

Evaluation of the Work Experience Programme

A report to Reed in Partnership

Tim Riley

Stuart Deaton

Ellie Roberts

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This report has been quality assured by:

Name: Stuart Deaton

Position: Associate Director of Research

Date: September 2010

Tim Riley

Senior Researcher

Inclusion

Third Floor

89 Albert Embankment

London

SE1 7TP

Tel: 020 7840 8342

Email: tim.riley@cesi.org.uk

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1 Summary and methodology

Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1** This report sets out the findings of the evaluation of the Work Experience Programme, conducted by the Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion (*Inclusion*) on behalf of Reed in Partnership. When this research was undertaken, the programme was called Backing Young Britain. Backing Young Britain aimed to provide work placements for unemployed young people aged 18 to 24, in order to improve their position in the job market. The programme aimed to provide 5,000 two-week placements, for which young people were eligible to apply on the first day of their Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim, and 20,000 internships lasting between eight and 13 weeks, for which young people needed to have been on JSA for six months. This was replaced by the Work Experience Programme to provide work placements of two to six weeks in duration for young people who have been on JSA for 13 weeks. The programme closed in November 2010.
- 1.2** The evaluation consisted of two elements. The first, an online quantitative survey of young people who had taken placements, was conducted between July and August 2010. All the young people who had, at that point, been on a placement were sent three email invitations to take part in the survey. A £200 prize draw was provided as an incentive for young people to take part in the research. In total, 1,318, young people were emailed, and 1,237 young people successfully received the email. Of this effective sample of 1,237, 279 people took part in the survey, representing a good response rate of 23 per cent.
- 1.3** The second element was a series of 30 qualitative interviews conducted with young people over the telephone in August 2010. These young people had all agreed to be re-contacted by *Inclusion*, and were offered a £15 'thank you' for taking part in this element of research.
- 1.4** This report highlights the following key strengths of the Work Experience Programme:
- helping young people choose which career they want to pursue
 - helping young people to gain experience in the world of work and develop their 'soft' transferable skills

- helping young people build confidence in their ability to work
- actually getting young people into jobs, particularly with the placement company
- empowering young people to take a more active approach to jobseeking.

Backgrounds of young people

1.5 Those who took Work Experience Programme placements often had low level qualifications, and had been claiming JSA for a considerable period of time. Only one-quarter had been in full-time employment in the past, and 32 per cent had never had any employment or undertaken any voluntary work. Many of the respondents in the qualitative interviews noted that they lived in areas of high unemployment and low educational attainment.

1.6 At the same time, the young people were very keen to gain employment and were utilising multiple job-search methods. In sum, the young people using Work Experience Programme placements seemed to be in a difficult position in the labour market, but were enthusiastic about getting work. As such, the programme reached a group of young people that was most likely to benefit from a work placement.

Finding out about the Work Experience Programme and the application process

1.7 Virtually all young people surveyed had heard about the Work Experience Programme from their Jobcentre Plus adviser, which is to be expected, as Jobcentre Plus is the only official referral pathway and the Work Experience Programme does not advertise. Most found the Work Experience Programme website easy or very easy to use. However, eight per cent had never used the Work Experience Programme website, and instead were simply called by a Work Experience Programme adviser and offered a work placement.

1.8 In the online survey, most young people agreed that there were enough opportunities available, both in the locality in which they lived, and in the sector that in which they wanted to work. However, in qualitative interviews it became apparent that many young people were unable to find opportunities in the specific sector they wanted that were also in their

locality, even if there were placements in those sectors available in other parts of the country. Therefore, some young people took placements in the retail sector, even if this was not their sector of choice. Many young people noted that they wanted to see more opportunities in different sectors, such as IT, media and administration. Whilst placements were not always in the specific sector that young people wanted, the experience was nevertheless highly valued, particularly by those who had no previous work experience.

- 1.9** The application process did not cause problems to applicants, despite the fact that nearly one-third of survey respondents reported that they had received no support from anyone when applying. Of those who did receive help in applying, this most often came from Jobcentre Plus advisers, although young people also noted in the qualitative interviews that Work Experience Programme advisers provided useful advice over the telephone. Nearly 70 per cent of young people were accepted onto a placement on their first or second attempt.

The placement

- 1.10** Nearly three quarters of placements were in the retail and wholesale sector, with the next most common sector being business services (six per cent). Many young people reported undertaking placements at discount retail stores. Only 38 per cent of young people said they wanted to build a career in the sector in which they did their placement. Three quarters of placements were short, two week placements, but 42 per cent of those on short placements would have liked them to be longer.
- 1.11** Eighteen per cent of young people left their placement before it was completed, and these people tended to leave placements either at the very beginning or mid-way through. The most common reasons for leaving the placement early were that they did not enjoy the placement (46 per cent) or that the placement was not what they expected (40 per cent).
- 1.12** Six in ten of those on longer placements were aware that they were receiving a Training Allowance. However, in the qualitative interviews, a notable minority of young people noted that their JSA claim stopped or they were not receiving a Training Allowance, and this caused them significant problems. It will be important for Jobcentre Plus to resolve these issues for future programmes.

1.13 Overall, satisfaction with the Work Experience Programme was high – 75 per cent were either very or fairly satisfied with the programme. Those who were most satisfied often were on longer placements in the sector they were most interested in, on placements where employers were particularly engaged, where the young person had no previous work experience, and when the young person was offered a permanent job at their placement company. Satisfaction varied depending on whether the young person had completed their placement or not: 81 per cent of those who completed their placement were very or fairly satisfied, compared with only 26 per cent of those who did not complete the placement.

Impacts of the placement

1.14 The main benefits of undertaking a Work Experience Programme placement reported by survey respondents were increases in confidence and 'soft' skills, whilst administrative, and job-specific or technical skills were less often mentioned. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents very much or mostly agreed that their confidence in the workplace had increased, 78 per cent very much or mostly agreed that they were more confident in the skills and experience they could demonstrate on their CV, and 80 per cent very much or mostly agreed that they were more confident in interacting with different people in different positions. Furthermore, 77 per cent reported that their communication skills had improved, 75 per cent that their time management had improved, and 79 per cent that their teamwork skills had improved.

1.15 On the other hand, only 44 per cent said their administrative skills had improved, and 64 per cent that their technical or job-specific skills had improved. In addition, only 62 per cent very much or mostly agreed that that they were more confident about attending interviews. Young people were most likely to report that they had not felt challenged in their placement (35 per cent), although smaller numbers thought that their main challenge had been familiarising themselves and using new technologies and equipment, and completing all the tasks allocated to them within the timescales given.

1.16 One area where young people gained less confidence was with future work searches. Interviews suggested that those who did receive advice on future work searching from their employer valued it very highly. It seems that more guidance could be provided to employers to encourage them to provide advice to young people, as it would provide a valuable alternative

source of guidance to supplement that provided by Jobcentre Plus advisers. Employer guidance could encourage employers to:

- provide advice and guidance to young people about future career plans, and help plan the practical steps that would make those aspirations achievable (this could be in the form of a review after the placement has finished)
- make young people feel fully part of the team
- encourage and reward enthusiasm and achievement
- more actively take a young person 'under their wing' and mentor them.

Post-placement outcomes and plans

1.17 At the time of the survey, 12 per cent of respondents were still on their placement, 22 per cent were in employment (including 12 per cent who were in employment with their placement company), and 66 per cent were not in employment.¹ Of those who were not still on the programme, 25 per cent had found work. In 2005 the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) found sustained, unsubsidised jobs for 34 per cent of participants. Whilst the Work Experience Programme has a lower job outcome rate than this, it should also be noted that NDYP provides more sustained and intensive support.

1.18 In total, 28 per cent of those who completed their placement had moved into employment when interviewed, compared with only 13 per cent of those who had left their placement before it was due to end. Those who had gained employment in a different company from their placement were more likely to have done so in a different sector from their placement, again suggesting that placements were not always in the sectors in which young people were most interested in working.

1.19 Of those who were not in employment at the time of interview, 20 per cent were on a training course or studying, and 10 per cent were doing voluntary work to gain further work experience. Some young people had in fact organised their own voluntary work placements, having felt empowered to do so by their Work Experience Programme experience.

¹ When those who were still on their placement but who had been offered a job at the placement company when they did finish the placement are taken into account, 24 per cent were either in employment or had been offered a job.

2 Background of young people

2.1 This section examines the backgrounds of the young people who undertook Work Experience Programme placements.

Gender, age and qualification levels

2.2 Survey respondents were slightly more likely to be male (55 per cent compared with 45 per cent female). This figure is lower than the national average – in July 2010, 68 per cent of jobseekers aged 18 to 24, were male.²

2.3 Nearly half of the respondents were aged 18 to 19; 30 per cent were aged 20 to 21, and roughly one fifth were aged 22 to 24 when they started their placement.

Age at start of placement

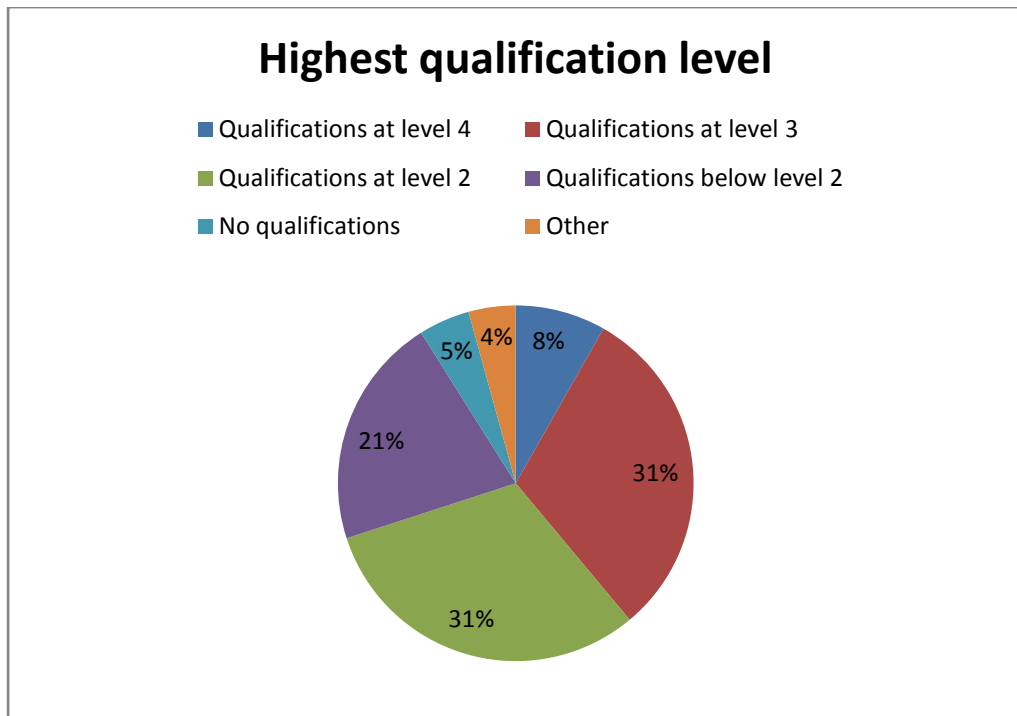
18 to 19	47%
20 to 21	30%
22 to 24	22%
25 or older	1%

N=274

2.4 At the time of survey, most respondents had qualifications at either Level 3 or Level 2 (both 31 per cent). However, five per cent had no qualifications, and over 20 per cent had qualifications below Level 2. Again, these findings differ slightly from the available national statistics. The Labour Force Survey shows that 36 per cent of economically inactive 18 to 24 year olds have qualifications below level 2 or no qualifications at all.³

² Data from NOMIS on 6 September 2010

³ Labour Force Survey, ONS. January–March 2010



N=280

- 2.5** Furthermore, it was often reported during the qualitative interviews that those who had Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications had achieved poor grades at either GCSE or A level. Often their highest qualification was vocational, in areas such as hair and beauty or IT.
- 2.6** Many of the young people interviewed said that they enjoyed school or college, suggesting that they were not disengaged from learning. However, some emphasised that it was the social rather than academic element of school or college that they had enjoyed, and that there was not a strong culture of learning in their locality.
- 2.7** Most survey respondents (82 per cent) were not working towards any other qualifications at the time of the survey. Of those that were, just over one-third were studying for Level 2 qualifications, while just over one-fifth were studying for Level 4 qualifications. Some young people were unsure of the level of qualification they were studying for, and therefore answered they were studying for 'other' qualifications.

