

Mutually compatible - effective work placements



Bina Mistry (left) benefited from a secondment in marketing and gained the necessary skills and experience to successfully apply for the post of communications executive at City & Guilds

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1. Foreword

Values are critical, driving the behaviour and actions of most businesses and employees today. Companies strive to differentiate themselves and highlight their unique selling points through their brand values. Individuals, particularly young people, increasingly make their employment choices based on the reputation and history of a company, associating themselves with those who share their own values and ethics.¹

Compatibility and fit therefore play an integral part in this process, with mutual benefits influencing whether both parties wish to embark on a contractual arrangement.

The opportunity to assess compatibility, without commitment or risk, is an attractive proposition and smart organisations and individuals are increasingly recognising the advantages offered by work placements. Such arrangements provide potential employees with a basis on which to make their career choice and establish their interest and suitability in a particular profession or organisation. At the same time, employers can assess and attract potential talent without the complications of hiring new and untested staff.

This report explores the extent to which UK businesses are already offering work placements. It also sets out to identify the perceived benefits of work placements to both employers and individuals – new entrants to the workforce, returners and career changers – and establish whether they have made a significant impact on career development.

The results are fascinating and indicate that the potential of work placements has not yet been fully harnessed. UK businesses need to consider them as a serious tool in enhancing recruitment and minimising reputational risk, and realise the commercial advantages that work placements can offer their business. The perception of work placements should gradually change as work placements become a more permanent fixture in the UK, following the introduction, in September 2006, of the mandatory provision for vocational experience in the school curriculum.

Whilst some organisations already play an altruistic part in developing the skills of school children through work placements, more needs to be done. As the cohort of young people entering the labour force decreases by 60,000 individuals each year², employers will need to tap into a broader range of workers of all ages and experience. The extension of structured work placements to those considering changing their career or returning to work should pay dividends for the business and employee, and attract a more diverse and experienced workforce to meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Chris Humphries CBE
Director-general, City & Guilds

¹ Source: Missing Generation, May 2005, City & Guilds

² Source: Skills in a Global Economy, January 2006, Chris Humphries, City & Guilds

2. Background

Relevant work experience counts. Anecdotal evidence and research³ indicate that employers are increasingly recruiting staff on the relevance of the work experience that they have gained for the post they have applied for.

For new entrants to the labour force and career changers, applying for specific posts without the necessary experience can present a few challenges. More forward-thinking organisations are becoming more receptive to work placements or secondments that allow existing and potential staff to transfer existing skills and develop new ones in a new environment, facilitating new opportunities and openings.

Work placement case study

Bina Mistry
Marketing Executive
City & Guilds

I started my career as a marketing assistant in a small tourism and marketing company in Leicester. Although I enjoyed my role and working environment, the company was unable to offer me the career progression that I was seeking.

Consequently, I applied for numerous posts within larger organisations in London and joined vocational awarding body, City & Guilds in May 2004 as an administrator for the construction team.

At my annual review, I discussed my professional career development with my line manager and it was agreed that we would explore the possibility of including some marketing activities within my role.

I also took the opportunity to apply for the post of brand executive but sadly other candidates had more experience than me. I didn't let this put me off and because I had impressed the brand manager, I was offered a three month secondment in his team. During that time, I was exposed to different parts of marketing including brand marketing, exhibitions, sponsorship and PR.

I very much enjoyed the insight – both the good and not so good - that my secondment had provided into marketing. It also gave me the confidence backed by sound experience to apply for the post of communications executive in Construction and Engineering Technology, and was successful in my application. I am extremely grateful to Group Marketing and City & Guilds for giving me this opportunity and a job that I really enjoy. My current role is so diverse encompassing copywriting for the web and publications, and organising events, and no two days are the same.

My advice to those who would like to change their career is to explore the possibility of undertaking a 3 or 6 month secondment within your organisation. Talk to your line manager about your personal development needs and discuss areas that interest you as your line manager may not necessarily know what motivates and excites you. Recognise your strengths and apply them to your day-to-day job. Act upon your interests and turn your dreams into reality.

