

Work experience as a gateway to talent in the UK: Assessing business views

JUNE 2016

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Acknowledgements

With special thanks to our business members who carried out testing and gave invaluable feedback on an earlier pilot version of the NCUB Survey of Work Experience, as well as to all our business responders for completing the survey and consequently making this report possible. Thanks also to Dr Rosa Fernandez, Inga Sileryte, and other NCUB colleagues for intellectual and practical contributions to the survey and to report improvements. Any remaining errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

Executive summary

Work experience gives university undergraduates the opportunity to gain transferable employability skills, bettering their chances of success in securing jobs on graduation. For businesses, work experience provides a means for capturing and nurturing talent early on and for identifying students with work-ready attributes. Where there is unequal access to or participation in opportunities for students from different backgrounds, this limits the capacity of work experience to be a gateway to talent, by impacting on the efficient allocation and matching of talent for businesses.

This report draws on original survey evidence collected by the National Centre from 34 businesses during December 2015 to March 2016, where respondents primarily comprise our business members. We explore business practices and processes around work experience offers and related considerations for student engagement in work experience, the use of work experience to facilitate social mobility, and consequent implications for talent supply. We also consider solutions for improving student access to opportunities and associated business access to skilled undergraduates.

Key findings from the survey are as follows:

- There is a **buoyant amount of work experience activity relating to university undergraduates across a plethora of different types. Paid internships were most common in 2015, with 9 businesses taking on over 100 students and a further 9 recruiting between 10 and 49.** These internships frequently lasted for 1 to 2 or 3 to 6 months. Formal work placements in industry are also important: 13 businesses took on between 10 and over 100 students in these roles in 2015, in placements lasting 7 to 12 months.
- **Business engagement in work experience matters for staying ahead of competitors in the race for talent. Additionally, work experience is used as a recruitment tool; businesses take on work experience undergraduates into longer-term roles. Where work experience is gained is of less importance to employers than the development of transferable skills that the experience of work fosters.** Businesses that hire their work experience students most frequently do so while the student is still on work experience, showing that employers use this route to capture talent as early on as possible.
- **Businesses rely on relationships with universities to source undergraduates for work experience. Exclusive relationships with universities, targeted recruitment from top-tier Russell Group institutions, and student speculative applications all rank highly as recruitment mechanisms.** For 13 businesses, the best channel for finding students for work experience is university advertising, although word-of-mouth/network connections also matter for 9 respondents. These findings reveal **limitations in the role of work experience as a gateway to talent, with access issues for undergraduates and constraints on the talent supply pipeline for businesses.**
- **There is mixed evidence on business use of work experience as an enabler of social mobility.** In each case, 25 businesses strongly agree/agree that opportunities are offered 'for spotting talent among less advantaged students' and that a benefit of work experience is in giving these students 'fairer access to higher level jobs'. On the other hand, **while 14 businesses state that they always or often source work experience students from universities with talented disadvantaged students, 12 businesses occasionally, rarely or never do.**
- **Businesses support targeted guidance for disadvantaged students as a way to improve employer access to undergraduate students for work experience and so widen their talent pipeline.** Overall, 17 businesses rate this as the first most effective sector-led action. This indicates that employers need help in both ascertaining and accessing talented socially disadvantaged students. Universities, as gatekeepers of talent with knowledge of their student population, have a key role to play. Collating examples of effective business *and* university approaches to the use of work experience as an enabler of social mobility is an important next step for this work.

01. Introduction

In the UK, the total number of full-and part-time first degree higher education qualifiers stood at 395,580 in 2014/15 which, though down from 421,635 in 2013/14¹, remains above that in the pre-recession period of 319,260 qualifiers in 2006/07². Of those qualifying in 2014/15, 72% achieved a first or upper second degree classification, compared to 70% in 2013/14³. These figures indicate an ongoing stable supply of highly educated graduates for the UK economy.

Research shows that employer demand for graduates continues to be strong, with an 87% graduate employment rate in the second quarter (April to June) of 2015, the highest rate since the first quarter of 2008 (UUK, 2015). According to the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) 2015 survey of 205 respondents, predicted graduate vacancies were 24,126, an increase of 13.2% on the previous year, while salaries were up 3.7% on a year earlier, at £28,000, in line with strong market competition for graduate talent.

Despite this steady supply of and growing demand for graduates, employers continue to report that graduates lack particular work-relevant aptitudes. In this report we present findings from our own survey on work experience available to university undergraduates, opportunities that are crucial for developing the skills employers want graduates to have. The survey was sent out to 58 businesses, primarily NCUB business members, but we also sought responses from non-members so as to gain wider business community insights.

NCUB research (2015b) has established the importance of work experience both for building the work-ready attributes employers seek and for helping them to identify the more employable graduates amongst a sizeable supply. The CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey (2015), of 310 employers, found that 43% of businesses were dissatisfied with the lack of "relevant work experience" among graduates, while 33% and 29% were not satisfied with their self-management or their communication skills respectively. These studies highlight the significance that exposure to work as an undergraduate can have.

At the same time, student surveys and empirical research note that undergraduates do not always participate in work experience opportunities, even if they are an integral but optional part of a degree course, though there are graduate labour market advantages to doing so (NCUB, 2015a; Mason *et al.*, 2006). Participation constraints include economic and personal barriers such as financial and self-selling limitations, but they also involve social capital barriers, where not all students are aware of how to and so they cannot easily access opportunities. Studies report that these combined barriers are prevalent among lower socio-economic student groups in particular (see, for example, Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008; Mountford-Zimbars *et al.*, 2015 (see pages 45-46 of the latter)).

While there is evidence on work experience activity among students (see NCUB, 2015b, page 12 for a summary), there is less in-depth exploration of how the work experience practices and processes of employers fit into the student participation picture. Faced with a strong supply of graduates and competing demand for their skills from other businesses, it is pertinent for employers to maximise their potential for attaining a broader supply pipeline and a better match of talent. Yet uneven access to and therefore take-up of work experience has implications for employer-employee skills matching and the most efficient allocation of talent towards its best possible use.

Access to work experience is also attracting attention from the sector in relation to participation in both Higher Education (HE) and the labour market among candidates from less affluent backgrounds. To the extent that work experience opens up labour market opportunities for this group of students, there is an argument to explore their access to such opportunities in the context of engagement in HE overall. Stakeholders involved in graduate recruitment note that there has been "little discussion to date around the social mobility consequences

1 HESA SFR 224, Table 10.

2 HESA SFR 169, Table 5.

3 HESA SFR 224, Table 11.

of placements/internships particularly where specific universities are targeted for interns (e.g. employers are returning to their old university to recruit), where internships are obtained via ‘word of mouth’ application or involve alumni in networking/mentoring, or where they are unpaid” (BIS, 2015, pp. 181).

In what follows we describe the findings from 34 responses out of 58 businesses contacted. Because of the small sample size, we provide context for these findings using larger and better-established surveys, where these are available. The survey and therefore the rest of the report covers the following areas: (i) the amount and duration of work experience on offer to undergraduates; (ii) business use of work experience as a recruitment tool; (iii) the channels used to find students for work experience; (iv) fair access and social mobility considerations in student work experience recruitment; and (v) business views on effective approaches for improving access.

