

Chapter 1

Introduction

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1.1 About this study guide

So you are thinking about doing a placement or an internship? If you manage this opportunity well, it will help both your academic success, and your future career prospects. This book has been written for undergraduates and postgraduates who have already planned, or are considering, a placement or internship as part of their courses. It has been written based not only on the authors' personal experiences of working in organisations with university students, but also after research with a selection of universities, organisations, and students themselves. It has been designed to help you whether you are doing a specialist course requiring a placement, or a more general course, which may not even require a mandatory placement of internship.

Getting the most from your placement is not just about finding somewhere to work for a year, but making the most of the learning opportunities which this will present. So this study guide will take you through finding, undertaking, and learning from a work placement or internship. To do this, the book is divided into the following sections to reflect the different stages of placement:

Introduction

Chapter 1 is an introduction to placements – what they are, and why you should think carefully about whether a placement is right for your studies, and longer term career.

Section 1

In Chapter 2, we will give further guidance on how to find a placement, and, in Chapter 3, how to apply. Being shortlisted for a placement opportunity is one step nearer success, but you need to make sure that you maximize your chances in interview and in assessment centres. So in Chapter 4, we explain how to prepare for interview, group assessments, presentations, and the battery of tests which you can expect at assessment centres. In Chapter 5, we look at the important not-so-small print – tax, work permits, and what to do if you plan to work abroad for your placement or are a visitor to the UK.

Section 2

For many placement students, settling into a new organisation can be very different from the student or vacation employment experience. In Chapters 6 and 7, we discuss the practical steps of settling into your new organisation, and outline your employment rights and obligations. To support your learning and development in your placement, Chapter 8 explains how you can make the most of learning opportunities generally.

Section 3

It can be easy to think that university is somehow in another world, once you are in an organisational work role, and particularly easy to slip or be 'too busy' to start academic work, especially if you have a dissertation to complete. In Chapter 9, we provide advice on planning and delivering your dissertation, and ensuring that you set aside sufficient time for this.

Section 4

And after all the preparation and hard work finding and doing your placement, it is over. If you are still not sure whether or not a placement is right for you, or where or how long that placement should be, Chapter 10 closes this guide with the accounts of three actual students' stories about their placements. They discuss what went well in their placement, the challenges they faced, and what they would have done differently.

1.2 The wider picture of graduate job prospects

For many organisations, engaging student placements and internships is not just about offering development opportunities for students, nor even about getting work done. Although these are both important, placements will often be an integral part of the organisation's graduate recruitment process: organisations using this approach may recruit 70–90 per cent of their graduates in this way. But even where graduate recruitment is not part of the organisation's objective, universities, organisations, and students themselves testify to the value a placement brings to longer term job applications, and a renewed enthusiasm and application to university studies.

Why organisations offer work placements – some examples of what employers say about their views of a successful placement

A student who is willing to become fully immersed into the organisation and relevant department(s). For example, our current placement student has been carrying out testing on a new software system, this is a business critical system and his input has been valid and appreciated. (Financial Service Company)

Referral for a conditional job offer on graduation at the conclusion of the placement. (LloydsTSB)

We consider direct applications – so it is important that applicants research us in advance, and clearly show how they could achieve development with us, as well as giving something to the organisation ... Placements must not be about photocopying or making coffee – so we find a role with tangible outcomes, such as in a project, or in research'. (Zurich Financial Group)

Placements are a very valuable experience. With new ideas and up to date skills, we learn as much from them as we hope they learn from us. (UK Border Agency)

It has been estimated that approximately 29 per cent of UK students undertook some form of internship during their final two years of study (Universum, 2006). But this lags behind our closest European Community competitors where 66 per cent of German students and 79 per cent of French students undertook some form of internship. It is little wonder, therefore, that UK Regional Skills Partnerships include Graduate Placement Programmes as part of their Higher Education and Higher Level Skills objectives (see, for example, South West of England Regional Development Agency, Graduates 4 Business).