³ Source: Graduate skills and recruitment in the City, The City of London Corporation and the Financial Services Skills Council

i) Definition of work placement

The term 'work placement' encompasses the following definitions and benefits different groups of people.

- **Work experience organised through a school for secondary school children.** As from September 2006, vocational work experience is a mandatory component of the school curriculum. For this group, work placement provides a taster of the world of work, an insight into a particular profession, and what behaviour and values are expected from the next generation of workers.
- **A placement on a tertiary course including vocational,** also described as a sandwich course. These generally provide a more detailed insight into a student's chosen profession and enable them to put learning and theory into practice.
- **Internships or secondments within an organisation** enabling existing staff with an interest in developing their skills obtain a practical insight and experience in a new career.
- **Work placements for those considering or embarking on a career change.** As employees are expected to have two to three career changes in their lives⁴, it is envisaged that work placements for people in their 20s, 30s and 40s is set to grow.
- **Voluntary role** to gain experience of a particular sector

All types of work placements provide benefits to employers and potential employees alike and rely on mutual needs. For example, new entrants into the workplace may not necessarily have the technical skills or experience, nevertheless, they can provide employers with a fresh perspective, new ideas and lots of energy and enthusiasm.

More experienced workers can provide added value by transferring their core skills, knowledge and experience of the workplace to a new environment, and broaden an organisation's scope.

ii) Benefits of work placements to employers

- Organisations can 'try before they buy' and reduce the risk of employing the wrong person for the job.
- Participants (particularly students) can offer a fresh approach and new ideas.
- They provide employers, particularly those who are struggling to recruit new staff, with a great opportunity to showcase themselves and career opportunities and progression at their organisation.
- They enable an organisation to fulfil its corporate social responsibility and put something back in to the community.

⁴ Source: Portfolio careers, City & Guilds, February 2004

- Employers can establish whether potential employees' beliefs and behaviours are compatible with their brand values and corporate culture.
- They are a cost-effective way of coming into contact with young talent at a time when the pool of young entrants into the marketplace decreases by 60,000 each year.
- Hiring students or newcomers to the industry can provide a fresh perspective, new thinking, enthusiasm and ideas.

iii) Benefits of work placements to potential employees

- Work placements can provide a useful insight into a particular sector or organisation and help them make an informed decision about their career.
- They can help students make the transition to the world of work, develop their abilities and confidence and help them work as part of a team.
- A work placement is a genuine opportunity to make new contacts and take steps towards a new career.
- Employees can use work placements to develop their professional skills and make them more marketable

3. Research findings

i) Aims and methodology:

City & Guilds strives for a better understanding of the issues that both employers and individuals face so that it can play an integral part in developing strategies for re-skilling the UK's workforce.

As the UK's leading awarding body for work-related qualifications, City & Guilds was particularly interested in exploring the extent to which work placements could help businesses to upskill their staff and improve their productivity, particularly as it offers an award in Work Experience, Co-ordinators and Monitors (7325). Consequently, City & Guilds commissioned research amongst employers, employees and those considering returning to work, to explore the tangible benefits of work placements for UK businesses and those taking part, and the extent to which employers were offering work placements

604 HR managers from businesses of varying sizes – ranging from five employees to over 500 employees from a variety of sectors were surveyed; 544 employers from companies with 500 or less employees; 1389 employees from different occupations and sectors throughout the UK

The results were delivered with cross tabulations including region, gender, size of business, sector, and age group. Both surveys were conducted anonymously by The Survey Shop in March 2006 and the results were analysed by chartered occupational psychologist, Dr Stephanie Morgan, who offers her conclusions in this report.

ii) Results among employers

a. Does your organisation offer work placements?

Regional variation

National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
64%	68%	66%	54%	66%	65%	69%	58%	60%	55%	68%	81%	61%

Our research findings highlight wide regional variations in the provision of work placements offered by employers.