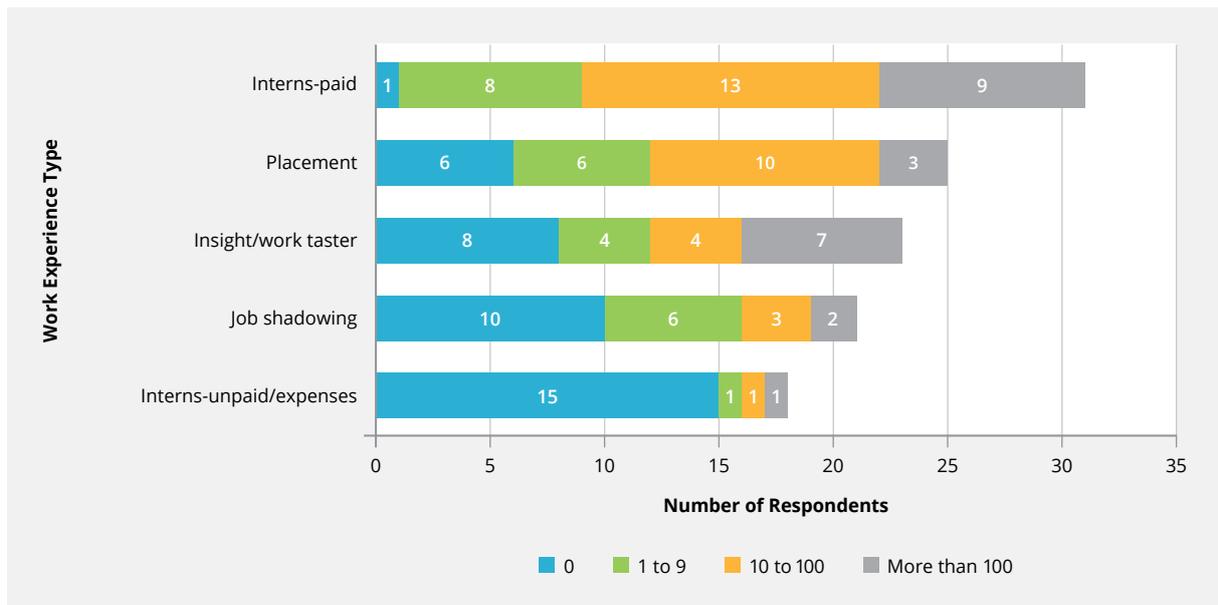
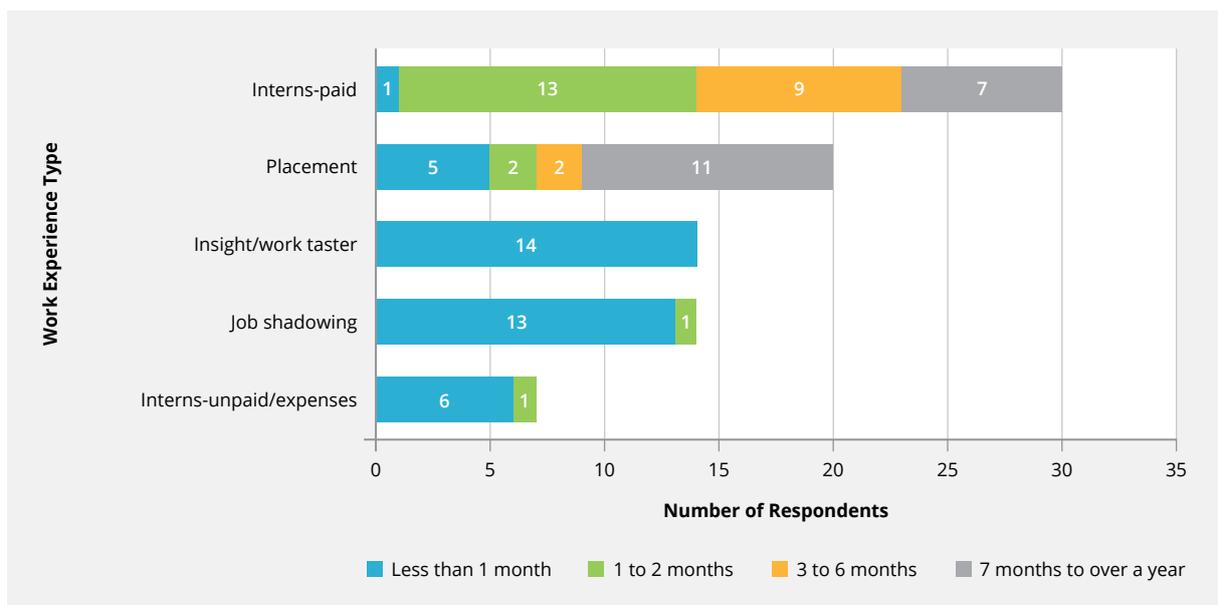
We find evidence of abundant work experience activity across a range of types for university undergraduates. Paid internships of 1-2 months are most widespread. Work experience is an important part of business recruitment methods, building skills that are transferable across sectors and organisations, while giving employers a try-before-you-buy means for evaluating the candidate-employer match prior to longer-term hire. The channels used to source students focus on relationships with universities that are exclusive or that target well-reputed Russell Group institutions, with university advertising providing a key means for the promotion of work experience opportunities. Students are also found through networks and connections, limiting the capacity for student knowledge about and access to offers.

Delving deeper into work experience gateways, we find mixed evidence that businesses are aware of the implications of uneven access to opportunities on the talent supply pipeline, indicating that there is a long way to go before work experience is seen and used by employers as an enabler of social mobility. In considering ways to improve access, businesses favour targeted guidance for less-advantaged students in particular, an approach which can better access to roles for these students and the talent supply pipeline for businesses. Going forward, we consider the next steps for this research, which involve building evidence on the successful strategies and methods businesses and universities are following as ways for broadening access to work experience across students of all backgrounds.

02. The take-up of university undergraduates for work experience roles

The NCUB Survey of Work Experience reveals a buoyant amount of business activity around work experience opportunities for university undergraduates. In 2015, paid internship opportunities were most common, with 9 businesses offering more than 100 paid internships and another 13 offering between 10 and 100 (see Figure 1a). Durations for paid internships were often 1-2 months, though many lasted a longer 3-6 months, or from 7 months to over a year (see Figure 1b). Responses also indicate opportunities across a plethora of work experience types. Ten businesses reported that they offered 10 to 100 formal work placements in industry last year, most frequently of 7 months to over a year long. Seven employers provided in excess of 100 insight or work taster experiences in 2015, with these tending to last less than a month (see Figures 1a and 1b).

When asked about changes in their number of work experience offers for university undergraduates in 2015 compared to adjacent years, 21 businesses reported making more offers in 2015 than in 2014 and a further 10 reported that offers remained the same (see Appendix 2, Table A4). Although the economic climate is uncertain, 17 businesses expect offers to go up in 2016 compared to 2015 and a further 14 businesses forecast that offers will remain unchanged this year (see Appendix 2, Table A5).

Figure 1a: Number of undergraduates taken on for work experience in 2015**Figure 1b:** Work experience durations for undergraduates in 2015

Note: Respondents were asked to report separately on (i) the number of undergraduates taken on for each type of work experience and (ii) the duration of each type of work experience undergraduates were taken on for. Response rates were highest for paid internships, both on number (31) and duration (30). See also Tables A2 and A3.

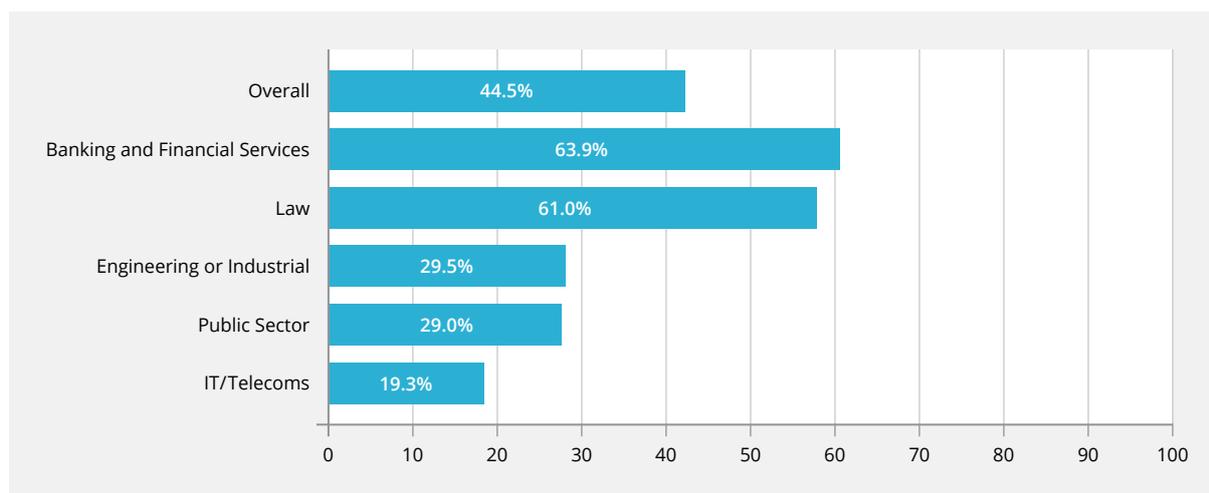
These results, despite their small scale, tally with those from other reports and employer surveys. Work experience encompasses three main types: internships/short-term placements, sandwich placements, and short work taster sessions (BIS, 2015). Across respondents to the AGR survey, 73% offered student internships in 2013-14, with a mean of 52 internship offers per employer, each averaging 11 weeks in length. Additionally, 56.3% of employers offered one or more sandwich placements, each lasting around a year on average, with the mean number of offers being 28 per employer. More recently, High Fliers Research (2016) reports that just over 14,000 paid internships and work experience placements are on offer in the academic year 2015-2016 among the top 100 graduate recruiters, more than in any of the previous High Fliers studies. Paid internships or holiday placements for undergraduates in their penultimate year are most common and are on offer among 76% of these employers, followed by degree-integrated sandwich placements of 6 to 12 months in duration, with 59% of employers offering these.

03. The use of work experience as a recruitment tool

One of the strongest reasons for offering work experience to university students among respondents was so that businesses could raise their profile in the graduate recruitment market, with 29 businesses strongly agreeing or agreeing with this suggested motivation (see Figure 3 on the next page). In addition, 33 businesses strongly agree/agree that a key benefit of work experience is that it 'gives students a springboard for a job in our sector' (see Figure 7, pp. 14). Combined, these findings highlight a connection between work experience and recruitment, with businesses increasingly seeing work experience as an effective means for capturing talent early for longer-term roles.