Students who have completed a placement or an internship are more likely to obtain a good degree than students of similar ability without a placement. And students who have worked on a placement and achieve a 2.2 degree are as likely to find graduate level careers as students with a 2.1 degree who have not completed a placement. So a placement has a double benefit in helping you to find a graduate level job, and in obtaining a higher degree classification.

But irrespective of the chances of improving your course marks, the value of a good placement or internship is in helping you to understand better the type of work you wish to do, and with whom you wish to do it.

The key is how to make the most of your placement and internship opportunities – finding the best placement opportunities, competing to get a place, and making the most of the learning, development and networking opportunities your experience offers. This book has been written in the chronological order of the placement process to help you navigate through each stage of the placement process.

We take you through all steps of your internship and placement, step by step, from search, application, placement itself, to making the most of your placement afterwards too. The book draws on hints and tips from students who have been through the process already, research with a selection of universities, and research with organisations themselves.

Think back to how long, as a student, you prepared for university. For a few, the idea of a university place may have been quite late into the final years of school, or have even come after school. But for most students, planning and preparations for university start 3 or 4 years previously: in choosing the right subjects, building CVs, and starting to think about the right courses and locations for your studies.

If you have chosen a course with a placement or an internship, it makes sense that similar care and thought needs to be given to choosing the right placement, and making the most of it. Your placement year is likely to be very different from work experience you may have had as a student, as one student commented.

The change from a part-time job in a shop to my placement is astounding! ...it can be lonely and very difficult at times.

But despite the challenges, the vast majority of students would summarise their placement experiences in the same way as this student

Definitely do a placement. It will really boost your confidence and your capabilities.

The key is for good preparation and personal management whilst on your placement.

The first question to consider is whether a placement is for you. What are the benefits of deferring completion of your studies, and if you do so, how do make the most of it?

In 2007, the Association of Graduate Recruiters estimated that, on average, 29 graduates were chasing each graduate vacancy, and that for

some organisations, the number was as high as 104 per vacancy. But UK employers frequently bemoan that graduates do not have the necessary skills. Why?

Despite the improvement in degree classes, and the wide availability of specialist and general courses, employers regularly say that graduate applicants lack the *skills* and the *competences* they are looking for. For example, 2008 People/Management, the professional journal for HR specialists, suggested that two thirds of UK graduates lacked adequate communication and interpersonal skills, and fifty four per cent lacked leadership and managerial skills. In a conference launching the Confederation of British Industry Higher Education Task Force, employer representatives said that more than a fifth of employers were dissatisfied with graduates' soft skills, communication, and self-management. One representative was even blunter – saying that students needed to 'get up in the morning'.

You may have your own views about the validity of these opinions and statistics. Business dissatisfaction about graduate readiness for employment is not just a twenty-first century gripe – for example, in the eighteenth century, Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* that:

The greater part of what is taught in schools and universities does not seem to be the proper preparation for business. (1819: 361)

So this is the job market which you are entering as a graduate. And history suggests that it won't change much by the time you graduate! One student explained it this way:

When you first go to University, you are under the illusion that once you graduate, you will be swamped down by job offers because you have a degree to your name. However, by talking to other people you soon realise the struggles you will incur to find this employment after graduation without having the experience in the field you want to go into. Recognising the need to gain this experience whilst studying I looked into gaining a work experience placement.

Universities themselves recognise that students need to develop employability skills. As one commented

A placement is very important to students nowadays as degrees are becoming more commonplace. The only thing that differentiates a student in the graduate market (especially in degrees such as business studies or marketing) is relevant work experience. Other than that, students are very small fishes in a very big pond.

There is also a wide and increasing realisation for work organisations of the value of work placements. Research by Heaton and colleagues pointed to the 'vital importance that was attached to the placement experience' (2008: 283). As examples, they quote the views of HR managers who actively use placement students as part of the graduate development process:

We definitely prefer to recruit students who have completed a work placement. In fact completion of a work placement as part of a degree gives applicants a big advantage since we select through assessment centres, using competency based criteria. The work placement means that applicants have more experiences to draw on. But once they are with us, those with work placement experience are less unrealistic than those without (HR Manager, Engineering Organisation). (2008: 282)

Those having completed a work placement have hands-on experience of technical aspects – those who don't, may know what to do in theory, but they don't have the confidence to do it in practice (HR Manager, Construction Organisation). (2008: 283)

So the case in favour of doing a placement or internship is strong. To make the most of your degree and future career, improving employability skills will lift you above the competition and improve your chances of getting the role you are looking for. Placements and internships are a great way of improving these all important employability skills...and helping you decide what you want to do longer term as well.

