The perceptions of post work placement students from DBS, DIT and WIT towards their work placement experience.

A case study of work placement students’ experience from Dublin Business School, Dublin Institute of Technology and Waterford Institute of Technology.

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to understand how beneficial work placement experience is to those students that participate in it. There is much research into the benefits of internships but scant research examining the students’ level of satisfaction with their placement and there is also scant research on the career outcomes of the students after they have completed their work placement. There is also little research scrutinizing internships where the findings are empirically based.

Research data was taken from an online survey carried out on students that had completed a work placement in the last round of placements from DBS, DIT and WIT higher educational institutes. Four one-to-one interviews were also carried out with students that had completed placements. To strengthen the research, various journals and literature on internships were reviewed.

The research found that work placements are very beneficial to the students who participate in them. The majority of students are satisfied. They are afforded the opportunity to develop their skills. Their attitudes and expectations are also altered by the placement which ensures their career intentions are clarified and that they have clear expectations of the workplace. They feel they have an advantage over those that have not completed a work placement programme.
Chapter 1: Introduction
1.1 Background to this research

The title of this research is ‘The perceptions of post work placement students in DBS, DIT and WIT towards their work placement experience’.

Work placements are not a new concept in college courses. They have been present in higher education for over a century with the first college endorsed employment program appearing as early as 1906 (Thiel and Hartley as cited in Gault et al, 2000). Work placements have long been associated with various types of apprenticeships particularly in fields such as social work and medicine throughout the USA, Canada and Europe. Over the years this type of work based learning approach has become more and more prevalent in Higher Education Institutes (HEI’s) in Ireland. Work placement is now a key part of third level education that helps students to better prepare for future employment. A report published by REAP (Roadmap for Employment-Academic Partnerships) in 2011 identifies 411 courses in Ireland that include a work placement element among 23 HEI’s with over 10,577 students undertaking placements on an annual basis.

Work placements have been defined in a number of ways but all definitions include the idea that placements involve ‘gaining experience on the job’. Coco (2000) suggested that work placements are a ‘planned transition from the classroom to the job and are a natural bridge between college and the work world’. The work can be paid or unpaid. Work placements should help students focus their career choices, hone their jobs skills, personally focus their work values and decrease their anxiety about the job search (Hall 1976, Kane et al., 1992 as cited in Knouse et al, 1999).

In recent years, the global economic downturn has placed an even greater emphasis on employability and transferable skills along with increasing awareness of those attributes which most benefit graduates seeking employment. As new economic and competitive challenges are faced, work placements enable students to gain valuable learning experience. As a result, the researcher feels work placements are an increasingly topical area and one which deserves to be studied further.
The value of work placements has been widely touted by academics but it is not unusual for their worth to be questioned. Blackwell et al (2001) surmised that work experience itself does not have intrinsic value but rather it is the learning that the individual derives from the experience that is important, pointing to the need to ascertain if students develop career oriented skills on placement. Although work placements are now commonplace, surprisingly little empirical evidence has been carried out on them. Further data driven studies have been called for by researchers in relation to the outcomes of internships and work placements and their relationship between entry-level successes. D’Abate et al (2009) posits that satisfaction is the key to successful internships that will benefit all involved but also points to the need to empirically evaluate this satisfaction. The researcher therefore aims to ascertain if students develop career oriented skills, whether they perceive that work placement enhances their employment opportunities, their career outcomes along with their level of satisfaction with the work placement. All of which can be addressed with the research question.

The research question to be addressed is therefore ‘How beneficial are student work placements to the students who participated?’

1.2 Objectives of this research

In order to answer this research question, the researcher will conduct fundamental research which will address the following objectives;

1. To ascertain the students’ level of satisfaction with the overall experience

2. To ascertain if the students accrued benefits by developing career oriented skills and if so which skills?

3. To ascertain whether the experience has changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits.

4. To ascertain the students’ current status and career outcome.
1.3 Research Structure

The layout of the dissertation begins with chapter one, the introduction (herewith). This outlines the background and approach to the research question and the overall dissertation.

Chapter two examines academic literature in the area of work placements. A review of literature was undertaken under four main headings to reflect the objectives being researched. These were (1) To ascertain the students’ level of satisfaction with the overall experience (2) To ascertain if the students accrued benefits by developing career oriented skills and if so which skills? (3) To ascertain whether the experience has changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits and (4) To ascertain the students current status and career outcome.

Chapter three is the research methodology section which provides details of the research approach followed, the data collection method used, the type of analysis being performed, the validity of the research and the population used.

Chapter four, the data analysis section is where the findings of this research are highlighted and discussed.

Chapter five, the conclusion section, is where summations and conclusions are made based on the literature review along with the information compiled in the data analysis section. Recommendations are also made in this section.

Chapter six is the self-reflective learning section which reflects on the learning that has occurred throughout this dissertation process. This section will include reference to specific events which serve as a measure of the learning that has occurred, and will be used to measure whether a particular style of learning has evolved throughout this process.

Resources such as the questionnaire used and transcripts of the interviews are included in Appendices 1 to 3.
1.4 Recipients of this research
The intended audience for this research are the three main stakeholders in a work placement program, the students who participate, the company who hires them and the higher education institute that the student is enrolled in. The research can be of interest to all involved in programme design, placement coordination and communication between higher education and workplaces generally. It aims to focus on the students’ perspective of work placement and their perceptions of the experience. These results will be of obvious interest to students who are considering participating in a voluntary work placement program or whose course subscribes to mandatory work placement. The research will also be of interest to organisations that employ students on work placement as to their perceptions of the process. It will help to inform these organisations of areas in which they can improve their approach to placements and so ensure better relationships with their interns and also with the educational institutes. Additionally, the research will be of relevance to the educational institutes themselves. A positive work placement experience for the student benefits the institute as it may ensure the student becomes more employable, therefore improving the institutes employment graduate rates and in turn interest in the institute and its courses.

1.5 Scope and limitations to the research
There are several practical issues around this research which needed to be addressed before commencing. Firstly, in relation to the primary quantitative research, due to confidentiality procedures in the educational institutes, it was not possible to obtain contact information for the students who had completed work placements. Therefore, the researcher contacted an administrator from each of the colleges who agreed to take the researcher’s questionnaire and attach it to an email that would be forwarded to the list of relevant students. This eliminated the researcher from having direct access to the contact details of the students however ensured that the questionnaire could reach the researcher’s population. The researcher undertook a census of the students that had participated in the previous round of work placements in DBS and WIT and the students from the Retail and Services Management course in DIT that had participated in the previous round of work placements. The population size was 184, and the data being analysed is based on a 39% response rate. Given the amount of students that now
regularly undergo work placements, a larger sample would have been preferable however given the restrictions due to confidentiality and ease of access this was not possible.

Another issue that arose from this lack of access to student details meant that the researcher similarly had no access to post work placement students from DBS, WIT and DIT in order to conduct the qualitative part of the research. To counteract this problem, the researcher attached a final question to the questionnaire asking for willing participants to conduct an interview with. If the participants were agreeable to this, they would leave their email address for further contact. The researcher then contacted these students and the information that they had provided previously in the questionnaire was removed from the pool of responses in order to avoid a skewed sample.

As a result, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with 4 post placement students from either DBS, DIT or WIT as the qualitative research. The aim of these interviews was to further understand the experiences of work placement students, giving these interviewees a chance to explain more in depth about their experiences. Using the information gathered from these interviews along with information gathered from the questionnaires, the researcher was able to gain an in depth knowledge of the work placement experience.
Chapter 2: Literature Review
2.1 Introduction

There has been scant empirically based literature examining work placements. What empirically based literature that has been carried out has been done so in relatively small numbers considering the current prominence of work placements and their use to enhance experiential learning particularly in the United States. Gault et al (2000) reported that in the U.S., 9 out of 10 four year college programs participated in an internship and 1 out of every 3 four year college attendees worked as an intern during their studies. Most of the literature the researcher reviewed has been based on studies carried out on interns attending just one educational institution in the US and usually in just one academic discipline, posing the question of whether the research carried out has been broad enough to accurately represent work placements.

Firstly, the researcher will clarify what is meant by work placements as three terms are commonly used interchangeably to describe higher education programs involving learning through employment. Cooperative education refers to students who work full time and are paid for the work which they do. The usual participants are students in the engineering, manufacturing oriented and technical fields. In contrast, internships refer to part time positions where the student usually continues their studies simultaneously. They encompass a broad variety of disciplines and compensation for work done is optional. (Gault et al, 2000) These subtle differences mean the two terms are often used interchangeably. Additionally, the term work placement can be used to describe either cooperative placement or internships. The word internship is commonly used in the United States and as most of the literature reviewed hails from there, the word internship is almost exclusively used. However, the researcher feels for the purposes of this research, the programs are similar enough in their characteristics to include in the research so from here on the researcher will use both internship and work placement interchangeably or simply placement. When referring to those who partook, the researcher will use both the term students and intern.
From reviewing the literature it can be seen that the studies carried out can be divided into five sub-groups depending on the main focus of their research in regard to work placements. Firstly, the most prominent and researched area is examining the outcomes of placements for students, looking at whether participation in them will lead to career success. The next area looks at the benefits accrued to students from work placements, however the research in this area in lacking much empirical evidence. Thirdly, research looked into ways to enhance their overall efficacy and educational value for students. Next, research looked into the perceptions and expectations of students both before and after their placement. Finally, the sub group with the least research done into the area is a study looking at students’ level of satisfaction with their placement and how this in turn can affect the success of the work placement and the future success of the intern.

From this, the researcher formed four main objectives for the research which the researcher found would be most beneficial to research in relation to work placements in Ireland and the literature was reviewed in relation to these objectives.

2.2 To ascertain the students’ level of satisfaction with the whole experience

D’Abate et al (2009) conducted a study looking into what makes interns satisfied with their experience. They built on Rothman’s 2003 qualitative study and looked at three broad factors; job characteristics, work environment characteristics and contextual factors (referring to flexible working hours, pay and the location of the placement). The study found that work environment characteristics such as supervision, career development opportunities, relationship with co-workers and opportunities to learn were the most relevant to whether interns were satisfied with their placement. Job characteristics proved the next relevant with factors such as clear task identity, the significance of tasks carried out and the autonomy afforded to interns in determining the satisfaction of interns. The study found that contextual factors did not play a significant role in work placement satisfaction. Upon reflection, D’Abate et al concluded that the reason for this was that interns had previously and consciously taken these factors into account. In other words, the interns knew what they were signing up for when they applied for the placement and were more willing to accept little or no pay, inflexible
working hours and possibly a long commute to the location of the placement. The fact that internships are temporary in nature also points to the interns’ readiness to overlook these factors which they may be unwilling to do in a more permanent position. D’Abate et al posited that satisfaction can be viewed as the key to a successful internship as it is not only a concern to students but also to organisations. “Research has demonstrated links between job satisfaction and job stress, organizational commitment, absenteeism, turnover, and intent to leave (Hellman, 1997; Knoop, 1995; Sagie, 1998; Steinhardt, Dolbier, Gottlieb & McCalister, 2003; Tett & Meyer, 1993)” (D’Abate et al 2009). D’Abate et al also note very little empirical evidence looking at satisfaction of interns and highlighted a need to examine interns’ satisfaction from other populations in order to generalize the findings.

As D’Abate et al (2009) found that satisfaction can be seen as the key to a successful internship, following on from that, we can look at research into how to improve the efficacy of internships. This research area is focused more on what the employer can do to improve the experience and so improve the interns’ level of satisfaction. Narayanan et al (2010) state there has been little research into the causes of internship efficacy. He looks at the roles of the three main actors in internships, the student, the educational institution and the employer and gives recommendations for each actor. The recommendations for students state that the intern must view the experience as a knowledge transfer process. They also point to the importance of the process for understanding student satisfaction with the internship to gain success. Clark (2003) proposes a menu of academic assignments that can be carried out by the interns while completing the internship in an effort to enhance the educational value and so the efficacy of internships. This study however is not empirically based and merely suggests a number of possible assignments which can help to promote intellectual growth that contain practical and reflective components. She does however highlight the only cynical view of internships which I came across during my review of the literature. She acknowledges that internships have pragmatic benefits that sometimes draw more attention than their educational value. She points to the fact that educational institutions generate tuition income with a minimal commitment from staff, employers use talent cheaply or for free and students earn credit toward graduation while building contacts.
Rothman (2007) carried out a study asking interns for their views on how internship programs can be improved. The study is worthy as it used a large sample size of internships and also includes interns from a breadth of academic disciplines. The study corroborates previous studies recommendations for the improvement of internships calling for clarity of tasks, on-going feedback, mentoring, exposure to other parts of the business and respectful treatment of interns. It also looks at the expectations of employers from the point of view of interns, calling for more reasonable expectations around challenging assignments being completed in a reasonable timeframe.

**Conclusion**

Satisfaction of interns is vital to the success of internships. Empirical evidence is needed which looks at the satisfaction of interns specifically in new populations and the researcher plans to carry out such research. The researcher intends to look at three broad factors that help classify satisfaction. These factors (job characteristics, work environment characteristics and contextual factors) borrow from Rothman’s 2003 qualitative study. The researcher aims to use qualitative research carried out through interviews with interns to corroborate Rothman’s (2007) and previous studies looking at how internships can be improved.