Qualifications currently being studied for

Qualifications at level 4	22%
Qualifications at level 3	14%
Qualifications at level 2	35%
Qualifications below level 2	4%
Don't know	8%
Other	16%

N=49

Career aspirations, previous work experience, and job-search activities

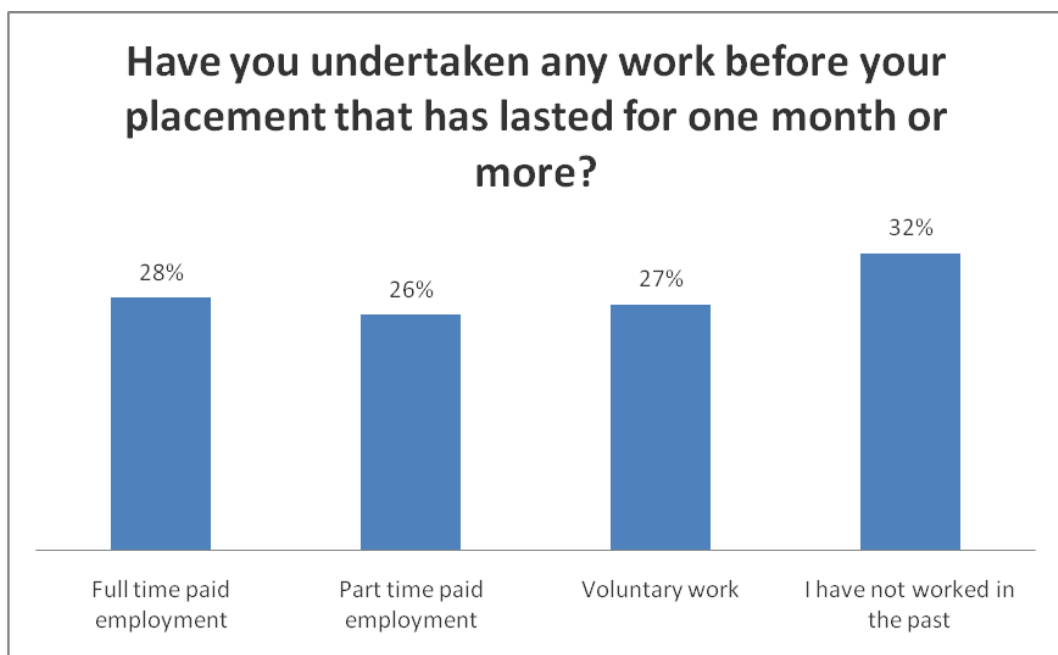
- 2.8** During the in-depth interviews young people were asked whether they had clear career aspirations when they left school. There was a mixture of those who were uncertain when they left school and those who had stronger career plans. The young people sometimes noted that school careers advisers had not been able to help them plan their future, as they did not have an idea of what they wanted to do themselves and the careers advice given by the adviser at school was not useful.
- 2.9** Often, young people's aspirations had changed since they had finished school or college. For example, one young person had always wanted to join the navy, but was injured and discharged in the first weeks of his training. He was then unsure of what he wanted to do. Another young person had completed two years of training to become a hairdresser but subsequently decided that she would rather work in retail. Some young people's experience of unemployment had changed their aspirations – as a result their immediate goal was to gain employment, regardless of which sector. For example, one young person who had been unemployed for six months before his placement had obtained an IT qualification at college and wanted to work as an IT technician. He now said that 'he realised this had been completely unrealistic' as there were no jobs and his aim now was to find any work at all.
- 2.10** Twenty-eight per cent of respondents had worked full time in the past, while a similar proportion had held down part-time employment, or had done voluntary placements. Thirty-two per cent of survey respondents had no previous work experience before taking up their placement. There

were examples of young people who had no previous work experience for whom the placement was very important.

'I've been trying to get a job for years and you know, people say "You can't get a job because you haven't got the experience" and you can't get the experience because they won't let you? This way, [the Work Experience Programme] can really help you get the experience you need to get on that ladder.'

'It was something more than my school work experience placement, which to me seemed like two weeks of playing about.'

2.11 The qualitative research found that the jobs that young people had had in the past were often low skilled, and a high proportion had had experience of working in retail outlets. Other experience that the young people had had in the past included: working at fast-food outlets, cleaning jobs, and bar, hotel and call-centre work. Only a few young people that we spoke to had held down full-time jobs and jobs that required trade skill-sets, including one young person who had worked in construction and one who had worked as an electrician.



N=268 (respondents were able to select more than one option)

2.12 It was most likely that young people who took the survey had been claiming JSA for between five and six months (39 per cent) before taking a Work Experience Programme placement. A further 18 per cent had been claiming for between seven and 12 months, and seven per cent had been

claiming JSA for more than one year.⁴ High levels of uptake around the five to six month mark correspond to when the young people became eligible for longer placements of eight to 13 weeks.⁵

Time claiming JSA before taking a placement

less than 3 months	12%
3–4 months	23%
5–6 months	39%
7–12 months	18%
1–2 years	5%
more than 2 years	2%

N=271

2.13 Those young people on placements reported during the survey that they were using multiple methods to find work, suggesting that these young people were actively seeking employment despite being unemployed. In the in-depth interviews, young people stated that they were extremely keen to find employment and come off JSA. In total, 95 per cent of young people were using internet searches to find jobs, 90 per cent were using Jobcentre Plus, 79 per cent were looking at job adverts in, for example, newspapers, and 53 per cent were searching through word of mouth. Significant minorities had signed up with employment agencies (26 per cent) or attended job fairs (18 per cent).

⁴ Young people who had been on JSA for more than a year would not be eligible for placements. It is possible that those young people who reported being on JSA for more than one year before going on a placement had had a short period of employment within the year before they started their Work Experience Programme placement, and either forgotten it or felt that it was not meaningful employment and therefore neglected to mention it.

⁵ The Work Experience Programme aims to provide 20,000 internships lasting between eight and 13 weeks for young people who have been on JSA for six months or longer.

Work-search activities undertaken at the time of applying for placement

Internet searches	95%
Jobcentre Plus	90%
Job adverts (e.g. newspapers)	79%
Word of mouth	53%
Signed up for work with employment agencies	26%
Attended job fairs	18%
None	2%

N=258 (respondents were able to select more than one option)

3 Finding out about the Work Experience Programme and the application process

3.1 This section examines how young people found out about The Work Experience Programme, and their experiences of applying for placements.

Finding out about the Work Experience Programme

3.2 Jobcentre Plus was the only official referral channel into the Work Experience Programme, and this was reflected in the fact that the vast majority of survey respondents heard about the Work Experience Programme through their Jobcentre Plus adviser (96 per cent). The remaining four per cent heard about the scheme from another source, such as Connexions or directly from the Work Experience Programme website. All of the young people we conducted qualitative interviews with had found out about the Work Experience Programme from their Jobcentre Plus adviser.

3.3 The majority of young people (89 per cent) found the Work Experience Programme website either very easy or easy to use. Eight per cent stated that they had not used the website. A significant proportion of young people that we conducted qualitative interviews with had not used the website at all to apply for placements.⁶

The Work Experience Programme website ease of use

Very easy	40%
Easy	49%
Not very easy	3%
Have not used website	8%

N=259

⁶ See paragraph 3.8.

Availability of placements

- 3.4** Eighty-four per cent of respondents in the survey stated that they knew which sector they wanted to work in. Most respondents agreed or mostly agreed that there was a good enough range of placements available, both generally in their local area and in the sector(s) that they were interested in. However 14 per cent of respondents did not agree that there was a good enough range of placements in the sector(s) they were interested in and around one-quarter only agreed somewhat that this was the case. However, findings from the in-depth interviews about the availability of suitable placements seemed to reflect the fact that there were not enough placements available locally that were *also* in the sector young people were interested in.

Views on range and location of placements

	Very much so	Mostly agree	Agree somewhat	Do not agree
Agree that there was a good range of placements available in the sector(s) I was interested in	24%	37%	25%	14%
Agree that there were placements available locally	30%	41%	24%	6%

N= 255 (range); 232 (location)

- 3.5** The in-depth interviews suggest young people's views on the availability of opportunities varied according to where they lived and what their career aspirations were. Although some interviewees were positive about the availability of local placements, it was more common for young people to say that they felt that their options were limited. For example, a young person from Scotland said that the selection was not great in his local area. However, looking at all of the opportunities on the website he could see that there were lots of good jobs – though they were all in the south.

'All the good jobs were down south or just out of my travelling range'

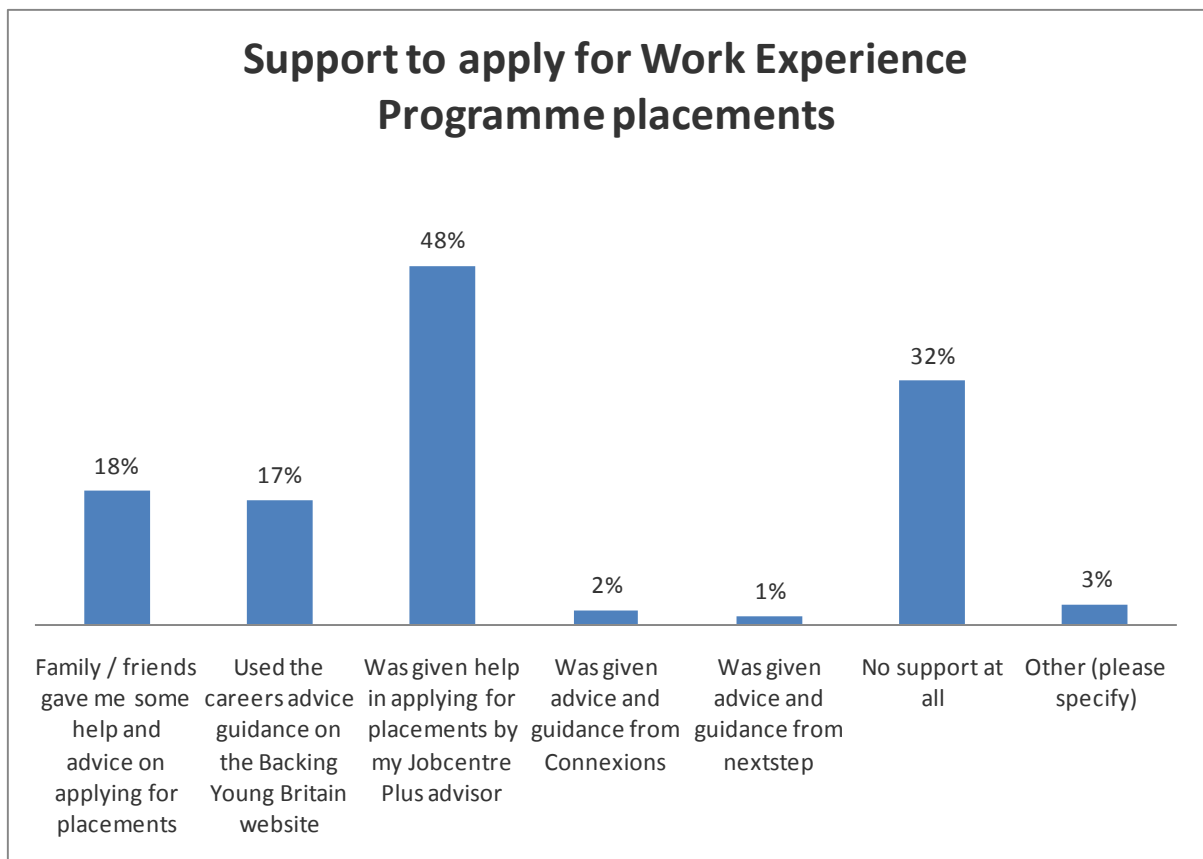
- 3.6** Young people often reported that they would have liked to see more opportunities related to their career aspirations, such as IT, media or administration. For example, a young person who wanted to work in IT could only find retail placements in his area. However, despite this, most

young people were keen to find work in any sector, rather than claim JSA, and therefore were happy to gain whatever experience they could.