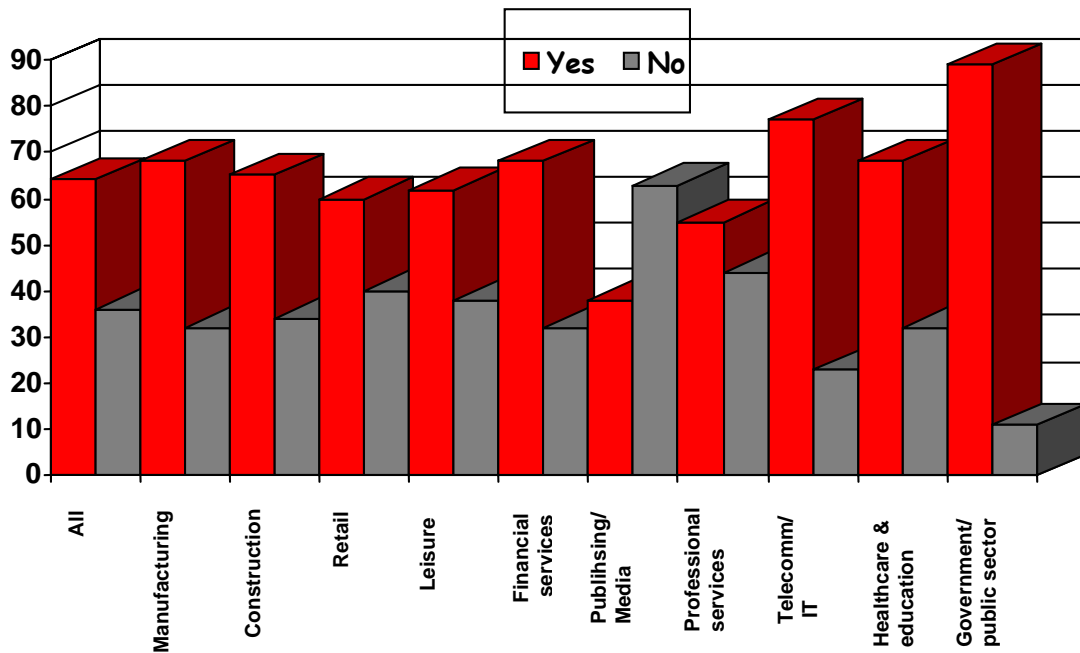
The West Midlands, by far, appears to offer the largest proportion of work placements according to 81 per cent of employers surveyed in the region, followed by Northern Ireland (69 per cent) and East Anglia (66 per cent). Altruism and recruitment are the biggest drivers for offering work placements with 74 per cent of employers from the West Midlands stating that they offer work placements to put something back into the community whilst a further 37 per cent regard them as a good way to assess potential employees.

Surprisingly, Greater London and the South West offer the least proportion of work placements (54%) and 66 per cent respectively. If we explore the reasons given by employers in Greater London for offering work placements, neither altruism nor company policy feature highly. Only 8 per cent do so to attract workers to their industry whilst a further 12 per cent offer work placements to keep recruitment costs down.

Employers in Wales are the most likely to offer work placements to a wider range of people; 14 per cent of work placements were offered to those over 40 years of age

Occupational variation

National	Manufacturing	Construction	Retail	Leisure	Financial services	Publishing & media	Professional services	Telecomms and IT	Healthcare & education	Government and public sector
64%	68%	65%	60%	62%	68%	38%	55%	77%	68%	89%



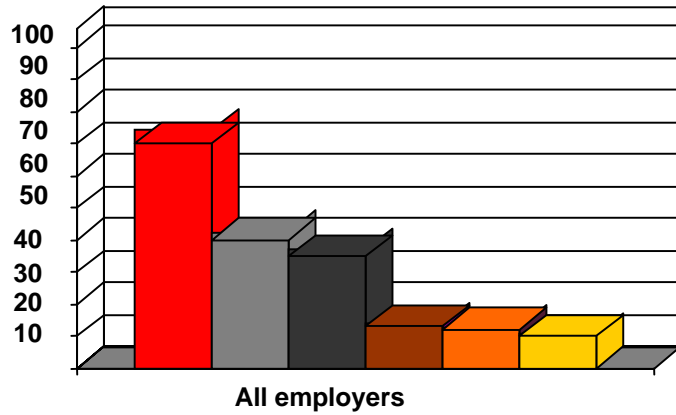
The research findings also highlighted variations between occupations. 89 per cent of employers in the public sector offer work placement which fits in with the Government's strategy to increase work placements. IT and telecommunications also feature highly (77 per cent of employers) which suggests that this sector has understood the value and benefits of work placements.