2.3 To ascertain if the students accrued benefits by developing career oriented skills and if so which skills?

There are few data driven studies supporting internship benefits (Green et al, 2011) and even fewer that have been carried out in recent years. Coco (2000) stated that ‘Internships are a win-win situation for students, host companies and universities’. His work has been often referred to in internship literature however his 2000 article is not empirically based. Knouse and Fontenot (2008) referred to previous empirical studies such as Knouse, Tanner and Harris (1999) to illustrate the benefits of internships. There is evidence that there are definite extrinsic benefits to be gained from work placements. These benefits include students who complete internships being offered jobs more quickly than non-interns. This can be seen in evidence which suggests that recruiters rate students whose resumes showed evidence of internship experience higher than students
without the experience (Knouse and Fontenot, 2008). However, although they are offered jobs more quickly, there is still no evidence to prove that they acquired better skills during their internship.

Students now view internships as essential for gaining a competitive advantage and a way of networking (Cannon and Arnold, 1998). However, students with higher GPAs were more likely to do an internship than those with lower GPAs (Knouse, Tanner and Harris, 1999 as cited in Knouse and Fontenot, 2008). This predominance of students with high GPAs alone could explain the reason for higher employability after graduation than non-interns rather than career oriented skills which they developed during internship. The reason for this is because not all internships are equal and although many provide an opportunity for interns to develop a wider skill base, the nature of internships and their reliance on the employer’s attitude to the internship suggests that not all will provide interns with career oriented skills. Knouse and Fontenot (2008) state that overall, internships are beneficial however they can be improved through mentoring, realistic expectations from interns and also through interns with a positive attitude.

Conclusion

By reviewing the current literature in relation to the benefits gained from undertaking internships, the researcher has identified the need for more data driven studies supporting internship benefits. There is evidence that there are definite extrinsic benefits to be gained however there is still no evidence to prove that the interns acquired career oriented skills during the work placement. The researcher has identified four skill categories based on the model used by Gault et al (2000). These skill areas are; communication skills, academic skills, leadership skills and job acquisition skills. These four skill areas can then be broken down further into 13 distinct career skills, also used in Gault et al’s model namely, oral communication, written communication, problem solving, analytical skills, computer applications, information search, leadership/teamwork, creative thinking, job networking, relationship building, job interviewing, resume writing and proposal writing. The researcher aims to ascertain if the interns acquired and/or developed these skills.
2.4 To ascertain whether the experience has changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits

This area of the research looks at the expectations and perceptions of students towards their internship programs. Green et al (2011) looked at the effect of internships on the perception of the importance of employment traits. He carried out a survey of both employers and interns post-internship and pre-internship. We have already seen evidence that firms perceive students with internships as better than their counterparts but Green et al’s study looked at whether this was due to a change in the interns’ perception of employment traits due to their experience which brought their perceptions closer to those of the employers. The results showed that interns’ perceptions of important employment traits often differ from employers and that the internships did change the interns’ view of important traits needed to excel. However, the internship increased the number of differences between interns’ and employers perceptions and reduced the interns’ view on the importance of certain employment traits. It was commented that this was due to a misplaced level of confidence in the experience by the interns and they subsequently forgot about the importance of inherent employment traits such as technical and interpersonal skills. All groups viewed a positive attitude as vital for interns and employers placed a greater emphasis on a strong work ethic than students. The study however has its criticisms. The employer group was a small sample and the interns were once again from a single educational institution making it difficult to generalize beyond the sample. Also, perceptions may also be affected by other things than the work placement program especially leading up to graduation.

Cannon and Arnold (1998) conducted a survey of students and found that students at that time were placing a growing importance on obtaining internship experience. They viewed an internship as a viable tool for landing an entry level job and a vehicle for obtaining employment. He pointed to students having been affected by seeing the effects of the recession in the US in the early 90’s and this prompted them to strive to become more competitive in an increasingly competitive job market. Although this study is dated, we can draw interesting parallels between Cannon and Arnold’s comments on the effects of the recession in the early ‘90’s on students’ perceptions and the current financial downturn whose negative effects greatly outweigh the recession of the early
90’s. Cook et al (2004) completed a longitudinal study examining the change in the perceptions of interns over a 10 year period. The study built on Cannon and Arnold’s study and proved that students, by the end of the 10 year period, still had positive perceptions of internship programs. The study has its merits in that it conducted research on interns from different universities but who attended the same internship program in the same firm over a ten year period. Therefore it stands out in that it surveys students from more than one educational institution and was conducted on a longitudinal basis. They noted that for internship programs to thrive the needs of students must be satisfied.

**Conclusion**

From the literature, the researcher has identified an area of research which can be built upon. The researcher intends to identify whether the placement has influenced their expectations of the workplace, their belief whether it has enhanced their employability and whether they, subsequent to their placement, view themselves as having an advantage over other students who have not completed placements.

**2.5 To ascertain the students’ current status and career outcome**

By far, most research on internships has focused on the outcomes of the placement for the interns. (Narayanan et al, 2010). Despite this there have still been few data driven studies examining this. The first study to empirically inspect the outcomes of internships was carried out by Gault et al in 2000. This relatively recent research is surprising considering the presence of internships in higher education for over a century with the first college endorsed employment program appearing as early as 1906 (Thiel and Hartley as cited in Gault et al, 2000) In this study, Gault et al surveyed graduates who had completed internships during their studies along with non-intern graduates to quantify the effects of internship on career outcomes. He measured the outcomes based on intrinsic and extrinsic success. Intrinsic success was measured by looking at the graduates’ level of satisfaction with their coworkers, benefits and salaries in their current positions and overall level of satisfaction. Extrinsic success was measured by their time taken to get a job after graduation, their starting salary after graduation and their current salary. The findings showed there were no significant differences between interns and
non-interns regarding their intrinsic success. However, the interns had a higher level of extrinsic success than their non-internship counterparts, meaning they received higher pay, were hired more quickly and had higher levels of job satisfaction after graduation. This study provided valuable insight into internships and was broad in its depth as it examined 13 skill areas that interns may have acquired and in turn the intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes of acquiring these skills.

In 2004, Callanan and Benzing built on this research by exploring if interns acquired increased career oriented employment after their placement and whether they possessed a greater degree of confidence over their classmates due to it. The results pointed to an increase in career oriented employment for interns, however not a higher degree of confidence in their chosen field compared to others. In 2010, Gault et al once again conducted research into the effects of internships on the job marketability of interns i.e. the career outcome for interns. This study however, was taken from the point of view of the employers as it was employers who were the survey participants. This research however is still useful even though the researcher will not be concentrating on the perceptions of the employers as it still gives insight into outcomes for interns post-graduation. The survey found that employers of interns were willing to hire students with internship experience over non-interns, that the internship contributed to the future job performance of the interns and that the employers were willing to compensate more to interns returning to the company post-internship, who had exceeded their expectations during the placement. All three studies, greatly add to current work placement research as they empirically prove positive outcomes from internships for interns, however all three draw samples from a single educational institution and so their scope was limited.

**Conclusion**

Research on internships has focused on the outcomes of the placement for the interns. In spite of this, there have still been few data driven studies examining the outcomes for interns such as the time taken to get a job after graduation and whether the interns are now in career oriented employment. All three studies done point to the need for more research into the area of career outcomes for interns which the researcher plans to carry out, which will draw from graduates from three institutes.
Literature review conclusion

To surmise, from reviewing the literature it can be seen that there is a gap in the knowledge relating to work placements which the researcher will attempt to build on. There is a lack of empirical evidence supporting the benefits accrued to a students’ skill base due to completing a work placement and there is also scant scrutiny relating to the students’ level of satisfaction with the work placement experience. There is also a chance to further research into the expectations and attitudes of post placement students along with their current career outcomes. The researcher hopes to investigate the career outcomes, skills gained, current attitudes and level of satisfaction of the students in the chosen population.
Chapter 3: Research Methods and Methodology
3.1 Introduction
The first step in conducting any Masters level dissertation is to identify a clear and determinate research methodology to follow so as to ensure that the research gathered is suitable to address the research objectives. Blumberg et al (2008) identified the nine criteria which together make up “desirable, decision oriented research” which are;

1. Purpose of the research is clearly defined with clear objectives, scope and limitations and a precise meaning for all the words and terms significant to the research.

2. Research procedure described in sufficient details as to allow another researcher to repeat the research.

3. Research design clearly described and carefully planned.

4. High ethical standards applied to the research with safeguards in place which prevent causing harm to the participants.

5. Limitations or imperfections to the research should be clearly stated.

6. Analysis of the data should be extensive enough so as to reveal its significant insights.

7. Findings should be clear and unambiguous.

8. Conclusions should be clearly justifiably from the data provided.

9. The research report should contain information about the qualifications and suitability of the researcher.

This research will follow Blumberg’s methodology in order to ensure that a suitable standard of research is attained.

Collins et al (2009) stated that “many of the characteristics of good research can be developed by adopting a methodical approach” and that “methodical rigor refers to the appropriateness and intellectual soundness of the research design and the systematic application of the research methods”. Though Blumberg’s methodology will be used to ensure methodical rigor and intellectual soundness of the research design, the appropriate
research methodology to follow can be determined by considering in turn each layer of the Saunders et al (2009) ‘research onion’ (Figure 3.01 below).

Figure 3.01 Saunders’ Research Onion

3.2 The Research Philosophy
According to Saunders et al (2009) the research philosophy or epistemology adopted by the researcher contains important assumptions about the way in which the researcher views the world. These assumptions in turn will influence the research strategy chosen for the research and in turn the methods chosen as part of that strategy. In other words, the research philosophy plays an important role in shaping the entire research. Which philosophy is adopted will be influenced by the researcher’s “particular view of the relationship between knowledge and the process by which it is developed” (Saunders et al, 2009). However, there is no one research strategy or philosophy that is better than the others, different strategies will fit better with differing research questions and research questions rarely fall squarely into one philosophy or the other. In fact, pragmatism suggests that it is perfectly possible to work with variations of both spheres of influence in your epistemology (Saunders et al, 2009).
The first step in determining which research philosophy is most suitable to address the research objectives is to consider the two most distinguished research philosophies, positivism and interpretivism. “Positivism is the position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond”. (Bryman and Bell, 2011) With positivism, existing theory is used to develop hypotheses. The role of research is to test these hypotheses which in turn will lead to the development of further theories. Positivism posits that only confirmed knowledge can be viewed as knowledge and is concerned with facts rather than impressions.

An important element of positivism is that research where possible is carried out in a value-free way. This means that the researcher is seen as external or independent of the collection of data and therefore can do little to affect the data. The assumption is that the researcher can therefore maintain “an objective stance” (Saunders et al, 2009)

Interpretivism is the name given to the opposing philosophy to positivism. It views the subject matter of social sciences, i.e. people and institutions, as fundamentally different from the subject matter of the natural sciences. It is far more subjective and focuses on exploring the complexity of social phenomena with a view to gaining interpretive understanding. According to Blumberg et al (2008), interpretivists argue that “simple fundamental laws are insufficient to understand the whole complexity of social phenomena’ and that ‘an objective observation of the social world is impossible, as the social world has a meaning for human beings and is constructed by intentional behaviour and actions’. In direct contrast to positivism, the interpretivist stance calls on the researcher to adopt a sympathetic stance. Here, the researcher is “value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched and cannot be separated and so will be subjective” (Saunders et al, 2009).

As neither the objectivity of positivism nor the subjectivity of interpretivism could be considered an appropriate philosophy to follow in order to reflect the researchers objectives, the researcher was required to consider a third option, realism. The philosophy of realism lies on the plane somewhere between positivism and interpretivism. Blumberg et al (2008), state that realism is a research philosophy sharing principles of both positivism and interpretivism. Like positivism, it accepts the existence
of a reality independent of human beliefs and behaviour, however it also concedes that understanding people and their behaviour requires acknowledgement of the subjectivity inherent to humans. Two forms of realism exist, direct realism and critical realism. According to Saunders et al (2009), direct realism posits that what we experience through our senses portrays the world accurately whereas critical realists argue that as researchers, we will only be able to understand what is going on in the social world if we understand the social structures that have given rise to the phenomena that we are trying to understand. They also argue that the critical realist’s position is much more in line with the purposes of business and management research as it often is aimed at the reason for phenomena in order to recommend change. This is in line with the researcher’s research into understanding the benefits accrued to students undertaking work placement and the reasons behind these perceived benefits.

The researcher has therefore chosen Critical Realism to be the most suitable research philosophy to apply as given its nature, enabling both a scientific approach and rich data, provides the most appropriate fit for this research. The researcher will apply a pluralist approach to the research using both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

3.3 The Approaches Layer
In order to determine which research approach is the most appropriate to follow, the researcher sought a clear understanding of the two different reasoning approaches; deduction and induction.

Deductive theory represents the most common view of the type of relationship between theory and research. According to Fisher (2004), deduction is when a conclusion is drawn that follows in logic from the premise that is stated, i.e. it does not depend on observations or experience and it is simply a matter of logic. Saunders et al (2009) elaborate further by stating that the deductive approach has its foundations in scientific research and includes the development of hypothesis from theory as the first step. Data is then collected in order to confirm or reject the hypothesis.
Deductive research was discounted as a research approach due to the fact that the nature of the research at hand will depend on observations and experience whereas deductive research depends on arriving at a conclusion based only on logic. This would lead to the conclusion that this approach would be better suited to research which evaluates theoretical writing and then draws conclusion based on that logic. This would not be a suitable approach to follow for this research.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2008), with an inductive stance there is no strength of relationship between theory and research, reasons and conclusions. In induction, the researcher draws conclusions from one or more facts or pieces of evidence. The conclusion explains the facts and the facts support the conclusion. Cooper and Schindler (2008) infer however that the conclusion is only hypothesis and “an inferential jump beyond the evidence presented”. Bryman and Bell (2011) add that with induction “theory is the outcome of research” and “involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations”. Collis et al (2009) state that inductive research is when theory is developed from the observation of empirical reality; thus general inferences are induced from particular instances. Collis et al note that as inductive research involves moving from individual observations to statements of general patterns or laws, it is referred to as moving from the specific to the general. Research using an inductive approach is usually concerned with examining the context in which the findings took place where the researcher plays an active part in the research (Saunders et al, 2009). Saunders et al imply that induction is mainly about gaining an understanding of the meanings people attach to events and allows a more flexible structure of research to take into account changes of research emphasis that might occur during the course of the research. Inductive reasoning is also more tolerant to the researcher’s knowledge in the area and understands that the researcher is not an expert in the area and will not have the knowledge necessary to form hypotheses. (Saunders et al, 2009)

Although inductive research is considered to be less scientific than deductive research, the inductive approach is a more suitable approach to follow for this research. During this research, the researcher will undertake primary and secondary research and following an analysis of the information, will aim to infer an answer to the research
question, that is, the researcher will follow an inductive approach which begins with theories that are developed from patterns in observation. This approach to research is more flexible than the deductive approach as it begins with examining primary data and then attaching meaning to it therefore the focus can shift from the original area of research if the data specifies. (Saunders et al, 2009).

