Similarly, she had been concerned that she would not fit in well in an organisation that was not used to employing graduates and which had such a strong family ethos, but after some initial resistance, she felt she had been accepted and was treated 'like one of the family';
- The person on placement said that although she had been aware of the types of organisation that could utilise her skills, she had perhaps been too quick to dismiss some of them as being unsuitable, and having done a placement in a type of organisation she might have dismissed in the past, and found it an enjoyable and successful experience, she would be less quick to close her mind to these sorts of opportunities in the future.

> "*I'm not so squeamish now!*"

> [Placement 1]

How could the experience be improved?

- A lack of job-seeking skills amongst applicants for the placement meant that some people may have been rejected who could have done the job well.

> "*The applications we received were appalling. Nobody wrote letters correctly, the spelling and grammar was atrocious. There are more people coming out of university these days, but it doesn't mean the same thing anymore. We looked at their interests outside university, and whether they could motivate themselves. Universities should have at least a half-day session for all their students on how to present themselves, their CVs, especially if they have no employment history and no experience.*"

> [Employer 7]

- They approached three HEIs in the South West about the placement, but two of them were not helpful. It was very difficult to get in touch with HEIs. It involved a lot of searching and ringing around. There should be an easier way.
- They are not a big enough organisation to take people on placement simply to provide training, they would only be able to take more people on placement if there was a specific job for them to do. At the moment they do not see this happening, although they would consider taking undergraduates on short placements if they did not have to pay them, and they now know how to do this.

6. COSTS AND BENEFITS TO GRADUATE OR STUDENT OF PLACEMENTS

As with the employers, costs and benefits to the student or graduate on placement can be in the immediate, intermediate and the long-term. Long-term benefits were somewhat easier to identify amongst the students and graduates, although some of these benefits remained hypothetical, as in the case of being able to find suitable employment more easily than might otherwise have been possible.

6.1 Benefits to the graduate or student

Both the employers and the students and graduates were asked what they considered to be the benefits of doing a placement. Figure 14 shows the responses given by the employers.

Figure 14: Benefits employers think graduates and students derive from doing a placement
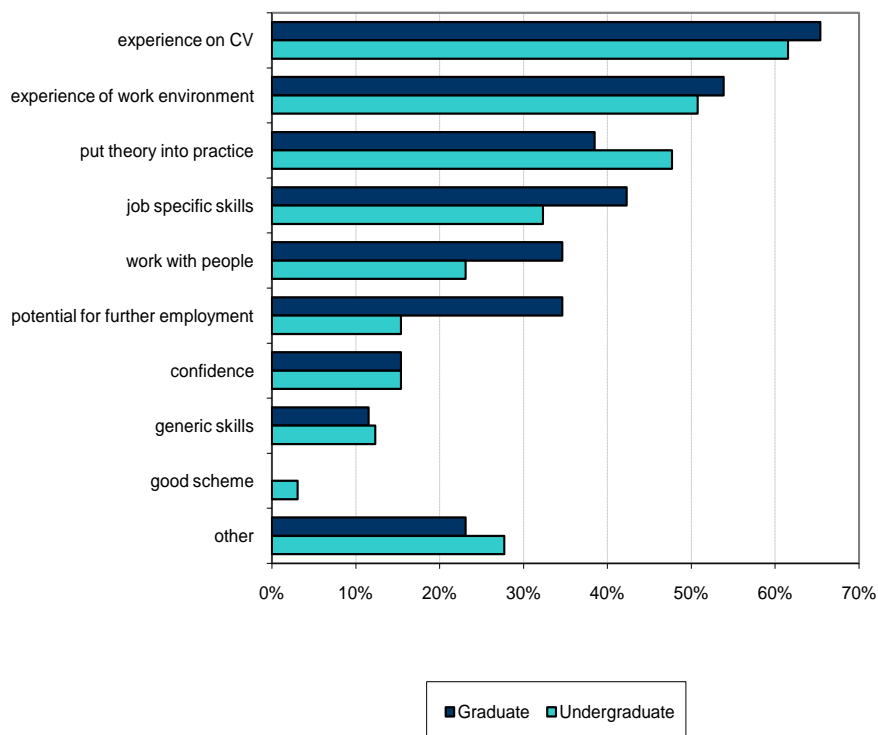
6.1.1. Experience and the development of skills

As the Figure shows, having some work experience to put on a CV was the benefit most commonly mentioned by employers in the case of both graduates and undergraduates.

"They do large, elaborate, six month projects at university, but in industry, you are looking at cost-per-hour, so that kind of thing is a luxury and much too expensive to be realistic. So they get more of an appreciation of how it works in the real world, how a real-world organisation operates. You have to pay back your investment."

[E18: Large employer in Engineering and Manufacturing who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

This benefit was even more commonly given by the students and graduates themselves, being specifically mentioned by 46 of the 50 respondents. Three of the four respondents who did not mention this as a benefit of the placement had been offered employment with the organisation where they did a placement, and so may be expected to have been less concerned about having the placement experience itself on their CV.

Experience of the work environment was the second most frequently mentioned benefit by the employers. The students and graduates also commonly mentioned this as a benefit, although the focus of the two groups was slightly different. Although the employers were more likely to mention the acquisition of job-specific skills than generic employability skills overall, as Figure 14 showed, when they were talking particularly about experience, they were more likely to refer to the experience of acquiring and using softer skills, for example, being a member of a team, or turning up for work every day, and some regarded the placement as providing a transitional environment between education and employment in which these kind of skills could be developed and their importance understood. This is reflected in the frequency with which generic employability skills were also mentioned as a benefit by the employers.

The students and graduates tended to mention experience in relation to the acquisition and use of more specific skills, particularly those related to working in the industry or job they were interested in. Team-working and getting along with people, time-management and "just going into the office every da*y."* were the only generic skills that were commonly mentioned by students and graduates, and all these skills were most frequently mentioned by undergraduates. The only respondents who mentioned the acquisition of softer employability skills as the primary benefit of doing a placement were those undergraduate students who had been engaged in relatively routine work on their placement and who were generally dissatisfied with their placement experience, in particular with the opportunities they had to use and develop their skills.

6.1.2. Future employment

Murdoch (2004) reports that in 2002 a major UK contractors group confirmed that 70 per cent of its graduate recruitment was through cooperative/sandwich programmes, and a study by the University of Manchester (2004) found that on average, 72 per cent of placement students who were offered graduate jobs went back to the company where they had completed their placement. Ten of the G4B employers said that they had offered a job to the person on placement. A further eight had extended the placement, one had offered the undergraduate a place on a graduate scheme, and two had offered short-term consultancy work.

"I regard it as an extended interview. We are very clear and upfront that we might offer them a job at the end of the placement. I would say we offer a job to about 70% of the people who we have had here on placement, and about 75% of those accept."

[E77: Large employer in Engineering and Manufacturing who took an undergraduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

Despite this, the potential for future employment was mention more frequently by employers who had taken graduates on placement, and as Figure 15 shows, graduates were more likely to have been offered a job by the organisation where they were on placement.

Figure 15: Whether the graduate or student was offered a job at the organisation where they did their placement
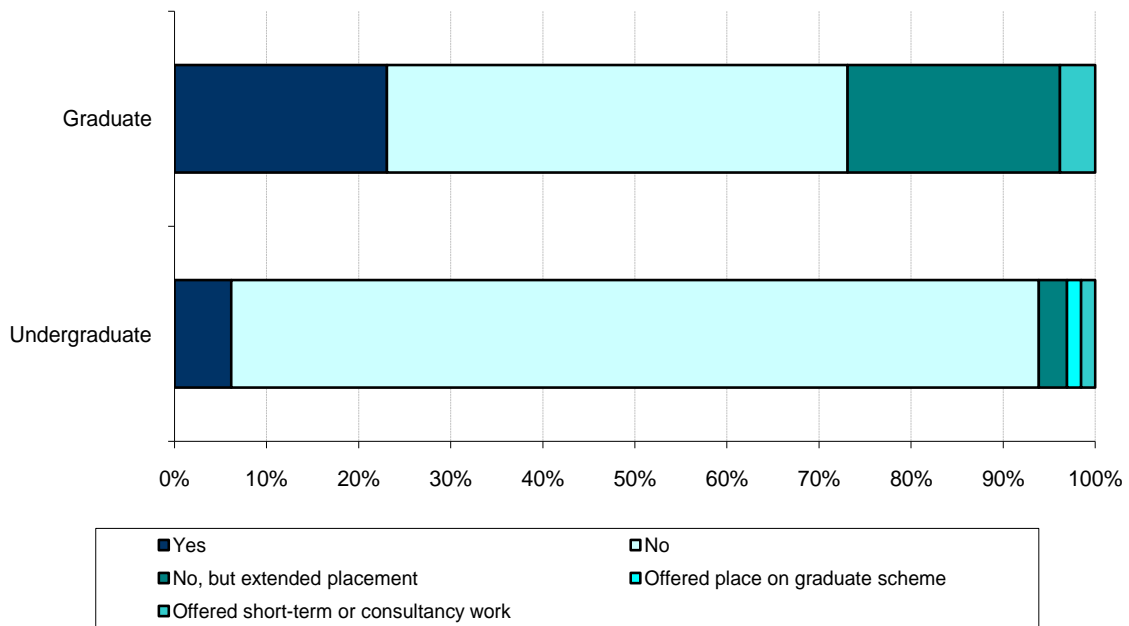
This is likely to be because most of the graduates were immediately available for employment, so employers who had graduate placements were more likely to be considering this and to be using the placement as a way of assessing someone they were considering employing.

"We always saw it as a permanent role. We were able to use the placement to test them out first."

[E16: Large employer in the Food and Beverage sector who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

It was more difficult for many of the employers who had undergraduate placements, particularly those with no established graduate scheme or history of employing graduates, to predict whether they would employ someone in one or two years' time, when they had completed their degree. This is demonstrated by the 21 per cent of employers who said that they might offer the person on placement a job in the future.

Figure 16:   Why the placement did not result in a job
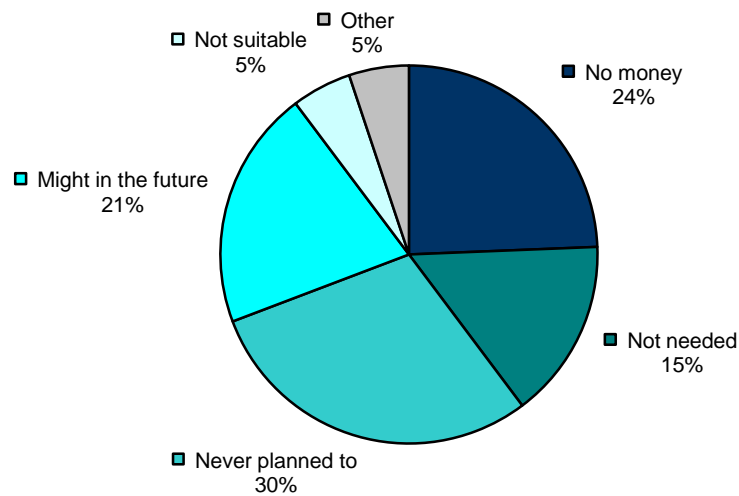
Those employers with an established graduate scheme used the placement process to recruit onto these programmes, but they also, as the quote below illustrates, used it to discover students who might not be suitable for a formal graduate scheme, but who nonetheless had skills that the organisation found valuable.

> *"*[She] *is very specialised in her interests and skills. She might not really be suitable for our graduate scheme, I don't know if she would get through the process, to be honest, because she just isn't that kind of person, I don't even know if she would go for something like that. But because she was here with us on placement, we have been able to see what she can do, what her skills are, and yes, they are specialist, but there is a place for them here."*
>
> [E78: Large employer in the IT sector who took an undergraduate on placement for 6 months to a year]

As Figure 16 showed, around a quarter of the employers said that they could not afford to employ the person on placement. This was most frequently mentioned by employers in Arts and Media and the Voluntary sector. The implication is that these organisations would like to be able to offer the person on placement paid work, but they are unable to. This is a particular problem for SMEs, and clearly makes placements in such companies less attractive and sometimes inaccessible to significant numbers of graduates and undergraduates.

As well as the potential for employment with the placement organisation, the placement experience was thought by both employers and students and graduates who had been on placement believed to improve their chances of employment more generally. Having a reference and something to put on their CV was mentioned by the undergraduate and graduate respondents, while employers also noted that someone with a period of work experience on their CV would be looked favourably upon because it showed that they knew how to operate in a work environment and were likely to have developed the kind of generic employability skills that would enable them to fit in well. This suggests that there are likely to be longer-term benefits to graduates' employment trajectories as a result of the placement.

55

6.1.3. Information to help in making career decisions

Providing help in clarifying career preferences by the sheer process of exposing graduates and undergraduates to work experience and the skills it requires, and allowing them to sample its realities, was rarely stated specifically by the employers as a benefit they thought graduates and students would derive from placements, but, as has been mentioned, it was one of the most common reasons graduates and undergraduates gave for doing a placement. It was common across all sizes of organisation, but was most common in sectors such as Engineering and Manufacturing and PR and Marketing where there were often a wider range of options available to suitably-qualified job-seekers.

Slightly less than half of the graduate and student respondents said that their career ideas had become clearer as a result of the placement, while all except one of the remaining respondents said that their ideas were no more or less clear as a result of the placement. Some respondents said that their ideas were clearer because they had found an area that they really wanted to work in and they now had a better idea of how to find appropriate employment in that area, as in the case of the undergraduate who had reluctantly accepted a teaching placement in a Reception Class instead of one at the 'top junior' level where he had assumed he would want to apply for a job in the following year, and had found to his great surprise that he really enjoyed working with young children. In other cases respondents said that their career ideas were clearer simply because they had been able to rule out a particular field.

> *"Someone could describe it, and I would think it sounded great, but now I have done it, I know it is not for me."*
>
> [P14: Undergraduate who had done a placement lasting one to three months with a large Engineering company]
>
> "*I didn't dislike it, but I do know now that I don't want to go into PR. I'm more interested in advertising."*
>
> [P6: Undergraduate who did a placement in PR and Marketing lasting 2 weeks to one month]

6.1 4. Personal development

Both employers and graduates and undergraduates stated that the experience of working developed confidence and maturity. Being successful in the placement gave graduate and students confidence that they had adequate skills and also that they could cope socially in a work environment. This was particularly evident when the person on placement had been given significant responsibility or had worked with senior people either within the organisation or externally, as can be seen in Case Study 5 at the end of this Chapter. In this case, being trusted with work that was high profile, and which involved meeting senior government officials had given the undergraduate on placement confidence that he felt he had previously been lacking.