Employers in the media and publishing were the least likely to offer work placements (38 per cent). Surprisingly, out of the 38 per cent of businesses in media and publishing offering work placement, all of them stated they did so for altruistic reasons, but none of them regarded it as good way to assess employees or to attract entrants to the industry. This would suggest that as publishing and the media are deemed highly attractive careers with no shortage of candidates, employers in these fields are less likely to use work placements for commercial benefits.

b. Reasons for providing work placements

Corporate social responsibility is by far the most popular reason given by employers for offering work placement – 70 per cent. 40 per cent of those surveyed also viewed work placements as a trial period to assess potential employees, which is quite an undervalued aspect given the high cost of recruiting new staff. A further third (35 per cent) claimed that it was part of their company's training and recruitment policy.

Personal experience of work placement is undoubtedly a deciding factor. If employers themselves were able to take advantage of a work placement and develop themselves, they would be less likely to see the benefits and use it as part of their business strategy.



- It puts something back into the community
- It can be used as a trial period to test an employee's ability
- It is part of our training and recruitment plan
- We are suffering from a shortage of new entrants to our industry
- It keeps recruitment costs down
- It is a means of getting inexpensive staff

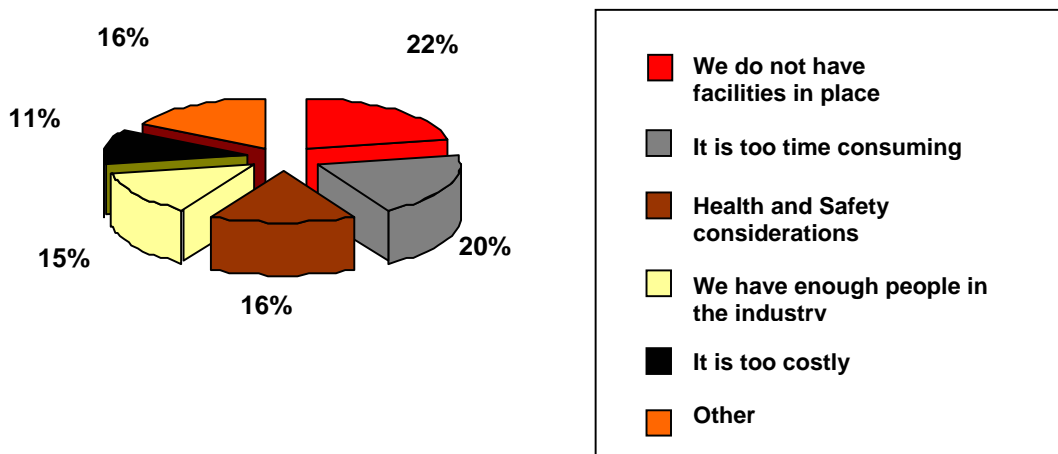
Regional variation

Opinions of employers (%)	National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
Assess employees	40%	48%	32%	24%	48%	40%	41%	57%	39%	44%	37%	37%	33%
Keeps recruitment costs down	12%	0%	12%	12%	26%	17%	14%	5%	0%	11%	3%	5%	17%
Inexpensive means of recruiting staff	10%	13%	12%	12%	17%	3%	23%	5%	3%	11%	3%	13%	7%
Our training & recruitment policy	35%	13%	44%	32%	43%	34%	36%	33%	32%	22%	33%	34%	37%
Investment in the community	70%	70%	68%	64%	65%	60%	91%	62%	71%	78%	83%	74%	63%
Shortage of entrants to our industry	13%	22%	8%	8%	9%	9%	14%	10%	16%	11%	10%	13%	13%