Figure 3.02: Research approach

3.4 The Strategies Layer
Saunders et al (2009) state that the research strategy should be guided by the research question and objectives, by the extent of the existing knowledge and also by the research philosophy. Once again it is noted that strategies are not mutually exclusive. The researcher determined that the research was explanatory in nature with an aim of “studying a problem or situation in order to explain the relationship between variables” (Saunders et al, 2009). The situation being studied being work placements and the variables being numerous such as pay, work environment, feedback, skills gained, career outcome etc. in order to explain the students post placement positive or negative perceptions. With this in mind, a number of different strategy options for undertaking this research were considered in turn.

Some options such as Action Research and Experimentation could be discounted upfront as not being suitable to appropriately address the research question. Others such as Case
Study and Survey needed further consideration due to some similarities in both methods such as the use of multiple sources of data to form an opinion on a particular area of research.

The researcher decided that a case study strategy would be the most appropriate strategy for the research. Robson (2002:178) as cited in Saunders et al (2009) defines a case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. For this research that would entail empirically investigating work placements using multiple sources of data.

This allows a “rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted” (Morris and Wood, 1991, as cited in Saunders et al, 2009). Case study strategy is most often used in exploratory and explanatory research and the data collection techniques are likely to be various and used in combination. Questionnaires although mainly thought of as part of a survey strategy, may also be used in a case study strategy. As Saunders et al (2009) notes “it is quite possible to use the survey strategy as part of a case study”. The researcher intends to use different data collection techniques, namely questionnaires along with semi structured interviews. This infers that the researcher will be ‘triangulating’ multiple sources of data.

Triangulation is the term used to describe combining qualitative with quantitative methods within one study to ensure that the data is telling you what you think it is telling you. The researcher will plan to use qualitative data collected during semi structured interviews with students who have completed work placements as a way of triangulating the quantitative data collected using a questionnaire administered to students in three different institutes. The aim of collecting this qualitative data is so the students can explain their experiences more in depth, provide reasons for the perceived success or failure of their experience and suggest areas for improvement. This deeper understanding of knowledge to their experience would not be possible using questionnaires alone.

Additionally, the researcher intends to use a case study strategy that incorporates multiple cases. This means the researcher plans to use information from three sets of
students who have completed work placements from three separate higher education institutes, namely; Dublin Business School (DBS), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The rationale being in studying multiple cases, a deeper understanding of the subject can emerge. It can also provide the opportunity for cross case analysis.

3.5 The Choices Layer
The research design which will be followed is the ‘Multiple-methods’ approach as after considering the methods available, (mono method and multiple-method), it is the researcher’s opinion that this would provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the primary data. This implies that more than one data collection technique is used but this is restricted to either exclusively qualitative methods or exclusively quantitative methods. ‘Mixed methods’ approach stems from the ‘Multiple methods’ approach and uses both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures. Stemming from ‘Mixed methods approach’ are ‘Mixed method research’ and ‘Mixed model research’.

The researcher has chosen ‘Mixed method research’ as it uses both data collection techniques but does not combine them as with ‘Mixed model research’. The quantitative data collection technique will be used first and then the qualitative data technique will be used in this research (the reason for this sequencing is explained in Section 3.7.2). This means quantitative data will be analysed quantitatively and qualitative data will be analysed qualitatively. The qualitative data collection will be used to explain the situation more in depth using questions that slightly vary from the questions used in the questionnaire however the broad themes explored will be the same in both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The interviews will use open ended questions and allow the participants to expand. While it is possible to use open ended questions in questionnaires, due to the medium, they are less likely to be answered in depth and leave little scope to analyse them quantitatively. In this research, however, the quantitative technique will predominate. The qualitative and quantitative research has been designed to answer different aspects of the research problem.
The researcher is aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both the qualitative and quantitative techniques used. Quantitatively, using questionnaires (in a survey strategy as part of a case study) is relatively simple to administer and the use of fixed response questions can reduce variability in responses which results in interpretation and analysis of the information being more straightforward. However, the researcher is also mindful that if the options in a fixed response are too rigid, there is a danger that it might result in the questions being ‘leading’ and the results therefore being inaccurate. Also the detachment of the researcher from the participant when they are completing the survey may lead to the participant misinterpreting the questions or even the motives behind the survey.

Qualitatively, conducting interviews means the free exchange of information is likely to result, as well as greater depth of insight and logistical advantages. However, there can also be negative aspects to using interviews such as a lack of interviewing skills by the researcher and the time required to adequately interview a suitable pool of people.

The researcher was mindful of the drawbacks of these methods throughout the process however felt the positive aspects outweighed the negative aspects throughout the research.

3.6 The Time Horizons Layer
An important aspect to consider with regard to determining which research methodology to follow is to consider the time-horizon that will be used. The two options for a time horizon are cross-sectional or longitudinal. Saunders et al (2009) describes cross sectional research as being a “snap-shot of one point in time” whereas longitudinal research refers to research which is undertaken over a period of time and allows the researcher to track change and developments over this period.

The time horizon for this research will be cross-sectional rather than longitudinal as the objective of this dissertation is to discover the perceptions of post work placement students toward their work placement experience at a single point in time.
3.7 Data Collection and Data Analysis
There are two main categories of data, primary data and secondary data. According to Easterby-Smith et al (2008), the term primary data relates to new information that is collected directly by the researcher and secondary data is research information that already exists in the form of publications or other electronic media which is collected by the researcher. Easterby-Smith further states that the value of primary data is that it can lead to new insights and greater confidence in the outcomes of the research whereas secondary data allows the researcher to build on what has been done before. For the purpose of this research, the researcher will use a combination of both primary and secondary data to address the research question and objectives.

3.7.1 Secondary Data Collection
The secondary qualitative data used for this research has been sourced from academic journals on Emerald, Business Source Complete and the Irish Managers Institute databases. A bibliographical review of the initial relevant articles that were found led the researcher to source related articles which were not initially part of the search results. The main searches used were “Internships”, “Cooperative Education” and “Work Placement”. Additionally, the researcher sourced a recent report published by the Roadmap for Employment-Academic Partnerships (REAP) which is available on the Cork Institute of Technology website. All sources of secondary data have been referenced in the bibliography section of this research.

3.7.2 Primary Qualitative Data Collection
The primary qualitative data used in this research was gathered through interviews. According to Saunders et al (2009), the nature of any interview should be consistent with the research question(s) and objectives, the purpose of the research and the research strategy adopted. Saunders et al continue by stating that interviews may be highly structured using standardized questions for each research participant (structured interviews) or they may be ‘non-standardized’ whereby the research will have a list of themes and questions to be covered which may vary from interview to interview (semi-
structured interviews). The researcher has opted to use semi-structured interviews as it allowed the researcher to omit certain questions which did not pertain to a particular interviewee, e.g. questions relating to the current career status of students who had yet to finish college. It also allowed the researcher to ask questions relevant to the flow of the conversation and to add additional questions where needed.

The researcher has used information gathered from the quantitative data collection process to attain contact with students who would agree to further interviews for the process of qualitative data collection. Due to problems of access as mentioned earlier, the researcher was unable to acquire a list of the students that had completed work placements in the previous round of placements in each college. Therefore, the researcher was unable to directly contact post-work placement students that could be used in the qualitative data collection. As a way to combat this problem, the researcher attached a final question to the questionnaire asking if respondents would be willing to participate in an interview. If the respondents answered positively, a space was available on the questionnaire where they could fill in their email address to be contacted further. The interviewee’s responses from the questionnaire were then removed from the quantitative data in order not to skew the results.

The interviews were individual depth interviews (IDIs) where there is an “interaction between an individual interviewer and a single participant” (Cooper and Schindler, 2008) and were recorded. Appendix 1 provides a transcript of the questions asked in each interview and a summary of the responses received.

3.7.3 Primary Quantitative Data Collection
In order to determine the most appropriate type of survey method to use, the researcher identified the most important criteria for a mode of survey administration with respect to the research at hand. These were speed of receiving information, response rate, sample control, quantity of data and cost. Having considered all the methods of survey administration available in both the self-administered and interviewer administered types and realizing that no one mode matched all five criteria, the researcher was aware of the requirement to make a trade-off between each criteria in line with Saunders et al’s (2009) suggestion that compromises are usually needed to be made in the choice of
The search was then narrowed to the two criteria which the researcher perceived as the most important; speed and cost and from this it was determined that the most appropriate method to use was an online questionnaire. According to Saunders et al (2009) the questionnaire is one of the most widely used data collection techniques within the survey strategy (which the researcher is using as part of a case study) because each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions. Therefore, it provides an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample. For the purpose of this research, the questionnaire will be administered electronically through the SurveyMonkey® website and will be completed independently by the respondents.

The nature of the survey questions will be firstly to determine a little background information about the type of placement the student did as the population consisted of respondents from various areas of study and course requirements. Next, the survey asks how satisfied the respondents were with their work placement experience, what skills they gained, their attitudes toward the workplace and how their perceptions have changed since the work placement and finally questions about their current status.

**Questionnaire Design:**

1. Specify the Information Needed  
2. Specify the survey administration method  
3. Determine the content of individual questions  
4. Design the question to overcome the respondent’s inability or unwillingness to answer  
5. Decide on the question structure  
6. Determine the question wording  
7. Arrange the questions in the proper order  
8. Identify the form and layout  
9. Reproduce the questionnaire  
10. Eliminate pooblems by pre-testing

![Figure 3.03: Question Design Cycle (Source: Burns & Bush 2006)](image)

According to Saunders et al (2009), the validity and reliability of the data you collect and the response rate you achieve depend largely on the design of your questions, the structure of your questionnaire and the rigor of your pilot testing. When designing the
questionnaire, the researcher first needed to consider the research objectives and what the questionnaire was aiming to determine. A review of relevant academic literature also proved very useful in determining questions which needed to be addressed. The questionnaire was then designed, as mentioned previously, in five parts. The first questions were background questions to determine the demographics of the respondents, along with information about their course and area of study and basic questions about the duration of placement, pay and whether it was full or part time. Respondents were then asked how satisfied they were with their placement followed by questions relating to variables which affect a student’s satisfaction on placement. Next, respondents were asked how the placement improved or developed their skills in eight areas. The fourth section asked about their expectations and attitudes toward the placement, the workplace and their level of employability. The final section related to where the students are now. The respondents were asked a filter question which determined whether they had graduated yet or not and depending on their response, they were either directed to the final question or questions about whether they were currently employed and further questions relating to their current employment. All the questions asked were forced choice questions, no open-ended questions were used. This approach was taken to limit the variance in responses and thereby enable better comparison of the responses. However, there were various types of forced questions used in the aim of ensuring the respondents had enough alternatives to choose from and had also considered all possible responses. List questions were used for this purpose along with rating questions which used the Likert-style rating scale with a four or five point rating scale depending on the question. One matrix question was also used concerning skill development in order to try to prevent respondent fatigue and to improve the flow of the questionnaire. Appendix 3 contains a copy of the questionnaire submitted and Appendix 2 contains an early draft of the questionnaire prior to pretesting.

**Pilot Testing:**

A pilot test is carried out to detect weaknesses in design and instrumentation and should therefore draw subjects from the target population (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). However, the researcher chose to forgo pilot testing in favour of a variation on pilot
testing called pretesting. According to Cooper and Schindler (2008), in small populations, pilot testing can run the risk of exhausting the supply of respondents and sensitizing them to the purpose of the study. Due to the initially small population, the researcher chose to use pretesting which instead relies on colleagues and friends to test the internal validity of the questionnaire. The aim of this pretesting is to use the suggestions of the respondents to identify and change confusing or awkward questions. Additionally, this gave the researcher the opportunity to ensure there were no technical problems with the administration of the survey through SurveyMonkey®.

Having re-written the questions a number of times, the researcher finalized the content of the questionnaire, and then uploaded the questions onto the SurveyMonkey® website. A link to the questionnaire was then sent to six people who were asked to complete the questionnaire online and revert to the researcher with feedback. The feedback resulted in some changes being made to the set-up of the questionnaire along with a re-phrasing of some of the questions asked. Conducting a pre-test was in the researcher’s opinion a vital part of conducting the research as it enabled the researcher to identify problems not only with the content of the questionnaire but also with how it was being administered which would otherwise have been overlooked and would likely have reduced the effectiveness of the questionnaire.