Support from HEIs also gave respondents confidence. One respondent commented that because the placement was arranged through an HEI they felt that the employer understood that she might have some deficits in her skills and that she might not have extensive experience of a work environment and that they had made allowances for this.

> *"Personally, I found it really helpful that the placement was arranged through the university, because I think they didn't have the same expectations as if it was a completely proper job, like they didn't mind that I didn't have experience. It's more kind of like part-way between being a student and having a real job, although it was a real job actually."*
>
> [P27: Graduate who did a placement in Health and Social care for 3 to 6 months]

Other benefits that were commonly mentioned by graduates and students were financial reward and job satisfaction.

6.2 Costs to the graduate or student

6.2.1 Disappointment or disillusionment

Stewart and Knowles (2000a) found that some undergraduate students on placements had unrealistically high expectations and so were disappointed with the placement experience. In other cases, employers have been found to simply be using placements as a source of cheap labour which did not develop the skills of the person on placement. Among the graduates and students interviewed, disappointment was most evident where the aims of the student or graduate had not matched the aims of the employer. This mainly related to the work on the placement having been essentially confined to unchallenging work and the person on placement felt that they had not learned very much.

> *"Sometimes you get bad jobs for the whole day.".*
>
> [P36: Undergraduate who had done a placement of between one and three months with a small PR company]

It also occurred when the person on placement had been relatively isolated, as was the case with some respondents who had spent most of their time working away from the office of the company where they had done their placement, and when the student or graduate and the employer had different ideas about what a placement was for, in particular the extent to which it was a learning experience and the extent to which it was a job. As a result, a small number of respondents, all of whom were undergraduates, felt that the placement had been a waste of time.

> *"I do appreciate that I wasn't there very long, and that they couldn't really give me much training, or have me start something and then just disappear without finishing it, but to just be stuck doing admin work wasn't really what I had in mind. I suppose I discovered I don't really like doing office work."*
>
> [P4: Undergraduate who did a placement lasting 1 to 3 months in Engineering or Manufacturing]

This was also the case when students discovered early in the placement that they did not want to work in a particular industry. In one case, the student had not completed the placement for this reason, and in two other cases, both in Agriculture, the students on placement said that they had only completed the placement because it was a requirement of their course, and despite not wanting to work in agriculture they still wanted to get a degree.

6.2.2 Financial costs

A small number of respondents mentioned specific financial costs related to travel and to opportunity costs when, for example, the placement was low paid or unpaid and the respondents felt that they could have found better paid employment elsewhere, even if it was unrelated to the career they eventually hoped to develop. Additionally, some students who were doing placements as part of their course mentioned that they still had to pay course fees, which they regarded as unfair and not justified by the support they received on the placement.

E88: Small IT employer who took one undergraduate on placement

The company is a small organisation, employing 19 staff. It has gone through a period of rapid expansion. Prior to the placement, they had not been involved in any other placement-related activities. The placement was for one year, starting in the summer of 2008, and the placement contract has since been extended for a further six months. The firm hopes to offer the person on placement a permanent contract when he graduates.

Initially, the placement involved developing software to improve in-house running of IT systems, but as the organisation took on more projects, the student was given responsibilities within these projects as well.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- Until he approached them, they had not considered taking someone on placement, but he was able to convince them that there would be benefits for the company.
- They are a successful company and wanted to help an undergraduate get experience in what is a relatively niche area.
- They wanted to establish links with the local HEI.
- Having gone through a period of rapid expansion, there was a need to improve in-house communication and storage systems.

Why was the placement successful?

- The company did a lot of work before the placement started to identify work that could be done by someone on placement. Before the placement started, they interviewed him to identify his skills and as a result were prepared and had a plan of activities.
- Included in the placement was a large degree of mentoring. The company ensured that the person on placement was fully integrated into the organisation, that he met everyone in the organisation and had an understanding of the work they did. The person on placement particularly noted the helpfulness of the staff, who he now considered friends.
- The placement developed and the role grew as the person on placement proved himself and developed his skills. Initially the placement involved basic IT work, but by the end of the placement it involved working on a very high profile project. This gradual increase in both the level of skills the person on placement was using and the responsibility he was given allowed trust to develop on both sides. The employer was sure that the person on placement was able to cope with the new demands placed on him because he had been though this period of proving himself.
- The person on placement felt like an employee. He noted that there were things that he knew that no-one else in the organisation did, which made him feel valuable and needed. Additional things, like being given a Christmas bonus and invited to the staff Christmas party had furthered this feeling of being part of the organisation.
- The placement involved a responsible job, but was conducted in a low-pressure environment with appropriate levels of support.

> "*I went to Westminster, to* [a government department] *to present the work. You don't get higher than that do you? I could never have imaging being able to do that. In fact, when we went, my boss was just like "we're going to*

Westminster." and I'm like "where in Westminster?" thinking it would just be a business, and eventually he told me it was [the government department]*. So I didn't even know beforehand. I don't even know if I would have gone, if he had told me what we were going to do. I don't think I could have done it, but he gave me no choice, and it was amazing."* [Placement 1]

Through being given this responsibility and treated as a valuable member of the team, the person on placement had gained in confidence and maturity. It meant a lot to him to feel that he had been trusted by the company to be involved in something that was very high profile.

"*Everyone has seen a change in me. I don't know if it's confidence, maturity, but everyone has noticed it. My dad says I've become a man. I know it sounds stupid, but it's true. I do feel that. I've grown up."* [Placement 1]

- The activities of the placement built on skills the person on placement had learnt on his course, as well as skills he had taught himself. He also gained experience of working in an office environment, and particularly developed his interpersonal skills. He has been able to identify gaps in his skills and plans to take further courses to improve in these areas.
- While the person on placement had work experience, he had very little work experience in the IT industry. Through the placement he learnt more about the areas of the industry that he was interested in, and found that he enjoyed the selling and business aspects more than he had imagined. He hopes the placement will lead to a job with the company, or if this is not possible in the IT sector locally as he wants to remain in the area. He has now decided that some time in the future, he would like to own his own IT company.

"*I was a bit vague before. To be honest, I hadn't thought about it enough. I suppose I'm just that kind of person. I'm very laid-back, I just go a long with things, hope for the best.* […] *I really think everybody should do a placement to learn about their career."* [Placement 1]

- The person on placement was skilled, independent and resourceful. He was able to work on his own when appropriate, which limited the demands the placement put on other members of staff.

How could the experience be improved?

- Both the employer and the person on placement felt that integration with his course had been inadequate. Although the placements office were helpful, there were problems with the management of the placement by the person on placement's academic department. They did not take a lot of interest in the placement, and the student did not feel he was getting good value for his course fees.

"*I could have been a good advert for placements. To have done something like this, been on the news, I could really have shown how good placements can be. But nobody has asked me. I don't think my placements tutor even knows my name."* [Placement 1]

- Related to this, the organisation had not developed a sustainable relationship with the HEI in question, as they had initially hoped. The company may consider taking someone on placement next summer, because they thought the placement itself had been very successful, but their unhappiness with the involvement of the HEI may limit this.

7.   THE ROLE OF HEIS

In relation to placements, the HEIs in the South West have various roles. Within the HEIs, G4B scheme budgets have mainly been used to pay for staff time to enhance placement creation and organisation and in some cases to employ new staff with a dedicated G4B role. On average, the money paid for someone to work on G4B placements in a fractional post, normally 2.5 days per week, although in two cases resources were used to facilitate travel to placements. G4B placement staff were often appointed late into the project, and there has been a high turnover of staff. In most cases, G4B staff and those working with them on the programme were based in the HEI's Careers Service, although in some cases their remit was to work as an intermediary between the Careers Service and an enterprise unit. In one case, G4B activities were based primarily in an enterprise unit.

Figure 17 shows the roles employers identified the HEI they were associated with as having during the project.

Figure 17:   Role of the HEI in the placement
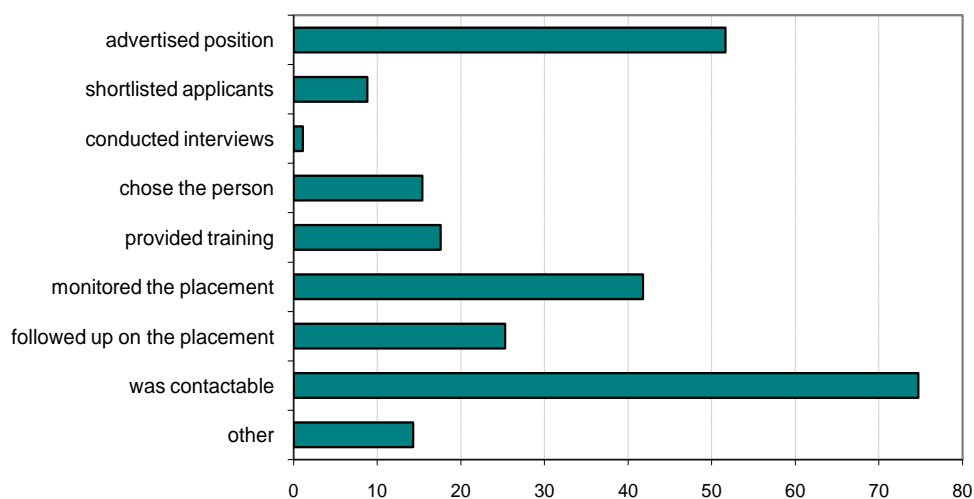
As the Figure suggests, although just over half the employers said the HEI was involved in advertising the placement, and three quarters said that they knew who to contact at the HEI if there were problems, beyond this, the role of the HEIs was variable and often quite minimal.

> *"They were just like an employment agency. They put the advert up there. I didn't have anything else to do with them at all, but I didn't really need to, so…"*

[P27: Graduate who did a placement lasting 1 to 3 months in an organisation in the Health and Social Care sector]

Of the eight HEIs who described their role, four were only involved in signing up employers and advertising the placement. They played no role in selecting the student or graduate to go on placement. In two of these cases, the employer chose the person they wanted, and in the other two cases, academic departments matched the student to the vacancy. Two other HEIs, in addition to recruiting employers and advertising placements, were involved in matching the students or graduates to particular placements. Two HEIs, both of whom dealt exclusively with graduate placements did not select the person to go on placement, but they recruited employers, advertised the placement, and also played a role during the placement, including providing training for the person on placement and requiring reports from them.

Academic departments played a short-term role in equipping students and graduates with the skills they needed to transition between HE and employment, and in the case of undergraduates, back to the HE environment, as well as a more long-term role in giving their students the skills and knowledge they required to enhance their employability post-graduation. Additionally, at some HEIs, academic departments had been involved in the establishment of placements, including advertising placements and selecting the student for a particular placement. They also played a role in monitoring the placement, arranging feedback sessions, and, in some cases, ensuring that learning from the placement could be used in subsequent study.

7.1.   Benefits to HEIs

The HEIs saw themselves as deriving particular benefits from doing placements. As well as direct benefits, such as bringing money to the institution and increasing staff numbers and increasing the employability of graduates, indirect benefits, including encouraging departments to teach employability skills, providing students with more support, and giving staff management and other development opportunities were also seen as benefits of the G4B scheme.

The project was also felt by one HEI to have improved networking between different departments and specialists in parts of the university and institutional 'joined up thinking' about their graduates' employability and community outreach roles.

Additionally, there was evidence of improved networking between HEIs and local employers. There was not a great deal of evidence of the scheme establishing new links between HEIs and employers, with only three employers saying that the placement was the first form of engagement they had experienced with the HEI in question, but there was evidence of a broadening and deepening of relationships between HEIs and employers in the South West region, particularly in the immediate area of the HEI. Two thirds of the employers interviewed said that they had contact with the HEI before the placement, and they hoped that this engagement would continue in the future, encompassing not just placement activity, but input onto courses, presentations and also recruitment of more graduates from the particular institution. This previous engagement took various forms. Excluding general recruitment from an HEI, the most common form of engagement was presentations about their specific company or area of work, which was related to a targeting by some organisations of certain institutions because of a particular course or general ideas about the calibre of its graduates;

"We target 15 universities across the UK, so our recruitment is national, you could say. This intake, nine of the 55 people on our graduate scheme are from Bristol, and five are from Bath."

[E77: Large engineering employer which took an undergraduate on placement for three to six months]

Previous placement activity was also mentioned, as were various contributions to courses (particularly in the Arts), involvement in specific projects (generally by Voluntary sector organisations), and various other *ad hoc* activities, including, in one case, having been involved in construction work on the campus.

Despite costs outlined below, all the G4B HEIs thought that placement schemes were a good idea and wanted to continue them after the current round of funding finished. It was felt that some initial problems had been resolved, and that the scheme had introduced a culture of placement activity in institutions where it had not previously existed. This new-found culture would make the process of conducting placements much easier in the future.

7.2 Costs to HEIs

7.2.1. Costs related to establishing and monitoring placements

G4B representatives commented on the time-costs involved both in identifying and accessing potential placements, and turning initial interest on the part of employers into an actual placements. Nearly half of those interviewed reported that process of finding placements had been more labour-intensive and time-consuming than they had expected.

Only two respondents said that it had been easy to find placements, and in both these cases, the institutions were doing short, undergraduate placement and were able to build upon established placement schemes within their institution. Most felt that although they had an adequate system for identifying and contacting employers who might be willing to take people on placement, the issue was getting the employers to commit to actually taking someone. In some cases, this was attributed simply to timing issues, and employers having the time to set a placement up, but in other cases, there were felt to be particular issues that made employers less interested after their initial contact. Three institutions felt that employers' expectations were too high and inflexible, in particular that they asked for high-level and high-demand skills that were simply not available, for example high level IT skills, and three employers who had tried to arrange graduate placements had experienced employers questioning the calibre of the graduates they proposed, particularly wondering why these graduates did not already have a job. Four institutions, all of whom had attempted to find graduate placements, felt that graduate placements were more difficult to arrange than undergraduate ones, in some cases for this reason, but also because they found graduates to be more inflexible in terms of timing and pay than undergraduates. Three felt that trying to organise paid placements generally was particularly difficulty. Nevertheless, only two respondents reported difficulty in recruiting students or graduates onto the scheme, but even there, recruiting graduates had been more difficult.