The role of work experience as a gateway for both identifying and recruiting talent has been well documented across several surveys and reports (see, for example, BIS, 2015, chapter 7). Just over one third of entry level posts available with the top 100 graduate recruiter firms in 2015-16 are expected to be filled by graduates who have already had work experience in their organisation (High Fliers Research, 2016). In the 2015 AGR survey, a total of 7,195 internship opportunities across 205 business were offered to students in 2013-14 and on average 45% of interns were converted as graduate hires (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of interns converted into graduate hires by sector



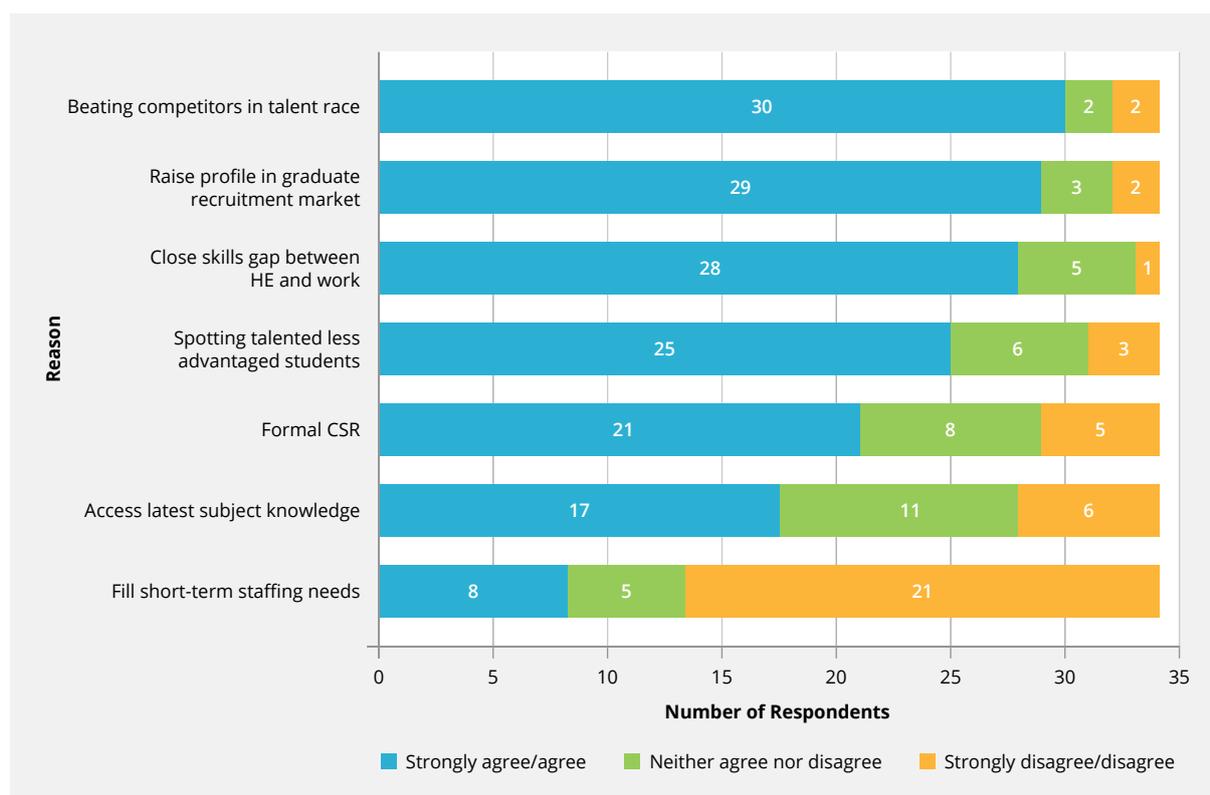
Source: Reproduced from Bridge Group, 2016, pp. 21 (original source: AGR).

NCUB reports on work experience corroborate this evidence of the feeder mechanism of work placements into vacancies for a wide range of employers and sectors (NCUB 2015a, 2015b). Additionally, according to the 2014 UKCES Employer Perspectives Survey (UKCEPS), around 28% of 8,915 establishments offering work experience placements in the past 12 months cited 'helps us with recruitment' as a reason for doing so and 4% stated that offers were made in order to raise the profile of the establishment in the recruitment market.

Furthermore, opportunities are reportedly being offered at earlier stages of the undergraduate study track and include engagement with first year students through approaches such as short work tasters. High Fliers Research (2016) reports that 42% of the top 100 graduate recruiters are offering open days, introductory courses or taster experiences, and 28% are providing paid internships or holiday placements to first year undergraduates. The NCUB report on computer science placements (2015a) suggests that, among larger companies, the placement recruitment process begins about a year prior to the start of the placement itself so as to secure the strongest candidates (NCUB, 2015a). Stakeholder evidence gathered in 2014 found that offers of placements and vacation internships were being made to 1st and 2nd year students "as employers try to 'pick off' the best potential applicants ahead of their competitors" (BIS, 2015, pp. 168). This research comprised of telephone interviews with 76 graduate recruiters and interviews with representatives from 30 groups involved in graduate recruitment, including heads of university careers services, academics and employer bodies.

These findings reveal that, in the competition for talent, employers are adopting pre-emptive lock-in methods for securing the early interest of students towards future employment in their sector, with work experience providing a key tool. Overall, the survey results highlight the significance of engaging in work experience if employers want to capture talent, and the pressures and challenges of this drive for talent. We find that 30 of the 34 businesses strongly agree/agree that work experience is offered to students 'for beating competitors in the talent race' (see Figure 3). When we asked if businesses had any problems in recruiting university undergraduates for work experience in 2015, 13 respondents said that competition from other businesses for the same skills and talent was an issue⁴. This is an on-going concern for employers along the recruitment path, with 36% of the top 100 graduate recruiters stating that "increased competition from other employers" was a challenge for 2015-16 (High Fliers Research, 2016).

Figure 3: Reasons for offering work experience to university undergraduates



Note: Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed with each listed reason. See Table A9.

While work experience can provide a recruitment pipeline, it also matters to the recruitment decision-making process, with NCUB research identifying that prior work experience is important in the decision on who to hire (NCUB, 2015b). In the 2014 UKCEPS, two-thirds of respondents in the 18,000 strong survey sample regard relevant work experience as a critical or significant factor when hiring new staff. Similarly, 64% of 310 surveyed employers for the 2015 CBI/Pearson survey state "relevant work experience/industrial placement" as an important factor considered when recruiting graduates in particular, up from 62% in 2014 (pp. 56).

We unpick details on the importance of work experience in recruitment by asking businesses about their last undergraduate hire into a longer-term role, whether the hire had work experience, and whether this work experience was with their business or not. Interestingly, an equal number of businesses stated that they had recruited individuals with prior work experience gained either with them or elsewhere, with 30 businesses saying so in each case. However, a lack of work experience is not necessarily a barrier to recruitment, as 23 businesses also said that they had hired an undergraduate in a longer term role who did not have prior

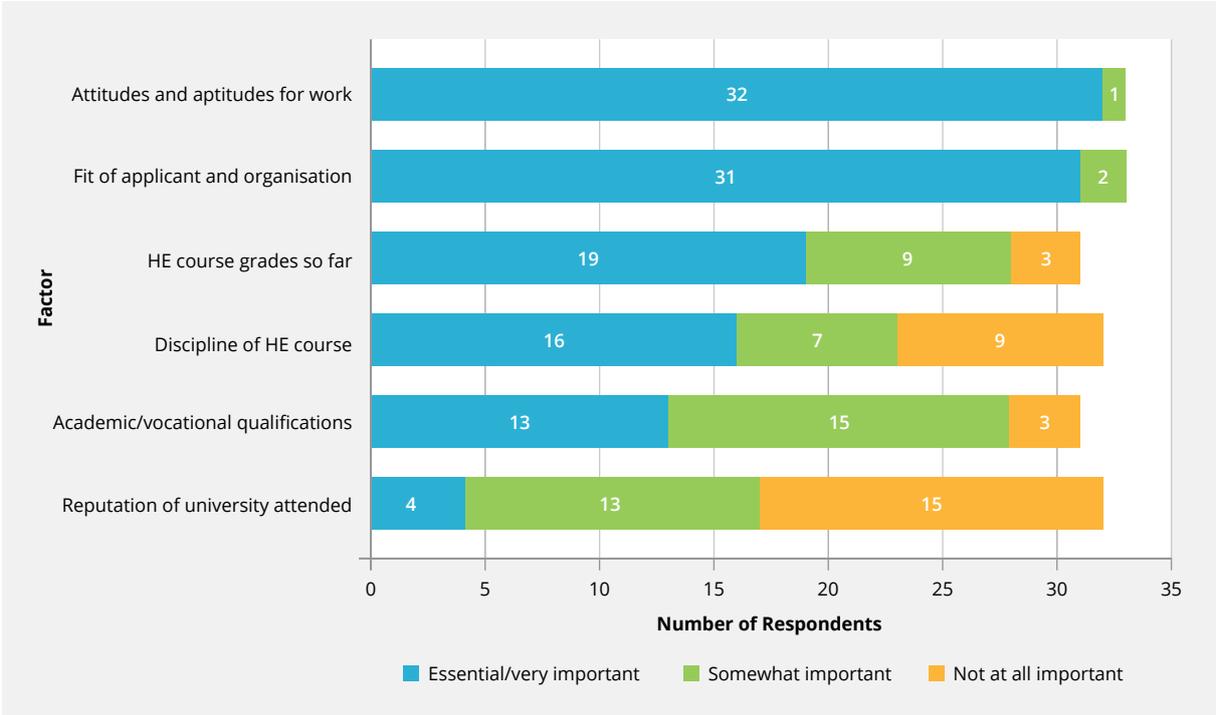
⁴ Note, however, that a further 13 respondents said they had no problems in recruiting students for work experience in 2015. See Table A17.

work experience (see Appendix 2: Table A6). This is in contrast to the High Fliers Research (2016) report that finds work experience is close to being a necessity for securing a job in some businesses. Nearly half of their respondents reported “that it was either ‘not very likely’ or ‘not at all likely’ that a graduate who’d had no previous work experience at all with any employers would be successful during their selection process and be made a job offer, irrespective of their academic achievements or the university they had attended” (pp. 25).