'Pretty much the only localish ones on there, and the one that I did, were in retail, but I would have liked to have seen more IT placements.'

Applying for placements

3.7 Forty-eight per cent of survey respondents received help when applying for placements from their Jobcentre Plus adviser. Others were given help from friends or family and/or used the guidance on the Work Experience Programme website. Thirty-two per cent received no help at all.



N=260 (respondents were able to select more than one option)

3.8 The qualitative interviews shed more light on the ways young people actually applied for placements. In many cases, young people were simply referred to the Work Experience Programme by their Jobcentre Plus adviser and completed the application by themselves. Most of these young people volunteered that they had received a phone call from a Work Experience Programme adviser in the mean time to explain the

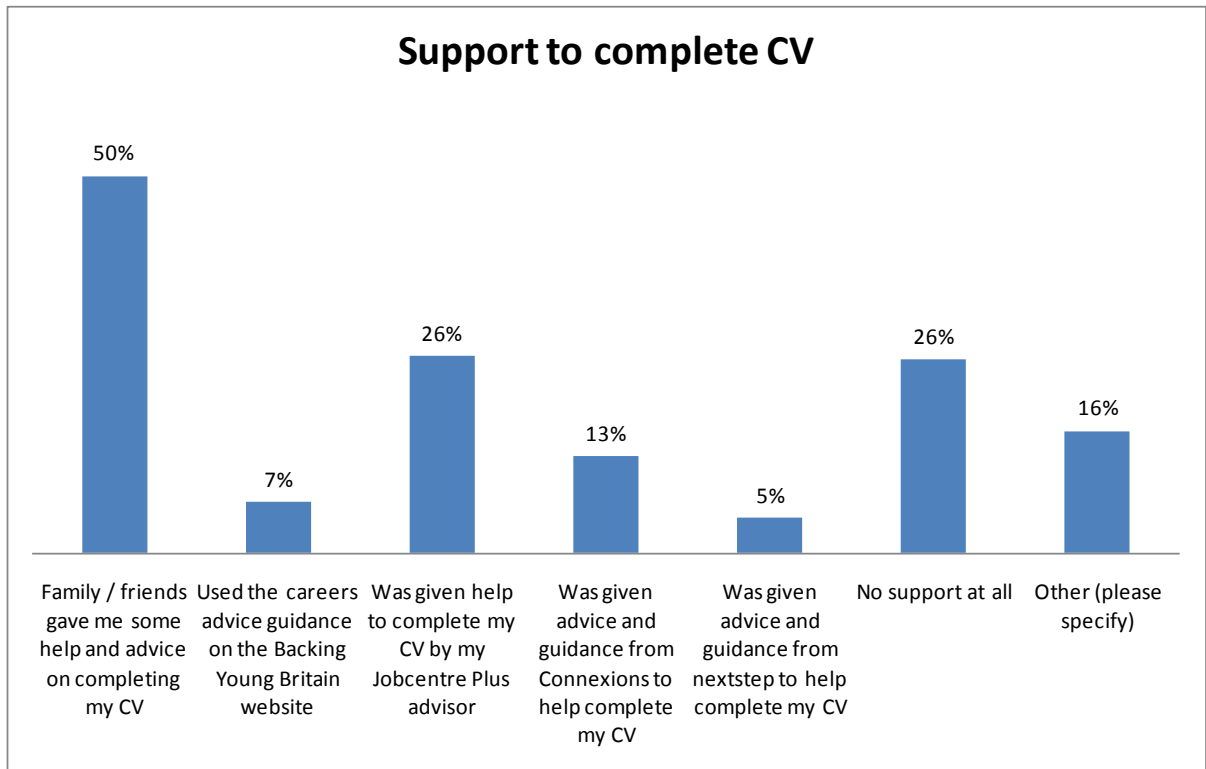
service in more detail and offer support.⁷ Others, however, having been referred by Jobcentre Plus, were called by a Work Experience Programme adviser who talked them through the application process and helped them submit an application immediately. A small number were referred by Jobcentre Plus, and then called by a Work Experience Programme adviser telling them there was a placement available if they wanted, and if they did, giving them the details of when and where to start. This latter group never had to use the Work Experience Programme website. In these instances, the young people we interviewed were often offered a position in one of the retail outlets that appear to recruit a large proportion of candidates on short work-experience placements (in particular at discount retail stores).

3.9 Most of the young people that we spoke to during the in-depth interviews reported having support from a Work Experience Programme adviser during the application process, and it seemed that this help was welcomed and valued. These young people were very keen to take part in a placement in order to improve their future employment opportunities. Indeed, some young people possibly required less support than was provided. For example, given most of the young people were computer literate, it may have not been necessary for a Work Experience Programme adviser to go through the whole application process with them. In these circumstances, it may have sufficed for a Work Experience Programme adviser to call to engage the young person and encourage them to apply, and then offer more support as necessary.

3.10 About three quarters of the survey respondents stated that they had received help completing their CVs from one or more sources.⁸ The most common form of support was family and friends (50 per cent). Just over a quarter received help from their Jobcentre Plus adviser. However, 26 per cent of respondents received no help at all. Findings from the in-depth interviews suggest that some those taking up placements had not received support in making a CV, but there was no indication that they felt they needed more help.

⁷ Work Experience Programme advisers called all young people who registered on the programme to offer support and advice. Most young people mentioned receiving this phone call during the qualitative interviews, although there were no questions specifically asking about it.

⁸ Please note that survey respondents could report that they had received help from one *or more* sources, and hence the percentages in this paragraph do not sum to 100%.



N=270 (respondents were able to select more than one option)

3.11 The majority of survey respondents only applied for one or two placements before they were successful in securing one. This is a positive finding, as it demonstrates that the majority of applicants were being placed quickly. However, as has been previously noted, young people were not always placed in positions or in companies that closely matched their career aspirations. In the in-depth interviews young people suggested that there was very little attempt by advisers at either Jobcentre Plus or the Work Experience Programme to find placements that matched their specific career aspirations. In general however, there were very few complaints about the application process.

'They should look at a person's CV before sending them to a job. If you have been in, for example, retail for four years then don't send them to a shop for work experience because they are not going to gain anything from it and it wastes their time.'

Number of placements applied for before securing an opportunity

1-2	68%
3-4	12%
5 or more	11%
Don't know	10%

N=256

- 3.12** It appeared that many young people started placements without having any direct contact with their placement companies. Only one-third of survey respondents were required to meet with their employer or attend an interview before being accepted on a placement; again this survey finding is corroborated by the in-depth interviews.

4 The placement

- 4.1** This chapter examines details about the placement itself, including the type and length of the placement, how suitable it was, why people left their placement early, and their satisfaction with the placement.

Type and length of placement

- 4.2** The majority (74 per cent) of survey respondents had been on Work Experience Programme placements that were in the retail and wholesale sector. No survey respondents reported taking up placements in the education, mining and quarrying, and electricity gas and water sectors.

Placement sectors

Retail and wholesale	74%
Business services	6%
Hotels and catering	3%
Health and social work	3%
Public administration and defence	2%
Financial intermediation	2%
Construction	1%
Transport, storage and communications	1%
Manufacturing	<1%
Agriculture	<1%
Other	8%

N=262

- 4.3** A significant proportion of the young people we conducted in-depth interviews with had been on short retail placements, in particular at discount stores. Of the total number of those respondents that took part in the in-depth interviews, 16 out of 30 had accepted Work Experience Programme placements in two discount retail store chains. It is probable that many of those young people who undertook placements for these companies did so because opportunities were not available in other sectors.

4.4 The in depth interviews suggest that some of the young people on retail placements tended to work stacking shelves and in some cases helping customers. They tended not to work on the tills. Other retail placements reported by interviewees included working in a bookstore and working in a charity shop. In both of these cases, the tasks assigned to the young people were similar to those who worked in the large discount store chains.

4.5 Some of the young people that we spoke to during the in-depth interviews felt that they may have been offered their placement because their employer wanted cheap labour. This was the case in some retail placements, and in one case where a young person spent the entire placement copying email addresses from the internet into a database.

'[The Work Experience Programme] seems to be simply allowing companies to take on masses of people as free labour. At my placement there were two people from [The Work Experience Programme], including myself. We both did more work and more hours than the paid staff. Companies should not be allowed to abuse this system.'

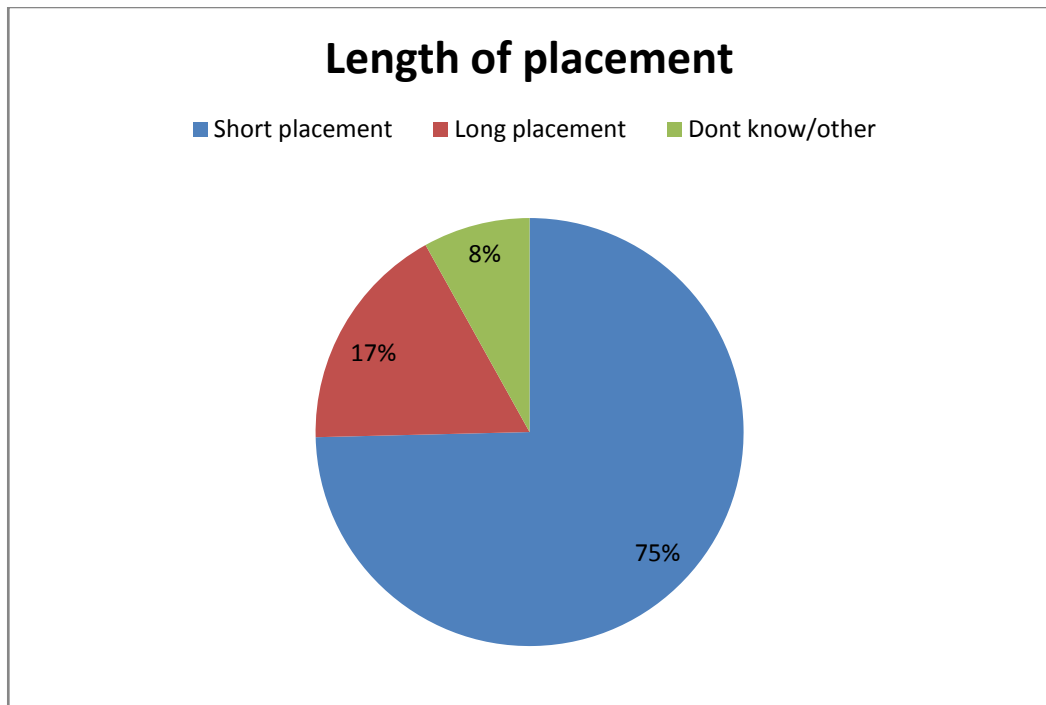
4.6 Additionally, it seems that a small number of companies were using the Work Experience Programme in a way that the programme was not originally designed. A few young people that were interviewed reported working for companies where the work that they were involved in did not seem to be regulated or well-aligned to work experience roles. It was suggested by some young people that companies providing placements could be better vetted, such that the roles the young people are given are acceptable.

'[The Work Experience Programme] should research into companies to make sure it is a suitable and adequate place for people to work in.'