7.2.2. Costs related to administering the G4B project

Five of the HEI informants claimed that administrative requirements of the G4B programme had been difficult to fulfil and highly bureaucratic. On the other hand, two HEIs reflected that it was less bureaucratic than other, similar, projects they had been part of.

It was felt in more than half of the institutions that there had been a lack of clarity about the project as a whole. Five institutions said that for a relatively long period they had been unclear about what the criteria were for counting something as a G4B placement. Of these, two said they had incorrectly counted placements and then had to remove them from their totals, and another said that there were some employers that they avoided because they did not want to spend time arranging a placement only to find that it did not count. Three respondents said that not being clear what was expected of them had held up parts of the project.

The changes made to the scheme to allow different types of placement, for example, undergraduate placements, were broadly welcomed, but their *ad hoc* implementation had caused confusion, and some institutions felt that a quicker response to the difficulties identified in, for example, arranging graduate placements, would have reduced the amount of time that they felt was wasted early in the project's duration. There were two comments that some of the criteria set for G4B placements was known by some of the institutions to be unrealistic from the beginning, but that these concerns had not been listened to because other HEIs had too much influence in the planning of the project.

Four respondents thought that the lack of a G4B 'brand' had explicitly hindered the project. It was felt by nearly all the institutions that a coherent branding and marketing campaign would instil more confidence in employers, and one HEI considered that a unified brand would have helped institutions with no track record of placements draw on the success of those HEIs that did have a successful track record. Problems identified in doing this largely related to this track-record being linked to existing branding, for example, the GBP placements run by Exeter and Plymouth universities.

7.2.3. Networking costs

Networking costs were primarily related to disappointment with the networking opportunities available, and the disillusionment this created amongst staff responsible for administering the G4B project.

Contrary to the reflections about improved networking *within* HEIs, five respondents considered that there had been a lack of networking and good practice-sharing *among* the G4B HEIs and only one thought that the G4B project had brought SW HEIs together. The reasons for this were two-fold. Firstly, several commented that meetings between those responsible for the day-to-day management of the G4B placements were too infrequent, particularly given the high turn-over of staff working on G4B. Respondents said that they had not met other people working on G4B in other institutions, that they did not know who to turn to for support or help, and that they did not know how anyone else was running their programme. Secondly, sharing of good practice was hindered by the different HEIs all doing different things, so that good practice was not transferable across the institutions. One HEI

felt that grouping the HEIs regionally did not make a great deal of sense, and it would have been better to group similar types of institution who might be doing similar things. Two institutions thought that they had existing models of good practice in placements, but that a lack of co-ordination meant that they had been unable to share them before everyone started doing their own thing and simply hoping it would be successful.

These difficulties may explain the relatively high turnover of G4B adviser in HEIs. Related to this, staff turnover and the late stage of the scheme at which staff had been appointed in a number of HEIs had also hindered the process of finding placements, as the contacts with employers require continuity of relationships. This draws attention to the limited resources that were available and the challenge to normally part-time employees or employees balancing other responsibilities to maintain progress.

There was also some disappointment about networking on the part of the employers interviewed. Almost a third of the employers interviewed said that despite having taken someone on placement, they would not describe themselves as having a relationship with the HEI at all. The reasons for this was a lack of contact with the HEI while they had someone on placement, and this was particularly common when the person on placement was an undergraduate who had initiated the placement themselves, and a lack of follow-up once the placement was complete. Three employers commented that they had hoped to take more people on placement, but that they had received no response to their request. This was largely attributable to staff changes at particular institutions, and illustrates the problems a lack of continuity can cause in trying to build better relationships with local employers, caused to a considerable extent by the limited funding available to HEIs.

Case Study 6

A graduate who had done a placement with a large organisation in the health sector

The company is a branch of a large national organisation. The placement lasted for 6 weeks at which point it became a permanent job with a gradual realignment of the salary. The graduate had a degree in Biology and a Masters in Bio-Medicine, and the company is now planning to pay for her to do a PhD.

The placement initially involved working on a single project, producing information leaflets, and as it progressed into a full-time job, she was given more of her own projects.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- The employer had always intended that the placement would become a permanent job. Starting it as a placement meant that someone could start on the work quickly and circumvent a lot of the red tape involved in making a permanent appointment.
- Having a placement also allowed them to gauge the level of graduates in the area.
- After moving to the area with her partner, the person on placement had found it difficult to find work in the medical field. She had tried working in other industries, but had not found anything that she really wanted to do and was increasingly sure that she wanted a career in science. The placement offered a way into the science field in the South West.
- Starting as a placement allowed her to learn more about the company and she liked having the possibility to leave if she found that she did not like the job. She commented that it felt balanced because at that stage, both sides could back out if they wanted to.

Why was the placement successful?

- From the beginning, it was treated like it was a job that would continue. The person on placement felt the projects she was working on were important and she had a sense of ownership over them. She was confident that she would still be with the organisation when they ended.

  > "*Some people I met on the training course were just being passed around departments and they weren't really happy with that. That's not what I was looking for either, to me it was a job, I didn't think of it as that kind of placement. It was just a way for them to get me into position quickly. I think if you are a graduate, perhaps that is more likely to be what you are looking for, particularly if you've been working before. I just wanted a job, it wasn't the placement aspect that really interested me, although I did think the lectures* [on the training course] *looked interesting."*

  [Placement 1]

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- She was given a lot of opportunities to ask questions and talk to people to find out more about the organisation. She was introduced to a lot of people, and everyone was expecting her. Through this she was able to get a realistic picture of what working for the organisation would be like.
- She felt that the organisation invested in her very early in the placement, for example, by paying for her to go to conferences, rather than waiting for her to prove herself. They had a lot of confidence in her abilities and this helped her to develop her self-confidence.
- The placement involved training run by the HEI involved. It was useful to meet other people on placement through the training programme.
- She has been offered a lot of opportunities to do further training, including the chance to do a PhD

How could the experience be improved?

- There was a lack of clarity about her status. The placement started out under the G4B scheme, but then became a KTP placement, and finally full-time job. This meant that it took her salary a long time to align with other employees in the field. Although the placement was initially for six weeks and it was agreed at that point that she would become a full-time employee, it took a year for her to be paid the normal rate for full-time employees.
- The person on placement felt that she could have been in the same situation without the placement. She would have received similar levels of support and responsibility had she simply been taken on as a full-time employee immediately.
- The training course offered by the HEI, although interesting, did not seem very relevant. She already had experience of work and some of the things she was taught felt a bit basic as a result. The diversity of people on the course, both in terms of the work they were currently doing and their previous work experience made delivery of the course difficult and some sessions were poorly attended as a result. It was awkward to be taken away from her job, particularly as she was enjoying it. While she would consider doing more placements in the future, she would not want to do another training course unless it was much more specific and there was greater integration with the placement itself.

8. THE FUTURE: BUILDING ON EXISTING ACTIVITY

The employers, graduate and students and HEIs involved in G4B all saw benefits deriving from the scheme and placements in general. Although a few employers were unsure whether they would take part in the scheme again, as the Figure below shows, there was wide consensus that placement activities in general should be continued and developed further, and only three employers said that they would only recommend placements in some circumstances, and no employers said that they would not recommend them at all.

Figure 18: **Whether the organisation has taken anyone on placement since their first G4B placement**
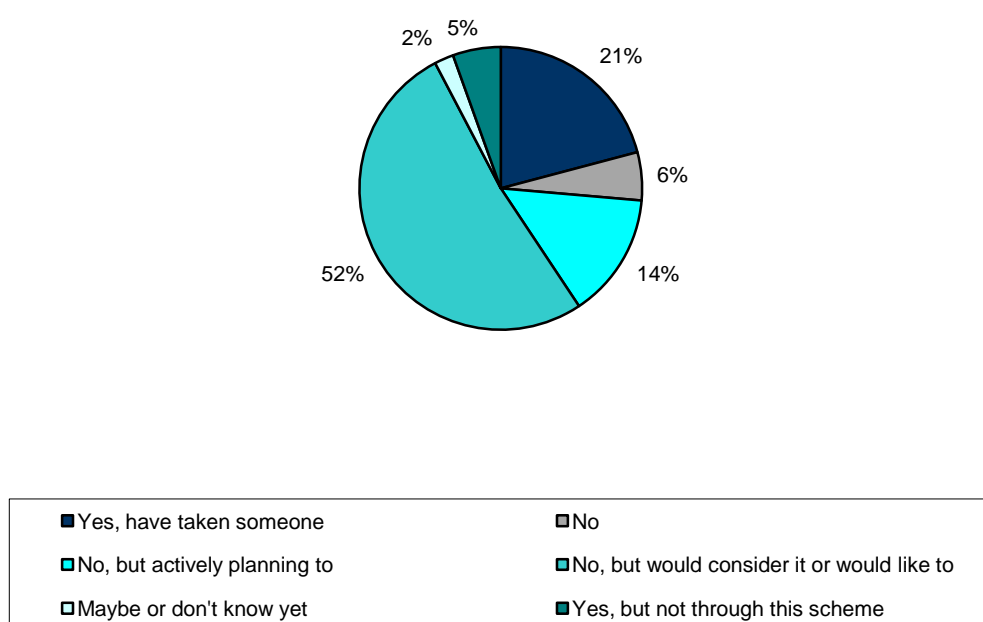
Employers were also asked whether there were any incentives or additional support that would encourage them to take more people on placement in the future. As Figure 19 shows, half the employers said that incentives or changes in the scheme would not encourage them to take more or different work placements, they would need to have suitable work for someone, or for more people, to do.

Being paid was the only actual incentive mentioned by employers. This was most commonly mentioned by small organisations where the time-cost of engaging in placement activities had been most felt. It was mentioned more by employers who had taken undergraduates on placement, but whether the organisation was paying the person on placement had no impact on the likelihood of them saying that payment for the organisation would encourage them to take more people. However, possible adjustments to the way the placement scheme was run were acknowledged to have the potential to participate in the future, as shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Support or incentives that would encourage employers to take more people on placement

there is nothing that would make us take more people if there was something for them to do
we were paid
there was more flexibility in the timing
there was more demand from better quality people
the process was easier or clearer
the process was more structured
there was (relevant) training

0   10   20   30   40   50   60
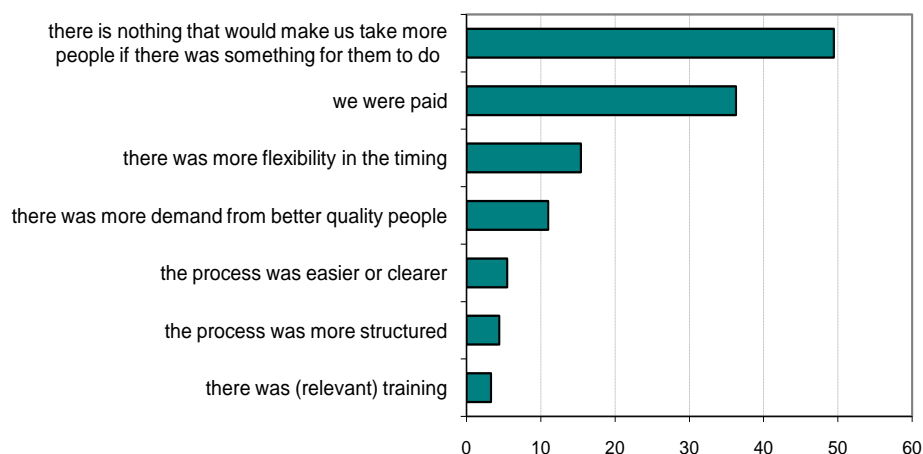
Flexibility in timing was usually mentioned by employers who took undergraduates on placement, and relates to the high demand they experienced for placements during university vacations versus the low demand they experienced during term time. There were also some employers who would prefer to take someone on placement two days per week over an extended period, rather than in a continuous block.

It might have been be expected that the recession would have an impact on the likelihood of considering placements, with unpaid contributions to productivity particularly attractive in the current climate, but as Figure 20 shows, 56 per cent of employers said that it would have no impact on their policies regarding placements. Perhaps informants were unwilling to divulge commercially or politically-sensitive information in response to this direct question, because their response below suggest that this has not been the case. Some stated that they were in industries that were they considered fairly recession-proof, like law and defence, others were in industries or departments where their budgets were known reasonably far in advance and which did not fluctuate a great deal, and other organisations simply felt that they were managing well enough that they would be able to maintain current activity.

In fact, twenty-three percent said that they would take less people on placement. These were mainly employers who were paying the person on placement, and they were slightly more likely to have been taking undergraduates than graduates on placement. The size of organisation did not appear to have much impact, with one of the largest and one of the smallest organisations giving these responses.

"We have frozen recruitment onto the graduate scheme. If we hadn't already set up the placements for this year, we wouldn't have done them, but we will honour those we have committed to. People are being laid off, and it would be unfair to bring in new people with less experience while we are laying off people with experience. You can imagine how that would go down."

[E2: Large employer in the food and Beverage sector who had taken an undergraduate on placement for more than one year]

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"My job has been under threat for 6 months, so I'm not really in a position to take any more people on placement. It's hard for me even to travel now."

[E82: Very small in employer in the legal sector who took undergraduates on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

Conversely, 19 per cent of the employers said that they would take more people on placement. Only one employer who gave this reason said that it was because taking people on placement was cheaper, and four, (in Arts and Media and PR and Marketing), said that there might be more demand from more highly qualified candidates who were unable to find employment or who recognised that work experience was likely to be more important in the current economic climate, so they might be more inclined to give them the opportunity to gain experience. The representatives of the other organisations, and some of those who said they expected more demand, said that they believed they were in an industry that might gain from the recession, for example people who ran art galleries and events who suggested they would benefit from greater numbers of people taking holidays in the UK.