3.7.4 Data Analysis
The researcher used the SurveyMonkey® tool to administer the questionnaires and analyse the results. Although a basic package was available at no charge, the researcher chose to subscribe to the ‘Select Plan’ as this option enabled the researcher to incorporate filter questions or ‘question logic’ into the survey. As mentioned previously, the researcher was not allowed access to the lists of students who had completed placements in each college. To ensure confidentiality, the college administrator emailed a web link of the survey to the population meaning the researcher never got to see a list of the names however it ensured the target population was reached. After a week or so, the researcher contacted the relevant college administrator and requested that a reminder email be sent to the population encouraging those who had not completed the questionnaire to do so. The researcher created three ‘collector’s on the SurveyMonkey®
website which meant the same questionnaire was sent to all respondents, however the responses were divided up electronically depending on which college the student attended. This was done by creating three separate web links, one for each of the colleges. Only the relevant web link was sent to the college administrator of each college.

3.8 Population and Sample
When determining the most appropriate mode of administration for the survey, (Section 3.7.3), the researcher also needed to consider who the research population would be and then what the important criteria being sought were in a mode of administration. The research population for the quantitative analysis of post work placement students attending DBS, DIT and WIT will be a census of all students who completed work placement in the previous round of placements in DBS and WIT and all the students who completed work placement in the previous round of placements in the Retail and Services Management course in DIT. According to college administrators these numbers are 55 for DBS, 61 for WIT and 66 for DIT giving a total population of 184 students.

This population was chosen in order to provide a basis for case study involving multiple cases from three higher education institutes in Ireland. The researcher understands the drawbacks of only having work placement students from a particular course in DIT as opposed to all the work placement students in DBS and WIT and the problems that this affords to the research methodology. However, the researcher was unable to gain access to all work placement students in DIT and feels the data obtained is still beneficial to the case study. The researcher feels this population is representative of students completing work placements from other courses in DIT. Additionally, as a result, the populations of work placement students are roughly the same in each college and so this prevents the final results being skewed toward any particular subset of the population.

The sampling frame used is as follows;

Element: ‘Post work placement’ students

Unit: Have undertaken their placement in the previous round of work placements from their college
3.9 Ethical issues in data collection
According to Eriksson et al (2008), research ethics cover the ways in which research is conducted and reported and is concerned with the whole research process, starting from the relationship between the researcher and the research objective and ending with writing and publishing the report. Although ethical behaviour should be maintained throughout the entire research process, the need for ethical behaviour is perhaps most imperative during the data collection and interview processes. From the point of view of this dissertation, ethics will refer to the practices which were followed to ensure that participants in the study were treated in a manner which ensured respect, privacy and data confidentiality.

In designing the questionnaire, no personal data was requested and the respondents were identified only through gender, age range and a high level view of their work placement experience. Participation in the questionnaire and also the one to one interviews was voluntary. This according to Eriksson et al (2008) is good practice in ethical research. Finally when designing the questionnaire questions, the researcher was conscious of not using overly sensitive questions e.g. using a pay range when asking about current salary rather than asking about specific amounts. This was done in the case of the questionnaires and the one to one interviews.

3.10 Limitations to the Research
The limitations to this research are discussed in section 1.5.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Findings
4.1 Analysis of Primary Quantitative data

The results of the findings from the questionnaire will be discussed in this section. There were 184 students who had completed work placements in the previous round of placements from DBS, DIT and WIT. Each of these students was asked to complete an online questionnaire for the purpose of this research. The population size was 184, and the data being analysed is based on a 39% response rate (or 66 responses received). Before analysing the results, we need to keep in mind the research questions being asked which were; 1) What was the students’ level of satisfaction with the overall experience?, 2) Did the students benefit by developing career oriented skills and if so, which skills?, 3) Has the experience changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits and 4) what is the current status of the students?

4.1.1 Demographics & work placement details of questionnaire participants

Participants in this survey were asked some general questions to build a picture about their demographics, their course and basic information about their placement. There was a majority of female respondents (62%) over male respondents (32%). 58% of respondents were aged between 22 and 26 years of age, with 15% between 17-21 years and 15% between 22-26 years, the remainder being over 32 years. The students were mainly enrolled in undergraduate courses (76%) as opposed to 24% in post graduate education. Most of the respondents (68%) were at the time attaining either a 1.1 or 2.1 course award grade. These are the two highest possible award grades in Ireland and this corresponds with the literature reviewed. Knouse, Tanner and Harris, 1999 as cited in Knouse and Fontenot, 2008 state that students with higher GPAs were more likely to do an internship than those with lower GPAs. (GPA being the equivalent to the course award structure in Ireland).

The respondents were asked what area of study they were in with the majority (33%) in Business and Management, followed closely by Retail and Services Management (27%) with 17% in Accounting and Finance.
The work placements mainly lasted between four to six months (39%) and seven to nine months (32%). The majority of the placements were full time placements (85%). Also most were paid internships (62%) with 29% being unpaid. A small proportion (9%) were classed as other. From reviewing the responses, the researcher discovered this 9% of respondents had their expenses paid by the company but were not paid a wage.
4.1.2 Objective 1: To ascertain the students’ level of satisfaction with the overall experience
The researcher dedicated a section of the questionnaire to focus on the students’ level of satisfaction with their experience on work placement. Initially, they were simply asked to rate how satisfied they were. Most were very satisfied (41%) with 37% feeling satisfied. Only 3% of respondents were not satisfied with their experience.

Figure 4.04: Level of satisfaction
This means that a large majority, 78% of students were either satisfied or very satisfied. This positive outcome should be reflected in the remaining questions of the section as the researcher next made ten statements which relate to factors which determine the satisfaction of students while on work placement. If the students were mainly agreeing with these statements it would confirm research indicating that these are the factors which influence students’ satisfaction with their placement. The respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or state their uncertainty in relation to each statement. Firstly; my employer clearly outlined their expectations of me from the beginning.

*Figure 4.05: Clearly outlined expectations*

![Pie chart showing response distribution](image)

Most students agreed (57%) or strongly agreed (19%) with this statement. No students strongly disagreed. Next; the placement required me to use a number of complex or high level skills. 45% of students agreed with this while 22% strongly agreed. However, 27% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. After that the students were quizzed on the tasks they were given and how significant these tasks were to the running of the organisation. 84% either agreed or strongly agreed that the tasks they underwent were of significance to the organisation. The students were then asked if they were permitted to use personal initiative when carrying out their work. 49% agreed that they were with 38% strongly agreeing.
Figure 4.06: Complexity of tasks

Figure 4.07: Significance of tasks

Figure 4.08: Personal initiative
In relation to whether the students were given regular feedback on their performance a large 54% agreed that they were with 19% strongly agreeing. However 19% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This means that the percentage of students strongly agreeing that they received regular feedback is comparable to the percentage who disagreed overall and so points to a significant proportion of students who felt they weren’t given appropriate feedback. When asked whether they were given opportunities to learn about their particular field, a large majority of 78% agreed or strongly agreed that they were given these opportunities on placement.

*Figure 4.09: Feedback*

![Feedback Graph](image)

*Figure 4.10: Opportunities to learn*

![Opportunities Graph](image)
Next, the respondents were asked if the placement helped them to determine that the job they were doing was in a field in which they were interested in. 64% of respondents felt that the experience in the workplace helped in discovering that they had an interest in the area. Yet, a substantial 22% felt that it failed to do this. The majority of 77% of students felt that they were provided with support from a supervisor within the organisation. While almost all students who were surveyed (97%) felt that they were treated respectfully by co-workers.

*Figure 4.11: Determine of field of interest*

*Figure 4.12: Supervisor support*
A large proportion (58%) of the students asked either agreed or strongly agreed that they were exposed to other parts of the business other than the one they were assigned to while 23% felt they were not given that opportunity. The final part of this section of the questionnaire was to ask the students if they admired the organisation they worked for, the majority of 72% agreed or strongly agreed that they did.

*Figure 4.13: Exposure to other parts of the business*

*Figure 4.14: Admiration of the organisation*
4.1.3 Objective 2: To ascertain if the students accrued benefits by developing career oriented skills and if so which skills?

Figure 4.15: Improvement or development of skills

The third section of the questionnaire asked the respondents about which skills they feel they improved or developed during their placement. The students were asked if they felt they developed each particular area to a large extent, to some extent or not at all. The researcher posed this question using a matrix format in order to decrease the possibility of respondent fatigue. The above figure summarises the results of this section. If we break down the graph into two sections it becomes more easily understandable. Firstly, the respondents were asked about four main skill areas, academic skills, communication skills, leadership/teamworking skills and job acquisition skills. Examples of skills which might fit into each area were given in brackets to ensure the students fully understood each question.
The results for these four main skill areas were mainly positive. The majority of students felt they developed their academic, communication and leadership/teamworking skills to either some extent or to a large extent. The majority (47%) felt they increased their communication skills to a large extent. Also, the majority of students (60%) felt that they increased their academic skills to some extent with the majority of students (49%) feeling they increased their leadership skills also to some extent. However, for job acquisition skills, the majority of students (42%) felt that they had not developed these at all.

The four remaining areas; interpersonal skills, level of confidence, knowledge of the job market and knowledge of practical areas of work were also mainly positive. The majority of students felt that they improved their level of confidence and practical knowledge to a large extent while the majority also felt they improved their interpersonal skills and knowledge of the job market to some extent.

**4.1.4 Objective 3: To ascertain whether the experience has changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits.**

*Figure 4.16: Clarification of career intentions*

The next section of the survey asked about the students, perceptions and expectations since completing their work placement. Initially, the participants were asked if the placement had helped to clarify their career intentions. 76% either agreed or strongly
agreed that this was the case. Only 14% believed that the placement had not helped to clarify their future career intents. Next, a large 80% majority felt the placement changed the significance they now place on important traits they need for future employment. The respondents were then asked if the placement helped them in creating realistic expectations of the workplace. 88% believe they now have more realistic expectations of the workplace since the experience.

*Figure 4.17: Influence on significance of employment traits*

*Figure 4.18: Perceived advantage over other students*
The students were subsequently asked whether they felt they now had an advantage over other students who have not completed work placements. 87% either agreed or strongly agreed that they perceive they have an advantage over other students as a result. A very large 95% of students then agreed when asked if they felt the experience has enhanced their employability.

**Figure 4.19: Enhanced employability:**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who agree or strongly agree that their placement has enhanced their employability.]

4.1.5 Objective 4: To ascertain the students’ current status and career outcome.

The final section of the questionnaire aimed to discover where the students are now since the completion of their placements and asked other questions relating to their current status. Out of the respondents, 75% have not currently graduated and so are still in college. The researcher set up the questionnaire in such a way so that those respondents who answered positively to still being in college, were sent to the end of the questionnaire and asked no further questions.

The minority (25%) of students had since graduated. Those students who had graduated were asked if they were currently employed. A huge majority of 93% of the students that had since graduated were employed. 79% of those respondents were employed in the area of their study. Of those students that had graduated and were now employed, 82%
4.2 Analysis of Primary Qualitative data
The qualitative research method undertaken for this study was to carry out semi-structured one-to-one interviews with four work placement students to gain a deeper insight into the research objectives by hearing about their first hand experiences on work placement. The interviewee’s were two students from DBS and two students from DIT. As mentioned previously, the interviewee’s were contacted from the group of respondents that had answered the researcher’s questionnaire and had indicated that they would be willing to answer further questions in an interview situation about their work placement. The interviewee’s responses from the questionnaire were then removed from the quantitative data in order not to skew the results.

While many of the questions were the same for each interview, the order of questions changed with the natural flow of the conversation and also other questions were added depending on the interviewee’s experiences. The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and also noted by the researcher. They were then transcribed immediately after to ensure as much accuracy as possible. Full transcripts of the interviews can be found in Appendix 1. The interviewees will be referred to by the order in which they were interviewed in to ensure confidentiality. E.g. Interviewee 1 etc. Baring the research questions in mind, the main findings from the four one-to-one interviews are summarized as follows;

4.2.2 Research Objective 1:
To ascertain the students level of satisfaction with the overall experience

Summary of responses from Interviewee 1:

The interviewee described herself as being very satisfied with her placement. The main reasons she cites are the fact that the working environment was very pleasant, she could see the practical applications of her degree while working on placement and also her opinions were listened to by her colleagues. She also felt that she benefitted from getting a ‘rounded view’ of the company. She stated however that she was not satisfied with the
college side of things. The interviewee did not find her college helpful at all. She gives an example of needing an insurance form for her placement company from the college administrators. They were slow to help and when they did produce the form it was three years out of date. She also had trouble contacting them, found they didn’t monitor her progress and the college was not instrumental in finding her a work placement which she subsequently found through her own means. The researcher asked the interviewee about certain factors in her job relating to the level of satisfaction of students on placement. She felt she was able to work autonomously and felt she was mentored well in her position from a manager who ‘took her under his wing’. The interviewee felt she had definite career opportunities as she has applied to return to the organisation after her education is completed and is returning for an interview. She also felt the pay was very good and was better than she could have hoped for.

Summary of responses from Interviewee 2:

The interviewee was a post graduate student and felt that she was satisfied with her placement due to the pleasant work environment. She was also happy to get a chance to work in her area of study as the placement cemented the idea in her head that this was an area in which she wanted to work in. The interviewee expressed that she felt autonomous in her work but at the same time felt a little bit isolated as she was not working in a team and was mainly working on her own. However, she was not exposed to other parts of the business and felt that she could have been on placement for a longer duration in order to benefit properly from career opportunities (the placement was for four months part-time).

Summary of responses from Interviewee 3

The interviewee felt that she was satisfied with her work placement. Her main reasons were due to the positive work environment in the job, the opportunity to get a reference on completion and also due to the fact that she felt she had made some really good connections. The interviewee stated that she was very autonomous in her job and was allowed to ‘do her own thing’. She also felt that she was mentored well within the job and was in contact with everyone within the company. She enjoyed the fact that she was kept busy and was given a large workload and was exposed to the other parts of the
business. However, she mentioned the fact that her work placement was unpaid with no expenses paid. The interviewee felt that it was unfair to be expected to work for free and mentioned that she ended up worse off financially as she was expected to pay her own petrol expenses in getting to work every day.

