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The Student Voice - Undergraduate Student Insights of Pre-Placement Experience

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The Student Voice – Undergraduate Student Insights of Pre-Placement Experience

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Placement is an important component of an undergraduate degree programme and has been recognised as being beneficial to the student population, the academic community and to the organisations that enable the internship process. For example, it allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge and develop their skills within a ‘real-life’ organisational environment (e.g. Gavin and Coleman, 2016). Furthermore, it facilitates increased co-operation and relationship-building between higher education institutions and companies (Burdett and Barker, 2017).

However, whilst there is general awareness of the benefits and opportunities of experiential learning, there has been a call for further research to be undertaken regarding students’ attitudes to their placement both *before* and *after* their placement practice (Edwards, 2014), as opposed to the current emphasis on post-placement analysis. To that end, this paper examines and specifically explores hospitality, tourism and event (HTE) management students’ perceptions and attitudes about the placement planning process and their expectations for their work-based learning experience and the overall potential impacts on student career aspirations.

To that end, this paper reports on a study which focused on the student perspective on placement at the pre-placement stage. A qualitative research methodology was employed to explore students’ pre-placement perceptions and their expectations of the placement on their career aspirations at that time. The research utilised a qualitative survey to capture the views of 102 students (undertaking placement in the current academic year) across five undergraduate programmes (at both levels seven and eight of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) framework) in one higher education institution. Open ended questions were used to explore student learning expectations, skills development, career planning aspirations, challenges and concerns within the placement planning process. Qualitative data analysis identified and interpreted themes and patterns in the data.

The preliminary results indicate that the respondents in the main hold a positive view of the HTE industries. A number of challenges and concerns at the pre-placement stage centre on operational issues around the acquisition of a placement and the completion of the requisite documentation. The students indicated that they hope to achieve industry insights which will enhance their employability and career networks in the future. Communication, organisation, time management, team-work and problem solving were identified as some of the key skills that these respondents hope to develop in the course of their placements. These findings will contribute to the future development of the placement preparation process in HTE higher education programmes in Ireland.

List of References

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