Figure 20:   Impact the recession has had or is likely to have on placement activities
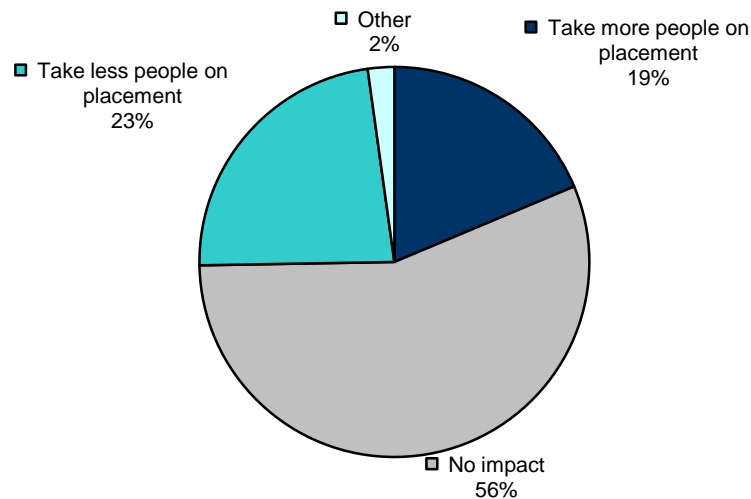
Case Study 7

E75: Small voluntary sector employer who took an undergraduate on placement

The company is a small voluntary sector organisation, employing 14 paid staff and around 70 volunteers. They took an engineering student on placement for six weeks in the summer of 2008. Although the placement was organised by one HEI, the person on placement was a student at another HEI in the region. He decided to pursue a placement through the particular HEI in part because of their reputation in being involved in successful placements, and in part because the HEI was the most local to where he was spending his summer.

The person on placement produced a feasibility study and business plan for extending the services offered by the organisation.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- The organisation had a project that needed to be done.
- They had contact with the HEI in the course of another project, and they suggested that they should try to take someone on placement.

Why was the placement successful?

- Their ethos was to provide a placement that was fulfilling and worthwhile*.*
- The employer felt that they went into it with their eyes open. The HEI gave them clear support, including checklists of what to do with people on placement and other useful advice. The employer felt that this happened because the placement was very organised and planned between himself and the HEI. He stressed that when placements were more ad hoc or one-off the employers should be given the same level of support*.*
- The company planned a thorough induction programme, which included observing other people in the organisations, and allowed a week of the placement just for this. This was felt to be particularly important because the person on placement had little prior work experience*.*
- The organisation is small. This meant that there was a clear management structure and the person on placement was exposed to various jobs and developed an understanding of the organisation quickly*.*
- They set a series of milestones and they assigned a single individual to monitoring the placement and providing mentoring. There was a lot of informal discussion about the placement, but they also held a formal meeting every week*.*

> "*It would be a waste of money if you didn't find the time to look after them."*

> [Employer 75]

- The person on placement was treated as a normal employee. He was given a lot of responsibility and was able to meet a lot of senior people from outside the organisation*.*

- The placement built on the research skills the person on placement had developed on his course.
- A piece of work was completed that would otherwise have been left to a permanent member of staff who would not have had time to do it. They now have better plans for where they want to go with the scheme that the employer was considering implementing. They have been able to use the models produced by the person on placement to plan the costs of other projects, rather than having to start again from scratch.
- The person on placement won an award for his work.
- The placement was paid.
- The HEI provided useful training, including workshops before the placement started to ensure the person on placement was well-prepared to enter the work environment. The employer felt that this had helped to ensure that there were no problems during the placement.
- The person on placement had gained a great deal of career clarity from the experience. He was studying engineering, but although he had decided that he did not want to work in engineering, he was unsure what kind of job he would like or would be qualified for. As a result of the placement, he had decided to go into business planning, and was hopeful that in the future he might be able to integrate this with engineering, perhaps going into a management role in the engineering sector.
- The employer has remained in touch with the person on placement. He has graduated and has been applying for jobs. He has had a lot of success and is always asked about the placement. When he applied for the placement, his CV was poorly presented, and he was lucky to be interviewed. He did really well in the interview and was offered the placement, but he had to fight hard to overcome his CV. His CV is now much improved, and the employer helped with this.
- The company has started to develop a relationship with the HEI

    "*I feel like we are their partner now, so I feel obliged to do talks and anything else they might ask me to do to help them out.*"

    [Employer 75]

How could the experience be improved?

- It cost the organisation money to take part in the placement scheme. They felt the government or someone involved in running the schemes could subsidise the scheme or charge charities less and businesses more for taking part. In his opinion, there is something special about placements in the voluntary sector, as evidenced by their success in various awards.
- The recession means that the organisation would struggle to pay someone on placement at the moment. In particular the employer felt that he would not be able to take someone on placement without having a very clear project in mind, and he thought that other organisations which had done this in the past would be unable to do so now.

9.   RECOMMENDATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICE

Employers were asked what they would recommend to organisations that were similar to their own if they were considering taking someone on placement. Graduates and students who had been on placement were asked what had been the best and worst things about their placement, what they would identify as good practice in relation to their own placement, and recommendations they would make for improvement if the placement was to be repeated in the future. G4B representatives at HEIs were asked about their experience of organising placements. Synthesising the responses to these different questions allows us to develop a list of recommendations and good practice in the establishment and running of placements. In this section, we outline those recommendations for the different groups involved.

Figure 21 shows the recommendations made by employers about the factors associated with a successful placement.

Figure 21:   Factors associated with a successful placement identified by employers
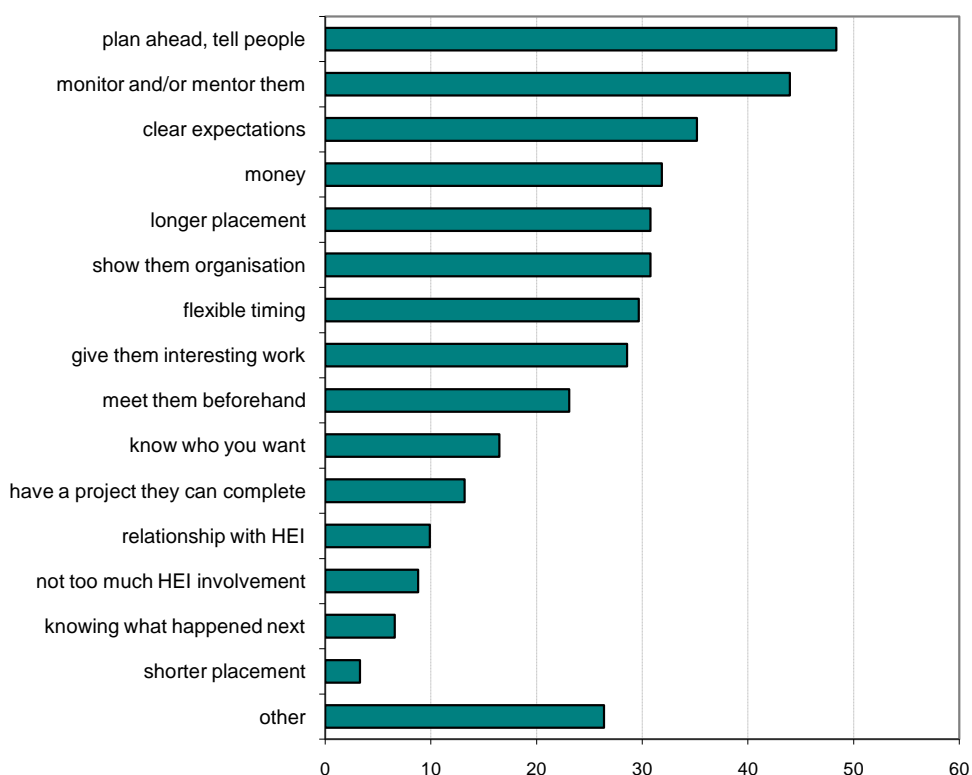
9.1.   General recommendations

The two general recommendations that were mentioned most often related to the length of the placement and whether the placement was paid. These recommendations are things that need to be considered by the employers, the person on placement and the HEIs involved in arranging the placements and negotiated between them so that objectives, roles and responsibilities are understood by all those involved.

9.1.1.   A successful placement does not feel exploitative

Both employers and graduates and students highlighted the issue of payment and how this related to feelings of exploitation, and it was noted that it was not only the graduates or students who could feel exploited, but that the employer could as well.

> *"Money is important. If they are paid, they don't feel they are being used and they try harder."*
>
> [E12: Very small Arts and Media employer who took undergraduates on placement]

Concerns have been raised by groups such as the Low Pay Commission, the National Union of Students and the TUC that unpaid internships are potentially both exploitative and exclude those who had no other means of support (Curtis, 2009; Curtis, Friend and Jones, 2009). These concerns were echoed by some employers and graduates and undergraduates, who felt that is someone was doing something that amounted to a job, they should be paid for it.

However, this raised a number of issues for both employers and people who had been on placement. There were questions asked about whether the placement did in fact amount to a job, what should happen if the perceived costs outweighed the perceived benefits to the employer, as well as whether some types of organisation could afford to pay anyone.

As Figure 22 shows, 81 per cent of the G4B employers said that if they had not been able to take someone on placement, they would not have filled the position otherwise. This was particularly common amongst employers who had taken undergraduates on placement, 91 per cent of whom said they would not have filled the position otherwise, compared to 58 per cent of the employers who had taken a graduate on placement. Nineteen per cent of the employers who had taken the graduate on placement said they would have employed someone, even if it was only in a temporary position, compared to 6 per cent of the employers who had taken an undergraduate on placement. The other category is composed primarily of employers who took on someone on a placement which had then become a full-time job, and this had always been the intention of the placement.

Figure 22:   What would happen if the employer could not have taken someone on placement
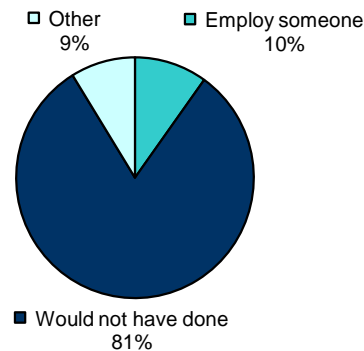
Consequently, several employers did not regard the placement as a job. This was particularly common amongst the very short (1 to 2 week) placements involving undergraduates. They saw the placement as essentially being a favour to the student in question. The placement was a chance for them to learn about the industry, occupation or the company and, in some cases, to acquire knowledge they could use in projects or related academic work. These employers did not feel that they should be paying people on these kinds of placement, even if the organisation derived some benefit from the placement, because the benefits were very heavily weighted in favour of the person on placement.

Additionally, these employers, particularly those that were from SMEs or who were offering placements in the Arts and Media and Voluntary sectors, commented that if they were asked to pay someone on placement they would be unlikely to take anyone, either because it would not be worthwhile for them, or simply because they would not be able to afford it. There was a feeling amongst some of the employers in this group, particularly those in small organisations, that the HEI or local or national government could give some kind of grant that would be used to pay the organisation for taking someone on placement and giving them useful experience. This would recompense them for the time-costs incurred by the organisation, and ensure that not only did the graduate or student not feel exploited, but the employer did not either.

The recommendation is therefore not that placements should uniformly be paid, but that there should be a recognition that both the employer and the person on placement need to feel that they are getting a fair deal from taking part.

Furthermore, neither employers nor students or graduates should be excluded from taking part in placement programmes due to financial issues. This is a particular concern for SMEs, because the loss of staff time to monitoring the placement can have a more distorting effect in small organisations, as well as graduates from non-traditional backgrounds, both groups who were targets of the G4B scheme.

9.1.2. A successful placement is long enough for the graduate or student to find out about the company

The ideal length of placement varied depending on the type of employer and industry, whether the person on placement was an undergraduate or a graduate, and what both parties hoped to gain from the placement. There was agreement amongst the majority of employers that the ideal length of placement was one that, where possible, allowed the person on placement to see an entire cycle of activity in the organisation, whether this involved a four week placement to enable witness the production of one issue of a monthly magazine, or placements of shorter or longer duration to allow them to see the fruition of an advertising campaign or the development of a piece of software.

Nearly all the employers, even those who had taken people on placements of two weeks or less, agreed that excluding exceptional circumstances, two weeks was too short a placement length. The majority of employers who had taken people on these very short placement lengths said that a recommendation arising from their placement experience was that placements should be longer. Only two employers said that a two-week placement was the ideal length of placement for them, and these were employers in Arts and the Media who, as has been mentioned previously, felt that in terms of helping people find employment in a competitive industry, it was better to give many people a small amount of experience rather than a few people a lot of experience.

Two week placements, and even some that were longer, were not thought to provide a representative picture of what the organisation did. For example, one respondent noted that one particular two-week period might solely involved administrative work, but a different two-week period could involve travelling, liaising experts in the arts field or other more interesting and prestigious activities. They stated that the nature of their business meant that it would not be known well in advance what activities might be undertaken in any two week period, but with a longer placement they could be fairly sure that something interesting would happen at some point.

Additionally, it was felt by many employers that if the placement was too short, they would not think it an appropriate use of time to do a thorough induction or to spend too long training or teaching them new skills. The employers felt that they would not get as much benefit, measured in the amount of work completed, and the person on placement would not gain as much actual experience of working.

> *"I think a three to six month placement is ideal. Any shorter than that and you are going to start skipping things. Are you going to bother with an induction, take the time with that, is it going to be a worthwhile use of the little time you have got them for. But I realise with that, they lose out in a sense, they aren't learning as much, it's a different animal.*

> [E76: Large employer in the voluntary sector who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

> *"Some of the work I had to do was fairly basic and boring. I was only there for four weeks, so there was no point in training me in technical things, so I was a bit limited in what I could do."*

> [P4: Undergraduate who did a placement in Engineering and Manufacturing lasting 1 to 3 months]

Although there was consensus that two weeks was generally too short, what constituted the ideal length of placement varied depending on the needs of both the employer and the graduate or student on placement. Although the New Engineering Foundation (2007) found that many employers were not interested in placements that were less than 6 months in duration, and authors such as Bowes and Harvey (1999) and Silver (2003) favour year long placements, as the following quotes illustrate, a significant proportion of G4B employers favoured shorter placements

> *"Four weeks was a good length for us, because it came at just an opportune moment because we happened to have lots of people on holiday. If we were thinking about a year's placement, there would be different considerations, you have to think "is there really something for them to do?"* [...] *I would say a better model would be to start with that kind of shorter placement and then you can extend it if they are good and there is something for them to do, but you don't have that commitment of a job."*

> [E83: Medium sized employer in Building and Construction who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks to one month]

> *"Six weeks is quite short, so it was a very steep learning curve. She was very bright, not everyone could have done what she did in six weeks. Another two weeks would have been good, it would have added a lot more."*

> [E17: Small employer in Engineering and Manufacturing who took an undergraduate on placement for 1 to 3 months]

Longer placements had to fit around the academic year calendar for undergraduates, and if a summer placement was not long enough, the only other option was a year-long placement and employers, particularly those in very small organisations, were unsure firstly whether they would have something for someone on placement to do for such a long period, and secondly whether they would be able to afford to pay them for this time.