Occupational variation

Opinions of employers (%)	National	Manufacturing	Construction	Retail	Leisure	Financial services	Publishing & media	Professional services	Telecomms and IT	Healthcare & education	Government & public sector
Assess employees	40%	40%	52%	49%	42%	50%	0%	38%	30%	34%	28%
Keep recruitment costs down	12%	12%	17%	9%	9%	15%	33%	10%	20%	12%	8%
Inexpensive means of recruiting staff	10%	12%	7%	18%	5%	15%	17%	8%	30%	8%	8%
Investment in the community	70%	60%	55%	71%	75%	77%	100%	78%	60%	66%	76%
Our training & recruitment policy	35%	20%	43%	20%	30%	38%	17%	30%	50%	46%	44%
Shortage of entrants in our industry	13%	12%	31%	5%	16%	4%	0%	10%	10%	12%	16%

c. Reasons for not providing work placements



The report was keen to explore the barriers towards offering work placements and established five key factors: inadequate facilities, time, health and safety considerations, sufficient people in the industry, and cost.

Regional variation

Over a third of employers (35 per cent) were concerned that they did not have sufficient facilities or resources to be able to offer work placements. Employers in Yorkshire & Humberside and the North East (58 per cent and 50 per cent respectively) cited this as their key concern.

A further third (31 per cent) believed that work placements were time-consuming to arrange and implement. 56 per cent of employers in the West Midlands supported this view

A quarter (25 per cent) of employers did not offer work placements on the grounds of healthy and safety concerns. This was strongly borne out by employers in Northern Ireland (44 per cent), Wales (43 per cent) and the North West (42 per cent).

Reasons given by employers (%)	National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
Health & safety concerns	26%	27%	8%	29%	17%	42%	44%	27%	14%	36%	43%	22%	16%
Inadequate facilities	35%	36%	8%	38%	50%	37%	33%	40%	29%	43%	14%	11%	58%
Time consuming	31%	36%	17%	38%	17%	37%	0%	40%	38%	14%	21%	56%	21%
Too costly	17%	36%	8%	19%	17%	26%	11%	20%	14%	21%	21%	33%	5%
Enough staff in industry	23%	18%	17%	5%	17%	32%	11%	20%	24%	7%	14%	33%	16%

Occupational variation

Our findings also highlighted a difference of opinions within different occupations.

A half (50 per cent) of employers within construction claimed not to offer work placements because of health and safety concerns and given that young people under 18 years of age are not permitted onto a building site, these concerns would appear legitimate.

A surprisingly high proportion (67 per cent) of employers in the public sector cited inadequate facilities as their reason for not providing work placements whilst employers in IT and telecommunications (67 per cent) believed that work placements were too time consuming to organise.

40% of employers in the media and publishing felt that they did not rely on work placements as a means of attracting young blood into the industry.

Reasons given by employers (%)	National	Manufacturing	Construction	Retail	Leisure	Financial services	Publishing & media	Professional services	Telecomms and IT	Healthcare & education	Government and public sector
Health & safety	26%	17%	50%	14%	26%	25%	30%	15%	33%	38%	0%
Inadequate facilities	35%	33%	32%	36%	40%	17%	30%	40%	33%	31%	67%
Too time consuming	31%	42%	50%	25%	31%	33%	20%	30%	67%	24%	0%
Too costly	17%	17%	14%	17%	17%	8%	0%	23%	67%	19%	0%
Enough staff in industry	23%	25%	27%	25%	26%	17%	40%	25%	33%	14%	0%

d. Age of current participants in work placements

Most work placements offered were for those under 30 years of age which indicates that they are generally regarded as only being for the young. Given the number of people returning to the workplace (mothers, semi-retired people, unemployed), who have suggested that work placements would be helpful to them, this assumption should be challenged.

Age	16-18	19-21	22-30	31-40	41-59	60 plus
	73%	38%	21%	6%	4%	2%

Regional variation

Employers in Wales offer work placements to a wide age range with 17 per cent of those over 40 benefiting from them.