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 4:**

The interviewee once again stated that she was very satisfied with her placement. She enjoyed the fact that she was exposed to various parts of the business and was able to move to various store locations within the organisation. She felt her confidence in work was greatly boosted by the end of the placement as she was managing other staff. Initially, she was daunted by the work environment but ended up growing to love it. She didn’t find that she had the opportunity to act autonomously as the tasks were very structured and laid out. The interviewee found that she had no consistent mentor throughout her placement and at times felt she had questions which were going unanswered. She gives one example of how interns are required to do written exams at various points throughout the placement but felt that she was not given sufficient information about these exams and had no one to go to specifically to discuss this. She feels it the experience with a large multinational organisation looks ‘good on her CV’ but is unaware if things she learned there can be applied to other work environments. The interviewee did mention however how she still works for the company on a part-time basis while continuing her studies. The interviewee like Interviewee 1 was not satisfied with the organisation from the college in respect to her placement. She felt they didn’t help with CV preparation or monitor her progress. She also felt that the co-ordinator could do better in informing the students about the whole work placement process.

**4.2.3 Research Objective 2:**

To ascertain if the students accrued benefits by developing career oriented skills and if so which skills?

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 1:**

When asked what skills the interviewee learned in her placement experience, the interviewee responded that she definitely learned how to manage her time better and
explained that she was so busy that if she didn’t get work done on one day, there would be no time to finish it the following day and that it taught her to ‘just get on with it’. She felt that she was able to improve her skills on certain computer applications and also greatly improve her written communication skills as all communication was done through emails. The interviewee felt that the placement also greatly helped her leadership/team-working skills and also her job acquisition skills. She felt that due to the fact that she was working within the HR department as they prepared questions to ask in subsequent interviews, she was able to gain a greater insight into the other side of interviewing which she felt would help her in future interviewing situations. She felt it greatly improved her interpersonal skills as she it taught her to communicate with people outside of her usual social grouping.

Summary of responses from Interviewee 2:

The interviewee found that she was able to gain skills specific to her area of study while on placement and which she would never have done before. She found it definitely helped her with academic skills as certain aspects of her job overlapped with areas in which she was studying in college. The interviewee felt that the job didn’t particularly help her teamwork or communication skills as she mainly worked on her own on placement. The interviewee also felt that the experience helped with her knowledge of the practical areas of work in her area of study.

Summary of responses from Interviewee 3:

The interviewee felt that she was able to gain career specific skills while on her placement. She stated that she became directly involved with a video making project which can be a large part of her career area of marketing. She also obtained some experience in copy writing as well as practical day to day skills. She felt she learned some skills in the academic skill base as she worked continuously with an Apple Mac computer which she hadn’t worked with before and which is very commonly used in her area. The interviewee also got to develop her skills with database software which she had previously not used before. She felt the placement helped with her team-working skills also as she worked closely with another employee and was also part of the overall team.
The interviewee stated that having to deal with different people improved her interpersonal skills and that the work placement improved her knowledge of the job market as she feels she is now more aware of the jobs in her field which are available.

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 4:**

The interviewee felt that she definitely gained communication skills in that her placement experience required her to communicate with people who she would not usually communicate with. It also improved her group skills and her time management skills. She felt the experience helped her academic skills as she learned to use an ERP system which is a computer system specifically tailored to a specific business. She was then able to use what she learned in relation to the system when she visited other parts of the business and also when she returned to college in her Supply Chain module. The interviewee stated that she had improved her job acquisition skills as before the work placement she had never done a formal interview before. She also mentioned how she has applied for the company’s graduate program and is being called back for interview. She didn’t feel the experience has helped her knowledge in the practical aspects of her area however she states that it has improved her knowledge of the job market.

**4.2.4 Research Objective 3:**
To ascertain whether the experience has changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits.

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 1:**

The interviewee felt the experience definitely clarified her career intentions as before she was unsure of the selection of possible jobs that were available in her area of work. She states that the experience has ‘opened her eyes’ to looking further afield to other possible jobs. She feels her perceptions of what a work placement entails have completely changed since the placement and that the experience has really built her confidence. The interviewee states the internship was not what she expected it to be and that she got more out of it than she thought she was going to. She feels that she learned more in the six months of the job about the practical side to work than she would in the same amount of
time in college. She also mentions that she thinks work placements are a phenomenal idea.

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 3:**

Interviewee 3 feels that the experience has definitely helped to clarify her career intentions. She now understands that she is not interested in the particular aspect of marketing that she worked in while on placement but that she is interested in the area of marketing as a whole. It wasn’t what she expected in that she thought she would have a lot more work to do and at times felt bored. She states that work placements are definitely a good idea because they give you ‘a foot in the door’ and feels that they should be mandatory in courses especially in marketing courses.

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 4:**

Interviewee 4 also felt that the experience has helped to clarify her career intentions in that it has made her more wary of what she does not want to do. She feels it has given her a much better perspective of what work in her area entails. She articulates that she dreaded the placement before she started and was afraid that she might dislike it. Beforehand, she was unsure of what work placements exactly entailed but now would recommend that all students should do experience it for themselves.

**4.2.5 Research Objective 4:**
To ascertain the students’ current status and career outcome

**Summary of responses from Interviewee 2:**

Interviewee 2 was the only participant out of the four interviewees that had completed her course and graduated and so was the only interviewee where questions relating to this objective are relevant. The interviewee is currently participating in another work placement on the ‘Job Bridge’ scheme. ‘Job Bridge’ is a scheme run by the Fas employment support agency that aims to place people on unemployment benefit on work placement programmes. It took her nine months from graduation to obtain the job.
Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations
5.1 Introduction
The overall aim of this research was to establish just how beneficial are student work placements to the students who participated in them. The presumed benefits of work placements are widely known however the researcher wanted to empirically record the benefits which the post work placement students perceived themselves to have gained from if any.

In this section, the researcher will discuss the conclusions which can be drawn in relation to the research objectives and research question. As each research objective stems from the overall research question, they were essential for obtaining a deeper knowledge of the topic in hand in order to better address the overall research question. The researcher will draw from quantitative and qualitative analysis gathered during the research and will reference the literature review where applicable linking the secondary research to the primary research conducted. Each research objective will be concluded on separately. The researcher will then make recommendations. Finally, the researcher will make some suggestions for further research in this area.

5.2 Conclusion on Objective 1:
To ascertain the students level of satisfaction with the overall experience

The first research objective was to ascertain the level of students’ satisfaction with their work placement experience. The researcher then looked at characteristics which have been identified in the literature as enhancing the students’ satisfaction with their placement. D’Abate et al conducted a study in 2009 which found that certain work characteristics affected the students’ level of satisfaction positively. The researcher used these characteristics when conducting her research in an attempt to add to D’Abate et al’s research which was carried out qualitatively. The researcher tested these characteristics quantitatively. Firstly, the researcher found that 97% of students were satisfied in some way with their placement. 41% noted that they were very satisfied. This positive outcome should be reflected in the remaining questions of the section as the researcher next asked ten statements which relate to these characteristics.
The majority of respondents (76%) felt that their employer outlined their expectations from the beginning. Most (84%) felt that their tasks were significant to the running of the organisation with the majority (87%) also believing that they were allowed to use their personal initiative on the job. Most students (66%) students felt they were given complex tasks to carry out, however a significant majority (27%) felt that they were not given high level or complex skills. This may point a particular way of improving some internships. Also, the majority of students felt they were given regular feedback and support from the organisation, however once again a significant minority disagreed with this. The majority also felt that they were given opportunities to learn (78%), were exposed to other parts of the business (68%) and felt that the placement helped them to determine that the area of work, was one that they were interested in. Finally, the overwhelming majority felt that they were treated respectfully by their co-workers (97%) and so worked in a positive work environment. The results of the survey are quite positive and suggest that the majority of students enjoyed their placements. The fact that the students mainly agreed with the 10 characteristics also supports earlier research indicating that these characteristics positively affect the satisfaction of students as the majority of students were satisfied with their placement.

The qualitative research carried out also supports these findings. All of the interviewees were satisfied with their placement. When asked the reason for their satisfaction, a positive work environment was one of the reasons cited by all the interviewees. Also being mentored by a member of staff was mentioned in a positive light. The interviewees mentioned other reasons that they felt satisfied or felt that they were benefiting from the placement, namely; that it would ensure they would have a reference from an employer when they finished college, that gaining experience was a positive thing to do and that it ‘looked good on their CV’.

In the interviews, some of the students mentioned their dis-satisfaction with their educational institute during the work placement experience. They mentioned a lack of monitoring, difficulty in getting in contact and in getting appropriate information as reasons for this dis-satisfaction. Although, how educational institutes deal with
placements is not part of this research it does draw interesting insights into other ways in which the students level of satisfaction can be affected by the whole process.

The conclusion reached by the researcher is that generally the students were satisfied by their placements. A number of different characteristics led into this satisfaction. Areas such as level of support and feedback, the complexity of tasks the students were given and their exposure to other parts of the business did not have as high a majority as other characteristics and so point to the possible need to improve these areas in order to improve the overall satisfaction of the students.

5.3 Conclusion on Objective 2:
To ascertain if the students accrued benefits by developing career oriented skills and if so which skills?

The students mainly felt they were given the opportunity to improve and develop their skills. Not all work placements are created equal so it is important to evaluate if the students were developing and improving skills. These skill areas were decided upon by reviewing the literature. (Gault et al’s study in 2004). In this study Gault mentions the need for more empirical research into internships/work placements which this research has attempted to do. Gault’s study also surveyed students from a single higher education institute whereas this study uses data from three institutes in Ireland. The respondents were asked about four main skill areas, results for these four main areas were mainly positive.

The majority of students felt they developed their academic, communication and leadership/teamworking skills to either some extent or to a large extent. The majority (47%) felt they increased their communication skills to a large extent. Also, the majority of students (60%) felt that they increased their academic skills to some extent with the majority of students (49%) feeling they increased their leadership skills also to some extent. However, for job acquisition skills, the majority of students (42%) felt that they had not developed these at all.
The four remaining areas that the researcher enquired about; interpersonal skills, level of confidence, knowledge of the job market and knowledge of practical areas of work were also mainly positive. The majority of students felt that they improved their level of confidence and practical knowledge to a large extent while the majority also felt they improved their interpersonal skills and knowledge of the job market to some extent.

The qualitative research carried out adds to these findings. All of the interviewees felt that they had developed skills in two or three main skill areas. The conclusion drawn by the researcher is that students are improving and developing their skill base while on work placement, in all but one skill area (job acquisition skills). The majority of students felt that they improved to some extent or to a large extent in all other skill areas. This draws the researcher’s attention to the need of students in work placements to be aware of their necessity to improve their job acquisition skills, as they are currently not being developed.

5.4 Conclusion on Objective 3:
To ascertain whether the experience has changed the students’ attitudes to and expectations of the workplace and important employment traits.

The work placement experience has very much changed the students’ attitudes and expectations. The majority (76%) feel that the placement has helped to clarify their career intentions. 80% of respondents feel that the experience has influenced the significance that the students now place on particular traits needed for employment. Green et al’s study in 2001 stated that interns’ perceptions of important employment traits differ from those of their employer. The study explored the perception of employment traits and highlighted the need for more data driven studies exploring this area which this research has attempted to do. The question was posed if students’ perceptions of values change after internship which this research has answered, yes their values do change as to what traits they perceive to be important. This change of view post internship is important as it means the students are now more aware of what employment traits employers are looking for.
Additionally, 88% of respondents believe the placement has helped to create realistic expectations of the workplace. This is significant as the majority of those surveyed were undergraduates. The work placement experience may have been their first real full time job. 87% feel that they now have an advantage over other students that have not completed internships when seeking employment. This draws on Cannon and Arnold’s study (1998) that found students were placing a growing importance on obtaining internships in order to have a competitive edge at a time of recession in the early ‘90’s in the US. It also draws parallels to this moment in time when Ireland is experiencing a recession, students are once again placing a large importance on obtaining internships. The evidence that 95% of students studied believe the placement has enhanced their employability backs this up. Additionally, from looking at the qualitative evidence, the interviewees also pointed to their belief in the importance of completing a work placement. The conclusion reached by the researcher is that after their work placement experience, the students attitudes have changed, their career intentions are clarified and their expectations of the workplace have changed, all of which benefit the student.

5.5 Conclusion on Objective 4:
To ascertain the students current status and career outcome

The aim of this objective was to discover the career outcomes of the students after they had graduated in order to see if the work placement had positively affected them. However, after analysing the data, only 25% of the respondents have graduated from college. This leaves the researcher with a small number to work on and so the following results are not very robust due to the small numbers involved. The data however, does back up other research done in the area. Gault et al carried out a study in 2000 with Callanan and Benzing following that in 2004. Both studies looked at how the placement experience positively affected the students once they had graduated in areas such as their satisfaction in their current job and the time to get a position after graduation.

The researcher found that 93% of those currently graduated were employed. 79% were employed in jobs in their area of study with the majority of 81% taking only 1-3 months
to get a position after graduation. 82% were satisfied with their current position. These results are very positive however, they would need to be compared to students who had graduated without completing a work placement to be analysed properly. Also, due to the population of the group surveyed only 25% had graduated which leaves the remaining figures which the outcomes were measured on a little less robust.