> *"We would like longer placements, but people don't want to work for no money for a longer time. You can get a lot more involved with a longer placement, and you don't feel so much that you are taking advantage of them. It would be good if the universities could give them some money."*

> [E23: Very small employer in Arts and Media who took an undergraduate on placement for up to 2 weeks]

For graduates, this issue of payment was generally seen as a barrier to longer placements by employers, and some were not sure whether someone who was a graduate would want to spend so long on a placement when they could have a job. It was suggested by one employer that a longer placement would increase the pressure on them to turn the placement into a permanent job, and in doing that they would lose the flexibility that came from taking someone on placement.

One solution that was suggested by some employers as being particularly appropriate to their organisation was having placements that were either flexible in their timing or which spread the time-commitment out over a longer period, for example over one or two days per week, or discrete blocks of time at particularly interesting or relevant parts of a project. Other employers did not feel that this would be appropriate for their organisation.

9.2. Recommendations for employers

9.2.1. A successful placement is planned

As Figure 21 showed, planning was the most frequently mentioned recommendation made by employers, and it was noted by three employers that a failure to plan more effectively prior to the placement had resulted in them having unrealistic expectations about how the placement would operate, the time involved, and the opportunities they would be able to offer someone on placement.

> *"With hindsight, we were too ambitious, and took too many students, and it all took too much time, too much paperwork."*
>
> [E29: Very small employer in Arts and Media who took undergraduates on placement for 2 weeks or less]
>
> *"I really think the university should have tied me down a lot more on how the placement was going to work. They might have matched a better person to the placement then. They should have asked a lot more questions about what it was going to involve: what were they going to do, what would happen if...? That would have helped everyone to focus, so we didn't get into the situation where we all seemed to suddenly realise that they were going to have to travel about the place and who was going to pay for it?"*
>
> [E82: Very small employer in the Legal sector who took undergraduates on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

Although there should be some flexibility, as new projects arise or graduates or students show that they are capable of doing different things, plans should be in place before the placement has started. Both employers and students and graduates on placement suggested that there should be a relatively high degree of organisation to the placement. It should be structured and there should be clear, scheduled goals or milestones for what was expected to be achieved during the placement.

People who would be responsible for dealing with the person on placement should be informed beforehand that the person was expected and, if possible, they should be told when they would be expected to work with them or mentor them.

The issue of mentoring was also seen as a key to a successful placement. Employers thought that in the early stages of the placement, a more hands-on mentoring style was required. This involved an induction and an explanation of what the organisation did and the role the individual on placement would play within it, as well as ensuring that the person on placement knew what they were expected to do and how they were expected to do it. It included making sure that they had the appropriate skills, equipment and knowledge to do their job.

Assigning one person to be the primary focus of contact was thought to be an appropriate way of making sure that the person on placement always had someone that they knew they could approach with questions or difficulties, but it was also suggested that other employees should be told that there would be someone on placement in the organisation, and they

should be encouraged to be as approachable and willing to answer questions as the demands of their job allowed.

Once the initial period was over, employers generally favoured a more hands-off approach, in which there was continuous monitoring of the person on placement to ensure that there were no particular problems, but the person on placement was able to manage their own work, as they would if they were a regular employee of the company.

> *"Recent graduates need looking after at first. You need to do an induction, spend a lot of time looking after them for a couple of weeks, then after that you can leave them alone. They are graduates, they are bright and they learn fast, but you've got to give them the foundation."*
>
> [E76: Large employer in the Voluntary Sector who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

9.2.2. A successful placement involves matching not just skills, but also objectives

Related to the issue of planning, was having a clear idea about what you hoped to gain from the placement, and ensuring that this matched what the person on placement wanted. Particularly when placements were regarded as in some ways unsuccessful, problems had arisen not because there was a mismatch between the skills the employer wanted and those possessed by the person on placement, but because the two parties had different objectives. The primary area of mismatching focussed on the extent to which the placement should focus on learning and the extent to which it should be seen simply as a job.

It was suggested by employers that this should be negotiated before the start of the placement, so that everyone involved was clear and there was less scope for disappointment when the placement did not live up to the expectations of either side. People should be asked not just what their skills were, but also what their interests were and what they hoped to gain from the placement. Graduate and students respondents saw this as an issue of honesty. They wanted to be told before they committed to the placement what it would entail, so they could make an informed decision about whether the placement was going to be suitable and meet their objectives.

> *"If you just want someone to do data-entry, filing, whatever it is, then say "we want someone to do data-entry, filing." because if they are offering money, someone would do it, I would, probably. But if you are saying it's a placement, you expect something else than just being stuck in a box all day, doing data-entry, so you are going to obviously be disappointed if that's what you get."*
>
> [P33: Undergraduate who did a placement in Banking, Finance and Insurance lasting 1 to 3 months]

> *"I regard it as miss-selling actually. It's dishonest. If it happened to me, I'd just walk out. They don't deserve anything from you if they do that."*
>
> [P6: Undergraduate who did a placement in PR and Marketing lasting 2 weeks to one month]

Students and graduates also noted that, if possible, they appreciated knowing whether there was a chance that the placement might result in permanent employment. Employers who

were specifically using the placement to filter into a graduate scheme or with the idea that it might continue as a job also thought this was a good idea. They saw this as being fair, and encouraging people to perform well. Employers also thought that if there was no chance that the placement would result in employment, it was better to be honest about this from the beginning, rather than disappointing someone at the end of the placement and leaving them to wonder if the employer had simply not been impressed by them.

An interview before the placement was seen as a good way of discovering, and potentially reconciling these issues. Additionally, undergraduates and graduates who did not have much experience of looking for work thought that an interview beforehand would be helpful in giving them practice for when they looked for work in the future.

9.2.3. A successful placement makes an identifiable contribution to the company

There was some tension between graduate and student respondents' wish on the one hand to be treated like an employee of the company and on the other to have a 'placement experience' where they had opportunities to learn about the company and improve areas of weakness.

> "I wouldn't recommend this placement as the only placement someone did, because I don't feel I am learning a lot of skills, and I am working by myself, I don't go to an office or anything like that, so I'm not really getting the things employers look for and I'm not experiencing work in that way."

> [P47: Graduate who did a placement in IT lasting 3 to 6 months]

Employers felt that it was a lot to expect someone with perhaps little previous employment experience to come in and be a fully-functioning member of the team, but they also wanted to see tangible benefits from the time they invested in the placement, and some had struggled to reconcile these two aims.

Although some respondents clearly favoured one side or the other, in general there was a view that some kind of staged process where the person on placement was slowly introduced to the organisation while being given opportunities to demonstrate their skills and interests was the ideal situation. This allowed them to fulfil personal development aims while still eventually making a meaningful contribution to the company.

Both graduates and undergraduates wanted to be appropriately challenged by the work they were given, and to feel like they had opportunities to prove themselves. In many of the most successful placements, the person on placement noted that there were times when the placement had felt daunting and they had been unsure if they would be able to do the work they were given but they had successfully overcome this and as a result they had become much more confident about their skills and abilities.

> "It can be scary, but I think that is the best way to go. Make people step up to the plate, test them. That's the only way you are going to find out what they can do."

> [P50: Undergraduate who did a placement with a small IT company lasting more than 1 year]

> "*I could call it a baptism of fire* [laughs]. *But now I look back on it, it's pretty unbelievable the amount of faith they had in me, the amount of trust they put in me. It's a big investment really, I think, to have that kind of faith in someone, but it was a great opportunity for me, and I think I did OK, got it done, and they seemed happy.*"
>
> [P2: Graduate who did a placement lasting 1 to 3 months with an organisation in the Food and Beverage sector]

Doing the same work as existing employees of the organisation was seen as important, particularly by graduates and students, in helping the person on placement not only learn what working for the organisation would be like, but also in making them feel like they were a valued part of the company. They wanted to feel that they were doing something useful that contributed to the overall functioning of the organisation.

As Figure 10 showed, a third of the employers said that the person on placement had undertaken a specific project while they were on placement. Employers who had graduates or students doing this kind of work said that this was a good way of meeting these two aims. It gave the graduate or student scope to work at their own pace, and to use skills such as research that they had learn in higher education while at the same time giving them the impetus to learn new skills. The project itself would be of use if the findings or outcomes could be used or put into practice after the placement was completed. The project was also seen as something that the person on placement had ownership of, and completion of the project was a tangible outcome that they could see from their experience, so it gave them a sense of achievement.

> "*People stay in education longer these days, and so they are getting quite old before they get any experience of business and industry. Things like the graduate partnerships are a good bridge into industry, especially in our case because they were working on a project, which is a format they are used to, but it is in an industrial setting, so there is still that element of learning about the real world.*"
>
> [E18: Large Engineering and Manufacturing employer who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

Other employers disagreed that this was an appropriate activity for someone on placement because their own employees rarely worked in this way, in particular, they did not tend to work alone on a single project, so this kind of activity was not a true indication of what working for the company would be like.

Learning what working for the company would be like was a key issue for graduates and students. As has already been mentioned, some hoped to be employed by the company in the future, and the overwhelming majority had decided to do a placement because they wanted to find out more about an industry in which they were considering establishing a career. Consequently, they favoured doing projects only if this was a reflection of the work they would undertake as an employee of the company. While employers were very concerned that graduates and students should not be left doing repetitive, low-level or un-stimulating work, amongst the graduates and students, worry that they were being given work that was almost too enjoyable was mentioned by several respondents (although many also noted that these were the kinds of tasks they had been given and that this had not been useful). They were concerned that they were "just being given the fun stuf*f.*", and they

wanted to do a variety of tasks, including those that were 'less fun', partly because they saw that this as being indicative of how the job really was, and partly because they felt that doing the jobs that a permanent employee would do enabled them to make a more realistic and useful contribution.

This wish to be treated like an employee of the company extended to the facilities available to the person on placement. Things like having their own workspace made them feel like they were equal to other employees and that the company put some value on their work.

> "*Having my own desk, laptop, that made a big difference. It's nice to have your own base, a desk that is yours. It makes you want to work for them more. You feel like an employee, not a visitor.*"
>
> [P8: Undergraduate who did a placement in PR and Marketing lasting 1 to 3 months]

9.2.4   A successful placement includes feedback and follow-up

Both graduates and students commented that it was important to them to know what the employers thought about their skills and performance while on placement. In the most successful placements, there was a structured programme in place that allowed both the employer and the person on placement to review how things were going at key mile-stones. Additionally, at the end of the placement, the graduate or student was given feedback on their overall performance and were able to ask questions about how they should proceed to achieve their general career goals and any aspirations relating to employment within the company.

In the longer term, respondents wanted to be able to ask for a reference from the employer, and in most cases this happened. Some respondents, particularly in industries where networking is important, also wanted to keep a connection with the people they had worked with, and the continuation of some informal mentoring was welcomed by respondents, although there was a recognition that this could be too demanding of the employer's time.

9.2.5.   A successful placement builds relationships

As the previous recommendation suggested, many graduate and student respondents hoped to build an enduring relationship with the organisation where they had been on placement. Despite this, it was often the case that employers had lost touch with the person who came to them on placement because there had been little effort on either side to maintain contact. Both students and graduates worried that attempts on their part to keep in touch would be unwelcome – that they would be seen as burdensome or inappropriate because the employer was only interested in them while they were on placement. However, many of the employers commented that they would be really interested to know what had happened once the placement finished – whether it had been helpful, whether the person remained in the industry, etc, but that they had no contact details and the person on placement had made no attempts to get in touch. This may be an area where the HEI involved in the placement could play an intermediary role.

"I would like to know what happened next. Some of the people we have kept in touch with for years, but something more formal would be nice. We didn't really get much feedback from him at all. I would have liked to have known more about how it went from his point of view."

[E9: Very small employer in the Arts and Media who took an undergraduate on placement for between one and three months]

It was also an aim of the G4B project that through the provision of placements, networking should be increased between HEIs and local employers. In both these cases, the onus, to some extent is on the graduate or student or the HEI, but it is important for employers to realise that the development of a sustained relationship is beneficial for them as well. It appears that many employers did realise this, and it is something that was mentioned by many of the smaller employers in particular as something they hoped to gain from the placement. To some extent, this was hindered by the high turn-over of staff at the HEIs, which is discussed in more detail below.

Other types of networking mentioned by graduates and students included networking with other people on placement, either within the organisation if there were several placements, or with other people doing placements in other organisations. This kind of networking was seen as providing support for the students or graduates who were having problems, and enabling those who had good experiences to share ideas with others about how to get the most from the placement experience. One of the main benefits of the training courses run by some HEIs was the role they played in bringing people on placement together.

Networking with existing employees of the organisation and developing friendships was also mentioned by graduate and student respondents. When they were asked what the best things about the placement were, eight of the student and graduate respondents said that making

9.3. Recommendations for graduates and undergraduates

9.3.1.   A successful placement starts before you enter the workplace

The importance of planning for the placement before it had begun was mentioned above in relation to good practice for employers, and it is equally relevant for graduates and students. The person on placement needs to understand what the costs and benefits of doing the placement are. This will enable them to choose the correct organisation for the placements, and help them to consider how they can work with the employer to ensure that they get the most from the experience.

"What makes a placement successful for one person may not make it successful for another. It depends what you want from a placement. So you need to be aware going into it what you want from it."

[P47: Graduate who did a placement in IT lasting 3 to 6 months]

It became clear in the interviews with both employers and graduates and students that there were several instances where a lack of clarity about what the placement would involve, what the company did, and what the person on placement had been expected to do had led to

dissatisfaction. In some cases, details that later proved to be important had simply been overlooked. Examples of this are the two cases in which no-one had thought who would pay the travel expenses of the person on placement. This resulted in one of the people on placement not turning up for meetings and other activities because they could not afford it, while in another case the employer had to step in and pay the travel costs to avoid a similar situation.