Why employers use work placements and internships

Research by the National Council for Work Experience shows that employers see the benefits which well thought-out placements can bring to their companies in terms of:

- Gaining an intelligent, motivated, cost-effective labour resource with valuable skills, knowledge and fresh ideas.
- Flexibility of availability (students may be available at times of the year when the need is greatest).
- Projects can be undertaken that would otherwise take valuable time from fulltime employees or where there aren't the relevant skills.
- Permanent staff gain opportunities to develop supervisory skills by mentoring and monitoring placement students.
- Recruitment and training costs can be cut by employing placement students when they graduate.
- Temporary staff shortages can be overcome at low cost.
- It's a taster session for both parties with no commitment.

Source: National Council for Work Experience (2008). Reproduced with permission.

1.3 What are placements and internships?

A newspaper article described the difference between work and a placement like this:

Work means moaning about the boss, drinking tea, and helping yourself to the stationery cupboard – all while getting paid. Work experience means being enthusiastic, diligent, and full of ideas, whilst not receiving a penny. (Swain, 2008)

By the time you complete your placement, we hope that you will have a more positive view! Work placements are not necessarily unpaid, but what are placements and internships? We will use the two terms interchangeably.

The key features of a placement or internship are:

- Placements and internships may be undertaken during your first degree, after your first degree, part of professional training, or part of postgraduate studies.
- The appointment is always for a fixed period. It may be for as little as 1 or 2 weeks, and typically up to 12 months

In a placement, you will be expected to work, but it is generally recognised and accepted that you are also there for training and experience purposes. So, at times, you may find yourself 'shadowing' a more experienced colleague – for example, attending meetings, as an observer. You may attend more learning events than some of your colleagues; or gain wider work experience in the organisation. At other times, you may be involved in the day to day activities of the organisation; or working on specific one-off projects. Just sometimes, you may even find yourself with not enough to do.

You may find that your work is assessed in a slightly different way from more permanent colleagues. You may be subject to a different performance and potential assessment process within the organisation, using formats which have been specifically designed for graduates or placement students. Your placement employer may be asked to submit a report on you in your university's format; or, in rare cases, there may not be a report on you at all. If you are on a placement, it is very important to know how you will be assessed, and we say more about this in Chapter 4.

You may be paid during your placement, or, for short term placements, you may not receive any pay at all. The national minimum wage does not apply if your placement is part of your university course.

Unlike many of your permanent colleagues in your placement organisation, you may also be required to undertake university work, such as planned assignments, keep a learning journal, or learning log, research

projects, or dissertations. This is an essential part of your learning, and will add considerably to your workload. As well as developing your research, analytical, and interpersonal skills, this will represent a key time in your ability to manage potentially competing demands and priorities. To guide you through this, in Chapter 8, we will help you to understand why reflective learning is considered to be so important, and how to develop your capabilities as a reflective learner; in Chapter 9, we discuss how to tackle your dissertation.

1.4 Why you should consider a placement

A placement will represent a break from your university, or current job, so is a key investment in the future. So the arguments for and against doing this need to be thought through carefully, especially if the placement is for 3–12 months duration.

Short Placements

Shorter placements, for example during your summer vacation, may be less intrusive on your university studies, but are still time consuming. These short placements – ‘trophy placements’ – may look good on your CV, but are relatively low impact in developing your competences and experiences. The shorter the placement, the less likely it is that you will be paid, especially in some highly popular graduate employment destinations, such as media roles. Nevertheless, even short placements give you some experiences and demonstrate to future employers your initiative, commitment, and drive to succeed in our chosen area. Perhaps most importantly of all, any placement gives you the opportunity to extend your network, and to understand what you may wish to do in the future, and have a clearer idea on what to do to achieve your aspirations.