We find that when it comes to recruiting new students for work experience, just 6 businesses rate the importance of the discipline of the HE course as ‘essential’ and 10 rate it as ‘very important’, compared to 7 finding this ‘somewhat important’ and 9 saying it is ‘not at all important’ (see Figure 4 and Table A14). Additionally, while 17 businesses strongly agree or agree that they offer work experience to students ‘to access the latest discipline knowledge’, 11 neither agree nor disagree with this statement and 6 disagree or strongly disagree (see Figure 3). What matters more to businesses is the discipline-neutral transferable aptitudes and soft skills that work experience fosters. When asked how far they agree with the statement that work experience ‘builds the generic transferable skills set of students’, 34 businesses strongly agree/agree (see Figure 7, pp. 14).

NCUB research (2015b) suggested that if work experience is used for recruitment then it is more likely to be used where recruitment is taking place. This restricts the offer of placements to sectors where employment is growing, which are not necessarily those aligned with the discipline of study. On the other hand, using UKCEPS 2014 data, the same report concludes that employers see work experience as giving generic skills⁵. Together, these findings suggest a weaker need for employers to link work experience to the discipline of study. The report concludes that universities and businesses can expand their pool of work experience networks and offers by branching across sectors and subjects not traditionally associated with the discipline of study. As noted in the 2014 NCUB report, students find employment in diverse sectors relative to their degree subject – acknowledgment of this at the work experience stage is important for generating opportunities.

Figure 4: Recruiting undergraduates for work experience: importance of each factor



Note: Respondents were asked about the importance of each listed factor. See Table A14.

⁵ The report uses 2014 UKCEPS data as the basis for statistical analysis of the odds of an employer recruiting their placement student. Findings indicate that employers who consider work experience to be an important candidate quality are *not* more likely to hire their placement student (the odds are 0.895 and are not statistically significant). This is because placements confer generic skills that are of use and value to a broad range of employers (NCUB 2015b; pp. 19 and Appendix B, pp. 24-25).

Businesses place more emphasis on work cognition competencies and employer-employee suitability than on the degree subject. A student's attitudes and aptitudes for work, their motivations and interests are considered as essential aspects in work experience recruitment decisions by 23 businesses and very important by a further 9. Twenty businesses rate the fit between the applicant and the organisation as essential when recruiting new university undergraduates for work experience and an additional 11 say this is very important (see Figure 4 and Table A14).

What work experience offers is an opportunity for employers to test the match of the candidate to the job, organisation, and sector. It is also a means for bridging the gap between academic and work-based skills, through building competencies such as agility, flexibility, responsiveness, and business acumen. The last of these in particular is in wanting among employers as a skill of graduates – according to the wider CBI/Pearson (2015) survey, 54% of 310 respondent employers said they were not satisfied with this component of graduates' work-relevant attributes. Additionally, the recently released Wakeham Review (2016) assesses employability problems among STEM graduates in particular, finding insufficient work-related skills to be a central problem. As noted in the Review, “[m]any employers and employer representative groups have for a number of years reported difficulties in recruiting the skilled graduates that they need. Concerns have in some cases been directed at specific types of skill set, with much previous focus on graduates lacking the ‘soft’ and ‘work readiness’ skills needed to flourish in the workplace” (pp. 7).

The NCUB Survey of Work Experience indicates that businesses see work experience as helping to improve the match between the student and the employer and helping to develop work-based skills in the student, both of which are crucial to businesses. Twenty-eight businesses strongly agree/agree that a reason for offering work experience to students is ‘to close the skills gap between higher education and work-based needs’ (see Figure 3). Moreover, all 34 businesses strongly agree or agree that a benefit of work experience for university undergraduates is that it ‘improves their skills beyond academic qualifications’ (see Figure 7, pp. 14).

Overall, these findings highlight that work experience performs two functions. Where it is used to build and nurture the skills that businesses need, work experience delivers **employability** skills. Where it is used to capture talent and to identify early on the best of it, work experience contributes to **employment** opportunities.

04. Channels used to find work experience undergraduates

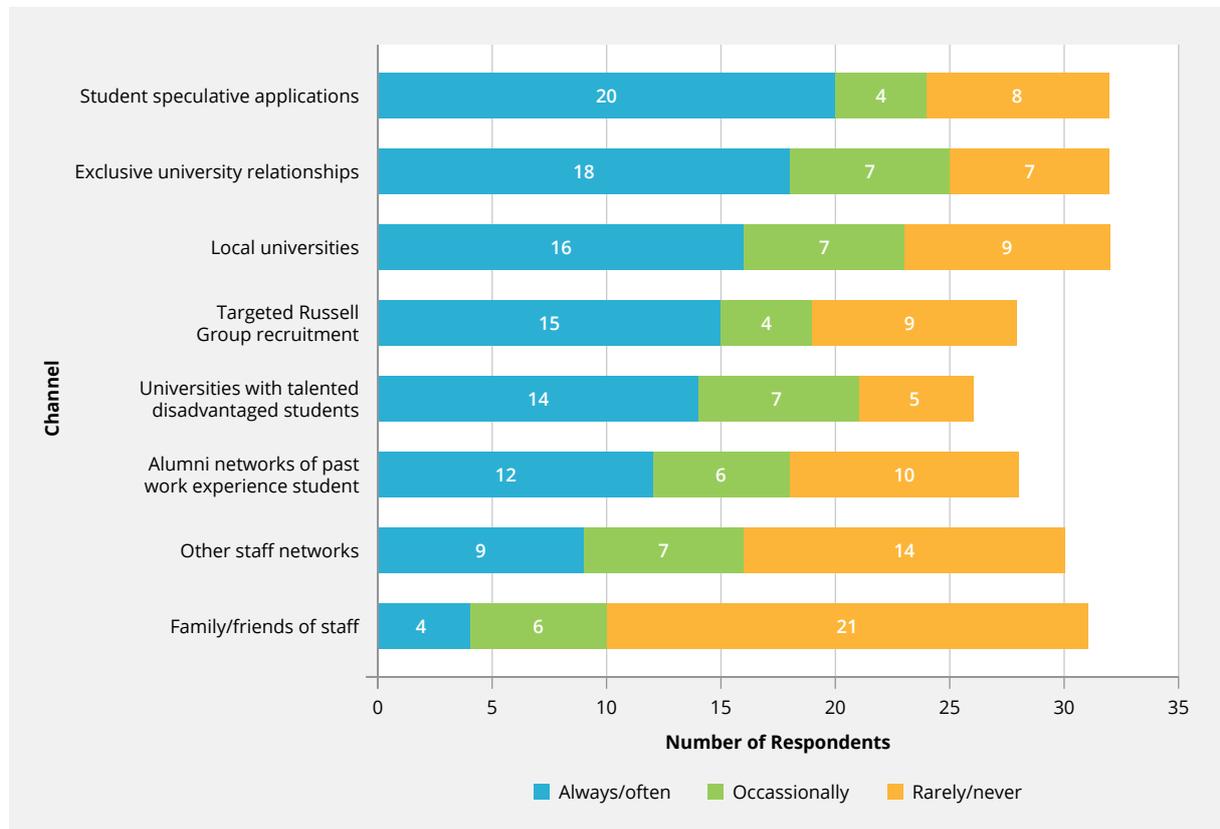
We asked survey participants about the channels they used to find students for work experience during 2015, according to a given list of sources that is based on those commonly identified in the literature. Determining the key access routes into the work experience opportunities that businesses offer is important in understanding the approaches they take and the extent of openness of the offers they make across broad talent avenues, and therefore the scope for student knowledge about available roles.

As indicated in Figure 4 on the previous page, we had asked businesses about the importance of the reputation of the university attended when they are looking to recruit new undergraduate students for work experience. Findings showed that reputation was relatively insignificant: only 4 businesses said university reputation was an essential or important factor, 13 considered this to be somewhat important, while 15 said this was not at all important.

Here we explore responses to more granular survey statements on channels used, with results revealing that reputation does matter, as shown in Figure 5 on the next page. Among the 34 respondents, 15 businesses said that they ‘always’ or ‘often’ used targeted recruitment from top-tier Russell Group universities, while an additional 4 occasionally used this channel. Aligned with this, exclusive relationships with a group of universities already known to the business were important, with 18 businesses always/often, and a further 7 occasionally using this source in 2015. To the extent that they are driven by such considerations, these exclusive relationships reflect the significance of university status.

Local universities are another important channel for businesses seeking undergraduate talent. In our sample, 16 organisations always or often used this route, and 7 did so occasionally. However, the picture changes when we look at business use of universities with talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds as a work experience supply channel. Only 4 businesses said that they always used this source in 2015; a further 10 said they often did while 7 occasionally drew on this (see Figure 5 and Table A12).

Figure 5: Channels used to find undergraduates for work experience in 2015



Note: Respondents were asked about their use of each listed channel. See Table A12.