Not having a clear understanding of what the company did, and therefore the role they might play within it, was mentioned by six of the student and graduate respondents as something that they would change if they were to do the placement again, and three said that they would not have embarked on the placement if they had done more research beforehand. In two of these cases, both in Engineering, the person on placement realised that they did not have the technical skills to get involved in many of the activities of the organisation and consequently they spent much of their placement doing administrative work, which had not been their goal. In another case, the person on placement had discovered that the company was working in a niche area in her chosen field and the skills she learnt were not as transferable as she had hoped.

Almost half the employers said that it was helpful for them to know before the placement started what the graduate or student wanted to get from it. This enabled them to plan effectively and ensure, as far as possible, that the person on placement had opportunities in the areas they were interested in. They also felt that if the person on placement had a clear idea of what they wanted from the placement, they would be more likely to use their initiative during the placement to find out more about activities that interested them. Employers stressed that getting to do work that was interesting and rewarding involved a two-way dialogue between the employer and the person on placement because,

> "*If they don't tell me what they want to do, how am I supposed to know? I know what I want, and I can just have them do that, but if they want something else, they have to tell me, not just sit back hating everything. I can't read their minds.*"

> [E53: Medium sized employer in the Agricultural sector who took an undergraduate on placement for between 6 months and a year]

9.3.2.   A successful placement involves taking responsibility

One of the issues raised by employers who were not completely satisfied with the placement was their feeling that the person on placement was not making as much of an effort as they employer to make the placement successful. This was particularly mentioned in relation to undergraduates. These employers stressed that they expected the placement to be taken as seriously as a job, and that the same conventions applied: they expected people to work hard, even if they hated the work and had decided it was not something they wanted to pursue as a career; they expected people to realise that they had made a commitment and that other people in the organisation were relying on them and if they were late or did not turn up, this caused problems to people who were trying to help them by giving them the opportunity to do a placement.

9.4. Recommendations for HEIs

The contact employers wanted with HEIs during the placement varied considerably with, at one extreme, employers who wanted to be left completely alone to develop their own relationship with the person on placement, and at the other employers who wanted some kind of formalised process of monitoring and feedback. This needs to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis to ensure that employers receive the kind of support they feel that they need. The one area of consent was that employers who had taken someone on placement through an HEI (rather than those arranged solely between the graduate or student and the employer) wanted to know that there was someone that they could contact if there were problems. Overall, 75 per cent of employers said that the HEI was contactable, and of the 25 per cent who said that they did not know who to contact, the majority were employers who had arranged the placement directly with the graduate or undergraduates. Lower satisfaction was reported about the contact employers had with the HEI outside the placement experience. Although forming a relationship with an HEI was relatively infrequently mentioned as a motivation for the placement itself, the majority of employers indicated that they would welcome the development of closer links to their local HEI. They saw this as a mutually beneficial activity that would enable them to recruit appropriately qualified graduates from the institution.

9.4.1. A successful placement has clarity about the costs (as well as the benefits) of taking part

All the respondents had a good idea of the benefits they could expect to derive from taking someone on placement. However, as was mentioned above, there were instances where students and graduates and employers felt that they had not adequately understood what the placement would involve, and the costs they would incur in the course of the placement. For the students and graduates, the unanticipated costs were primarily monetary, in particular costs incurred while doing their job. The payment of travel expenses was mentioned, as were cost incurred entertaining clients. One student mentioned loss of earnings when they were asked to work at the weekend and could not do their usual weekend job, and two students said they had not expected to have to dress formally and they had incurred costs doing so. All of these costs were relatively small, but for students and graduates who were disadvantaged, they presented significant financial problems.

The recommendation has already been made that people should not be excluded from taking part in placement activities because of financial concerns, but if the current financial situation of the employer or the HEI involved means that the person on placement may accrue costs, this should be clear so that they can choose whether it is financially viable for them to take part. Additionally, if financial support is available for people on placement, they should be informed, as this may encourage people who might otherwise be deterred by the costs.

> "I think now [the HEI] will pay travel expenses. But I didn't know that at the time. They just sent a form, quite recently, and said "we think you have done a placement, fill in this form to get your travel expenses." [I did the placement] last summer, so it was quite unexpected. It was a long time ago."
>
> [P15: Undergraduate who had done a placement in Engineering and Manufacturing lasting 1 to 3 months]

For the employers, the unanticipated costs were related to both time and money. The issue of work-related travel expenses was mentioned again,

> *"Money was a major problem. We ended up having to give one of them his travel expenses ourselves, because we were asking him to travel quite a lot in the region to attend various meetings. I think it is very bad of the university to not give them that kind of funding. It didn't seem very fair. […] The university should have told them they were going to have to travel long distances and would have to pay for it, they shouldn't have found out part way through."*

> [E82: Very small in employer in the legal sector who took undergraduates on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

And a significant number of employers had not been aware how much time setting up and managing the placement would involve, and had not adequately budgeted their staff time for this.

This is an area where HEIs could work with employers to ensure that costs, not simply the benefits, are formalised and made clear to all concerned. Both employers and graduates and student should be able to make an informed decision about whether they want to take part in the placement experience, based on accurate information.

9.4.2. *A successful placement minimises bureaucracy but involves good record-keeping*

This was an area that was a key concern to the HEI respondents. Fears that placing an administrative burden on employers would deter them from taking someone on placement were mentioned by nearly all the HEIs. The employers concurred with this view, noting that they understood that there needed to be some paperwork as part of the process, but that this should be kept to the minimum.

> *"The most helpful thing would be if the process was made very easy. If we were told dates, times, objectives, and there was a clear framework available so that we were aware what the student was expecting to get out of the placement, the kind of things they are hoping to do. We are a varied organisation, and there are a lot of things they could do, so it is helpful to know what they want to get from us. Ideally, it would be good if there was no other work on my part except putting together a timetable of activities."*

> [E14: Small employer in the voluntary sector who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks or less]

In particular, employers were critical of administrative processes that involved them having to invent job titles and descriptions before the HEI would advertise the placement. In one case, an employer said that they had put a lot of work into writing something that gave an exact description of what they were looking for, but this was disregarded because it did not fit into the administrative system the HEI was using, and as a result they had to spend a lot of time sorting through CVs from inappropriately qualified candidates.

> *"We put a lot of time into it, wrote a lot about what we were looking for, the processes and packages that we need people to be able to use, but when it passed through the hands of the university, they cut all that out. It was technical, and I think they didn't really understand it, but if that is the case, they should have left it as it was. We understood it and someone who knew about the area would understand it and know if they were*

suitable. As it is, we got a whole load of unsuitable candidates who thought they could do the job, but they couldn't."

[E89: Medium sized Engineering and Manufacturing employer who took an undergraduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

Another employer said that not enough work was done to get him to properly describe the placement, and as a result he had taken someone who was not an appropriate match. Consequently, we would recommend that while administration is kept to a minimum, there should be an appropriate system for ensuring that matches are made between employers and graduates and students are suitable in terms of the skills and interests of both groups. This will increase satisfaction with the placements and encourage employers to maintain their relationship with the HEI and take further people on placement from that institution.

9.4.3. A successful placement builds a lasting relationship with local employers

One of the aims of the G4B programme was to use placement activities to build enduring relationships between HEIs and local employers. As has been mentioned, while there was little evidence of placement activities building new relationships between HEIs and employers in the South West, there was evidence that through these activities, existing relationships had been broadened and deepened. Employers who had not previously been involved in placements but had other relationships with the HEI made more contacts within the institution and found new ways to work with them. Among the employers, there was also evidence that a successful placement experience made them want to become more involved in other aspects of the HEI, for example having input onto course or increasing graduate recruitment from the institution.

Employers wanted to see more pro-activity from HEIs in this area. There was a feeling that the process was currently very informal, relying a great deal on chance encounters, and there was a real opportunity to build on the relationships developed as a result of placements to develop greater connection between HEIs and local employers.

"I would like to see greater outreach from universities. This placement came about because of a chance meeting with a tutor at the university. As we are virtually next door to the university, we ought to be sharing students a lot more."

[E81: Large employer in the education sector who took undergraduates on placements of 2 weeks to a month]

"[There should be] better connections with local courses. It is very ad hoc at the moment. It is down to the individual to find out about us, approach us, or for us to find out about courses that we think are teaching the kinds of skills we are looking for and offer our time. We could work with universities much more effectively if there was some kind of system in place, a bit like Aim Higher, that connected arts organisations with universities."

[E19: Small employer in Arts and Media who took a graduate on placement for 1 to 3 months]

Developing the relationship formed through placement activities required follow-up from the HEI, but in some cases, this had been limited by the high turnover of G4B staff. Employers had developed a relationship with a particular individual who they trusted, and were wary of

starting again with someone new. Several employers were surprised that they had not been contacted again after the initial placement was finished, either to take someone else on placement or to become involved in other activities, and three employers said that they had tried to arrange another placement but had heard nothing.

Some employers had been surprised how little the placement activities seemed to build on existing networks and relationships. One employer commented that the process seemed rather chaotic and hit and miss, while another said he had initially been resistant to taking someone on placement from a particular HEI because he had never seen the scheme advertised in any of the reputable sources he knew advertised such things, which to him made the scheme lack credibility.

> *"It is very ad hoc. If there was more planning, if we knew that we were going to be asked to take someone, and when it would be, roughly, I think we would be more inclined to do it again. It does take time managing them and so on, so we want to be sure that we can see a return on the time we put in, and the only way to do that is if we are ready, we know what's going on, who we are going to allocate to look after them, do their induction, what they are going to do day-to-day, their achievables. Universities need to be more proactive. Build on the links they already have through other projects and activities, and ask those people to take people on placement. Make it a regular commitment."*
>
> [E83: Small Building and Architecture employer who took an undergraduate on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

9.4.4 A successful placement includes appropriate training, including preparation before the placement period and on the job training as part of the experience

Employers were asked what skills they thought HEIs could teach that would make the placement experience more successful. Additionally, those employers and graduates whose placement had involved training were asked to assess its impact.

Figure 23: Skills HEIs could teach to make placements more effective
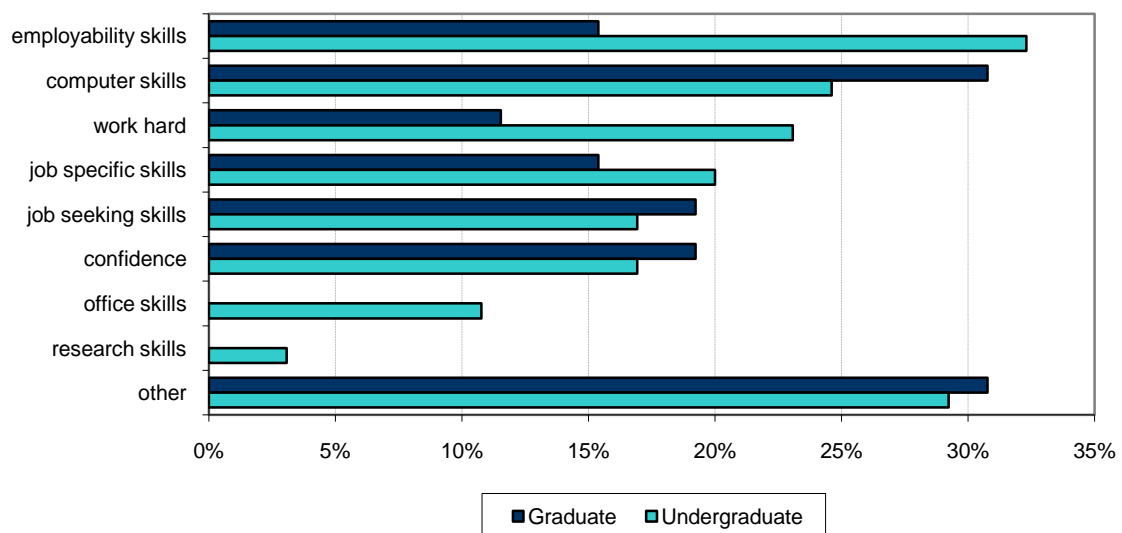
As the Figure shows, there were no skills that the majority of employers thought should be taught by HEIs. Despite concerns raised by authors such as Gillinson and O'Leary (2006), who found that there was a mismatch between how graduates perceived their skills and how employers perceived them, with employers complaining that the HE sector does not produce graduates with vocational or generic skills that meet their needs, overall, the majority of employers surveyed thought that the people who came to them on placement had been adequately skilled. It may be the case that employers had lower expectations of people who came on placement, they did not expect them to be 'ready to work', and this is borne out by the number of employers who qualified their statement that there were no skills HEIs could teach by saying that they would expect people to develop skills while on their placement, and that these skills could only be developed while on placement. This is similar to a finding by HEFCE (2003). Looking at the role universities play in enhancing employability, they found that many of the skills required by employers could be acquired best, and in some cases only, after commencing employment.

Evans and Whalley (2003) found that increasingly graduates are expected not only to have higher level technical skills, but employers are increasingly looking for more generic 'employability' skills that allow employees to adapt quickly to changing ways of working. Evans and Whalley (2004) found that the provision of employment-related skills by HEIs in the South West was a particular issue for employers, who noted a lack of employability skills such as team work, self-management and problem-solving. This is in contrast to the national picture. Hogarth *et al* (2007) found that the majority of employers conceded that graduates were generally adequately prepared or better, the areas where they had deficiencies were in commercial and practical skills, a situation that resulted from overly-theoretical degrees that were out of touch with developments in industry.

This is reflected in the skills employers thought undergraduates could develop to make their placement more successful, with employability skills being the most frequently mentioned by employers who had taken undergraduates on placement. Often these were fairly low-level employability skills, such as knowing how to behave in particular situations and how to work with other people.

> *"Some training would be good. I think it would give them some confidence that they seemed to be lacking, and also ensure that those few little irritants didn't happen. Just things like what to wear if you are going to a meeting, how to talk to people, to be prepared so you have things like the money to pay for parking. There were instances, where they were not entirely appropriate."*
>
> [E82: Very small in employer in the legal sector who took undergraduates on placement for 2 weeks to 1 month]

Employers also thought that it was important that HEIs in particular impressed upon their students that the placement should be treated like a job in the sense that they were expected to work hard and taken it seriously. Office skills were also much more likely to be mentioned in relation to undergraduates, reflecting the activities undertaken by students on placement.

Computer skills were more likely to be mentioned by employers who had taken graduates on placement, which is again related to the kind of tasks they were expected to perform.