Longer term placements

Longer term placements of 3 months, 6 months, or 12 months are most likely to make a real difference to your employability skills, and to be formally integrated with your study programme. Just as important, they are more likely to be paid too!

Careers after graduation

As we have seen, the hard fact is that organisations often seem to have a low view on graduate employability skills. During your placement, you will better understand the types of competences and skills which employers are looking for, and how to develop graduate level examples of competences and skills. As a result, you will be more able to compete for jobs

when you apply for them on completion of your studies. Equally, your work placement will have given you a better idea of the types of job which are most likely to interest you, and the organisations which you are likely to prefer.

The arguments in favour of internships and placements apply equally as well if the placement is a mandatory part of your degree studies, or if you are studying more academic subjects, such as the humanities. In both cases, you are developing the skills and competences for your future career, developing networks, and developing a clearer sense of those areas which you want to develop further, or avoid altogether.

Similarly, students who have completed placements find themselves more motivated to work well, better organised in their work, and more able to see the linkage between the theory they are taught at university, and its practical application. The universities recognise this too, and one university placement manager commented.

On return to university, students tend to do very well academically due to a stronger work ethic, a greater understanding, clearer goals, better time management, and an ability to get up early.

The workload is higher if you opt for a placement, but makes more sense because it feels more 'joined up' and relevant. A placement will often help chose final year options as well.

Placements not directly linked with a university course

Many students are now leaving university with no real idea of what they want to do, or without a track record to pursue their aims. As a result, applying for career roles can be an energy sapping and demoralising experience. Short term placements/internships may be especially useful for this group – whether during vacations from a university course, or even following graduation.

However, whilst this group may still have access to university careers advice, getting a placement, and maximising learning from it, can be more challenging. However, the principles of this book are just as valid as if the placement was part of a university course.

University studies

More organisations are saying, at least publicly, that degree classification is less important than having the right work competences and skills. Alternatively, they may say that they still consider graduates with weaker than expected degree results. For some organisations, it may be true that they give genuine and full consideration to graduates with less than 2.1 degrees. However, in order to compete with the large number of graduates seeking graduate employment, any weakness in your application needs to be avoided if possible. As we have already seen, placements

will help to lift your overall course marks, and may also take you to a higher degree class.

Why a placement? – Some student views

I chose this degree ... because it enables me to carry out a placement year. I believe that this is essential [in] applying my theoretical knowledge, whilst gaining invaluable experience in industry ... more than just a paper based education.

I thought that it would give me a wealth of experience ... help me to decide what to do on graduation ... hoped that one of my placements might lead me into a job or at least a field of interest.

I hoped that the placements would make me more employable as I would likely have more and better experience than many peers at similar universities with similar degrees.

To get real life experience so that I can enhance my CV in order to get a better graduate job.

My placement will help me to collect information for my dissertation.
To gain a better degree.

... The increased likelihood of finding employment after graduation. Prospective employers know a student who has experience of industry will need less time to fit into the culture of work and that the student will have had first-hand experience of applying many of the skills and techniques learned at university to 'real world' problems.

The course included a compulsory placement year, which was the deciding factor in choosing my university ... the experience gives you an excellent advantage over other students when you graduate.

It is the ideal time to look outside and discover the type of work and environments that I enjoy, and more importantly what I don't. I feel that it will enhance my understanding of how theories and techniques I study at university are used in the workplace. I firmly believe that this type of study can only enhance my final year grade.

I would advise anyone to do a placement. You get so much experience, you gain new experience, you gain new skills that you never thought you could, you meet new skills, and you get a taster of what life will be like after you graduate. Finally, you get a jump start ahead of the graduates who did not do an industrial placement.

Enhance my understanding of how the theories and techniques I study at university are used and adapted in the workplace.

For some students, the decision to take a placement year was not taken until after the start of the degree course:

When I started my course, I hadn't intended to do a placement ... I just wanted to do a 3 year degree course. But during my first year, I went to presentations on placements. They showed that you had a much better chance of a better job and a better degree if you did a year out. I am pleased with my decisions to do a placement.