We also consider employer utilisation in 2015 of more personal supply channels relating to networks of contacts, and here we find mixed results. We asked businesses about their use of family and friends of current staff as a means for finding work experience undergraduates, with 6 respondents occasionally using this, but 21 stating that they rarely or never called on this source. Accordingly, these findings suggest low level usage of nepotism-related routes into the work experience opportunities offered by our sample of businesses. On the other hand, the alumni networks of a former work experience student are relatively important: 12 businesses said that they always/often and a further 6 occasionally used this route. Additionally, we explore the importance of speculative applications, with 20 businesses having always or often used this channel in 2015, and a further 4 occasionally doing so (see Figure 5).

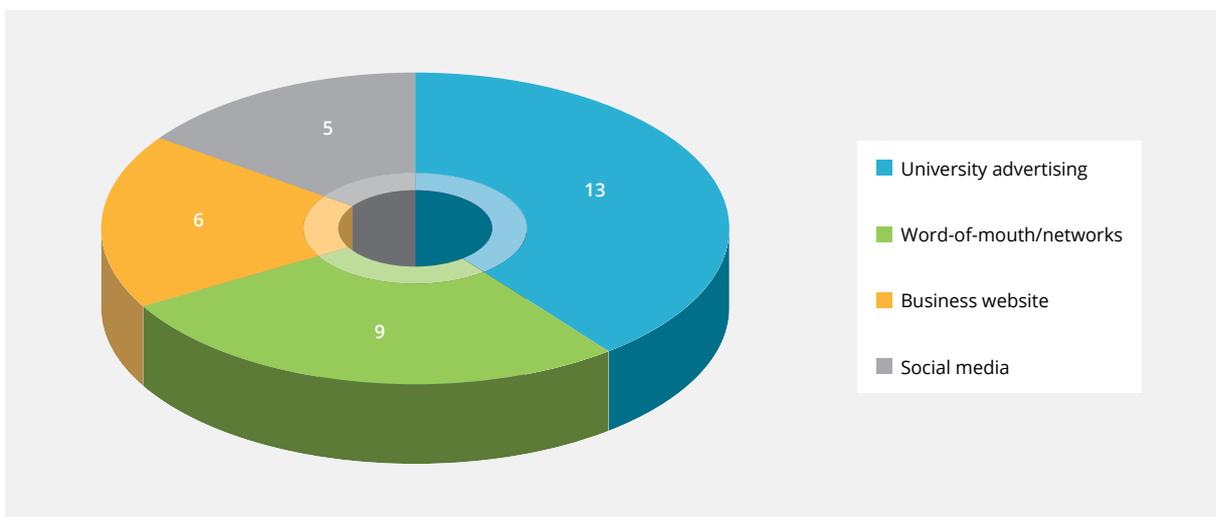
This evidence of business reliance on contacts and networks has important repercussions for fair access to opportunities across all students, as well as for business capacity to increase the supply of talent beyond familiarly used supply modes. These ramifications are greater for disadvantaged students because they lack connections for being informed about work experience opportunities (Mountford-Zimdars *et al.*, 2015). These findings highlight that not all employers are aware of what fair access means and does. Their use of networks to source students for work experience unevenly affects access, which in the long-run affects business capacity for finding the skilled employees they need. This is especially true when we consider that work experience is used to recruit.

To complete the picture of channels of recruitment, we also ask businesses to choose what they consider to be the best channel for finding students for work experience in general. The most popular response is

university advertising, with 13 businesses selecting this option (see Figure 6). This fits with survey results on the importance of exclusive university-business relationships in the search for work experience talent: half of the businesses that said they always used this relationships channel in 2015 also declared the best work experience recruitment channel to be university advertising (6 out of 12).

While these institution linkages matter, word of mouth/networks are also significant, with 9 businesses saying that this is the best recruitment source (see Figure 6). Word of mouth connections likely includes personal recommendations and also speculative applications that are brought about through informed awareness of work experience vacancies. Networks may incorporate individuals who are known to a business through its own contacts as well as those that arise from all manner of formal and informal interactions with universities and their students and alumni. Again, if businesses rely heavily on word of mouth or networked sources for their work experience talent supplies, then knowledge of opportunities will be restricted to well-networked students. This has ramifications for equal access to work experience offers across all undergraduates and for finding talent beyond known channels among employers.

Figure 6: Best channel for finding undergraduates for work experience (by number of respondents)



Note: Respondents were asked to choose one of the four listed channels. See Table A13.

The High Fliers Research report (2016) supports this finding of exclusive relationships with select universities by businesses, including Russell Group members, though their evidence refers to graduate recruitment. Their report also highlights the importance of university-related recruitment and advertising for finding graduates to hire, with more than 90 organisations holding campus presentation events. Additionally, in excess of two-thirds of respondents had networks of brand managers on campus in 2015-16, where these are “local students or postgraduates who are recruited to help publicise an employer’s university events, to remind fellow students about application deadlines, and assist recruiters with identifying potential local promotional opportunities” (pp. 30). An on-campus presence is important: 51% of the top 100 employers of graduates state that stepping up the profile of their organisation on university campuses is a challenge and focus for 2015-16 recruitment. All of these results indicate that targeted and exclusive relationships with universities, which incorporate various advertising methods, are important for large graduate recruiters. The results from the NCUB Survey of Work Experience show that these also act as significant means for finding work experience undergraduates.

Evidence collected through interviews with 76 graduate recruiters and 30 other stakeholders involved in graduate employment in 2014 (BIS, 2015) likewise shows employer targeting of universities, with a wide range of between 10 and 40 institutions targeted for recruiting graduates (see page 117). Identified reasons for targeting include: (i) to get the most out of limited resources available for graduate talent sourcing; (ii) to build relationships with local universities whose student population may be more committed to remaining in that area; (iii) to take advantage of university reputations in subject specialisms; (iv) to manage and raise the profile of the employer brand among students to best effect; and/or (v) to attract students from universities perceived as having a high reputation for academic rigour. On the other hand, relationships with some universities were sought so that employers could attract a more diversified graduate workforce.

Here strategies included targeting institutions from which lower numbers of graduate job applications were received, while keeping within the remit of finding the best candidate for the opportunity.

The BIS report (*op. cit.*) also notes the importance of informal networks and word-of-mouth recommendations for finding suitable candidates for work experience, particularly among employers with new or small-scale work placements offers. Specifically, “social networks may be more important in gaining access to work experience than to employment directly – especially in organisations taking only a few student placements or interns and therefore not necessarily advertising these opportunities very widely” (pp. 226). Given the role that work experience plays in sourcing longer-term recruits, it is not surprising that interviewed stakeholders also expressed concerns about the unfair access and social mobility implications of word-of-mouth and networks usage for work experience, as quoted in the introduction.

05. Business views on access to work experience

NCUB research (2015a) reports a lack of take-up of work placement opportunities among computer science undergraduates that contributes to their comparatively higher unemployment rates on graduation. Low participation in one-year industry placements is driven by factors including (i) financial pressures leading to a preference for finishing studying as soon as possible over improving the likelihood of employment, (ii) a lack of confidence to go through the complex and rigorous application and selection process for roles, and (iii) insufficient ‘soft skills’ that hamper the ability to translate degree learning to the world of work. At the heart of all of these deterring factors are access issues, whether through monetary constraints or via perceptions of low work-readiness skills that in themselves can be built through work experience (see also the Shadbolt Review, 2016).

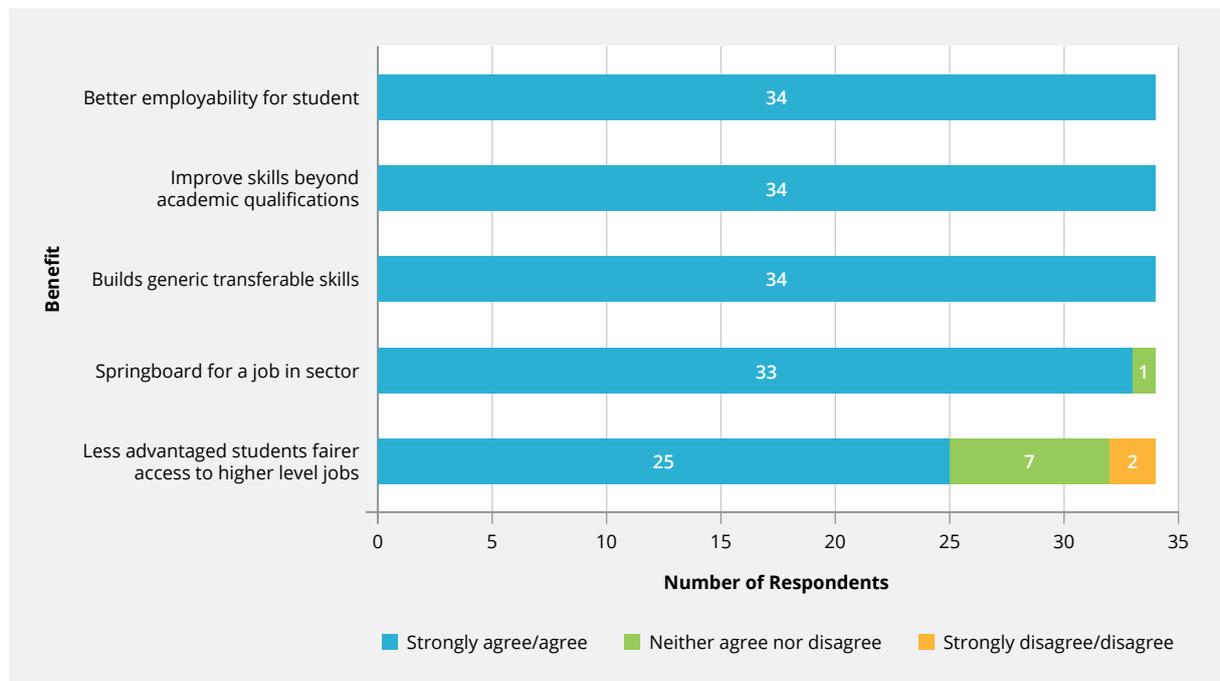
Across the work experience landscape more broadly, studies have noted barriers in access to work experience among undergraduates from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds in particular. Social, economic and cultural capital barriers emanate from the unequal distribution of access to networks for information and finding opportunities. Financial barriers are compounded if placements are unpaid, lengthy or geographically distant, particularly for those already working to support their studies. Barriers also relate to a lack of the self-direction, motivation and self-selling skills that employers seek (Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008; Equality Challenge Unit, 2010; Mountford-Zimdars *et al.*, 2015; BIS, 2015; Bridge Group, 2016; Wakeham Review, 2016).