Age of participants on work placements	National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
16-18	73%	78%	72%	52%	83%	71%	82%	81%	84%	89%	90%	74%	80%
19-21	38%	35%	36%	44%	39%	34%	41%	33%	35%	22%	30%	39%	40%
22-30	21%	13%	16%	36%	13%	17%	14%	14%	19%	17%	20%	13%	20%
31-40	6%	4%	8%	12%	4%	3%	0%	5%	6%	6%	7%	11%	7%
41-59	4%	0%	4%	8%	9%	3%	0%	5%	3%	0%	10%	5%	3%
60 and over	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	5%	3%	0%	7%	3%	0%

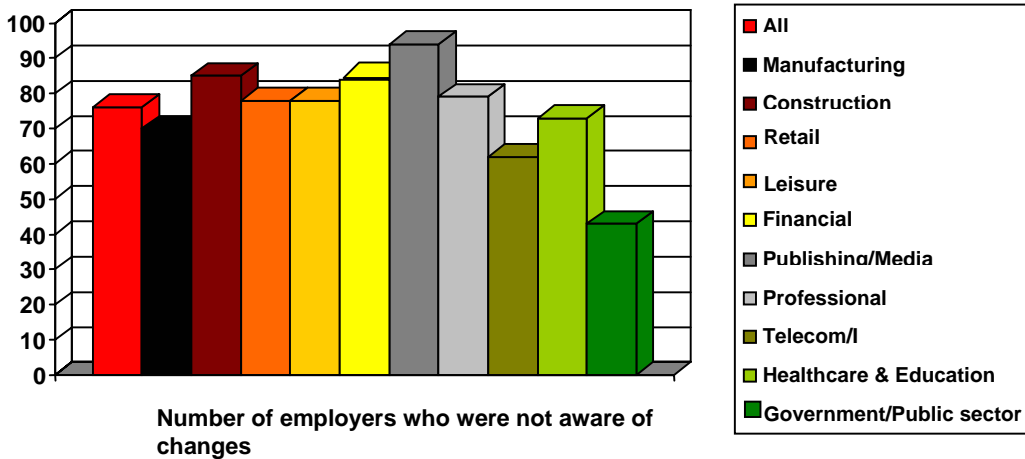
Sector variation

The financial services, public sector and retail had the highest proportion of work placements to mature workers which indicates a greater willingness in these sectors to offer placements to those over 40 years of age. On the contrary, employers within publishing and the media are the least likely to offer work placements to anyone over 30 years of age (0 per cent).

Age of participants on work placements	National	Manufacturing	Construction	Retail	Leisure	Financial services	Publishing & media	Professional services	Telecomms and IT	Healthcare & education	Government and public sector
16-18	73%	56%	74%	84%	70%	69%	67%	68%	80%	73%	84%
19-21	38%	44%	33%	24%	40%	54%	17%	34%	30%	42%	48%
22-30	21%	32%	17%	7%	11%	38%	33%	20%	20%	27%	32%
31-40	6%	4%	2%	5%	4%	8%	0%	2%	10%	9%	16%
41-59	4%	4%	2%	4%	0%	8%	0%	2%	0%	6%	12%
60 and over	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%	12%

e. Awareness of mandatory vocational work experience in the school curriculum

In September 2006, the Government introduced applied vocational learning in the school curriculum which stipulates that all school children below 16 must obtain vocational work experience.



Regional variation

Less than a quarter (23 per cent) of employers surveyed were aware that the Government intended to extend vocational learning among school children, rising to 40 per cent in the North East and 33 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Greater London (85 per cent), Scotland (81 per cent) and Wales (80 per cent) were the least informed.

Of those who did know of these changes, larger organisations were more likely to be positive about offering work placements to under 16 year olds, ranging from 43 per cent of smaller companies (less than ten staff) to 75 per cent for those with 101-250 employees.

Awareness among employers %	National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
Yes	23%	26%	32%	15%	40%	28%	25%	19%	27%	30%	20%	23%	33%
No	76%	74%	66%	85%	60%	72%	75%	81%	71%	70%	80%	77%	67%
Not stated	0.5%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Occupational variation

The public sector fared better with over half (54 per cent) of employers aware of these changes, dramatically decreasing to 6 per cent of employers in the media and publishing.

Greater awareness of the initiative needs to be generated particularly in industries that believe that work placements are too time consuming. This negativity will need to be addressed if young people are to be encouraged to explore their options and progression within specific industries.