1.5 When a placement may not be such a good idea

For some people, and some courses, a long term placement may not be a great idea, so needs some extra thought.

Previous experience

If you have come to university having already had substantial work experience, and especially experience in the area you plan to apply for after university, then a long term placement may not be right. Alternative strategies could include:

- Make sure that you stay in touch with your former place(s) of work, including short term vacation employment.
- Short term placements (1–2 weeks are ideal) in organisations or roles in which you may be potentially interested. With reasonable good luck, your previous work experience will mean that you can settle in quickly, and make a positive impression, despite the short time frame. The other advantage of the short placement is that, with good personal organisation, you may be able to see more than one organisation, and so develop a wider network of roles and organisations.
- Volunteer. Either during term time, or during vacations, volunteering may be of particular value if you are looking for a future career in the not-for-profit sector. It may also provide valuable experience in a range of professionally related roles such as teaching support, media, law, care, communications, etc. And don't forget, any volunteering helps develop your work skills, shows your initiative on your CV, and underpins your interpersonal skills during assessment processes.

Professionally based degree courses

For some professions and occupations, you may be better advised to complete your degree as soon as possible, and then join professional training schemes. Here too, a planned approach to short term placements during your university career will help to convince potential employers of your initiative, and that when you apply to them for work, you are doing so with the benefit of well informed choice of your organisation and role preferences.

An academic career?

Alternatively, you may be clear that you want an academic career and have the strong academic results to justify this track. Again, it may be better for you to continue with your degree, get an excellent result, and

move on to a higher degree. But remember too that a placement may give you a very important insight into organisational life, which may be important if your subsequent research requires you to do fieldwork in outside organisations. It also helps you to hedge your bets in case you change your mind on career choice, or do not achieve the grades to enable you to do higher degrees.

1.6 Large organisation or small?

A placement is not just about making you a better employment prospect, important as that is. It also represents a great opportunity for you to see the kinds of jobs, organisations, and work environments which you may enjoy in your future career, or, on rare occasions ... never want to see again!

Should you look for a placement in a large organisation, or a smaller one (often referred to as SMEs – Small to Medium Sized Enterprises)?

A big organisation may look good on your CV, but remember that the role you do, and the learning you get from it are more important. Larger organisations may offer a wider range of job roles, and back up extensive advertising of placement opportunities with generally well designed placement schemes. They may have more sophisticated assessment and support for placement than a smaller organisation, and must be a clear favourite if you want to work in a large organisation on graduation.

Smaller organisations may be harder to find for a placement, but once you have found a smaller organisation willing to take a placement student, there may be less intense competition for places than in larger organisations, especially outside major cities. If you find the right placement, you may gain much wider experience than in larger organisations. This can give you a better opportunity to develop your skills and competences, and so your future marketability. Indeed for some disciplines, working in small organisations or specialist agencies may be the best way to develop networks for your future career choice.

Just as important as the size of the organisation you join for your placement is the manager you will be working for, and the work you will be doing. If possible, ask if you can meet your manager during the selection assessment process. This is usually easier to arrange in a smaller organisation, but less likely to be practical in a larger organisation.

Which organisation? Some student views

I mainly wanted to get a job in a large organisation so that I could get experience of a big company.

I looked at a range of organisations from placements in manufacturing to ones in commerce and finance.

Organisations which have tried and tested placements ... I knew I would not [want] to be a guinea pig as the first placement student.

I wanted a company that cared for their employees and customers ... not just making a profit. The company [I chose] is very ethical, with a great reputation for employee development and ploughing back their profits into schemes to benefit the local community.

But for other students, the type of role being offered was more important than the organisation:

The role sounded great, and I could gain lots of experience in different areas.

I looked at organisations that could offer me all-round experience ... the ability to work in different departments ... I felt this would help me in the future.

Working in a communications team differs from [my current] computer course, so I am able to gain skills that will benefit me later in life.