4.7 Backing Young Britain, the precursor to the Work Experience Programme, split placements into short two-week placements, and longer eight to 13 week placements.⁹ The majority of survey respondents reported that they accepted short placements which lasted two weeks. Only 17 per cent of respondents took a longer placement. This may reflect difficulties in securing longer internship-style placements from employers, as our data

⁹ The Work Experience Programme offers all placements of two to six weeks.

suggests that around a half of respondents would have been eligible for the internship programme.¹⁰



N=260

- 4.8** Of those that completed short placements, 42 per cent would have liked their placements to have lasted longer. However, 36 per cent said that they would not have wanted their placements to have lasted longer.

'I would have liked the placement to be longer than the two weeks I had. And I just wanted to say thanks for giving me the opportunity of giving me a work placement, I am very grateful.'

Preferences on whether would have liked to have lasted longer

Yes	42%
No	36%
Don't know	22%

N=194

¹⁰ 25 per cent of the survey respondents had been claiming JSA for more than six months and 39 per cent had been claiming JSA for between five and six months. Those on JSA for six months or more are eligible for eight to 13 week internships.

4.9 Twenty-seven per cent of those who didn't want their placement to have lasted any longer were actually dissatisfied with their experience. This is likely to explain why they were not interested in an extension. Others may simply have felt that they had got maximum benefit from their placement once they had completed two weeks.

'The company asked if I wanted to get in contact with [the Work Experience Programme] and do another two weeks there, which I sort of declined because I was getting quite frustrated with the employer and my current situation.'

4.10 Six in ten of survey respondents on longer internships that were eligible to receive a Training Allowance were aware that they were receiving it. One-third who were eligible were not aware that they were receiving the extra money, or reported that they were not receiving the extra allowance.

Receipt of Training Allowance in place of Jobseeker's Allowance

Yes	60%
No	33%
Don't know	7%

N=43

4.11 One serious problem that emerged from the qualitative interviews was that Jobcentre Plus failed to ensure payment of JSA or the Training Allowance, and therefore they were not paid.¹¹ In some cases it took several weeks until payments restarted. One young person explained that his JSA payments stopped without warning when he started his placement, and that he lived off money from his parents and birthday money for the period. However, in most cases the young person had to make do with no income.

'I'm even worse now that I have finished. I am having so much trouble getting my benefits backdated. Unless I'm guaranteed a job at the end of the placement, or that it won't affect my benefits in any way, I wouldn't do an internship again.'

¹¹ Five young people from the 30 qualitative interviews

'I feel there was very little communication between the Work Experience Programme and the Jobcentre. I was meant to have received £40 a month extra but have not received it yet, so that's £120 I have still not received. But I am grateful for the Work Experience Programme for getting me this work placement.'

4.12 In more than one case the placement employer become involved to ensure young people did not lose out financially from being on a placement.

4.13 It is crucial that Jobcentre Plus resolves this problem, as it may discourage young people from taking offers of temporary employment or work experience in the future. During the qualitative interviews there was also a very small number of cases where there had been problems in accessing funding to cover travel expenses.

'Right now I couldn't recommend it to people. The premise is good. They've got a lot of good ideas and they'll be able to help a lot of people in time, but right now it is a huge guinea pig scheme.'

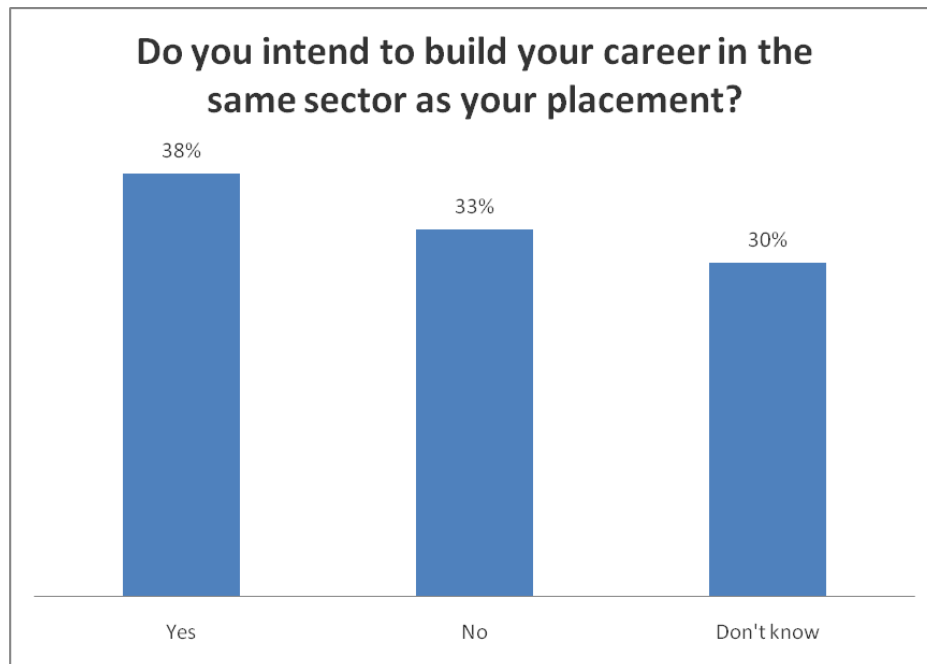
Views on suitability of placement

4.14 Just over one-third of survey respondents said that they intended to build a career in the same sector as their Work Experience Programme placement. However, one-third said that they did not intend to build a career in the sector they were placed in, while the remaining third were unsure. This may in part reflect the lack of diversity in the placements available. However, it may also reflect genuine uncertainty among those young people on the Work Experience Programme about their careers. Many young people were clearly keen to get a job of any variety in the short term, but were less sure about what they want to do in the long term.¹²

¹² It should also be noted that two-thirds of survey respondents very much or mostly agreed that their placement had helped them gain experience in a sector they were interested in (see paragraph 5.6), and that this is higher than the third who said they intended to build a career in the same sector as their placement. This seeming discrepancy is likely to result from a higher proportion feeling they were potentially interested in the sector their placement was in (given their enthusiasm for finding work), but a smaller proportion holding the stronger view that this was a sector they definitely wanted to build a career in.

'Well at the time I just wanted to get back into work, so I wasn't being very fussy.'

- 4.15** One positive aspect of the Work Experience Programme is that it may help some young people clarify their career plans, even if this only means ruling certain options out. But this will only be most effective when there is sufficient variety in the placements available and sufficient support for young people to find the right placements for them.¹³



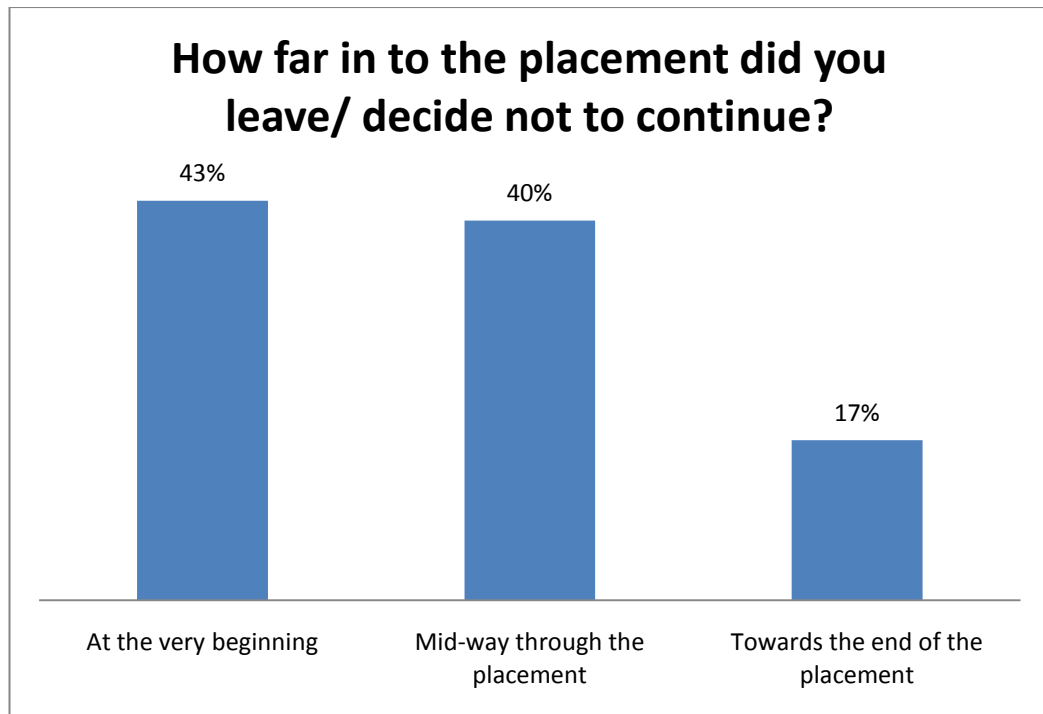
N=258

Completing placements, and reasons for non-completion

- 4.16** Sixty-nine per cent of survey respondents reported that they completed their placement in full. However, 18 per cent stated that they left their placement before they had completed it.¹⁴ Most of those who left their placement early did so either at the very beginning or mid-way through their placement.

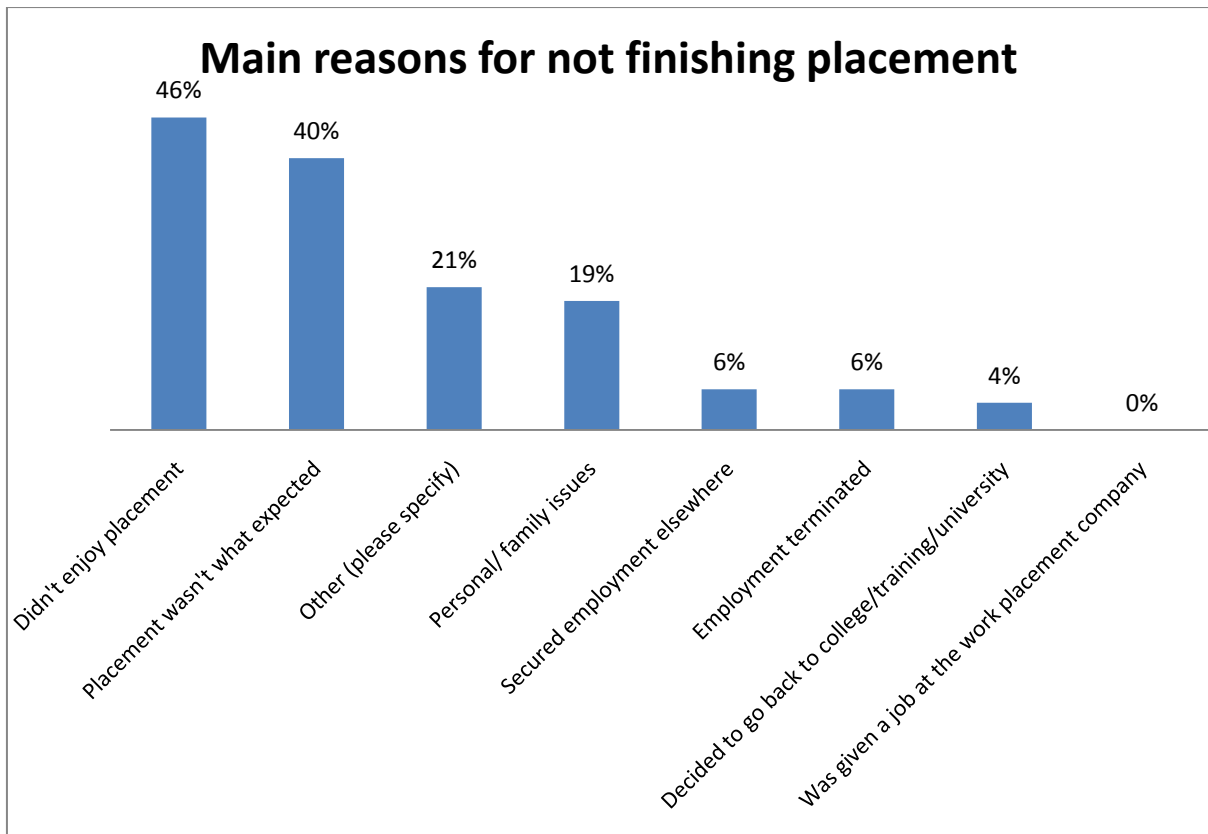
¹³ See chapters 5 and 7.