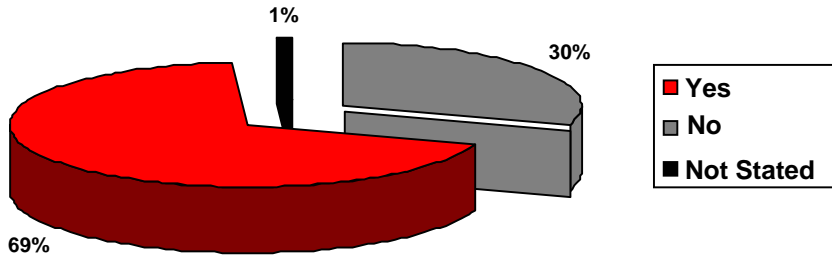
Those organisations who were aware of the changes and suggested that they were likely to offer work placements to young people were primarily in construction and telecoms and IT.

awareness among employers %	National	Manufacturing	Construction	Retail	Leisure	Financial services	Publishing & media	Professional services	Telecomms and IT	Healthcare & education	Government and public sector
Yes	23%	30%	15%	22%	22%	16%	6%	20%	31%	27%	54%
No	76%	70%	85%	78%	78%	84%	94%	79%	62%	73%	43%
Not stated	0.5 %	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	8%	0%	4%

iii) Key findings – research among employees

a. Participation in a work placement

Surprisingly, only a quarter (30 per cent) of respondents surveyed had taken part in a work placement, rising significantly in certain parts of the UK, 35 per cent in Wales, the West Midlands and the North West respectively. Scotland came bottom of the league in terms of participation in work placements (25 per cent).



Regional variation

% of employees who participated	National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
Yes	30%	30%	32%	28%	34%	35%	25%	25%	31%	31%	35%	35%	28%
No	69%	69%	68%	70%	66%	65%	74%	75%	68%	68%	65%	65%	72%
Not stated	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%

Occupational variation

% of employees who participated	National	Accountancy	Architecture	Banking	Chartered accountancy	Civil service	Chartered surveying	Healthcare	IT	Law	Media
Yes	30%	10%	33%	11%	29%	15%	28%	29%	34%	21%	35%
No	69%	90%	65%	89%	71%	85%	72%	69%	66%	79%	63%
Not stated	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%

% of employees who participated	National	Ministry & clergy	Pharmacy	Science and research	Social work	Teaching	Beauty	Building	Butchery	Care	Catering
Yes	30%	47%	52%	21%	75%	27%	44%	28%	12%	50%	44%
No	69%	51%	48%	79%	25%	73%	53%	72%	88%	48%	56%
Not stated	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	2%	0%

% of employees who participated	National	DJ-ing	Electrical services	Fitness instruction	Floristry	Hairdressing	Interior design	Motor vehicle servicing	Plumbing	Secretarial	Travel
Yes	30%	9%	21%	33%	36%	38%	24%	42%	16%	21%	36%
No	69%	91%	79%	67%	64%	60%	76%	58%	84%	77%	62%
Not stated	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%

75 per cent of social workers stated that they had participated in a work placement, followed by 50% per cent of care assistants. This significantly decreased for those employed in financial services, with only 10 per cent of accountants and 11 per cent of bankers having participated in a work placement.

b. Impact of work placement

Encouragingly, over three-quarters (86 per cent) of those who participated in a work placement stated that they had continued in that sector as it gave them a real insight into their chosen profession. This would suggest that work placements are an excellent means of attracting and recruiting potential staff into a sector and highlighting opportunities and career progression.

Only 8 per cent stated that it had put them off working in the sector. A higher percentage of these came from larger organisations (11 per cent of those at organisations with more than 500 employees). This may be linked to the type of work placement that they were given and they may possibly have felt lost within a larger organisation. This suggests that how people are received and trained in a work placement can make a big impact and difference on their experience and organisations need to take this into consideration.

City & Guilds identified that 21 per cent of respondents across a broad range of occupations stated that they either left their previous job or intended to leave as they wanted to change career.⁵ It is unknown the proportion of those who had experienced a work placement in their original choice of career .