Uneven access to work experience could have wide-reaching implications for students from less well-off backgrounds. This is particularly the case once account is taken for the evidence discussed above on work experience opportunities feeding into job offers on graduation, some of which may include higher level roles. Though we need better direct evidence on these specific access impacts in respect of work experience, indirectly we can conjecture from studies on how graduate employment differs according to socio-economic background that the longer-term effects of unequal access to work experience are detrimental for less advantaged students. Research by HEFCE (2015b) finds that among the most disadvantaged full-time first degree qualifiers in 2008-09, there remained persistent differences in employment outcomes up to 40 months after HE completion relative to the least disadvantaged qualifiers⁶. Lower employment rates were found in professional or managerial roles in particular. Added to this, empirical studies highlight exclusive access to top jobs by economically advantaged students in sectors including law, accountancy and financial services, an outcome that is evident 3 years after graduation (Macmillan and Vignoles, 2013; Ashley *et al.*, 2015; Kirby, 2016).

⁶ The most disadvantaged full-time first degree qualifiers are measured as the bottom quintile in HEFCE's ‘Participation of Local Areas’ POLAR3 classification that groups UK areas by the proportion of the young population participating in HE. For further details, see the HEFCE Briefing webpage on ‘POLAR – Participation of Local Areas’: www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/POLAR3_data

Respondents to the NCUB Survey of Work Experience were asked for their views on fair access to work experience in a number of questions, including those on the benefits of work experience for university undergraduates and the reasons behind offering opportunities to them. When asked how far they agree that work experience 'gives less advantaged students fairer access to higher level jobs', responses from businesses are more mixed relative to all other listed statements on the benefits of experience, as indicated in Figure 7 below (see also Table A10). Out of 34 responders, 25 strongly agree or agree with this, while 7 neither agree nor disagree and 2 disagree.

Figure 7: Benefits of work experience for university undergraduates



Note: Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed with each listed benefit. See Table A10.

When it comes to the reasons for offering work experience, 7 and 18 businesses strongly agree and agree respectively that 'for spotting talent among less advantaged students' is a motivation, though 6 responders neither agree nor disagree and 3 disagree with this objective (see Figure 3, pp. 8 and Table A9).

We can refine these findings by cross-referencing them according to the most common type of work experience offered in 2015, that of paid internships (see Figure 1a, pp. 6). Then, using the number of paid internships as a proxy for the size of the business, we can divide responses into two groups: those businesses with 49 or fewer paid internships (18 in total) and those with 50 or more (13 altogether) in 2015. Looking at how responses vary by this proxy for organisation size enables us to consider whether employers that managed a relatively smaller quantity of work experience student interns (smaller businesses) have differing views from those with larger, potentially more structured schemes in place for student internships (larger businesses).

Cross-tabulating by business size and by the benefits of work experience, we find that 12 out of the 18 businesses (67%) taking on 49 or fewer undergraduates as paid interns in 2015 said they strongly agree/agree that work experience gives less well-off students fairer access to higher level roles. Of the reciprocal 13 businesses with 50 or more student interns in 2015, 11 strongly agree or agree with this (85%). In terms of the reasons for offering work experience, 11 employers offering 49 or less paid internships to students strongly agree/agree that they do so to spot talented disadvantaged students, equivalent to 61%, while 11 businesses with 50 or more student interns strongly agree/agree with this, or 85% (see Figure 3, pp. 8). These results indicate that larger businesses with larger student internship intake programmes in 2015 were more likely to view and use work experience as a gateway into the organisation for talented undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds

The findings also signal that not all businesses are aware of the implications that unequal access to work experience has for the business employment pipeline, or for a student's access to top employment opportunities, as an enabler of social mobility. However, recent initiatives in recruitment strategies indicate that fair access awareness is growing. Businesses are attempting to boost talent supplies across socio-economic groups, primarily at the stage of graduate jobs, though with on-going efforts to expand recruitment inclusion approaches more widely. Practices such as blind recruitment – where information like an applicant's name, the school and/or the university they attended are excluded from the selection process – or accounting for the effects of contextual factors on academic achievement, such as school performance or neighbourhood deprivation, are gaining ground among larger graduate recruiters⁷ (Bridge Group, 2016).

The 2015 AGR survey reports employer use of metrics to get information on the socio-economic background of candidates. Indicators are being collected for whether the applicant is a first generation graduate, if the applicant attended a state or private school, or whether the applicant claimed Free School Meals as a proxy indicator of low household income, with some employers using more than one of these measures. High Fliers Research (2016) indicates the growing importance of diversity and social mobility goals among the top 100 graduate employers in the UK: 44% of graduate recruiters say that “achieving social mobility targets” is a challenge and focus for 2015-16 recruitment (pp. 29).

Additionally, more than 190 businesses have signed up to the government's Social Mobility Business Compact, which aims to curb barriers to the achievement of potential, where these barriers relate to factors including where a person was born, the school they attended, and/or the occupation of their parents⁸. In terms of pay for work experience, the Common Best Practice Code for High Quality Internships aims to address unequal access by establishing fair pay commitments for internships from leading employers (Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum, 2013)⁹. These are just some of the many diverse strategies that businesses are increasingly drawing on to ensure better access and a wider talent pool.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) also adopt approaches to tackling the issue of uneven access to work experience, including through the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) access agreements. These are “documents in which universities and colleges set out their tuition fees and how they plan to improve and sustain fair access at every stage of the student lifecycle (access, student success and progression)” (Bridge Group, 2016, pp. 8). In 2015-16, 88% of these agreements include financial support programmes for disadvantaged students and reduced tuition fees during a placement year as strategies for helping students to access and participate in work experience (Bridge Group, 2016).

Likewise, under the targeted ‘Student Opportunity’ (SO) allocation issued by HEFCE to HEIs as a conditional funding aspect of overall teaching funds¹⁰ – and known as the Widening Participation (WP) allocation prior to 2013-14¹¹ – HEIs have developed WP initiatives that aim to raise aspirations and awareness for continuing into and beyond higher education among disadvantaged groups, including gaining work-readiness skills (see reports to HEFCE by Bowes *et al.*, 2013; and Moore *et al.*, 2013). Though there will be variations in their provision across HEIs, the WP agendas and access agreements signal higher education sector attempts to address barriers to engagement in work experience and associated employment opportunities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

7 See also “PM: Time to end discrimination and finish the fight for real equality”: <http://goo.gl/jqAUaj> (October 2015).

8 For a list of signatories to the Compact, see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-business-compact-list-of-signatories
For more information on the Compact, see:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-business-compact-about-the-compact/social-mobility-business-compact