Only one of the interviewees from the qualitative study had graduated and she is currently not employed in a full time paid job which means analysis of the qualitative data adds nothing to this particular objective. The conclusion reached by the researcher is that the initial results look positive to there being a positive correlation between work placements and future career outcome. However, more empirically based studies will need to be done on the subject.

5.7 Conclusion on Research Question:
How beneficial are student work placements to the students that participated in them?

The researcher feels that student work placements are very beneficial to the students who participate in them. The research shows that the majority of students are satisfied. They are afforded the opportunity to develop their skills. Their attitudes and expectations are also altered by the placement which ensures their career intentions are clarified and their expectations of the workplace are altered. They feel they have an advantage over those that have not completed a work placement programme.

Going forward, work placement programmes will continue to be of importance to students. In an increasingly more competitive job market, students need added benefits to ensure they have a chance of securing a job over others. Work placement experience may be one of these such benefits.
5.8 Researchers Recommendations
There are numerous ways in which to increase the beneficial impact of work placements for students who participate in them. One such way that keeps coming to the surface is to ensure that the students are given regular feedback. The students should also have an assigned mentor in the workplace that the student can report to and ask for guidance. The colleges themselves need to put more effort in to helping students with the overall process whether that involves providing information or assisting the students in applying for placements. Additionally, it is important that there is a specific assigned college administrator that is knowledgeable in the area. Also, it may be helpful if the college organised an event where past work placement students that are still in the college could make a presentation or even have an informal chat with future work placement students about their experiences. The students may feel more comfortable asking questions of other students and so may be better prepared for the experience.

5.9 Suggested topic for future research

- Research to determine the role that the higher education institutes play in the overall work placement experience.

- More research in general in the area of work placements internships as there is currently little research in the area, especially empirically based research.
Chapter 6: Self-Reflection on Own Learning & Performance
6.1 Introduction
The purpose of this final section is to outline the approach to learning which I undertook during this research, to identify the skills I developed and to record a personal reflection of my development during the course of the MBA program which has culminated with the compilation of this dissertation. In order to achieve this, I will first define my personality type and learning style and then document the skills identified and acquired by me during the learning process. I will then outline my future development and progression plan.

6.2 My Personality Type
While not directly linked to learning style theory, I believe that an individual’s personality has a significant impact on how they learn. Before I undertake any significant task my first reaction is always to plan and organise how the task will be undertaken. Having completed the Myers-Briggs® Type Indicator assessment through my work I was identified as an ESTJ type personality, i.e. an Implementer Supervisor. The ESTJ Personality type is described as practical, realistic and matter-of-fact. Someone who will organize projects and people to get things done, have a clear set of logical standards, systematically follow them and want others to do the same.

6.3 What is learning?
According to Mumford (1995), learning has at least two meanings;

- the process by which we acquire knowledge, skills or insight
- The end result of the process – achieved knowledge, skills or insight.

Mumford states that learning can be achieved either through formal structures such as training and education or through experiences we have in and around work. He continues that education and training are inputs designed by educators and trainers but importantly, they are not the same thing as learning in terms of the second definition, i.e. achieved learning. Learning has happened when people can demonstrate that they know something that they didn’t know before (insights and realizations as well as facts) and/or when the can do something they couldn’t do before (skills) (Mumford 1995).
The way in which we learn can be illustrated through Honey & Munford’s learning cycle below, which takes the view that since we learn mostly by doing things and then thinking about how we have done them; the learning sequence can be set out as a learning cycle. (Mumford 1995).

*Figure 6.01: The Honey & Mumford Learning Cycle*

- **Having an Experience:** There are two different ways to have an experience, one is to let the experience come to you (reactive) and the other is to seek it out deliberately (proactive). The opportunities to learn are greatly increased if the normal everyday things that happen to us are supplemented by extra experiences we create. (Honey 2006)

- **Reviewing the Experience:** If you learn from an experience, it is vital to review what happened during it.

- **Concluding from an Experience:** Concluding involves scanning the raw material from the review for conclusions, ‘answers’ or lessons learned.

- **Planning the next steps:** Planning involves translating some of the conclusions into a form in which they can be auctioned.

According to Honey (2006), as each stage of the cycle feeds into the next, you can start from any point in the cycle. In the case of my dissertation, my learning cycle began with planning. The first step for me was to plan the work that was required. Having agreed at
a high level the research topic and objectives, I first began the work by planning how I would go about researching the objective, where I would source my primary and secondary information, the timelines for achieving the work and the individual tasks that needed to be met in order to achieve my objectives. Having planned the work I then had the experience of researching and writing the dissertation. The continuous reflection of my work during the dissertation allowed me to refine my efforts, which resulted in more focused research and analysis. Finally, this self-reflection has enabled me to reflect on and conclude from the experience and the learning gained through completion of the dissertation. Through this I can put what I have learnt to good use in my career. The approach followed for completing my dissertation mirrors the overall approach which I followed during the course of my MBA.

6.4 Skills identified and acquired during the learning process

During my participation in the MBA, I developed a number of skills such as interviewing skills and data analysis and research which before now I would have had no experience with. There were a number of times during the research work where I doubted my ability to be able to complete such a task to a Masters level, however after some initial concerns, I stuck with it and when I broke the huge volume of work required into smaller tasks I was better able to comprehend the task at hand. I improved my analytical skills and my ability to consider the information provided, analyse it and use the results to make decisions. Other skills developed include the ability to critically review literature and the sourcing and analysing of primary data. This experience has allowed me to gain more confidence in my abilities and I will bring this learning into my professional career.

According to Honey & Mumford (1992), the four stages of learning; experiencing, reviewing, concluding and planning are mutually supportive and no one stage is fully effective as a learning procedure on its own. Although each stage plays an equally important part in the total learning process, the time spent on each may vary considerably as most people develop a preference for certain stages over others. This preference leads to a distortion of the learning process so that greater emphasis is placed on some stages to the detriment of others. By identifying my individual learning style, I will be able to
determine my preference for learning and also the stage in the learning cycle where I am weakest and need to develop further in order to become a more effective learner.

6.5 My learning style preference
The term ‘Learning Styles’ is used as a description of the attitudes and behaviours that determine an individual’s preferred way of learning,(Honey & Mumford 2000). The four learning styles are Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists. Each style connects with a stage in the continuous learning cycle as illustrated in figure 6.02 below.

*Figure 6.02: The Honey & Mumford Learning Cycle and Styles*

Having completed the Learning Styles Questionnaire in Honey (2006), I learned that my learning style is a combination of Reflector and Theorist. This learning style is complementary to my personality type.

Figure 6.03 below outlines some of the main characteristic of both ‘Reflectors’ and ‘Theorists’ which I immediately identify with. On reflection of the learning I did during this dissertation, I would agree with the analysis that I tend to favour a particular type of learning. The ‘Theorist’ in me thinks problems through in a vertical step-by-step logical way and the ‘Reflector’ in me is more cautious and observes the experience from many different perspectives before making a decision.
Figure 6.03: Characteristics of a Reflector and a Theorist

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<tr>
<th>Reflectors like:</th>
<th>Theorists like:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to think before acting</td>
<td>concepts and models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thorough preparation</td>
<td>to see the overall picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to research and evaluate</td>
<td>to feel intellectually stretched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to make decisions in their own time</td>
<td>structure and clear objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to listen and observe</td>
<td>logical presentation of ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to become a more effective learner, I will consciously work to develop the other learning styles, Activist and Pragmatist and having reflected on the overall MBA experience, I feel that there is some evidence of my learning styles developing as a direct result of my participation in this programme.

Part of the reason for undertaking the MBA was to provide me with the opportunity to develop myself personally as well as through the technical knowledge I gained. On reflection of the learning process of the MBA, I became more vocal and confident as the course progressed and became more likely to speak up in class as my confidence developed rather than to take a more cautious approach to think things through in my head first. This was something that I would never have done at undergraduate level. This learning style would be more in line with an ‘Activist’ style rather than a ‘Reflector’ style which prior to this MBA experience I would say would be beyond my comfort zone. However the experience has helped me to develop my learning style and push myself to develop further and become a more effective learner.

6.6 How can I continue to become a more effective learner?

As the purpose of this self-reflection is to not only to determine my current learning style but also to identify areas for further development, I looked at the results of the completed learning style questionnaire to identify those learning areas where I scored weakest in
order to focus my development on strengthening these areas. The learning style which I most need to strengthen in order to further develop would be Activist as I recorded a low score of 3/10 for this learning style, followed by Pragmatist for which I scored 4/10. Given the very low Activist score, I will concentrate on this learning style in particular as an area which needs further development.

Reviewing the statements which make up an Activist, I would whole-heartedly agree with the evaluation that this is far from my current learning style. Statements such as ‘I quite like taking risks’, ‘I prefer to jump in and do things as they come along rather than plan things out beforehand’ and ‘I like the challenge of trying out different ways of doing things’ are far from how I would describe me or my learning style. Figure 6.04 outlines some areas which I am under-utilizing and a suggested action I can take in order to strengthen that learning style.

*Figure 6.04: Table to address my under-utilized learning style*  (Source: Honey, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Activist’ Statement not currently being met</th>
<th>Possible Learning Activities to undertake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I actively look for new things to do</td>
<td>Set a target to do one new thing each month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually talk more than I listen</td>
<td>Earmark times when it is appropriate for me to have most of the say and make notes that I can use for prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I quite like taking risks</td>
<td>Become less risk-averse by experimenting with some calculated risks which if they don’t work out, will not have unacceptable consequences for me or anyone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the challenge of trying out different ways of doing things</td>
<td>Set myself a challenge of tackling something I do routinely in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to jump in and do things as they come along rather than plan things out beforehand</td>
<td>Increase my tolerance for spontaneity by choosing to react to events rather than adhering to a pre-set plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.7 Conclusion:
In order to help me to continue my development, I have created a personal development plan which concentrates on developing my weakest learning style, the Activist. The plan identifies Activist characteristics which I would not currently meet and details how I plan to work to develop these attributes.

Figure 6.05: Extract from my Personal Development Plan to develop an under-utilised learning area

**Activist Attribute 1 “I actively look for new things to do”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What am I going to do?</th>
<th>Set a target to do one new thing each month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why am I going to do this?</td>
<td>On reflection of the various activities undertaken as part of my dissertation, there were a number of activities that were new to me which given the choice I would not have undertaken such as conducting interviews and critical writing. By being forced to undertake these new tasks I have learnt that I am capable of succeeding in areas which I would have considered in the past to be a weakness. I therefore want to capitalise on this new learning by continuing to try new activities in order to further develop my learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How am I going to do this?</td>
<td>Using the results from the Learning Questionnaire, identify areas for learning which are currently under-utilised and develop an action plan to address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When am I going to do this?</td>
<td>Will identify a new development goal to incorporate into my routine each month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When will I review the results?</td>
<td>Will review the results just before my birthday each year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reference & Bibliography
Books:

References for Literature Review


Appendices
Appendix 1: One to One Interview Questions and Responses Received
Interview 1:

Interview with a DIT student regarding their experience on work placement:

1. Firstly, could you give me a few details of your internship, such as where it was, how long it was, whether it was paid or unpaid etc.?

It was in a company called Tekno Surgical which is part of Sisk Healthcare based in Clondalkin. I was originally there for sixteen weeks which was the placement I had to do for college. At the end of the sixteen weeks, they kept me on so I ended up being there from February until September, so eight months. It was paid and full time.

2. What is your course of study and what year in this course of study did it take place?

My course is an undergraduate degree in Retail and Services Management and I was in the second semester of third year when I did it. It is a four year course.

3. So you mentioned that the placement was a required part of the course?

You had a choice whether to do work placement or Erasmus (European student exchange program) so I chose work placement.

4. Did you organize the internship yourself or did college administrators help you to get it?

Well, we had a liaison officer but to be honest she wasn’t any use to any of us so I actually found it on my own. I sent out about 50 CVs and in the end I had a friend who worked in the company and I asked would it be possible to get a job there because it was so hard to find a place.

5. On the college side of things, did you find DIT helpful? If not, why not?

No, not at all. I’ll give you an example, I came in over the Christmas holiday to get an insurance cert from the liaison officer that Tekno Surgical needed. I drove in especially from Kildare to Dublin. First of all she could never be contacted and never replied to her email, when I got the form from her, it was three years out of date, which she didn’t notice and then she said that it would be fine and that they won’t even look at it. So I told her, “Look, I’m after driving in all the way from Kildare for this, this is what they asked from me, I had to get this myself, you’re being no help at all, you can’t even give me an insurance form in date”. So it was loads of little things. She wasn’t helpful at all, we had no idea what was expected of us or how to sort this out. It was really down to the wire, I know people who didn’t start until May and I had started in February so they were under pressure to get their sixteen weeks done in time. It was ridiculous.

5a. Did DIT monitor your progress?
We had to fill in a work placement log which was to be submitted when we came back to college at the beginning of the fourth year. We had a monitor who was to come out to visit and there was to be a phone call. I emailed DIT to say it was coming to the end of my six months to say no one had come to see me. Seemingly, the person did come out but I wasn’t there the day he came so there was no contact.

5b. Did DIT ensure the internship was suited to you?

No, not at all. I didn’t have anything to do with DIT for the eight months.

6. What exactly were you doing in your placement, what were your tasks?

It started off I was mainly doing administration, filing, helped with accounts, dealt with a bit of marketing. Then I took on some of the sales if a Customer Service person was out, did a bit of reception. I kind of did a bit of everything.

7. Were you autonomous, were you given the opportunity to do tasks unsupervised?

Yes, I was given a few tasks by the general manager that he asked me to look into on my own. For example, there was a discrepancy on the phone bill of the sales reps and he asked me look through the data and report back to him. So, I was given tasks to do.