Regional variation

% workers continuing in sector of work placement	National	East Anglia	East Midlands	Greater London	North East	North West	Northern Ireland	Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & Humberside
Yes, gave me a real insight	86%	85%	89%	87%	89%	79%	97%	85%	83%	83%	78%	87%	91%
No, put me off working in sector	8%	15%	4%	8%	5%	14%	0%	15%	9%	9%	11%	7%	6%
Not stated	6%	15%	7%	5%	6%	7%	4%	0%	8%	8%	11%	6%	3%

Those who benefited the most from work placements were based in Northern Ireland (96 per cent) followed by Yorkshire and Humberside (91 per cent). A sixth (15 per cent) of participants in East Anglia and Scotland respectively stated that their work placement had put them off working in a particular sector.

Occupational variation

% of employees continuing in sector of work placement	National	Accountancy	Architecture	Banking	Chartered accountancy	Civil service	Chartered surveying	Healthcare	IT	Law	Media
Yes, it gave me a real insight	86%	60%	100%	60%	92%	86%	92%	92%	69%	91%	82%
No, it put me off working in the sector	8%	20%	0%	20%	8%	14%	8%	0%	19%	9%	12%
Not stated	6%	20%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	8%	12%	0%	6%

⁵ Source: Happiness Index, City & Guilds, March 2006

% of employees continuing in sector of work placement	National	Ministry & clergy	Pharmacy	Science and research	Social work	Teaching	Beauty	Building	Butchery	Care	Catering
Yes, it gave me a real insight	86%	65%	100%	25%	83%	83%	%	%	%	%	%
No, it put me off working in the sector	8%	22%	0%	38%	13%	8%	%	%	%	%	%
Not stated	6%	13%	0%	63%	4%	9%	%	%	%	%	%

% of employees continuing in sector of work placement	National	DJ-ing	Electrical services	Fitness instruction	Floristry	Hairdressing	Interior design	Motor vehicle servicing	Plumbing	Secretarial	Travel
Yes	86%	75%	78%	100%	94%	100%	73%	95%	88%	67%	100%
No	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	0%	12%	25%	0%
Not stated	6%	25%	22%	0%	6%	0%	18%	5%	0%	8%	0%

Work placements seem to lend themselves to occupations such as healthcare, education and construction whilst experience in the field of publishing and media followed by the public sector seemed to discourage at least two-thirds of participants.

In its research, City & Guilds surveyed those wishing to return to work to establish how helpful they perceived work placements to be.⁵ Over a third (37 per cent) of respondents welcomed the opportunity to take part in work placements as part of a career change. This indicates a relatively high demand, whilst at the same time, a potential misunderstanding amongst the remaining two-thirds of the value of work placements to increasing their understanding of different professions and developing their career.

Of those wishing to take part in a work placement, a high proportion were in the fields of beauty (50 per cent), catering (59 per cent), finance (50 per cent), IT (47 per cent) and teaching (70 per cent).

f. Summary and conclusion

The research findings highlight that over half of employers surveyed are broadly receptive towards work experience but need to take them more seriously as a business tool and tailor programmes to make them a valuable and practical experience for participants.

Specific sectors would almost certainly benefit from offering work placements, as there is tangible evidence that this can enhance recruitment and reduce the possibility of hiring the wrong person for the job. Given the high percentage of respondents who indicated that the experience provided them with an insight into the sector, more could be done in those sectors experiencing difficulties in attracting calibre staff. Undoubtedly, good work placements could also significantly reduce the number of people regretting their initial choice of career.

The findings have indicated that demand for work placements is likely to outstrip supply. Given that 37 per cent of returners suggest they felt work placements could help, it is ironical that most work placements seem to be offered to young people. This would suggest that an age-demand imbalance needs to be addressed.

Most organisations that offer work placements believe that they are not only are they putting something back into the community, they can be used as a trial period to test an employee's ability. A smaller percentage of employers agreed that work placements keep recruitment costs down and could be an inexpensive means of obtaining staff.

These benefits can be compared with the reasons why some organisations do not carry out work placements. These are primarily cited as lack of facilities, too time consuming, as well as health and safety concerns. It is possible that these employers misunderstand the requirements of work placements. Information and support on how to create a simple cost-benefit analysis may be useful for these employers. As only a quarter of employers confirmed that they had enough employees in their industry, this would suggest that most sectors need to increase their potential pool of workers and take work placements more seriously as a business tool.