9 See also Parliament UK ‘Work Experience: Social Mobility: Written question – 25863’:

www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-02-04/25863

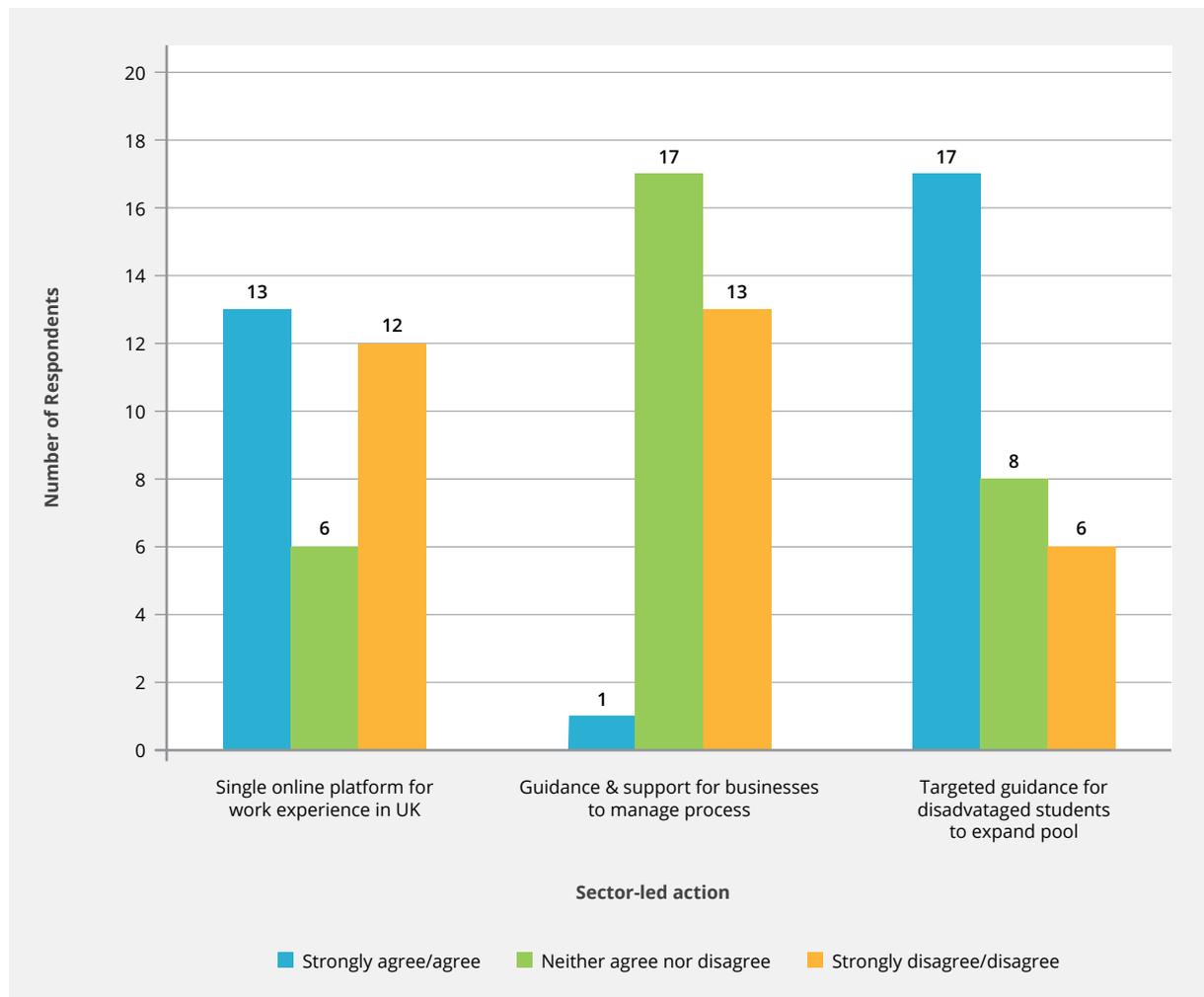
10 In terms of widening access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, “Institutions’ allocations are calculated pro rata on the basis of the previous year’s student FTEs, weighted to reflect the broad institutional mix of students from different census wards and the London weighting” (HEFCE, 2015a, pp. 22). See also HEFCE webpage on ‘How we fund student access and success’: www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/funding

11 See HEFCE webpage on ‘Report reveals continuing investment of HEFCE Student Opportunity (SO) allocation in activity to widen access and improve student success’: www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2015/Name,104404,en.html

06. Strategies for raising access to work experience

Employers were asked to rank a list of three possible solutions for curbing barriers to work experience. As a *sector-led action* for advancing access to the supply of university undergraduates who can undertake work experience, businesses strongly advocate 'targeted guidance for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to expand the pool of candidates'. In all, 17 businesses rank this action as the most effective approach for the sector to carry out in order to ensure an expansive and inclusive talent pipeline (see Figure 8). Additionally, when we asked businesses about problems they had in recruiting students for work experience in 2015, 7 said that they lacked enough access to the talent pool of students from less well-off backgrounds, a finding that concurs with the need for targeted support (see Appendix 2: Table A17).

Figure 8: Business rankings of sector-led actions for improving access to undergraduates for work experience



Note: Respondents were asked to rank effectiveness on a scale of 1 to 3 for each of the three listed sector-led actions. See Table A19.

Taken together, these findings indicate that employers face problems when it comes to identifying the full extent of talent supply, ensuring equal access to their work experience opportunities, and expanding the scope of their talent pipeline. This may be a reflection of their difficulties in ascertaining contextual factors relating to the socio-economic background of applicants, leading to problems in internalising and accounting for such factors to positive effect in business recruitment policies relative to, for example, addressing diversity.

The preference for sector-provided targeted guidance is relatively higher among those smaller employers offering fewer work experience opportunities, indicating that uneven access issues may be harder and more resource-intensive for them to address. When we look at responses split by the number of paid internships in 2015, 7 responders with 49 or fewer student interns were in favour of targeted guidance (out of 16 responders to both questions on internship quantity and sector-led actions, or 44%), compared to 9 responders with 50 or more interns in 2015 (out of 13, or 69%).

The support that businesses express for targeted guidance in turn suggests that they see sectors including HEIs as playing an important role in helping to deal with this asymmetry of information. As part of the supply chain for talent, HEIs are best placed to know about the skills of their student population and to help students from less-advantaged backgrounds to access and secure work experience and employment with those businesses that are most interested in their aptitudes.

As we have noted, HEIs implement WP measures as means for offering targeted information and advice to disadvantaged students. What this survey result implies is that there are dialogue, action and knowledge barriers between HEIs and businesses on the targeted guidance and support strategies that have already been adopted or that could be put in place. Greater collaboration and conversation is needed to effectively tackle these barriers and to ensure the best impact for existing WP approaches relating to work experience. The finding is supported by survey evidence on *business-led actions* that could be taken to improve access to student supply for work experience: here 12 businesses rank 'strengthen relationships with universities' as the most effective business strategy, while nine score 'expand the pool to include candidates from all backgrounds' as their number one approach (see Appendix 2: Table A18).

A further *sector-led action* that businesses support for improving access to undergraduate talent for work experience is 'a single online platform for students and businesses as a one-stop shop for work experience in the UK' (see Figure 8). Just over 50% of respondents (13) rank this as the top way for the sector to widen access. This preference for an online platform is more prevalent among smaller businesses with 49 or fewer undergraduate paid interns in 2015, where 8 responders ranked this first (out of 16 who answered both this question and provided 2015 internship quantity, or 50%) compared to 4 out of 13 of the larger businesses with 50 or more paid student interns in 2015 (31%) ranking it first.

This higher need for an online platform among smaller businesses with fewer interns implies that resource constraints relating to the work experience recruitment process and the provision of a centralised platform are of greater significance for this group. This is confirmed by looking at those businesses that ranked this sector-led action as being less effective relative to other measures. Here 38% of businesses taking on lower numbers of undergraduate interns in 2015 rated this as 3rd, compared to a slightly higher 39% of firms with 50 plus paid interns that year, indicating that smaller businesses with smaller-scale work experience schemes see more value in pooled online provisions.

BIS (2015) evidence from 106 interviews with stakeholders engaged in graduate recruitment shows support for closer relations and service provisions between universities and smaller businesses, so as to aid access and broaden the talent pool. The report notes that "[g]raduates working for smaller employers were very much more likely to have found their job through personal contacts. This is very consistent with the narrative of smaller businesses being less well-resourced and having fewer links to higher education than larger employers.....those students without the networks to use personal contacts effectively may find themselves at a disadvantage in competing for the diverse opportunities available at smaller companies. More traditional graduate recruitment schemes at large organisations, although often perceived as desirable opportunities, represent only a part of the graduate jobs market. There is an argument to be made that better links between small-medium sized enterprises and higher education may also aid social mobility by building bridges for all students" (pp. 115-116).

At the NCUB, we are constructing a new online platform for work experience, BrandU. Our web tool aims to open up student access channels, raise awareness of work experience opportunities, and improve the match between a student wanting work experience and an employer seeking to fill vacancies. At the same time, the platform aspires to boost business supply of and engagement in work experience offers, particularly among companies and sectors where resources for advertising and promoting opportunities are limited, for example in the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) arena.

07. Conclusion and next steps

In this report we have evaluated responses to the NCUB Survey of Work Experience, from both our business members and the wider business community, on their work experience practices and processes. The rationale for developing our own survey was to uncover employer use of work experience for sourcing undergraduate talent. Within this overall aim, we have explored the link between employer work experience recruitment strategies and student access to and participation in opportunities, and related implications for the supply of talent available to businesses where there are access constraints. Exploration of these aspects is important as although the prevalence of research focus is on *graduate* recruitment processes, employer competition for talent begins earlier on, including at the *undergraduate* stage, and increasingly incorporates the use of work experience.

Our findings reveal strong work experience activity among our 34 survey responders, particularly around paid internships and formal work placements. Evidence from the survey and elsewhere indicates that work experience is increasingly used as a recruitment tool for establishing longer-term hires, and as a contributing decider on candidate recruitment. Work experience is thus a key gateway to talent for employers, providing both transferable skills building beyond academic knowledge and a process for the early identification and capture of talent.

Findings from the NCUB Survey and the literature evidence highlight access and participation issues for students from lower socio-economic groups in particular. These impact on the talent pipeline available to employers and the match of employer skills needs to potential employees bearing those aptitudes. We note awareness of unequal access issues by universities and employers. Strategies to address this problem include WP measures by HEIs and social mobility practices, such as blind recruitment, by businesses.