1.7 Home or away?

The organisation and job that you go for are probably more important than where you may want to live, but it is still important that you are comfortable with where you are living. Many placements are based in London or major cities. They provide attractive prospects, but do make sure you work out your budget for travel, accommodation, sport, social life, and general living expenses first! However, do not overlook placement opportunities outside the large cities, especially if they are close to your home or university. In some cases, employers find it more difficult to fill placement opportunities here, and so, as well as saving money from working nearer home, you may find that competition is less intense as well.

Alternatively, you may have the opportunity to work overseas. Finding a suitable role is likely to be more difficult, as the organised channels which make this possible in the UK may not be so clear cut for overseas jobs. You are more likely to find an overseas placement if you already have contacts in your chosen country, for example, through your university, contacts through friends or family abroad, or following up contacts from previous years' students.

[My placement gave me an] understanding of research and development in the pharmaceutical industry and experience of a full time job. I also completed a research project which was good practice for my final year research project. Improved my German, made many friends and travelled a lot of Europe. (UK pharmacology student on placement in Switzerland)

Overseas work and placements require more planning and more active management than UK placements. A well organised and successful overseas

placement will be great for your CV, personal development and future employability. But the risks if you get it wrong are obviously higher than for the UK. Before you board that plane, make sure that your needs and expectations are consistent with those of your proposed host organisation. Domestic issues are also more complex if you go abroad, and so we cover these in more detail in Chapter 5.

1.8 Timeline to success

If you are planning a longer term internship or placement, you will need to prepare well in order to make the most of the opportunity. The timeline below has been prepared to help you with this, and is the ideal time you should take to prepare yourself – if you have less time available, you can still get ready, but still follow the advice in the book. Shorter internships (1 week to 1 month) will not need so much detailed planning, but the timeline will still give you some ideas about the questions you should be asking, and follow up action to make this a meaningful part of your university learning.

Placement timeline

18–12 months ahead (see Chapters 2–4)

- Update your CV to be a generic CV
- What type of organisations are likely to appeal to you, and why?
 - Read business or professional press articles and job applications for a better idea of the job market
 - Check university placement/careers service
 - Speak to family and friends for a clearer idea of work experiences
 - Discuss with students who have been through work placements, or who are currently applying for roles
- Think about short-term placements/internships now, even if these are 5–10 days and unpaid

12 months ahead (see Chapters 2–4)

- Attend university briefings on placement opportunities
- Set up and maintain a file/folder with all material relevant to your placement preparations
- Check carefully professional bodies for information on expected work experience and skills, and on Continued Professional Development (CPD) requirements
- Update (again) your generic CV

- Understand how you would demonstrate relevant competences and skills in a targeted CV/application by completing the competence example table
- Check closing dates for applications amongst larger organisations
- Prepare and submit targeted application letters, CVs, and applications
- Plan how you will develop key skills in group work and presentations
- Practise numeracy, verbal reasoning, and similar psychometric tests
- Be ready for telephone interviews and web-based assessment tests

6 months ahead (see Chapters 3–4)

- Apply now to smaller organisations for placements
- If going abroad, check and follow up all visa, health, insurance, accommodation arrangements
- To help with dissertations, etc, double check remote access to University Information and library services, including journal access; check whether/how you may be able to use library services in other towns and cities under university library reciprocal arrangements
- Get constructive feedback on your applications/assessments – don't be fobbed off by generalisations – what did you do well/not so well? Use this to develop future assessment strategies

Placement period (see chapters 5–9)

- Settle in to the organisation!
- Buy, and use, a diary for short, medium, and long term planning – use the year planner to scope your dissertation plans
- Start and maintain your own Personal Development Plan
- Use a learning journal to make notes on what you have learned that week
- Reflect on key learning – what has gone well, not so well, and why
- Be clear about what is expected of you: work objectives; how the organisation may expect you to develop skills and competences; university requirements
- Find one or two mentors to help guide and support you
- Network
- Make sure that you have details of who (and how) future employers can contact future referees in your host organisation, especially important if your placement has been outside the UK

Post placement (see Chapter 10)

- Update your competence example table and ensure that your generic CV is fully up to date and includes new examples of your achievements during your placement

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Volunteer to speak to the induction group for the next intake of students in your host organisation; or to potential placement students back at university
- Register your Continuing Professional Development papers with your future professional body if appropriate

Hints and tips from students, universities, and placement organisations

Start thinking about a placement early ... at least 18 months ahead.