8. Did you find you were mentored in the job?

Yes, definitely. I found them so helpful. There was training going on at the time and it was being taken care of by the quality controls manager and he really took me under his wing and really showed me in depth how everything worked so it was good like that. There was always someone I could ask if there was a problem. I answered directly to the General Manager but it was almost like a collective mentoring role. I could have asked anyone and they would have given me a hand.

9. Tell me a bit about your work environment in the position, what was your relationship with your co-workers like?

I was really nervous going in and it was grand, everyone was really nice and got on really well.

10. Like you mentioned already, you were exposed to other parts of the business. Tell me about this.

Yes, it wasn’t just the office. In the middle of my placement, the HR department took me to do some work with them; The HR department is with Sisk Healthcare. So I moved from Tekno Surgical to the parent company and did some work with them.

11. Do you feel you had career development opportunities?

Yes, definitely. I tried to work really hard there and I really liked what I was doing and so much so that in a few weeks I’m up for interview for a full time job in the place. It’s all medical related and that’s what I want to get into now.
12. Was the job easily accessible and did you find the pay acceptable?

It was really easy because there is a motorway just at Maynooth so it took me 25 to 30 minutes to get there each morning. The pay was really good. It was better than I could have ever hoped for.

13. What skills would you say you gained if any?

I definitely learned how to manage my time a bit better. Going into it, if I had an assignment due, I’d leave it to the last moment. But in the job, if you were given something to do today and you didn’t get to it today, you were never going to get to it tomorrow. So it taught me just to get on with it.

13a. So let me mention some skill sets and you can tell me about which ones if they improved or developed. Firstly, academic skills for example creative thinking, computer applications, problem solving.

It would have helped me with my Access database. I would have used it before but they asked me to put together a database while I was in there because I had access skills so it maybe developed that a bit more.

13b. Communication skills like written or oral communications.

I wouldn’t have had any presentations. It improved my written communication skills, as everything was done through email.

13c. Leadership and teamwork skills

I didn’t work too much in teams. In leadership, definitely as I ended up on the first week taking over the training so if people didn’t have it done I was chasing them down. It was time sensitive stuff so if it wasn’t back within a week they’d have to do the training again.

13d. Job acquisition skills such as CV writing job interviewing and networking

It definitely helped with job acquisition skills and job interviewing. Even though I wasn’t really hands on in the HR department, I was there when they were interviewing people, preparing what they were going to ask so it gave me a great insight into the other side. That was really helpful. It really helped with job networking also as I’m soon interviewing for a full time job there.

13e. Interpersonal skills

Definitely, it taught me to communicate with people older than me and outside my social set.

13f. Knowledge of the practical aspects of your area and knowledge of the job market.

It was related to my area, but it wouldn’t have been in depth learning like we would do in college. You’re communicating with people, dealing with complaints. Yeah, I
guess it would. From the time I was there I saw a lot of people who had moved up who used to be reps so there was a lot of internal movement. I’d have a greater understanding of how things work. And having to get the job myself, when you’re sending out so many CVs and making calls, you have to sell yourself that was something that I had to learn.

14. Did it help you clarify your career intentions?

Yes, up to this I had no idea. I was doing a degree in Retail and Services Management and I thought I would just manage a shop or something but now I see a bit further afield. And because this was a medical supply company, it opened my eyes to looking further than just a shop for retail.

15. What were your perceptions of internships before?

I had a very Americanised idea of work placements. When I went into work placement, it took the fear out of it a little bit. Once I got into the placement, my perceptions completely changed. I thought I would just be making tea and coffee but from the first day I was just thrown into things. They really built my confidence from the ground up.

16. Before the internship, did you view internships as a viable tool and has that opinion changed?

I always thought there was going to be merit in it. Beforehand when it was becoming so difficult to try and find one, I thought we should be able to come to college if we can’t find one. But after doing it, I learnt more in those six months, more practically than I would in college. There should be work placements in all degrees, especially in third year, at least you can come back to college and realise what I’m learning here is beneficial. I think they’re a phenomenal idea.

17. Was it what you expected?

No. It was much more than what I thought it would be. I got more out of it than I thought I was going to.

18. Were you satisfied and why?

Yes, definitely. I really liked where I was and what I was doing. I liked the people I was working with. I could see the practical application of my degree in it and they listened if I suggested something. I think maybe that’s why I was satisfied.

19. Where are you now?

I’m now in fourth year and I’m actually doing my thesis in conjunction with Tekno Surgical. They’ve been very helpful and any information I need they give me. It’s been really helpful getting information from people I’ve been working with for six months and they have great insights.

20. Do you think the internship could have been improved and if so how?
The DIT side definitely could be improved. It was so stressful; we didn’t have people around us who were able to help us get work placements. When we couldn’t depend on the person we were told we could depend on, you couldn’t get an answer. It was so frustrating, it really was. In the job, the fact that they had no formal structure for internships worked out for me. If there had have been a formal structure I probably couldn’t have done as much as I did. I kind of bounced around a bit.

21. How do you think the internship affects your future?

I think it is really beneficial. You come out of your degree with not just your degree; you have some real practical experience. With an internship, you either sink or swim in it. I think it makes or breaks you. It gives you an idea of whether you’re going to be suited to your area. I suppose it’s a bit hard that it comes in the third year, if you get that far and you don’t really like it. Once you get that far, it probably is a bit of a let-down if you realise it’s not for you. But for me it was fine.

22. What were the best and worst aspects of your experience?

The best part was being able to get such a rounded view of the company. The worst, I can’t really think of anything bad, I hated leaving.
Interview 2:

Interview with a DBS student regarding their experience on work placement:

1. Firstly, could you give me a few details of your internship, such as where it was, how long it was, whether it was paid or unpaid etc.?

It was in the Legal Aid Board on Montague Street in Dublin. I did it for four months but it was part-time and I was only doing it for a couple of days a week. It was unpaid.

2. What is your course of study and what year in this course of study did it take place?

My course was a postgraduate degree in Information and Library Management. It was a one year course and the placement took place in April so I was doing the course at the same time.

3. Was it a required part of the course?

Yes, we had to do a minimum of two to three weeks placement to be fully qualified in the library.

4. Did you organize the internship yourself or did college administrators help you to get it?

DBS emailed about legal aid work, that they had vacancies. So, it was through DBS.

5. On the college side of things, did you find DBS helpful? If not, why not?

Well, basically she just sent the email and that was it. There wasn’t a lot of follow up.

5a. Did DBS monitor your progress?

We had to fill out these time sheets basically saying what days we did and get them signed off and hand them back in but I actually emailed to ask what date they were to be handed back in but they never got back to me.

5b. Did DBS ensure the internship was suited to you?

Yes, I’d say so yeah. It was specifically what we needed to do.

6. What way do you think they could improve?

Maybe with the follow up. Checking in a bit or being a bit more available I suppose.

7. What exactly were you doing in your placement, what were your tasks?

So it was a library internship. It was a legal library so I was cataloguing, loose leafing, updating the information on the electronic database. They deal with information about specific countries that refugees come from so for a long time it
was pick a country and update information on it. Hard copy cataloguing as well, like books and journals, that sort of thing.

8. Were you autonomous, were you given the opportunity to do tasks unsupervised?
   Yes.

9. Did you find you were mentored in the job?
   Yes.

10. Tell me a bit about your work environment in the position, what was your relationship with your co-workers like?

   It was really nice. Everyone was really friendly. It was flexitime so people came and went in their own hours and it was very flexible for me because I was still in college. So it was a come in whenever you can kind of thing.

11. Were you exposed to other parts of the business?

   I was very much doing the library. They had monthly meetings and they did invite me to those where you could learn about the other areas but day to day I wouldn’t really have been involved in other parts.

12. Do you feel you had career development opportunities?

   Yes, definitely. It probably could have been a bit longer though, that would be my only point. They only required two to three weeks but I happened to stay four months, so I think they should change that.

13. Was the job easily accessible?

   It was very handy, yeah.

14. What skills would you say you gained if any?

   I guess cataloguing skills which is something you need. Using the library management system which I haven’t done before that was quite good. Loose leafing, I never would have done that before.

14a. So let me mention some skill sets and you can tell me about which ones if they improved or developed. Firstly, academic skills for example creative thinking, computer applications, problem solving.

   I think it definitely helped with what I was studying in college at the same time. It definitely overlapped and it was really helpful there. I don’t think it allowed for much creative thinking but it definitely overlapped with what we were doing in college.

14b. Communication skills like written or oral communications.
I was on my own most of the time so it didn’t really help with that.

14c. Leadership and teamwork skills

No, probably not because I was on my own for most of it.

14d. Job acquisition skills such as CV writing job interviewing and networking.

Yeah, I think so because the profession is quite small so if you say I worked with this person chances are people would know them.

14e. Interpersonal skills

In a way, yes because straight away I was working with an office full of people

14f. Knowledge of the practical aspects of your area and knowledge of the job market.

It absolutely helped with the practical side of things. Not really with the job market.

15. Did it help you clarify your career intentions?

It definitely did, yeah. It cemented what I wanted to do.

16. Before the internship, did you view internships as a viable tool and has that opinion changed?

Yes, absolutely and my opinion hasn’t changed.

17. Was it what you expected?

I think more or less. It was just getting experience in the area. It was a little bit isolated. I was on my own a bit but I think that was just that specific job that I had. In a service library, you’d have people coming in all the time but you didn’t really there.

18. Were you satisfied and why?

Yes, it was a really nice place to work so it was a relief to know. It’d made the decision to go back to college and had paid all that money so it was nice to know at least I was doing something I really wanted to do because you don’t know whether you’ve made the right choice. I do think having some experience is really necessary when you’re hunting for a job.

19. Where are you now?

I was working on my dissertation until January and I was looking for something for the last couple of months. I started on another internship on the ‘Job Bridge’ scheme about three weeks ago in another library. There is not a lot of work at the moment in the area.

20. How long did it take you since finishing college to get your current position?

I’d say nearly nine months.
21. Do you think the internship could have been improved and if so how?

I guess maybe a bit more communication from DBS. Also, I don’t know if this is a good idea or not. It goes through a liaison who doesn’t specifically know the professional area. She sent us information about other jobs and some of those wouldn’t have really been applicable so maybe if it could go through someone who knows the area. The library themselves were very good. I had no problem with them at all.

22. How do you think the internship affects your future?

I hope so. I do think it has helped. My current job said that’s why I got the job, because of my internship experience. Another plus was the fact that I could get a reference from someone in the industry.
Interview 3:

Interview with a DBS student regarding their experience on work placement:

1. Firstly, could you give me a few details of your internship, such as where it was, how long it was, whether it was paid or unpaid etc.?

   It was in a place called Educate Together which is a not for profit organisation that was set up in multi denominational schools in Ireland. It was for three months and it was full time unpaid.

2. What is your course of study and what year in this course of study did it take place?

   My course is an undergraduate degree in Marketing with Event Management. It took place in the second of three years during the summer.

3. So you mentioned that the placement was a required part of the course?

   No, it wasn’t. It wasn’t required by the course but it was recommended that we do something.

4. Did you organize the internship yourself or did college administrators help you to get it?

   I got it myself but I heard information about it through the careers website of the college.

5. On the college side of things, did you find DBS helpful? If not, why not?

   Yes, I found them very helpful. Well the website is very helpful, but I didn’t ask for any advice from them, they didn’t push me into it or anything. The careers website with information about internships is very good.

5a. Did DBS monitor your progress?

   No, I don’t know if they knew I did the internship.

5b. Did DBS ensure the internship was suited to you?

   The information that was posted up about the job was very suited to what I do. The job title was a fund raising and marketing intern but it gave a really good job description of what they would require the intern to do. I could see that it would interest me.

6. What exactly were you doing in your placement, what were your tasks?

   I was assisting the fundraising department, helping with marketing, keeping the databases up to date, doing copy writing, helping with organising fundraising events, helping with presentations, contacting clients, direct marketing, marketing research, that kind of thing.
7. Were you autonomous, were you given the opportunity to do tasks unsupervised?

Yes, very much so. My co-ordinator kept me up to date and gave me areas that I needed to look at, but I very much did my own thing, yeah it was good.

8. Did you find you were mentored in the job?

Yes. My mentor was the head of the fund raising department. I was directly under her so she looked after me but then I also communicated with the communications department who would have been looking after the social media aspect of things. I was in contact with everyone including the CEO.

9. Tell me a bit about your work environment in the position, what was your relationship with your co-workers like?

Great. I got along really well with everyone. They were really welcoming. They took me out into the school network as well so I got to meet some of the teachers. They gave me loads to do, my desk was right beside the CEO’s office and he was lovely.

10. Were you exposed to other parts of the business?

Yes, absolutely. I was exposed to other parts that had more to do with what I was doing. The office was on two levels and upstairs was communications and marketing so I dealt directly with them but I didn’t have much to do with administration.

11. Do you feel you had career development opportunities?

I would hope so, yes. I learned a little bit there. I think the fact that I did an internship looks good. That’s really just what I wanted, that I had an internship under my belt and could get a reference from them.

12. Was the job easily accessible?

I had a car, so yes. It’s out on the M50 near Parkwest and the Luas actually goes near there.

13. What skills would you say you gained if any?

Yes, definitely, we did video making which I got involved with directly so I gained experience with that. I got a bit of copy-write experience as well and also practical day to day skills. I did take something from it.

13a. So let me mention some skill sets and you can tell me about which ones if they improved or developed. Firstly, academic skills for example creative thinking, computer applications, problem solving.

Yes, definitely. I worked with an Apple Mac computer which I don’t usually work with so I learned a lot about how to use that which is very commonly used in my area. I got to use database software as well which I didn’t know how to previously use at all.
13b. Communication skills like written or oral communications.
Yes. I helped with a presentation at the end.