Employers who had taken graduates on placement were also more likely to mention that HEIs could teach job seeking skills and give people confidence. Four of the employers who had taken graduates on placement said that they could understand why they had experienced problems finding employment. It was not that they lacked skills, but that they presented themselves poorly, both on paper and in interviews. One employer, who had a very successful placement noted,

> "*It's a good job that he was the only candidate, because based on his CV, I wouldn't have taken him otherwise. It was terrible. But that is something that we sat down and went through with him and it's much better now. I think that is one of the reason he got the job he has now, as well as the placement and all that with us.*"
>
> [E26: Large employer in the voluntary sector who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

There was little evidence of formal training while on placement. Excluding those placements where the training was run by an HEI or other outside organisation, only one placement included a specific period of training. The training that did take place was informal and usually related to learning how to use particular computer packages.

One HEI provided training alongside the placement for all graduates who were part of the scheme, and students and graduates from two other HEIs said that they had done some training at their HEI, or on an HEI-sponsored course, as part of the placement. The training provided by two HEIs focussed on employability skills, while in the other case, the training involved learning very specific practical skills. There were also some ad hoc arrangements at the level of individual university department, particularly in cases where undergraduates were going on year-long placements as part of their course.

Almost all the employers who had someone on placement who had also done a training course thought that having some form of training during the placement was a good idea, but there was also agreement that the training would be more useful if it was more closely connected to the work the person on placement was doing (although it was also recognised that this might be very difficult to do in practice because of the different activities people on placement were involved in). One employer commented that the training seemed very separate from the placement itself and that they were not aware of what was being learnt on the training course because it was never mentioned by the person on placement. There was a feeling that if the employer was going to release the person on placement from work for a significant period of time, they needed to be more aware of what the benefits were, both for the graduate or student and for the employer.

> "*I would say the training was 50:50 in terms of good - waste of time. I didn't think it was very tailored to his needs. Certainly, he felt it was too basic, although there was a benefit in being able to share his experiences with other people in the same situation. Having to go to* [a different organisation] *and they arranged something for us because we weren't really happy that it was really what we wanted.*"
>
> [E1: Small employer in the Environmental sector who took a graduate on placement for 3 to 6 months]

The graduates who had done the training course made similar observations. They wanted greater linkage to the work they were doing while on placement, and it was suggested by one respondent that their impression was the HEI running the course had tried to make as few demands on people's time as possible, when a better approach would be to make more demands, but make their benefits more evident to the people taking part. They suggested that the graduate or student should have a piece of written work to do that in some way related explicitly to their placement experience, and perhaps involved a small amount of engagement with the employer, for example to find out particular pieces of information, so that the employer knew what was being done.

Although the employers who had someone on placement who was doing this kind of employability skills training were unsure of its benefits and preferred something more specific, among the employers who had not had people on placement who had not done any training, there was a lot of support for the idea that not only should placements involve some kind of training, but that the most appropriate area for the training to focus on was employability skills.

9.5. Recommendations for funders

9.5.1. *Continuity of G4B staff in HEIs is important*

As has been mentioned above, maintaining relationships between employers and HEIs and developing trust in the project requires continuity of staff. Under-resourced or insecure staff with briefs that are difficult to meet have high turnover.

9.5.2. *Having a track record of placement activity makes subsequent activity easier*

Having a track record of placement activity, and in particular graduate placement activity, helped HEI staff find employers who were willing to take someone on placement. The G4B scheme has enabled HEIs to start (or in some cases continue) to develop this track record, and has laid the foundations for success in the future – but all the HEIs could not have been expected to make the same progress in the time available, since they stared from very different foundations and were faced with different labour market and sectoral challenges in different sub-regions.

9.5.3. *A coherent branding and marketing campaign instils confidence*

It was felt by the Regional Development Agency that a branding campaign for G4B was not appropriate, in part due the conflict this would create with existing branding in certain institutions, for example, the GBP placements run by Exeter and Plymouth universities. However, respondents at four HEIs thought that the lack of a G4B 'brand' had explicitly hindered the project. It was felt by nearly all the institutions that a coherent branding and marketing campaign would instil more confidence in employers, and one HEI considered that a unified brand would have helped institutions with no track record of placements draw on the success of those HEIs that did have a successful track record. This view was echoed by some of the employers. Very few employers knew that the placement they had was part of any kind of scheme at all, and those thought that the placement was part of a scheme did

not identify G4B as the scheme. One employer described the situation of being 'cold-called' by an HEI and asked to take someone on placement through a scheme he had never heard of nor seen advertised in anywhere in the South West, despite his extensive contacts with businesses in the region. He noted that this was very off-putting, and had he not already been considering taking someone on placement, he would not have proceeded.

> "*From the start, it felt unprofessional. It made me nervous about the whole experience. I mean, someone calls you up out of nowhere, says they are so-and-so who you have never heard of, never seen anywhere, don't know anything about. It doesn't really inspire confidence does it? It all seemed like those firms you see on TV selling old ladies double-glazing. It went well, but I almost feel as though we were incredibly lucky, I don't know if I would do it again. Not with them.*"

> [E46: Large employer in a large Voluntary sector organisation who took a graduate on placement for 1 to 3 months]

9.5.4. Facilitating networking between HEIs would encourage the sharing of good practice

There should be improved networking between G4B HEIs to enable the sharing of good practice, in particular between the people who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the placements. Five HEI respondents said that there had been a lack of networking and good-practice-sharing, and several noted that particularly in the early stages of the project they had simply been left to struggle along doing what they thought was best, when this was a stage when the less experienced G4B representatives were most in need of guidance. This had resulted in the implementation of inefficient and time-consuming practices in some HEIs. Only one HEI through that the G4B project had brought the South West HEIs together.

Case Study 8

E27: Small agricultural employer who took three graduates and undergraduates on placement

The employer is a small agricultural enterprise, employing 12 staff plus various seasonal workers. In addition to the G4B placements, they also took undergraduates from an HEI in a different region, as well as local schoolchildren and students from abroad.

The placements were for various length of time, the shortest being three weeks and the longest six months, and they currently had someone on a year-long placement. They involved a variety of agricultural work, including working with animals and planting and harvesting crops. Some of the placements on the farm were part of the Young City Farmers scheme and included some training in associated activities, including cooking and building.

Since the placements finished, one person has gone into property sales, another into teaching, and a third into agriculture. Two were previously students of agriculture and one studied business studies.

Why did they take someone on placement?

- They needed people to labour at particular times of the year, and they could not justify taking someone on permanently to do the work.
- They wanted to give people insight into how their particular type of farm worked.
- It is good for the farm staff to get involved in teaching.
- They have close links with the HEI and were asked to take some people on placement.
- The people who went on placement said they wanted to build on their existing knowledge of agriculture.

Why was the placement successful?

- There were opportunities for the people on placement to learn.
- Discussion before the placement enabled people to suggest things that they wanted to do while they were on placement.
- They invested a lot of time in training the people on placement.
- There was supervision when people needed it, but once people had been shown what needed to be done and how to do it, they were left to get on with it.
- The people on placement said that they felt very safe. They were never asked to do anything dangerous or that they felt inadequately trained to do, and were given proper breaks. They did not feel exploited.
- The placements were paid the standard agricultural rate.
- The people who went on placement said it was very enjoyable and they had learnt a lot that they could use both in an agricultural setting and elsewhere.

> *"I have a better understanding of farming and the countryside. I really enjoyed working on the farm and learning new techniques. It was a very unique experience and the techniques we were learning were quite cutting edge in some ways."* [Placement 1]

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> *"I have learned to appreciate quality products. One thing I especially enjoyed was learning about clay pigeon shooting. I'm hoping to take that up again when I go back to college, and I've tried to become a beater. […] Although I have decided that I really can't go into farming full time, I would still like to use the skills in my own time, have an allotment. Farming is too badly paid though."* [Placement 2]

How could the experience be improved?

- The people on placement were quite good, but he has been disappointed with the calibre of other people who have been on placement or who have applied to do so. He felt that in general people lacked the agricultural skills he had seen amongst students and graduates in the past. This was a common issue amongst the employers in the Agricultural sector. There was a feeling that people were coming on placement without a real understanding of the practical aspects of agriculture because they either did not come from farming backgrounds or had not been involved in the running of family farms and that they were not interested in the day-to-day hard work of farming. People should be told that the placement was an important experience and they would get out of it what they put into it.
- The placements could have a heavy cost to them. It was time consuming to teach people things they should have known. There were cases where the people did not pay their way and were essentially just passengers. Although the employer tried to train people in appropriate skills, there was a limit to the time and resources they could devote to it on a working farm. They found it hard to judge who would do well on the placement because everyone had a good CV, but in many cases it turned out that they were inflating their experience. They would like greater help from the HEIs in selecting someone who would make a worthwhile contribution and financial support to make up for the time spent would be helpful.
- It was unclear who they should contact at the HEI, and although if there was a problem they could have searched for the right person, not knowing did not inspire confidence. There should be a placement tutor who helped people to sell themselves appropriately and who could act as an intermediary in the case of problems. Their experience with other institutions had been more structured in this respect.
- More of the training could be conducted by people outside the farm, which would take some of the burden from the farm workers and allow them to focus teaching things directly related to the farm.
- They would like to know more about what the people on placement have gone on to do and the impact the placement had on them.
- The recession means that they might have to take less people on placement because of the cost.

10. CONCLUSION

The economic structure of the South West region presents particular challenges to the effective deployment of graduate-level skills. There is a great deal of regional diversity in the South West, with some areas being more effective in retaining graduates and employing them in graduate-level jobs than others. Additionally, a high proportion of businesses in the South West are SMEs, with a large number of these being micro-businesses, and many of these SMEs are operating in sectors with a low density of graduates. These types of organisation have been found to be particularly resistant to work placements, lacking the infrastructure to establish and manage them, and to be seen by graduates as less attractive employers. Graduate placements in SMEs were therefore seen as a way of providing the opportunity for both groups to test these preconceptions, without the long-term commitment of a full-time job. The study found that organisations in Arts and Media, Publishing and Tourism and Leisure were most likely to be SMEs, and IT and Marketing and PR were notable growth areas with a number of small firms, often working in niche areas, being established.

Satisfaction with the placements was high, with almost nine out of ten employers saying that overall, they were satisfied with the placement. The majority of placements were found to be supplementing existing activities of the organisations interviewed, and there was little evidence that they were displacing jobs. There was evidence that some of the placements were not developmental in the sense that they resulted in a marked improvement in the skills of the person on placement, particularly where the person on placement was being used to free existing staff from more routine work or to keep very small organisations operating on a day-to-day basis, but even in these cases, the person on placement had gained experience of the work environment and had improved their CV. In the majority of cases, although quantification of impacts was generally difficult, it was possible to identify some potential for activities undertaken during the placement to develop a long-term impact. This was most obvious in cases where the placement had become a full-time job within the organisation, resulting in the development of a more skilled workforce, but it was also evident when the placement had result in the implementation of new policies and procedures, contributed to the general level of skill within the organisation, for example through giving existing staff management experience, or had simply brought a new perspective to the organisation. There was also evidence, particularly amongst smaller organisations where there was little history of work placements or employing graduates, that an attitude shift had occurred and these firms were now more likely to recognise the benefits graduates could bring to the organisation. It also led to the tentative development of a relationship with a particular HEI, which the employers hoped to use to recruit graduates in the future, and the further development of this relationship will obviously have an impact both on the employer and on the employment of graduates from the HEI. There was also evidence of broadening and deepening of existing relationships between the HEIs and local employers, and amongst both HEIs and employers, the G4B scheme introduced a culture of placement activity that holds a lot of potential.

Employers who had taken graduates on placement appeared to have higher expectations and to invest more trust in the person on placement. In general, graduate placements were regarded by employers as not differing greatly from a job in their organisation, and they

expected the graduate on placement to 'hit the ground running' to quickly fill identified skills gaps within the organisation.

Undergraduates, in contrast, were more likely to have spent at least some of their placement engaged in relatively routine tasks, reflecting the greater likelihood that they were taken on as an extra pair of hands to help the organisation out in a general capacity. However, their placements were also more likely to involve more traditional work experience activities, such as work-shadowing. Longer undergraduate placements, in particular those lasting a year, but also some of the placements undertaken in the summer vacation period, were more likely to involve the person on placement working in a specific, identifiable role, and in this respect were more similar to the graduate placements.

Employer's decisions to take someone on placement involved weighing the benefits they perceived both they and the person on placement would derive against the costs, primarily in time, that the placement would cause. The relative weight different employers put on the benefits they themselves would derive, and the benefits the person on placement would derive varied, but in almost all cases, both were a consideration. For employers who took undergraduates on placement, the balance tended to be more towards the experience the student would gain from the placement, while for the graduate placements, greater emphasis was placed by the employers on the benefits the employer themselves would experience as a result of having a particular piece of work completed or a new procedure implemented.

For the graduates and undergraduates who went on placement, the primary reason for doing so was to gain experience – of work in general and of specific industries or types of company. This was seen as a way of clarifying their career ideas, reassuring themselves that they had usable skills that would transition effectively into the work place, and identifying specific areas of weakness that they could improve to make themselves more likely to find employment in the kind of job they aspired to. Earning money was also an important factor in the decision to do a placement, and it was suggested by some HEIs that some graduates, in particular, had not been able to take part in the scheme when placements were unpaid. The G4B placements were less likely than more traditional placement to involve payment to the person on placement. This was largely a result of the size and industry of the organisations within the survey. Small organisations, particularly those in the Arts and Media, struggled to justify the cost of taking someone on placement even when they were not paying them. The time taken to manage the person on placement had a greater, and more tangible, impact in these organisations. The exclusion of small firms and graduates without outside support, who are therefore less likely to be able to undertake unpaid work experience, has been recognised as an issue by various bodies which monitor and advise upon work experience programmes, and the prevalence of SMEs in the South West makes this a key challenge for placement programmes in the region, particularly because placements in SMEs were regarded by both employers and graduates and students as offering real benefits that would be unlikely to be realised in larger organisations. These tended to focus on the informality that was possible in small organisations whereby the person on placement could be integrated quickly and relatively effortlessly into the firm's culture and given more opportunities to both observe and try out a range of activities than they would in a larger organisation, where the distinction between different operating functions tended to be more rigid.