¹⁴ The remaining 12 per cent were still on their placement at the time they completed the survey.



N=47

- 4.17** The most frequently cited reasons given by survey respondents for not completing their placements were that they did not enjoy the placement or because it was not what they expected. Six per cent reported that their placement had been terminated.
- 4.18** A few respondents during the in-depth interviews suggested they left early because they did not see a point or benefit of their placement, while a few others suggested it was because they found their placements generally hard to manage. For example, some found it difficult to fund transport costs or to get to placements that were too far away.



N=48 (respondents were able to select more than one option)

- 4.19** Some of the young people interviewed in depth said that they left their placement early because they found it boring or because they did not have enough work to do.

'I didn't like it, the things they made me do were kind of boring... and they made me do it over and over again. I thought they were going to change me around but I just ended up doing the same things.'

- 4.20** Some had already done similar work in the past or did not feel that their placement was giving them any valuable experience. One young person described how he felt as though he was not a part of the company and it was only after several weeks that he asked whether he was entitled to a lunch break (paid staff were taking breaks, but no one advised him that he could or should have a break). When he did this, his hours were reduced.

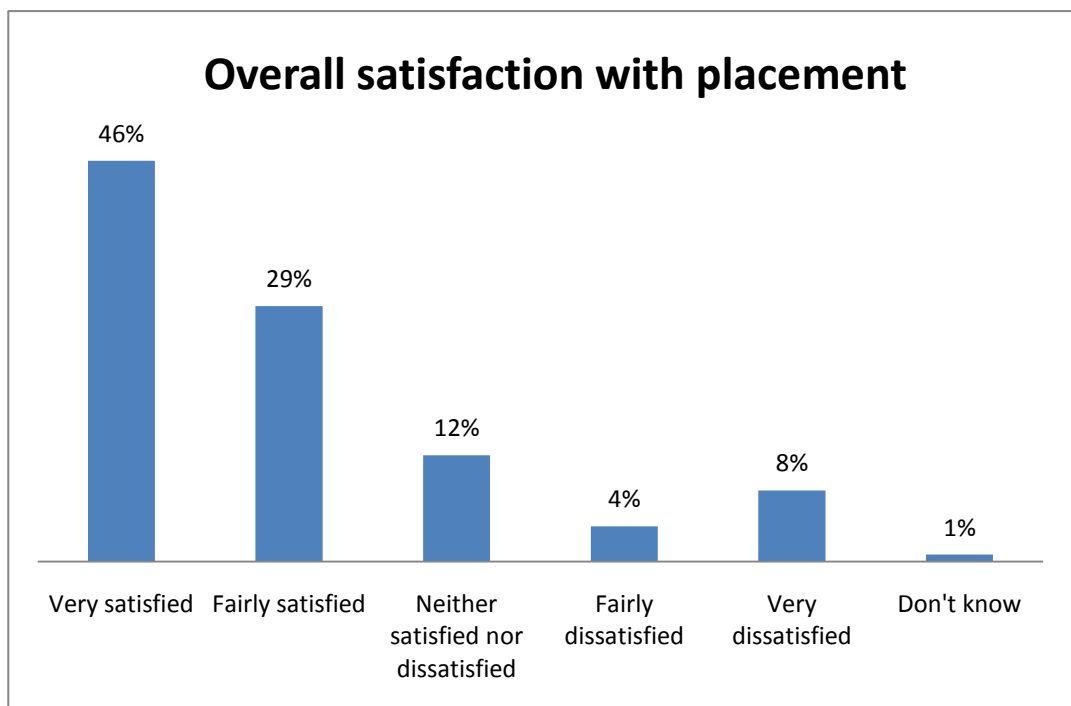
- 4.21** Despite Work Experience Programme staff providing clear directions, a small number of young people left early because they considered the tasks they were given were unsuitable. One left as his only task was cutting and pasting email addresses from websites into a spreadsheet and

another left because she felt she was being given too much responsibility and working too many hours.

'I didn't feel like I was gaining anything from it at all really, it was literally every day just copying and pasting. There was nothing more to it. It didn't feel challenging, it didn't feel like I was gaining any new skills.'

Satisfaction with the Work Experience Programme

4.22 Overall, satisfaction with Work Experience Programme placements was high. Seventy-five per cent of young people who completed the survey, including those who had left their placement early, were very or fairly satisfied. Twelve per cent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 12 per cent were fairly or very dissatisfied.



N=247

4.23 The young people that we spoke to in the qualitative interviews reported a range of levels of satisfaction with their placements. This was not always linked to length of placement or sector. Some young people who did two-week placements in retail found them boring and not useful. For example, one young person who did a two-week retail placement left early as she was only given tasks for the first few hours of the day but

then 'spent most of the time twiddling my thumbs'. By contrast, another young person was mainly tasked with stacking shelves but felt very satisfied with her placement and had been kept on by the company. Another young person, who had only ever worked in his parents' restaurant and had done poorly at school, undertook a placement at a DIY store, despite not having considered working in retail. He enjoyed his placement, especially working with plants and is now planning to pursue a career in gardening.

4.24 Those who were most satisfied with their Work Experience Programme placement tended to fall in the following categories:

- those undertaking longer placements in the sector they were interested in building a career
- those who later received a job at their placement company
- those who had not had any work experience in the past
- those where the employer was particularly engaged with the programme and gave proactive support.

'I couldn't have asked for a better placement to be honest. Yes, I'm quite lucky to be working where I am.'

'Due to the placement that I applied for I have managed to get a part-time job with them and am currently working on getting more hours with them. I am very grateful for the help and support you gave me and even more grateful that a job came out of it. So, I would like to say a "thank you" to all those that helped me secure a job.'

4.25 One young person who wanted to work in plumbing undertook a 12 week internship in that field. He describes plumbing as always having been his 'number one choice', and a career that he would like to stay in 'for a lifetime probably'. He was enjoying his placement, and it fitted well with his career goals. The placement company even suggested that they could support him to undertake further training, and said that they would give him £1,000 to complete an NVQ, as well as possibly take him on as a member of paid staff once he had completed the placement.

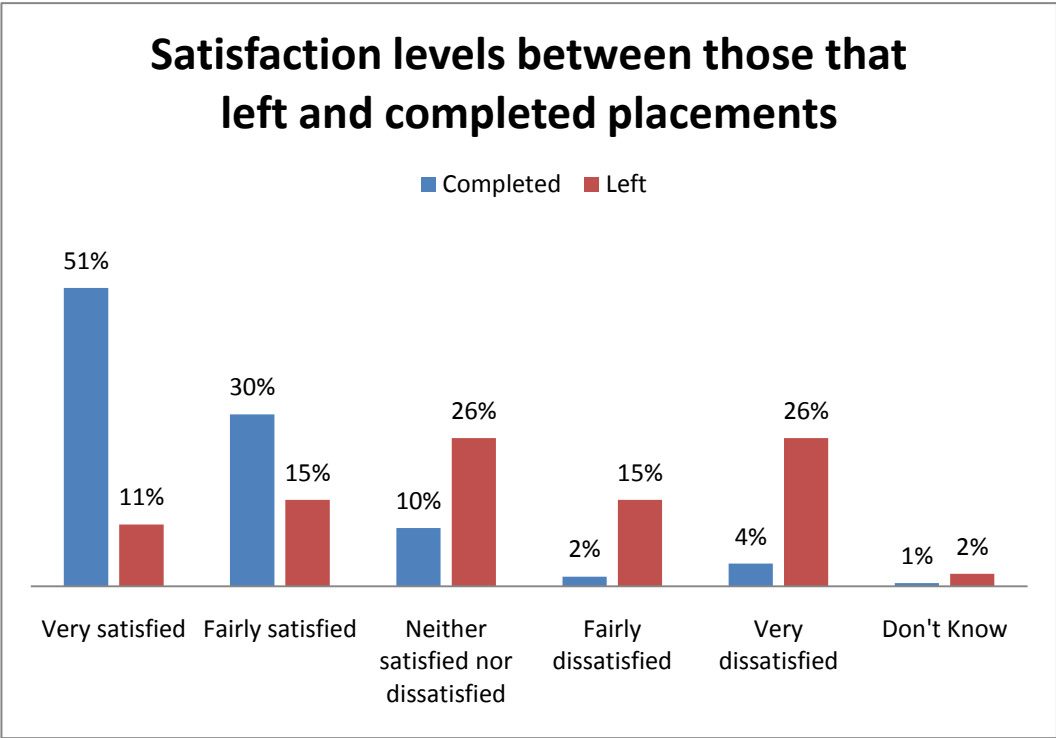
'You're getting paid to learn aren't you, basically? It's like a little apprenticeship scheme, not two years, but who wouldn't want to earn to learn.'

4.26 Young people were often particularly satisfied with their placement when support and guidance was provided by employers. This support often included:

- help in thinking about future careers and the practical steps needed to achieve career goals
- making the young person feel that they were 'part of the team' even on short placements
- encouraging and rewarding young people when they did well
- more generally taking the young person 'under their wing'.

4.27 In one case, a young person started on his placement at a retail outlet just stacking shelves, but the manager of the shop saw how keen the young person was and therefore gave him more responsibility for organising stock when deliveries were made. The encouragement and responsibility were extremely beneficial for the young person and significantly boosted his confidence. Even when young people did not like the work they were doing very much, being part of a supportive working environment was very positive. One young person working in an office had decided that he did not want to build a career in a similar job, but was given help and advice to plan his future and found the placement a very rewarding experience.

4.28 As to be expected, those survey respondents who had completed their placement were more likely to be satisfied with their experience than those who had left their placement early. While over 80 per cent of those who completed their placements were very or fairly satisfied, over 40 per cent of those who left their placements early were very or fairly *dissatisfied*. This corresponds to the earlier finding that large proportions of young people who left their placements early did so, either because they weren't enjoying their placement, or because it wasn't what they expected.



N=47 for those who left their placement early and 179 for those who completed their placement

5 Impacts of placement

5.1 This chapter examines the impacts of Work Experience Programme placements, primarily in terms of increased skills and confidence.

General opinions of placement

5.2 Online survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their opinions of their placements. The results are presented in the table below.