Apply early – for one year placements, large organisations often fill most of their roles in the Autumn *before* the Autumn you plan to start. So it is not too early to start making sure that your CV and application details are up to date during the summer after your first year.

Even if you had not previously thought about a placement, find out more when you start your university course.

Placements are not for you? Then still pay attention to developing your employability skills during your university course through volunteering, short term internships, etc.

Quality of ideas (and applications) are more important than quantity.

Whilst it is best to start early, don't give up! Even attractive and popular organisations may still be filling placement roles in the early summer to start in the Autumn.

Don't give up either on applying for short-term placements in popular organisations (for example, the BBC). If you want to get experience, keep applying.

Smaller organisations often leave it quite late before filling placement vacancies. Some may not even have a programme, but are so attracted by the quality of your approach and enquiry, they follow it up with a discussion.

If your applications are regularly ignored or rejected, double check that they are well presented, and then be patient. It's not personal. Think how many publishers rejected J K Rowling's Harry Potter!

1.9 Summary

A work placement during your academic studies will help you link theory and practice to your studies. It is likely to help you to get a better degree, and to shape your future career and organisation choice.

Finding the right placement will take time and will be competitive. As with graduation, you will be competing for jobs with similarly qualified people. Start planning for your placement early, and be perseverant in getting the right organisation for your needs.

The upside is that your placement is a great opportunity to work, continue to learn, and develop your CV. There will be few times in your working life when you will have such an opportunity to learn whilst you work. Every work situation is likely to have its ups and downs, but very few placements are a total disaster. The key is to see all your experiences as developmental – in this way you will exploit your placement to the full. This book has been prepared to help you navigate your way through your placement, and will give you detailed advice to fast track you through the learning curve. So good luck and Make the Most of Your Placement!

1.10 Further information

There is a wide range of reading material to help you decide what you want to do, and where you might do it. Here are some starter ideas:

National Council for Work Experience

www.work-experience.org

For a wide range of information and contact points.

Prospects

www.prospects.ac.uk

For information and sources on graduate job opportunities.

Family and friends

A great source, often under-exploited, of wisdom, opportunities, ideas, networks and contacts. Let a wide circle of people know that you are going on a placement, even a year ahead, and see what ideas come up! Don't forget to speak to students who have recently returned from placements too.

Overseas scholarships

Some organisations exist to promote trade and national links through exchange and internship programmes. For example, see as the

Mountbatten Scheme (www.mountbatten.org) which provides internship opportunities in the USA.

University Careers Office; University Placement Office

Be best friends with them! Make sure that you attend organisation briefings; and take advantage of interview and assessment centre skill development workshops, if available.

Rate my Placement

www.ratemylacement.co.uk

Students' views on experiences in a wide range of organisations, and site for possible placement opportunities.

Working Abroad

www.workingabroad.org

For ideas and information on overseas internships and volunteer roles.

Conferences and exhibitions

Keep your eyes open in quality newspapers and through web searches for conferences and exhibitions, organised both for placements and graduate opportunities. It is worthwhile to go to graduate recruitment fairs and meet prospective employers, since the representatives doing graduate recruitment will often be the same people responsible for placements. Talk to the people on the stands to find out information which may not be given in their brochures (eg what percentage of placements are offered full-time roles, what is their attitude on UCAS points or degree class, etc).

Checklist

- 1 Start early!
- 2 Use the timeline in this chapter to get ready
- 3 Start thinking early – is a placement right for you? Where would you like to be? What kind of role might you want? Talk with family and friends, and to people who may have already done a placement
- 4 Thinking of going abroad? Start planning now, and have a UK full-back in case the overseas placement applications do not work out
- 5 Visitor to the UK from abroad? Check that you have all the required documentation and permissions to do your placement in the UK (Chapter 5)
- 6 What support and advice is available from University?
- 7 Talk to students who are recently returned from university about their experiences
- 8 Attend university presentations on placements