Among the HEIs, there was evidence that there had been some problems in instituting the work placements programme, and these were not helped by the high turn-over of staff and lack of networking between the staff who managed the placements on a day-to-day basis, but in most cases, these problems had been overcome, and there were clear indications that the scheme had been beneficial and hopes that it would be possible to build on existing activity and develop areas of particular expertise.

Recommendations focussed on the need for planning and negotiating before the placement started to ensure that all concerned derived the maximum benefit. It was felt that there was not a 'one size fits all' solution to placements, but that careful consideration of the aims of the employers, graduates and undergraduates and HEIs could result in a placement experience that was felt to make an identifiable contribution to the long-term development of all concerned.

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SWRDA: PLACEMENT SCHEMES IN THE SOUTH WEST

EMPLOYERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name of organisation

Name of interviewee

Contact details

Industry

Start date and length of placement

Date of interview

Check start date and details given in email are correct

SECTION 1: Placement details

1. Was the person on placement an undergraduate or a graduate?

Undergraduate ☐   Graduate ☐

2. Which university or college did they attend? [and was this the same one administering the placement programme?]

....

3. What did the person on placement do during their time with the organisation?

....

....

....

....

....

4. Was the placement paid? Do you know if they got any financial assistance to pay for things like travel?

....

....

....

5. Did you offer a job to the person at the end of the placement / when they graduated? [*Do you expect to?*] Why/why not?

....

....

....

6. Do many of your staff have degrees from universities and colleges in the South West? (%)

....

7. How many people are employed by your organisation in the South West?

....

SECTION 2: Motivations and expectations

8. Why did you take someone on placement? And how did the placement come about?

....

....

....

....

9. Were you satisfied with the placement? Were your expectations met? Why/Why not?

....

....

....

....

10. Would you say that there has been any impact on the organisation from having someone on placement? Why/Why not? What impacts?

....

....

....

....

11. What do you think are the benefits for the person on placement?

....

....

....

....

12. If you had not been able to take someone on placement, would you have filled the position at all? How? Why/Why not?

....

....

....

....

SECTION 3: Relationship with HEIs

13. Did you receive any support from [university/college] during the placement scheme?

....
....
....
....

14. Are there any skills that you think a university could teach that it would be particularly useful for someone to learn before starting a placement?

....
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....

15. Have you had any other kind of engagement with universities in the South West? What did this involve? Would you like to?

....
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SECTION 4: Closing questions

16. Have you taken anyone on placement since then? Would you take someone on placement again in the future?

....
....
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....

17. Does the current recession make it more or less likely that you will take graduates or students on placement this year and next year? Do you think it will have an impact on placements generally?

....
....

18. Would you recommend placements to other organisations? [*check if they know they were part of a placement scheme -> would you recommend the placement scheme to other organisations?*]

....

....

....

....

19. Is there anything that would encourage you to take more people on placement? Incentives? Any support you would like?

....

....

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APPENDIX 2: GRADUATES AND STUDENTS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SWRDA: PLACEMENT SCHEMES IN THE SOUTH WEST

GRADUATES AND STUDENTS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Stress confidentiality- the data will not be fed back to HEIs or employers in a way that will identify respondents.

Basic details

1. Are you an undergraduate or a graduate?

Undergraduate ☐   Graduate ☐

2. Which HEI arranged the placement?

AIB	
Bath Spa University	
Bath University	
Bournemouth University	
Bristol University	
Exeter University	
Falmouth / Dartington	
Gloucestershire University	
Plymouth University	
Royal Agricultural College	
UWE	

3. Is this the HEI you normally attend/graduated from? [if not, what is the HEI you normally attend / you graduated from?]

Yes ☐   No ☐

4. What is the subject of your degree? [*BSc, BA, etc*]

5. What year of your course are you now in? *[if applicable]*

2nd [　　　] 3rd [　　　]

4th or later [　　　] Postgraduate [　　　]

Graduate [　　　]

6. When was the placement and how long was it for?

Approximate dates [　　　　　　　　　　]

Length of placement [　　　　　　　　　　]

7. Name of organisation

[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　]

8. Industry

[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　]

9. Can you give a brief description of what the organisation does? [*How big is the organisation – small, medium, large, etc*]

[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　]

10. What did you do while you were on placement?

[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　]

Before the placement

11. How did you find out about the placement?

[   ]

12. What did you have to do to apply for the placement?

[   ]

13. Did you apply for any other placements?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

14. Did you do any classes/training before the placement to prepare you? What did this involve?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

[   ]
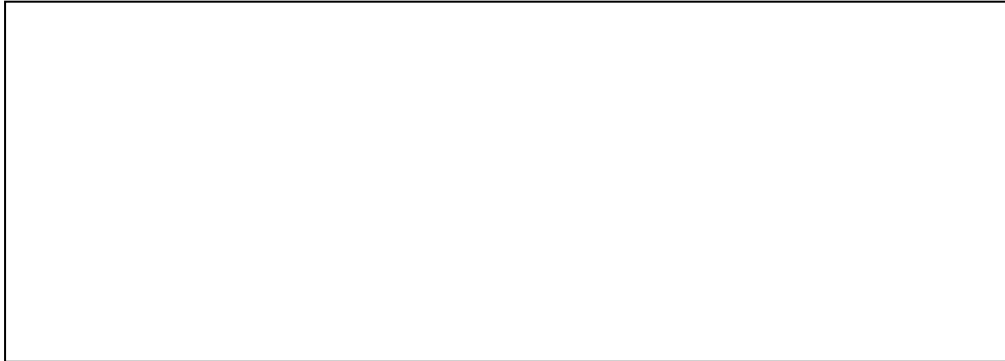
15. Did you do any classes/training during the placement?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

[   ]

Motivations for doing a placement

16. Why did you want to go on a placement?

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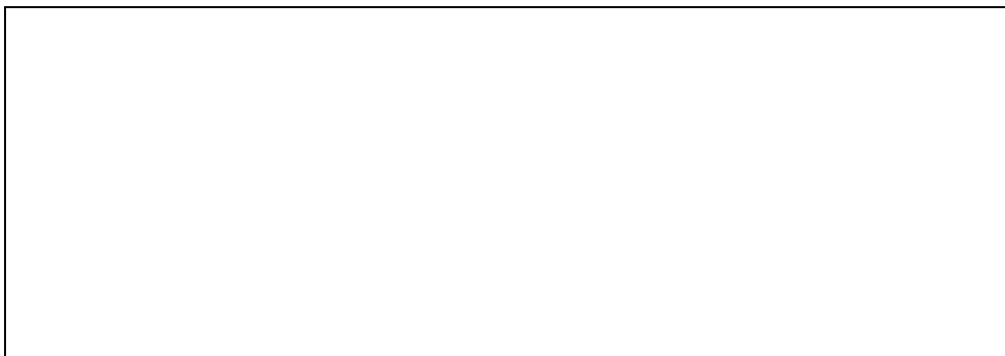
17. What did you expect from the placement? [*prompt: skills, career clarity, experience*]

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The placement experience

18. What do you think you got out of doing a placement? [*prompt: skills, career clarity, experience*]

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19. Did the placement live up to your expectations? In what way?

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20. Were you happy with the support you received from your university while you were on placement? What support, if any, did you get from them?

Yes ☐   No ☐

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21. Was there any follow-up in the placement a) from the organisation; b) from your HEI; c) anything you did?

a) From the organisation
Yes ☐   No ☐

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b) From your university
Yes ☐   No ☐

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c) Anything you did

Yes ☐   No ☐

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22. Has the placement had any impact on your career plans? [*made them more or less clear, not changed?*]

More clear ☐   Stayed the same ☐   Less clear ☐

Why is that?

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Recommendations and changes

23. What was the best thing about doing a placement? And what was the worst?

Best

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Worst

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24. Would you recommend placements in general, and the particular organisation where you did a placement?

Placements in general ☐

The specific organisation ☐

Why is that?

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25. Is there anything that could have improved the experience, or any changes that you would recommend organisations or HEIs make so that people going on placement in the future have a good experience?

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26. Are there any examples of things that worked really well that you would suggest to other organisations or universities?

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[If applicable]

27. After you graduate, would you consider doing a graduate placement? Why/why not?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Employers

Code	Industry	Length of placement	Graduate or undergraduate	Paid or unpaid	Number of staff
E1	Environment	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	6 to 10
E2	Food	1 year or more	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E3	Arts or media	various or other	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E4	Arts or media	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E5	Marketing or PR	various or other	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E6	Food	1 year or more	Graduate	Paid	More than 101
E7	Law	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E8	Publishing	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by HEI	10 to 25
E9	Arts or media	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	1 to 5
E10	Law	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	More than 101
E11	Law	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	More than 101
E12	Arts or media	various or other	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by HEI	1 to 5
E13	Arts or media	various or other	Graduate	Expenses paid by HEI	1 to 5
E14	Voluntary sector	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	10 to 25
E15	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E16	Food	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	More than 101
E17	Engineering or manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E18	Engineering or manufacturing	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	More than 101
E19	Arts or media	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	10 to 25
E20	Engineering or manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	1 to 5
E21	Marketing or PR	3 to 6 months	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E22	Marketing or PR	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	10 to 25
E23	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	1 to 5
E24	Education	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Not paid	More than 101
E25	Government	various or other	Undergraduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E26	Voluntary sector	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	More than 101
E27	Agriculture	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E28	Arts or media	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	More than 101
E29	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5

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E30	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E31	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E32	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E33	Arts or media	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	6 to 10
E34	Arts or media	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E35	Arts or media	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E36	Arts or media	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	6 to 10
E37	Sales	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E38	Tourism and Leisure	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E39	Environment	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	51 to 100
E40	Engineering or manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E41	Agriculture	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E42	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	6 to 10
E43	Voluntary sector	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	More than 101
E44	Voluntary sector	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	10 to 25
E45	Marketing or PR	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E46	Marketing or PR	various or other	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E47	Publishing	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E48	Publishing	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E49	Education	6 to 12 months	Graduate	Paid	26 to 50
E50	Agriculture	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E51	Agriculture	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E52	Agriculture	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	1 to 5
E53	Agriculture	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E54	IT	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E55	IT	6 to 12 months	Graduate	Paid	10 to 25
E56	Arts or media	various or other	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E57	Arts or media	2 weeks or less	Graduate	Not paid	Varies
E58	Publishing	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	6 to 10
E59	Education	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	26 to 50
E60	Engineering or manufacturing	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E61	Banking, finance, insurance	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E62	Environment	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	26 to 50
E63	Tourism and Leisure	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Not paid	6 to 10
E64	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	6 to 10
E65	Publishing	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	6 to 10

E66	IT	1 year or more	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E67	IT	1 year or more	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E68	Engineering or manufacturing	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	26 to 50
E69	Voluntary sector	various or other	Undergraduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E70	Voluntary sector	various or other	Undergraduate	Not paid	26 to 50
E71	Marketing or PR	various or other	Graduate	Not paid	6 to 10
E72	Marketing or PR	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	6 to 10
E73	Agriculture	2 weeks to 1 month	Graduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E74	Environment	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E75	Voluntary sector	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E76	Voluntary sector	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	More than 101
E77	Engineering or manufacturing	3 to 6 months	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E78	IT	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	More than 101
E79	Tourism and Leisure	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Not paid	6 to 10
E80	Engineering or manufacturing	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	26 to 50
E81	Education	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	51 to 100
E82	Law	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	1 to 5
E83	Building or architecture	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E84	Voluntary sector	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	6 to 10
E85	Tourism and Leisure	3 to 6 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Varies
E86	Law	2 weeks or less	Undergraduate	Not paid	10 to 25
E87	Marketing or PR	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	10 to 25
E88	IT	1 year or more	Undergraduate	Paid	10 to 25
E89	Engineering or manufacturing	3 to 6 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E90	Marketing or PR	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	26 to 50
E91	Marketing or PR	2 weeks or less	Graduate	Paid	10 to 25

Graduates and undergraduates

Code	Industry	Length of placement	Graduate or undergraduate	Paid or unpaid	Subject studied
P1	Arts and Media	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	Social sciences
P2	Food and beverage	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	Environmental sciences
P3	Food and beverage	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Business
P4	Engineering or Manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Engineering
P5	Marketing or PR	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	Arts
P6	Marketing or PR	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	Arts
P7	Engineering or Manufacturing	6 to 12 months	Graduate	Paid	Engineering
P8	Marketing or PR	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Arts
P9	Voluntary sector	6 to 12 months (various)	Undergraduate	Not paid	Social sciences
P10	Arts and Media	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Expenses paid by employer	Arts
P11	Engineering or Manufacturing	6 to 12 months	Graduate	Paid	Engineering
P12	Agriculture	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	Agriculture
P13	Voluntary sector	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	Business
P14	Engineering or Manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Engineering
P15	Engineering or Manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	IT
P16	Marketing or PR	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Arts
P17	Legal	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	Social sciences
P18	Marketing or PR	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Arts
P19	Engineering or Manufacturing	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	IT
P20	Education	6 to 12 months	Graduate	Expenses paid by employer	Education
P21	Education	2 weeks to 1 month	Undergraduate	Not paid	Social sciences
P22	Arts and Media	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Not paid	Arts
P23	IT	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	Environmental sciences
P24	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Environmental sciences
P25	Sales	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Business
P26	Tourism and	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Business

	hospitality				
P27	Medical, veterinary, social care	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Business
P28	Tourism and hospitality	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Business
P29	Agriculture	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Agriculture
P30	Engineering or Manufacturing	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Engineering
P31	Building and construction	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Environmental sciences
P32	IT	6 to 12 months	Graduate	Paid	IT
P33	Banking, finance, insurance	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Business
P34	Environmental sector	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Environmental sciences
P35	Agriculture	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	Business
P36	Marketing or PR	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Arts
P37	IT	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	IT
P38	Arts	2 weeks to 1 month	Graduate	Not paid	Arts
P39	Arts	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Expenses paid by employer	Arts
P40	Agriculture	6 to 12 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Agriculture
P41	Banking, finance, insurance	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Social sciences
P42	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Business
P43	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Environmental Sciences
P44	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Business
P45	IT	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Paid	Business
P46	Banking, finance, insurance	1 to 3 months	Undergraduate	Paid	Business
P47	Food and Beverage	3 to 6 months	Graduate	Not paid	Arts
P48	Medical, veterinary, social care	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	Biological Sciences
P49	Voluntary sector	1 to 3 months	Graduate	Paid	Engineering
P50	IT	More than 1 year	Undergraduate	Paid	IT