Feelings about the placement

	Agree very much	Mostly agree	Somewhat agree	Do not agree at all
I had the opportunity to work in a team and with a range of different people.	56%	28%	11%	5%
I felt that I made a significant contribution to the team in which I worked.	51%	30%	13%	6%
I enjoyed my placement.	53%	26%	10%	12%
I gained experience in a sector that I am interested in.	39%	28%	20%	12%
I increased my knowledge and expertise in ways and areas that I may not have done without the placement.	47%	28%	14%	11%

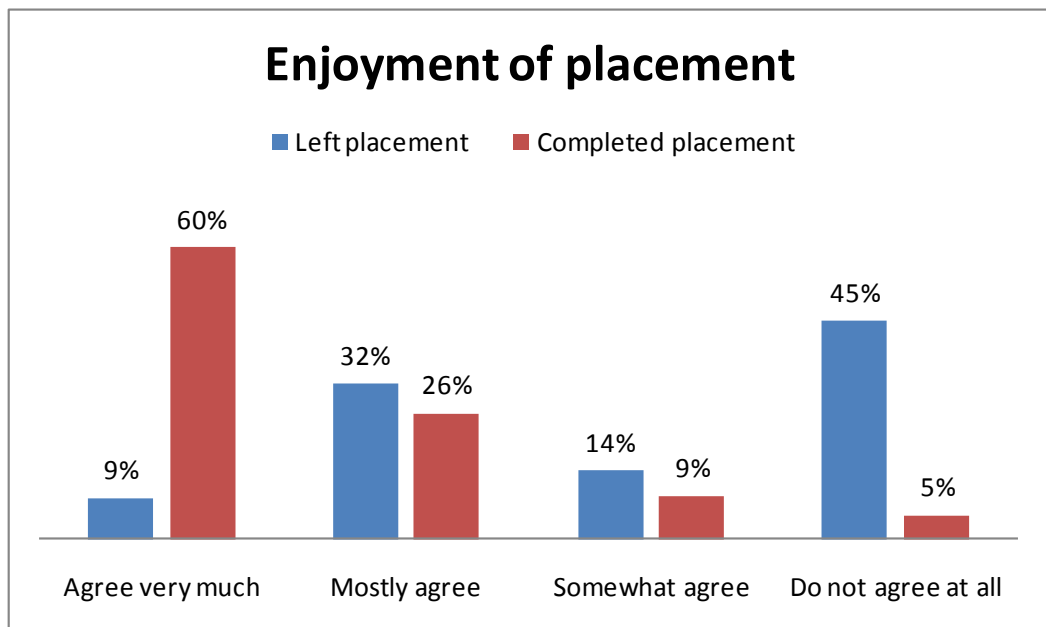
N=245-248

5.3 Eighty-four per cent of survey respondents reported that they very much or mostly agreed that they were given the opportunity to work in a team and with a range of people. In the in-depth interviews a significant proportion of young people said that interacting with other people and working in a team environment was one of the most positive things about their placement.

'Everyone's helping everyone else out. It's a nice place and it was good to work there.'

5.4 Eighty-one per cent of survey respondents very much or mostly agreed that they felt that they made a significant contribution to the team in which they worked. The majority (78 per cent) of respondents also reported that they enjoyed their placements.

5.5 As with overall levels of satisfaction, those who completed their placements were more likely to state that they enjoyed their Work Experience Programme placement. While 60 per cent of those who completed their placements agreed very much that they enjoyed their placement, 45 per cent of those who left their placements early did not agree at all. Many of the young people who took part in in-depth interviews who said that they enjoyed their placement also emphasised that they had got on well with their colleagues.



N=44 for those who left their placement early and 171 for those who completed their placement.

5.6 Overall, a smaller proportion of respondents (two-thirds) agreed very much or mostly what that they had gained experience in a sector that they were interested in.¹⁵ Again, views differed depending on whether the young people completed their placements or left them early. While three-quarters of those who completed their placements very much or mostly agreed that they had gained experience in a sector that they were interested in, only 40 per cent of those that left early did so. Some respondents in the qualitative interviews also expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to gain experience in a relevant sector – a number of

¹⁵ For more discussion of this finding, see footnote 12, page 24.

interviewees suggested that they had been placed in retail placements regardless of whether they had expressed an interest in that area. Nevertheless, given that these young people were very keen to get any work, whatever the sector, the placement was still most often valuable to them.

'The first woman said that they could put me on a course and do whatever I wanted. I wanted a bar job and she tried to get me in a hotel because apparently they don't have much contact with any pubs, and I think that's fair enough, but that fell through. Another man rang me to tell me it wasn't possible, and he ended up putting me in a shop.'

Skills gained

- 5.7** Survey respondents were asked about the specific skills they thought had improved as a result of their placement.

Skills improved during placement

	Yes	No	Don't know
Communication skills	77%	15%	8%
Time management	75%	18%	7%
Punctuality	75%	20%	5%
Administrative skills	44%	43%	13%
Teamwork	79%	16%	5%
Work conduct	71%	21%	8%
Technical or job specific skills	64%	29%	7%

N=245-248

- 5.8** The majority of survey respondents felt that their communication, time management, punctuality, teamwork, and work conduct skills (e.g. dressing appropriately) had improved during their placement. A real strength of the Work Experience Programme appears to be that it provided many young people with the opportunity to develop transferable 'soft skills' required in many different workplace environments, and Reed in Partnership have specifically worked to ensure that this is possible. This is particularly important for those with limited work-related experience. As noted previously, 32 per cent of respondents had not had any type of employment in the past.

- 5.9** Only 44 per cent of survey respondents thought that their administrative skills had improved as a result of their placement. This could be linked to the low frequency of placements available in workplaces where administrative skills might be needed. Furthermore, nearly 30 per cent of respondents felt they had not improved their technical or job-specific skills. This may be because some placements were in low-skilled manual positions with limited scope for individuals to develop these skills, and also because the majority of placements (75 per cent) were only two weeks long, meaning there would be a limited time to learn these skills.
- 5.10** However, it is encouraging that nearly two-thirds of survey respondents did feel that they had improved their technical and job-specific skills, and some of those interviewed during the in-depth interviews did report that they had learned invaluable job-specific skills. For example one young person who was on a plumbing placement reported learning important new skills. Some young people on more technical placements also received training. For example, a young person who had a placement at a computer repair shop learned about various computer parts and what needed to be done with each element to repair it.

Confidence, future job search and challenges faced

- 5.11** Young people were asked about how their Work Experience Programme placement had affected their confidence, as well as the advice they received, and how it helped them choose what sector they wanted to work in in the future.

Changes in confidence

	Very much so	Mostly	Somewhat	Not at all
My confidence in the workplace increased during my placement	56%	23%	13%	8%
More confident about interacting with different people in different positions	51%	29%	13%	7%
More competent in dealing with work-related issues and tasks in a work environment	51%	28%	12%	9%
More confident in the skills and experience I am able to demonstrate on my CV	49%	29%	11%	11%
More confident in my work-search activities	40%	31%	13%	16%
I now have a better idea of the kind of job that I might like to move into	43%	32%	15%	11%
I was given adequate training and support from my employer	48%	23%	16%	13%
More confident about attending interviews	32%	30%	20%	19%

N=245-248

- 5.12** Encouragingly, 79 per cent of survey respondents reported that they either agreed very much or mostly that their confidence in the workplace had increased as a result of their placement. Increasing confidence was repeatedly referred to in the qualitative interviews, as many of the young people were put in positions that were unfamiliar to them, especially those who had no previous work experience.

'I thought, I'm new and they're not going to like me and all that, but it's like I have got more confident with talking to other people that I've just met.'

'I now work in a call centre. I wouldn't have had the confidence to even apply for the job if I hadn't of been on that work placement. It helped my confidence a lot dealing with customers. I really enjoyed it.'

- 5.13** The majority of survey respondents felt that their placement had made them feel more confident in the skills that they could demonstrate on their CVs (78 per cent) and more confident about interacting with people in different positions (80 per cent). In addition, 79 per cent considered themselves more competent in dealing with work-related issues and tasks

in a work environment. Again, those who completed their placements were more positive than those who left their placements early.

5.14 In line with the survey findings, almost all of the young people who took part in qualitative interviews reported improvements to their confidence. This was the case even for those who were quite dissatisfied with their placement, or who had been given relatively mundane tasks. Improved confidence in speaking to strangers was often reported during the in-depth interviews. Many young people said that their work readiness had improved, either through having some work experience for their CV or, as one young person described it, 'learning how to be with people in a professional way'. Getting into the routine of going to work every day was also mentioned as a benefit of the placement.

5.15 Seventy-one per cent of survey respondents reported that their placement made them feel more confident in their work-search activities. A similar proportion (75 per cent) said they agreed very much or mostly that they had a better idea of the kind of job they wanted to move into, even if their placement was not in a sector they wanted to work in. These findings were supported by the in-depth interviews.

'This is a great, helpful scheme for people who are looking to make decisions as to what sector they would like to work in.'

'It was very helpful in that it showed me how employers can behave and treat people and also showed me that there are good places to work and very, very bad places to work.'

5.16 Seventy-one per cent of young people reported that they had had adequate training and support from their employer. However, during the qualitative interviews, very few young people reported that they had been spoken to about their future employment options and job search. Where this support had been given, young people found it extremely useful. A key recommendation to Reed in Partnership would be to incorporate and encourage more of this kind of activity between employers and young people to aid them in their future employment.¹⁶

'A review after the placement would help the person who's been on the placement to breathe afterwards so that they can let all that tension over the two weeks out and just explain what they

¹⁶ See paragraph 4.26 for more detail.

did and didn't like and talk to somebody about what they might want to do in the future.'

- 5.17** The Work Experience Programme had less of an impact on young people's confidence in interview situations. Only 62 per cent of the survey respondents very much or mostly agreed that they had gained confidence in this area. This is likely to be in part because most respondents were not required to attend an interview before starting their placement.
- 5.18** Survey respondents were slightly more likely to think that their placement would help with their personal development than their career development. This may be because many young people seemed to develop 'soft' transferable skills, but undertook placements that were not in line with their over-arching career plans. Only one in six respondents felt that their placement was not helpful, either in terms of their personal development, or not helpful in terms of their career development.

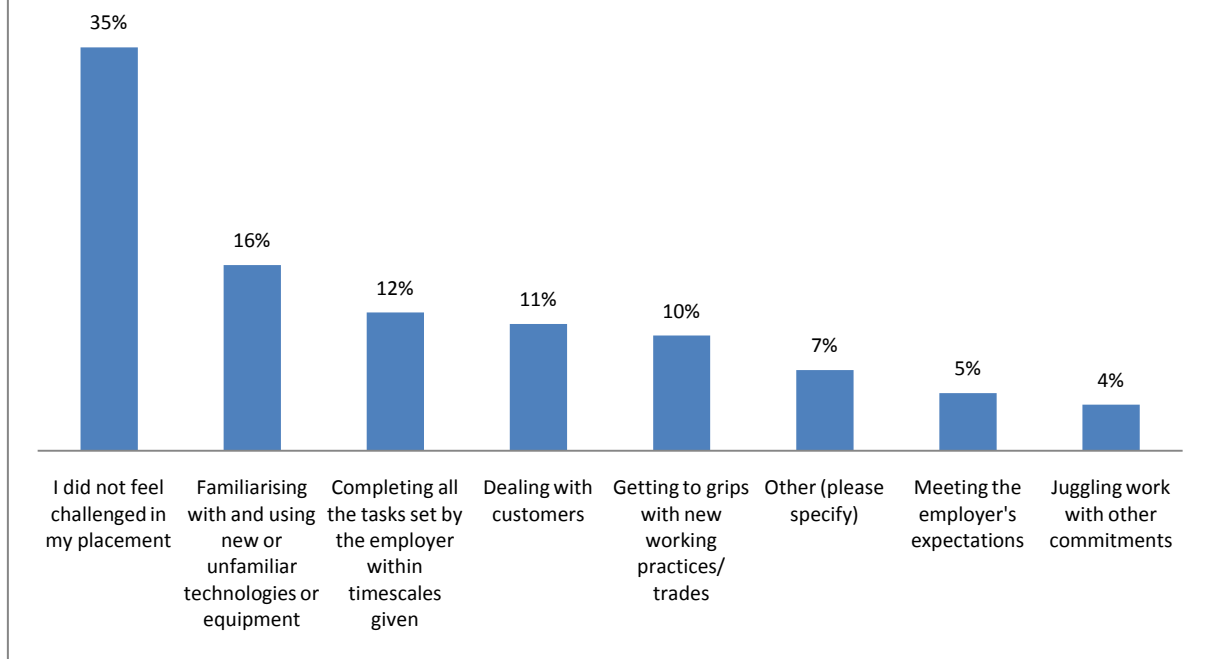
Help with personal and career development

	Very helpful	Helpful	Not helpful	Don't know
Personal development	43%	39%	16%	2%
Career development	35%	42%	17%	5%

N=241-242

- 5.19** Thirty-five per cent of survey respondents reported that they did not feel challenged during their placements. Again, this could be partially attributed to the fact that some respondents undertook placements that were not clearly linked to their over-arching career aspirations, as well as because they felt the tasks they undertook were not challenging.
- 5.20** Similarly, a substantial proportion of young people interviewed in depth did not feel challenged by their placement – it was common for young people in short retail placements to report that they undertook a very limited set of tasks, for example only restacking shelves. Nevertheless, young people's experiences were mixed – some young people doing very similar placements felt it was a challenge to improve their customer service skills while others reported that this did not present a challenge.