13c. Leadership and teamwork skills
There were two of us so we were like a mini team. And then I was obviously part of the overall team also.

13d. Job acquisition skills such as CV writing job interviewing and networking
Yes, it was a very informal interview which I wasn’t prepared for at all. I went to it fully dressed up. I learnt that when they say informal, they mean informal. Any interview always helps.

13e. Interpersonal skills
Yeah, dealing with different people. They were definitely different people to who I am so I got to learn how to deal with people like that.

13f. Knowledge of the practical aspects of your area and knowledge of the job market.
Practical aspects, I’d say a little bit. Not as much as I would have liked because it was during the summer and the schools weren’t in so it was quite quiet. It definitely helped with knowledge of the job market; I wouldn’t work in the education side of things again. I was tracking the DBS careers site all summer so it gave me a bit of knowledge of what is out there.

14. Did it help you clarify your career intentions?
Yes, definitely. There was kind of a fear where I didn’t know if I wanted to do this so being able to work in a job that involved some aspects of marketing really helped.

15. Before the internship, did you view internships as a viable tool and has that opinion changed?
I definitely thought internships were a good idea because it gives you an experience of the job while you’re still in college; it gives you a foot in the door. I definitely still think internships are a good idea. However, I think it is unfortunate that a lot of internships don’t pay in some kind of way and I think it’s very unfair. The one thing about the internship that I did is that I drove everyday so even to have the petrol paid for would have been good. It would have been nice to get some benefits. I really do think internships are a good idea, especially coming between second and third year and I think it should be something that is pushed, especially in marketing and events. Purely because, the majority of jobs out there are looking for experience.

16. Was it what you expected?
Yes and no. I thought there’d be a lot more work to it. I think it is because they didn’t expect much that they didn’t give me much. I got what I wanted out of it which was a bit of experience and a reference.

17. Were you satisfied and why?

Yes, because for me, I needed an internship to do. For what it was, yes, I was satisfied. I met some really nice people, got a good reference, got to work, I made some really good connections in the place which hopefully will help me in the future.

18. Where are you now?

I’m in my final year in my degree.

19. Do you think the internship could have been improved and if so how?

I think there could be more work involved, maybe more defined tasks. There could have been a bit more structure. They could have brought me into the communications side of the business more.

20. How do you think the internship affects your future?

I’ve gotten experience in the field now. It was something that was definitely on my mind to do and hopefully it will help me get a job.

21. What were the best and worst aspects of your experience?

It got a little bit boring sometimes because there wasn’t all that much to do. The days could be quite long, it wasn’t paid. Good parts; the people were nice; I got experience, a few contacts and a reference.
**Interview 4:**

**Interview with a DIT student regarding their experience on work placement:**

1. Firstly, could you give me a few details of your internship, such as where it was, how long it was, whether it was paid or unpaid etc.?

   I was a trainee deputy manager in Lidl for six months. The location varied, I was in six stores altogether. I was three months in Rathfarnham, six weeks in Dundrum, another six in Pottery Road and I worked a day in three different stores. I also did two weeks in head office in Newbridge. It was full time and paid.

2. What is your course of study and what year in this course of study did it take place?

   My course is an undergraduate degree in Retail and Services Management. I did the placement in the third year of a four year course.

3. So you mentioned that the placement was a required part of the course?

   It was compulsory.

4. Did you organize the internship yourself or did college administrators help you to get it?

   The college organised it. Lidl came into the college looking for students. They came in and did a presentation and thirteen students applied, five of us got jobs.

5. On the college side of things, did you find DIT helpful? If not, why not?

   Not really. I won’t put DIT down as helping me get my placement at all. They didn’t prepare me for the interview or help with CV preparation either.

5a. Did DIT monitor your progress?

   They were meant to but they didn’t.

5b. Did DIT ensure the placement was suited to you?

   No, not at all. If you got the interview and you got the job, off you go.

6. Do you think DIT could improve their side of things and if so, how?

   Yes, I think they could improve. The person who was the head coordinator had a lot of students and so didn’t know anyone’s specific details.

7. What exactly were you doing in your placement, what were your tasks?

   It varied. When I began I was on the till. The way Lidl work is you have to know all the basics from the store up to the managerial running of it. I did the day to day tasks...
such as write-off, cleaning the store, preparing for the next day. After that, I got moved up to anchor level which meant I was the manager of the tills. When people started work and ended work I sorted out their tills, made sure their breaks were taken on time etc. Then, I moved to the managerial level so I dealt with price changes, the complete running of the store and managed the night packers.

8. Were you autonomous, were you given the opportunity to do tasks unsupervised?

No, everything was very structured and laid out. It was really good but you were told from head office where everything went. You couldn’t decide yourself.

9. Did you find you were mentored in the job?

Yes and no, for every store I went to, the manager above me would have been my mentor but they didn’t actively do anything. If I had to go to someone, they were there but they didn’t come to me to make sure I was okay or anything. There was a person in charge of the whole internship scheme who checked up on me now and again but I didn’t feel I had a specific mentor.

10. Tell me a bit about your work environment in the position, what was your relationship with your co-workers like?

At the beginning, I absolutely hated it. A lot of the people who worked there were foreign and had been there for ages and were all really good friends and I was the outsider. But by the end of the first store when I was told I was moving, I didn’t want to; I really enjoyed it and got along with everyone. But it was the same again at the next store, I hated it at the beginning but I didn’t want to move when it was time to go again. So, it was good overall.

11. Like you mentioned already, you were exposed to many parts of the business. Tell me about this.

In Newbridge, yes I was. When I went there, I did two days in Goods In, Goods Out, Transport, Supply Chain, Sales, and Sales Admin. So overall, I was exposed to many different parts.

12. Do you feel you had career development opportunities?

I think it definitely looks good on my CV to say I did training with Lidl. I can definitely use it but because I’ve only ever done retail I don’t know if I can apply it to other situations yet.

13. Was the job easily accessible and did you find the pay acceptable?

It was fine because I had my car but if you didn’t have a car, it definitely would have been a pain. There was someone in my class who also got Lidl but didn’t drive so it was awkward for her. They didn’t check beforehand if you had a full license or not but it should have been a pre-requisite. The pay was really good and we got travel expenses for travelling to training every Wednesday and also for the two weeks in
Newbridge, our accommodation was paid and we had expenses throughout the day for food. I was on VHI with them also so we also had health insurance.

14. What skills would you say you gained if any?

I’d say definitely communication skills, especially with foreigners. If someone rang me, I could barely understand what they were saying but now I’m much better. Group skills, managing tasks and time management was a big one because there are specific tasks you need to do before the shop closes but you have a time you need to get out by.

14a. So let me mention some skill sets and you can tell me about which ones if they improved or developed. Firstly, academic skills for example creative thinking, computer applications, problem solving.

I didn’t really develop problem solving skills because there was a procedure to everything. I did learn how to use the ERP system and how it affects the back office and then when I went to Newbridge I saw it from their side of things and how the ordering went down through the line. I could then use what I learned from that in my Supply Chain exam in college so that was good.

14b. You already mentioned about teamwork skills and communication skills, do you think the job helped with job acquisition skills such as CV writing job interviewing and networking?

Job interviewing yes, because I had never done an interview before I had done that one. I have also now applied for their graduate program so I’m on the second last round waiting for a phone call to find out if I got it.

14c. Knowledge of the practical aspects of your area and knowledge of the job market.

I’m not really sure; I’d like to think it helped because of the supply chain stuff. When I went there, there was so much procedure sent down from head office that I didn’t get to deviate much. I’d like to think if I was at a higher level then maybe your ideas might be heard a little bit better. And for knowledge of the job market, I’d say yes I know what’s out there now.

15. Did it help you clarify your career intentions?

It actually made me more wary of whether I want to do it or not. I’ve only ever done grocery and I went in and thought this is great I’ll get a much better perspective. Now I’m thinking I’ve never done fashion; I’ve never tried anything else. So now I have that experience, I almost want to move away from it.

16. What were your perceptions of internships before and has that opinion changed?

I dreaded it. I didn’t want to go look for one. I was afraid if I hated it I’d be stuck there but then when Lidl came in I knew I wanted to do it. Without them, I genuinely would not have known what it was like. Beforehand, I did think internships were a
good idea but I really didn’t want to do it. Looking back, I know it has been really
good for me. I’d recommend everyone to do it.

17. Was it what you expected?

Not at first, but looking back having done it now, it definitely was. When I went in
first, because I sat at the till for the first day, I came away and hated it. But
throughout it, learning more, it was really good.

18. Were you satisfied and why?

Yes, 100%. I loved being able to move from store to store. When I got moved to the
three other stores, I had to step in as manager so I thought it was great. I had to
manage the staff and it really boosted my confidence.

19. Where are you now?

I’m in fourth year finishing my degree. I’m still working part time in Lidl; I got kept
on after the internship. I got demoted because I wouldn’t be able to do manager’s
hours with college but I was the only one of the five students who got kept on.

20. Do you think the internship could have been improved and if so how

On the DIT side, they didn’t know us at all. No one knew going into third year how
long it was meant to be for, where you could do it, we had no information. Two
people went on Erasmus (European student exchange program) when it was open to
everyone but no one knew about it. I would have done Erasmus had I known more
but they made it really difficult to get information. If you got on the bad side of the
co-ordinator, you didn’t have much of a chance. There was only one co-ordinator for
190 students.

On the Lidl side they were brilliant. The only thing they didn’t do was inform us of
what exactly we needed to know for exams we needed to do for them to be promoted
at certain stages. I had to do two exams; the first was at basic store level. Lidl don’t
promote within unless you passed these exams which I had to do to move onto the
next level for my internship. There was no layout so we could go to our manager if
there was something we hadn’t learnt yet to ensure we did well in the exams.

21. How do you think the internship affects your future?

Hopefully, it will stand in my favour. Now that I’m applying for the graduate
program, I knew the people doing the interview with me and the people at the
assessment day so hopefully that will help. At the moment, I’m applying for jobs and
I’m looking more to internships than full time jobs because I know that way I’ll get
the experience and see whether I like it without actually being settled in a full time
job that I mightn’t like.

22. What were the best and worst aspects of your experience?
Best parts, definitely moving store, getting to meet new people. Worst part would be working through the summer.
Appendix 2: Early draft of questionnaire:

Part 1: Demographics:

*Please tell us about yourself:*

1). Gender: Male Female

2). Age:

3). Undergraduate Postgraduate

4). Area of Study: Business & Management
   Law
   Marketing & Event Management
   Information Technology
   Accounting & Finance
   Arts
   Media & Journalism
   Psychology & Social Science
   Counselling & Psychotherapy

5). Award Grade: 1.1 2.1 2.2 Pass

6). Duration of Course: 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years

7). Year of course participated in placement: Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4

8). Duration of placement: 1-3 months 4-6 months 7-9 months
8). Full time placement Part time placement

9). Was the placement Paid? Unpaid? Other (e.g. expenses paid) please specify

Part 2: Satisfaction with the placement:

10). Generally, how satisfied would you say you were with your experience on placement?

Very satisfied Satisfied Moderately satisfied Not satisfied

For the following statements please tick the box that matches your view most closely.

11). My employer clearly outlined their expectations of me from the beginning of the placement.

Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

12). The placement required me to use a number of complex or high level skills.

Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

13). The tasks I was given were significant to the proper running of the organisation.

Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

14). The placement permitted me to use my personal initiative or judgement in carrying out the work.

Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

15). I received feedback about my work performance from my employer.

Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

16). I received many opportunities to learn about the field, profession or business.

Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree Strongly disagree

17). My placement helped me to determine that this was a field I was interested in.
18). My supervisor in the organisation provided me with support during my placement.

19). I was always treated respectfully by my co-workers and supervisors.

20). I was exposed to different parts of the organisation apart from the area I was working in.

21). I really admired the organisation that I worked for while doing my placement.

Part 3: Career development:

22). Do you feel the placement helped you to **improve or develop** in the following areas? *Please tick the appropriate box for each area.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To a large extent</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic skills</strong> (e.g. analytical skills, problem solving, computer applications, creative thinking, information search)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication skills</strong> (e.g. oral presentations, proposal writing, written communication)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership skills</strong> (e.g. leadership/teamwork &amp; relationship building)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job acquisition skills (eg. CV writing, job interviewing and job networking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
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<td>Level of confidence in the area of work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of practical aspects of your area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the job market</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

23). Do you feel the placement has helped to clarify your career intentions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Part 4: Attitudes/perceptions/expectations:

24). Did the placement influence the significance that you now place on particular traits which are needed for employment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

25). Did the placement assist you in creating realistic expectations of the workplace?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

26). As a result of the placement, do you think you have an advantage over other students who have not completed placements when seeking employment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

27). Do you think the placement has enhanced your employability?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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</table>

Part 5: Current Status:

28). Have you currently graduated?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
If you answered Yes to Q28 please continue to Q29.

29). Are you currently employed?

Yes  No

If you answered Yes to Q29 please continue to Q30 – Q33.

30). Is your current employment in the area of your study?

Yes  No

31). How long did it take you after graduation to get your current position?

1-3 months  4-6 months  7-9 months  10-12 months  More than 1 yr.

32). Are you satisfied with your current position?

Very satisfied  Satisfied  Moderately satisfied  Not satisfied

33). What was your starting salary in your current position?

34). Would you be willing to have a further discussion with the researcher at your own convenience?

Yes  No

If you answered Yes to Q34, please insert your email address.
Appendix 3: Final version of questionnaire circulated to census population

(Note: Questions contained question logic and some questions were only presented for response when a certain response was selected in the previous question)