What would you say was the biggest challenge that you faced in your placement?



N=248

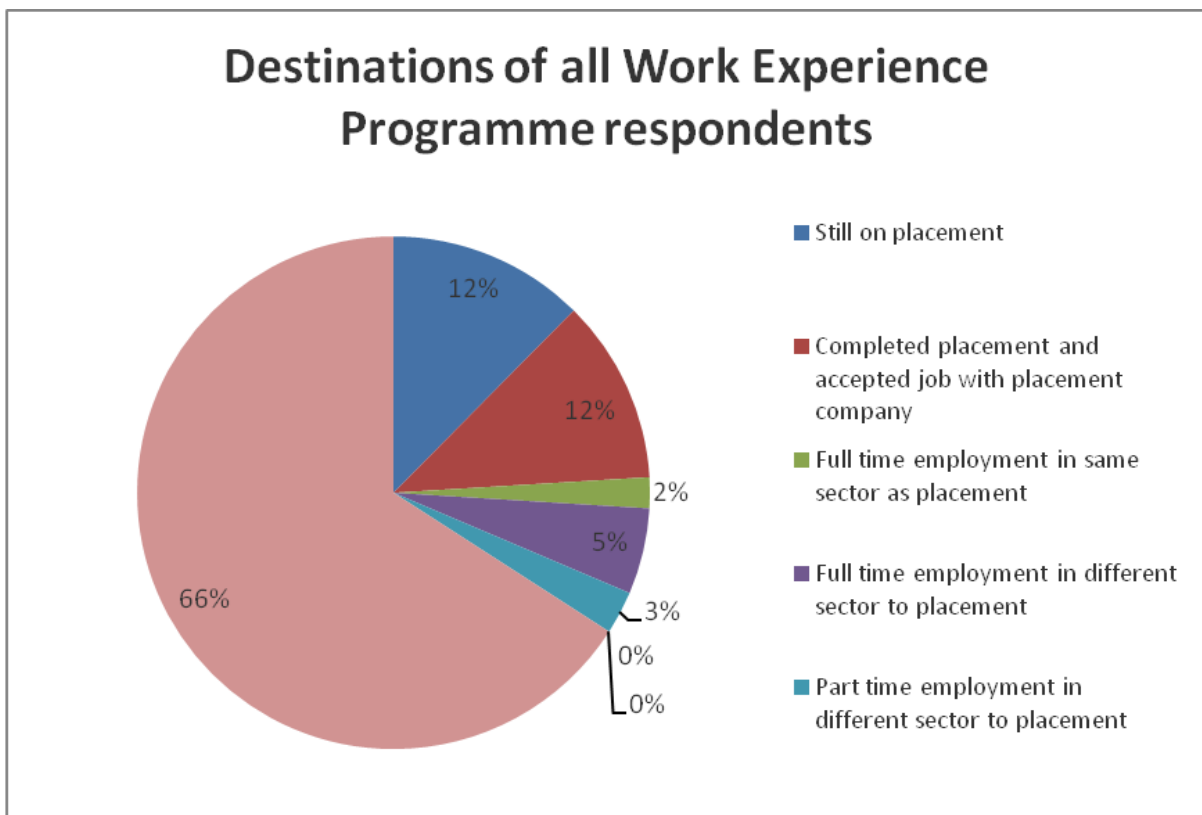
6 Post-placement outcomes and plans¹⁷

- 6.1** This chapter looks at what young people who had been on Work Experience Programme placements were doing at the time they took part in the online survey and qualitative interviews.
- 6.2** At the time of the online survey, two-thirds (66 per cent) of young people were not in employment, and 12 per cent were still on their Work Experience Programme placement. The remaining 22 per cent, however, were in some form of employment. Whilst this is lower than the 34 per cent of people on the NDYP in 2005 who gained sustained, unsubsidised jobs,¹⁸ the NDYP provided much more sustained and intensive support.
- 6.3** This 22 per cent of those that gained employment includes 12 per cent who had completed their placement and started employment at the same company. For these young people their Work Experience Programme placement had resulted directly in work. A further 10 per cent had gained employment elsewhere, including two per cent who had gained full-time work in the same sector as their Work Experience Programme placement, and eight per cent who had gained employment in a different sector. It is not surprising that most of those who had gained employment in a different company from their Work Experience Programme placement had done so in a different sector, given that many reported that their placement had not been in the sector they wanted to build a career in, and that many young people were very keen to get any job, no matter what the sector.
- 6.4** The fact that 66 per cent of survey respondents were out of work does not necessarily mean that placements do not help young people find work, as 87 per cent had completed their placement less than two months before completing the survey, including 53 per cent who completed their

¹⁷ Only seven respondents had completed their placement three months before taking the online survey, and therefore it is impossible to report longer term destinations for this sub-group.

¹⁸ F. Field and P. White (2007) *Welfare Isn't Working, The New Deal for Young People*, Reform, <http://www.reform.co.uk/Research/Welfare/WelfareArticles/tabid/111/smId/378/ArticleID/630/reftab/72/Default.aspx>, p.18.

placement less than a month previously. These young people had had relatively little time to find employment after their placement.



N=257

Destinations and plans for those still on placements

- 6.5** A few¹⁹ respondents who were still on their placements at the time they completed the survey had already been offered a job with their placement company. This means that, taking into account all young people on the Work Experience Programme, 24 per cent were either in employment or had been offered a job when they took part in the survey.
- 6.6** Of those still on their placement that had not yet been offered a job with their placement company, just over one-half of survey respondents thought that they might be offered either an extension or a permanent position when their placement ended. Just under one-fifth of respondents thought that they probably would not be offered an extension or

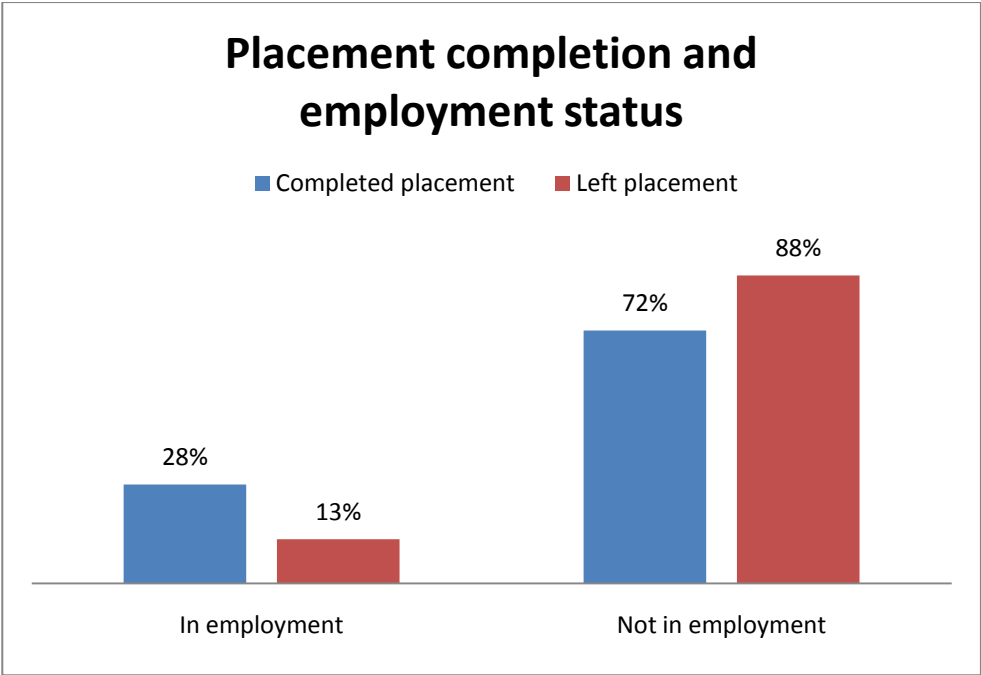
¹⁹ Five out of 31 young people

permanent position, or that this would be very unlikely, and the remaining respondents did not know whether this would be an option for them when their placements finished.

- 6.7** The majority of those that were midway through their placement said that they would be willing to take up a permanent position at their placement company if they were offered one.
- 6.8** About three-quarters of survey respondents who were midway through their placements said that they would look for employment opportunities within the field in which they had gained experience, with the remaining young people reporting that they would not be looking for employment opportunities in the same field. As noted previously, it is apparent that some young people had been offered placements that were not closely aligned to their career aspirations.

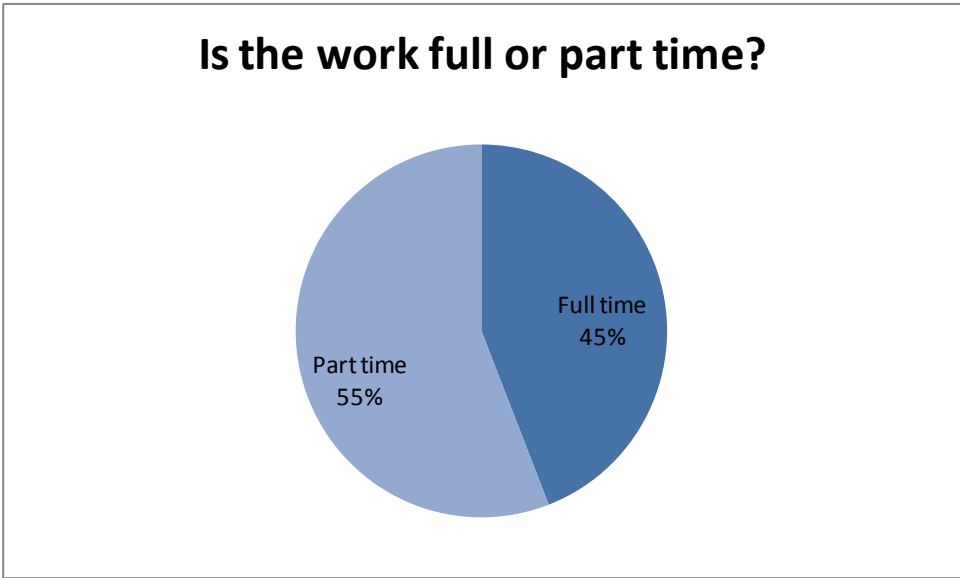
Employed

- 6.9** One-quarter of young people that had either completed their placement or left their placement early had moved into employment. As might be expected, a higher proportion of young people who had completed their placement had moved into work compared with those who had left their placement early (28 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). This may be attributed to the additional skills and competencies that those who completed their placements had acquired through their experience, or because those who completed their placements were generally more work-ready than those who did not complete their placements.



N=177 for completers, 47 for those who left placement

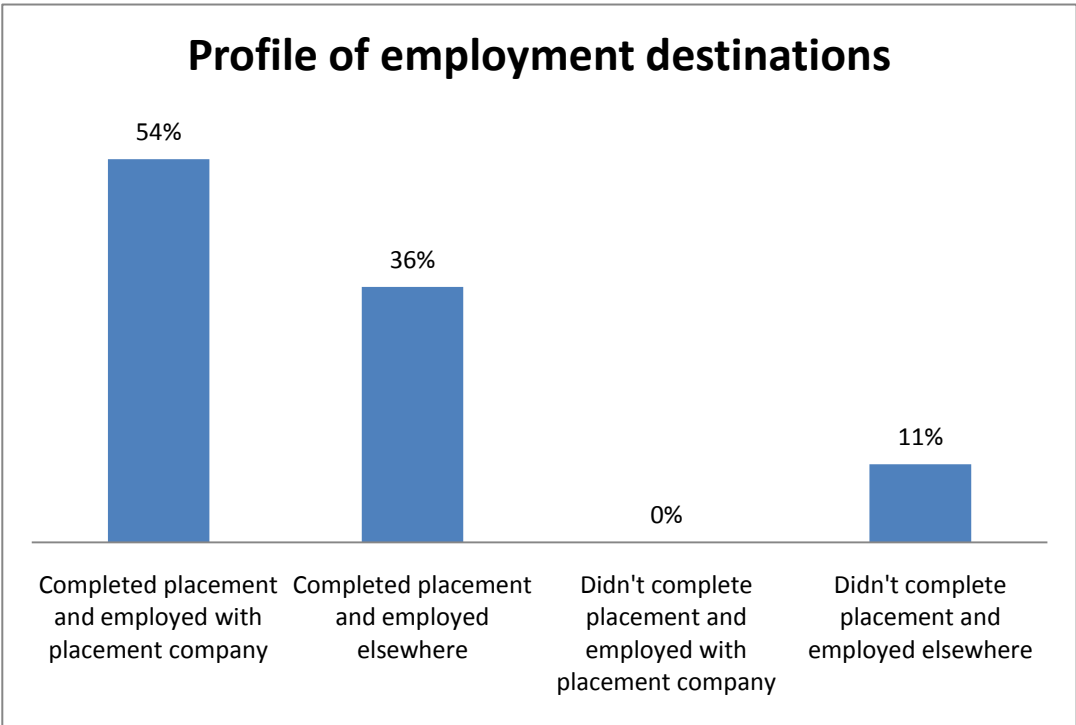
6.10 Of the total number of young people in employment at the time of the survey, 54 per cent had moved into employment with their placement company and 46 per cent had moved into employment elsewhere. Regardless of whether the young people had moved into employment in the same or a different sector, over half (55 per cent) had moved into part time employment.



N=56

- 6.11** In line with the survey findings, a number of young people we conducted in-depth interviews with were offered a job at the end of their placement. All but one of those who took a job with their placement company were still employed at the time of survey. The positions were sometimes part time and the young people were sometimes still looking for full-time work or a 'better' job. Others who were not offered jobs were told that they would be kept in mind for future vacancies.
- 6.12** An encouraging 84 per cent of survey respondents who had completed their Work Experience Programme placements but not been offered a job said that they would be willing to apply for and take up a position within their placement company if one became available. Whilst this may be surprising given many young people were did not want to work in the placement sector, it reflects that fact that these young people are very keen to get any work, rather than claiming JSA.
- 6.13** Eighty-one per cent of those who had completed or left their placements early and moved into employment not at their placement company had taken up employment (either full or part time) in a different sector from that in which they completed their placement.²⁰ This, of course, could be owing to chance in terms of the types of opportunities that presented themselves. However, it is likely to correspond with the finding that 63 per cent of survey respondents reported that they either did not want to or did not know if they wanted to build a career in the same sector as their placement.

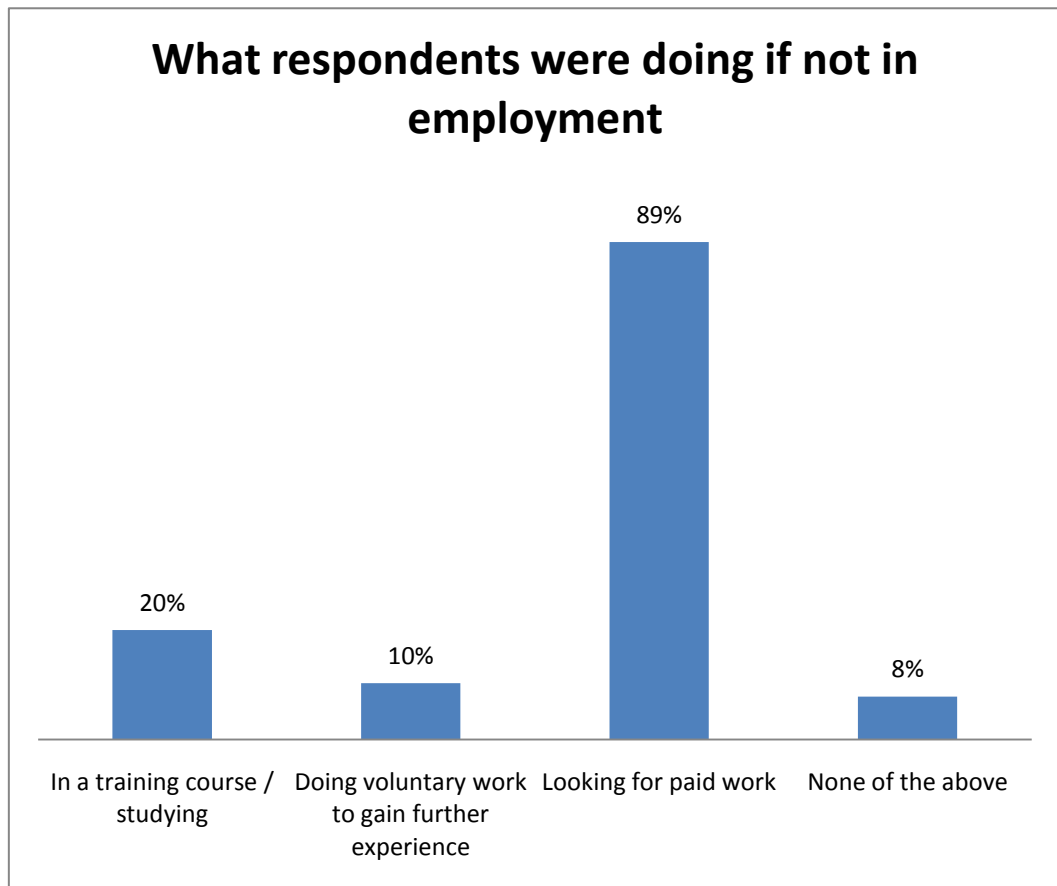
²⁰ This is based on only 26 respondents.



N=56

Unemployed

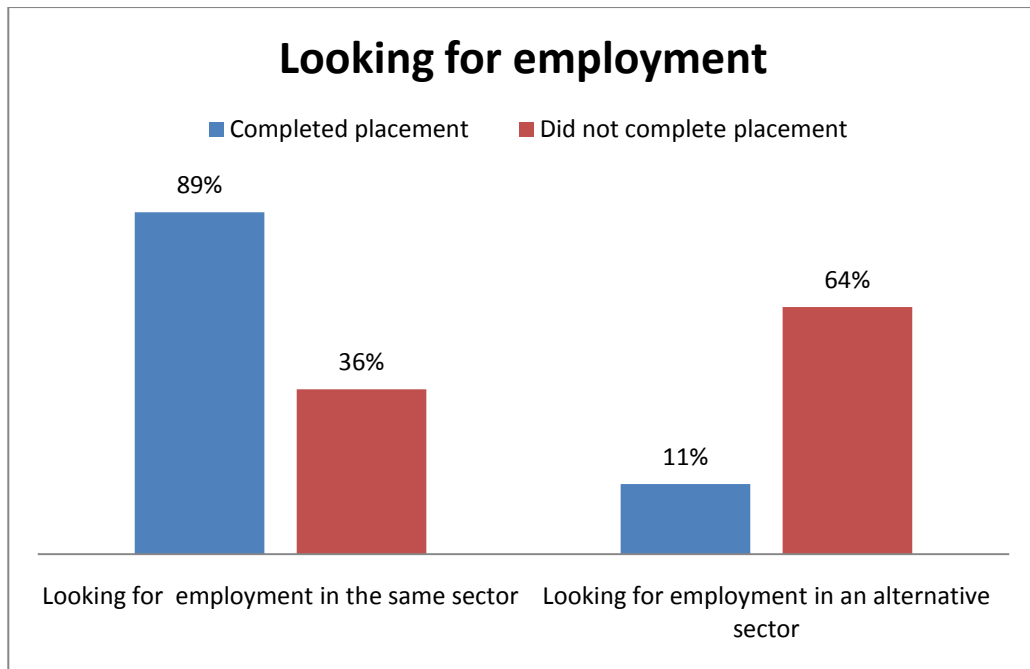
6.14 Seventy-five per cent of survey respondents who had completed or finished their placements were not in employment. Most of this group reported that they were looking for paid work but a significant proportion, 20 per cent, were studying or on a training course. Ten per cent reported that they were doing voluntary work to gain further experience. A small proportion of individuals reported that they were not engaged in any of these activities, although this group mostly reported that they had aspirations to do so by either looking for voluntary experience or intending to study.



N=169 (respondents were able to select more than one option)

- 6.15** Where respondents were unemployed and looking for work, over three quarters (77 per cent) reported that they were looking for a job in the sector in which they had gained experience, although the remainder were not. The fact that more young people were looking for work in their placement sector than were interested in building a career in that sector or felt they had gained experience in a sector in which they were interested,²¹ again suggests the enthusiasm for work, no matter what the sector, that these young people exhibited.
- 6.16** Those who completed their placement and were looking for work were more likely to be looking for employment in the sector in which they had gained experience. Unsurprisingly 64 per cent of those who had not completed their placement were not looking for employment in the same sector as their Work Experience Programme placement, and this could be owing to higher levels of dissatisfaction and lower levels of enjoyment on the placement for this group.

²¹ See paragraph 4.14 and paragraph 5.6.



N=109 for completers, 33 for those who left their course

- 6.17** The qualitative interviews showed that in many cases the experience of a Work Experience Programme placement had empowered young people in planning their future. Most had a better idea of what they wanted to do, even if this was not in the same sector as their placement. Two young people had even approached employers in sectors they were interested in and requested voluntary work experience to improve their employment opportunities. Neither considered that they would have had the confidence to do this without the experience of their Work Experience Programme placement.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 To conclude, we find that the Work Experience Programme has been successful in providing opportunities to young people who were struggling to enter the labour market. In many cases the placement was a life-changing experience for these young people, giving them their first experience in the world of work, and helping them make decisions for the future. In particular the strengths of the programme are:

- helping young people choose which career they want to pursue
- helping young people to gain experience in the world of work and develop their 'soft' transferable skills
- helping young people build confidence in their ability to work
- actually getting young people into jobs, particularly with the placement company
- empowering young people to take a more active approach to jobseeking.

7.2 There were some areas where the programme was not working as well as it might, and we therefore make the following recommendations regarding the future development of the Work Experience Programme.

- Many young people undertook placements in sectors in which they were not particularly interested, and although they very often reported gaining skills and confidence, the placement did not necessarily help them gain the particular job-specific skills that they wanted to get work in their chosen sector. Placements and internships were sometimes life-changing when a young person was able to undertake a placement in the sector that they wanted to work in, particularly if it was a long placement. As such, we recommend that more effort is spent in engaging employers in different sectors in different parts of the country, such that a wider variety of placements are on offer for young people. Matching young people to specific jobs will be important. Furthermore, having more internships lasting two to three months will increase the value of placements for many young people, given that 42

per cent of young people on short placements would have preferred them to have lasted longer.

- A number of cases were found when a young person's benefits were cancelled because they went on a Work Experience Programme placement. Those interviewed in the qualitative phase reported that this was a real problem for them, and it would be damaging if it became widely known that this was a danger of going on a placement. It will be important for Jobcentre Plus to ensure that this does not happen.
- When employers were engaged with the Work Experience Programme the young people seemed to get more out of the placement. Moreover, during the qualitative interviews it was noted that employers very rarely gave help or advice to young people about future job searching if they did not give them a job. It may be positive for Reed in Partnership to provide guidance to employers which suggests that they:
 - provide advice and guidance about future career plans, and help plan the practical steps that would make those aspirations achievable (this could be in the form of a review after the placement has finished)
 - make young people feel fully part of the team
 - encourage and reward enthusiasm and achievement
 - more actively take a young person 'under their wing' and mentor them.