The survey shows that targeted guidance for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is valued by businesses as an approach to improving access to work experience, with 17 businesses ranking this as the top most effective sector-led action. A one-stop shop for work experience opportunities in the form of an online platform is considered a viable method for enhancing offers awareness and spread by 13 businesses, and is supported in particular by organisations taking on relatively lower numbers of work experience students.

Underlying targeted provisions is the need for more and better university-business collaboration to ensure that guidance reaches the student groups most in need *and* feeds through to better engagement in and success with securing work experience. As a respondent commented, *"[o]ne of the points that hasn't been covered is the role that universities and particularly academic departments should play in supporting both students and employers with work experience"*. This indicates that, although there are partnerships and practices in place between universities and business to promote work experience opportunities and to support fair access for all students, awareness of these strategies and therefore their effectiveness is more limited.

Looking forward, the findings highlight significant next steps for NCUB research. Better awareness and identification of the role that work experience plays in improving employment and employability skills starts with the development of shared terminology on each type of work experience. The Wakeham Review (2016, pp. 77) recommends that the National Centre leads on embedding consistent terminology across the parties involved in work experience supply and demand to help mitigate errors in interpretation of the various types.

There is also a need for greater knowledge-sharing on the effective approaches universities and businesses are adopting to broaden access to work experience, through collating case studies for wider dissemination. This entails getting information from HEIs about their use of Student Opportunity funds for raising awareness of and access to work experience, and longer-term hire, among disadvantaged students. For employers, this requires getting details on the practices they use to expand opportunities take-up beyond familiar supply channels.

Exploration of the barriers to student access and participation in work experience is also important. On the employer front, this may involve looking at the complexity of application and selection processes for roles, as well as assessing employer awareness of the potential deterring effects of these processes and approaches taken to curb them. On the university side, this might include learning more about services provided to help students apply for work experience, and the extent of student success in getting roles. This is important for determining support-related barriers to work experience and the capacity for targeted guidance to positively influence outcomes.

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Appendix I: Method and respondent descriptive statistics

The NCUB Survey of Work Experience was sent out primarily to our business members, though we also sought responses from non-members so as to gain wider business community insights. The survey was compiled on Survey Monkey, with a link available for participant completion. A pilot version of the survey was emailed to select businesses in November 2015 for comments and feedback.

The link to the final version of the survey and information on how to complete it was emailed out to 58 businesses over the period December 2015 to March 2016, comprising 51 members and 7 non-member contacts, while we also encouraged all recipients to distribute the survey details to their interested associates.

The survey email targeted human resource specialists involved with skills development, university engagement and/or recruitment within each company. We received 34 responses in total, 28 from our business member organisations and a further 6 from non-members, with all responders being involved in HR or wider engagement relating to student or graduate talent. Among the non-members, one response was received from an organisation which was not part of the emailed group and instead had been informed of the survey through a contact.

Our responders were geographically concentrated in terms of the location of the organisation in which they were based, with 19 situated in London and a further 6 in the South East. The table below shows the sectors of the respondent and non-respondent businesses to which we emailed the survey details:

Appendix 1: Table i: Descriptive Statistics.

Sector	Responders	Non-responders
Cultural activities	2	1
Energy/Utilities	4	2
Financial Services/Banking	5	2
Food/Consumer Goods & Services	2	1
IT	1	4
Legal/Insurance	0	3
Manufacturing/Engineering/Defence/Transport	4	5
Media/Telecoms/Advertising	5	2
Professional services/consultancy	6	1
Publishing/Education services	1	3
Other*	4	1

Note: *Other includes sectors relating to mining & quarrying; human health/pharmaceuticals; business/public sector support services.

Other descriptive information: Of the responders, 1 organisation has fewer than 250 employees and of the non-responders, 2 organisations have fewer than 250 employees.

Appendix 2: Survey questions and response numbers

About work experience opportunities

Table A1: Thinking about the year 2015, how often did your business take on university undergraduates for work experience? Choose one from:

Frequency	Number of responses
Every month	4
Every 3 months	5
Every 6 months	9
Once in the past year	15
Total	33

Table A2: And how many university undergraduates did you take on for each of the below modes? Choose an annual offer in each case:

Quantity	0	1 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 49	50 to 100	More than 100	Total
Formal work placement	6	2	4	4	6	3	25
Internship - paid	1	3	5	9	4	9	31
Internship - unpaid/expenses	15	-	1	1	-	1	18
Job shadowing	10	6	-	2	1	2	21
Insight/work taster	8	4	-	3	1	7	23

Table A3: And what was the typical duration of each kind of work experience? Choose a duration in each case:

Duration	Less than 1 month	1 to 2 months	3 to 6 months	7 months to a year	Over a year	N/A	Total
Formal work placement	5	2	2	11	-	6	26
Internship - paid	1	13	9	6	1	-	30
Internship - unpaid/expenses	6	1	-	-	-	11	18
Job shadowing	13	1	-	-	-	8	22
Insight/work taster	14	-	-	-	-	6	20

Table A4: In comparison to 2014, how were your work experience offers for university undergraduates in 2015? Choose one from:

Offers	Number of responses
Up	21
Same	10
Down	3
Total	34

About work experience opportunities

Table A5: And in comparison to 2015, how do you expect your work experience offers for university undergraduates to be in 2016? Choose one from:

Offers	Number of responses
Up	17
Same	14
Down	3
Total	34

Table A6: When did you last recruit a university undergraduate into a longer-term paid role? Choose one in each case:

Work experience status	In the last 6 months	In the last 6 months to a year	In the last 1 to 2 years	Longer than 2 years ago	We have not done this	Total
With prior work experience in your business	25	5	-	-	3	33
With prior work experience from elsewhere	26	4	-	-	3	33
Without prior work experience	19	3	1	-	6	29

Table A7: Focusing now on your recruitment of university undergraduates with prior work experience with you, when did this recruitment offer typically happen? Choose one from:

Recruitment offer timing	Number of responses
During their work experience and while still a student	21
After they had finished their higher education course	12
Not applicable	1
Total	34

Table A8: And did recruits have to apply for the job? Choose one from:

Applied for job	Number of responses
Yes	28
No	5
Not applicable	1
Total	34

About the reasons for offering and taking work experience

Table A9: How far do you agree with the following reasons for offering work experience to university undergraduates? Choose a statement in each case:

Reason	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
For beating competitors in the talent race	12	18	2	1	1	34
To access the latest discipline knowledge	5	12	11	5	1	34
For spotting talent among less advantaged students	7	18	6	3	-	34
To close the skills gap between higher education and work-based needs	10	18	5	1	-	34
As part of our formal corporate social responsibility	7	14	8	5	-	34
To raise our profile in the graduate recruitment market	15	14	3	2	-	34
To fill the short-term staffing needs of our business	2	6	5	11	10	34

Table A10: How far do you agree with the following benefits of work experience for university undergraduates? Choose a statement in each case:

Benefit	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Leads to better employability for the student	25	9	-	-	-	34
Improves their skills beyond academic qualifications	26	8	-	-	-	34
Gives less advantaged students fairer access to higher level jobs	11	14	7	2	-	34
Builds the generic transferable skills set of students	19	15	-	-	-	34
Gives students a springboard for a job in our sector	22	11	1	-	-	34

Table A11: How important is work experience compared to qualifications in your recruitment decisions, on a scale of 1 to 5?

Scale	1 - Work experience is the most important	2	3 - Equally important	4	5 - Qualifications are the most important	Total
Number of responses	1	5	21	6	-	33

About recruitment for work experience posts

Table A12: During 2015 did you use the following channels to find university undergraduates for work experience in your business? Choose a statement in each case:

Channel	Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Don't know/ not sure	Total
Exclusive relationships with a group of universities we already know	12	6	7	4	3	-	32
Targeted recruitment from Russell Group universities	10	5	4	5	4	4	32
Universities that are local to our business	7	9	7	3	6	-	32
Universities with talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds	4	10	7	1	4	5	31
Family and friends of our staff members	-	4	6	12	9	1	32
Other networks of our staff members	-	9	7	5	9	-	30
Students who make their own speculative applications or enquiries	11	9	4	5	3	1	33
Alumni networks of a former work experience student	2	10	6	4	6	4	32

Table A13: Which of the following do you think is the BEST channel for finding university undergraduates for work experience? Choose one from:

BEST channel	Number of responses
Word of mouth/networks	9
University advertising	13
Business website	6
Social media	5
Other free websites	-
Total	33

About recruitment for work experience posts

Table A14: When recruiting new university undergraduates for work experience, how important are the following? Choose a statement in each case:

Work experience recruitment importance	Essential	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Don't know/not sure	Total
Academic or vocational qualifications e.g. GCSEs, A-levels, NVQs and BTEC Diplomas	8	5	15	3	2	33
Grades achieved on the higher education course so far	7	12	9	3	2	33
The university attended and its reputation	1	3	13	15	1	33
The discipline of the higher education course	6	10	7	9	1	33
Attitudes and aptitudes for work, motivations and interests	23	9	1	-	-	33
The fit between the applicant and the organisation	20	11	2	-	-	33

Table A15: How is your recruitment of university undergraduates for work experience managed? Choose one from:

Recruitment management	Number of responses
Entirely in-house	24
Mix of university and in-house	3
Mix of non-university and in-house	7
Fully outsourced	-
Total	34

About challenges and opportunities in accessing talent

Table A16: How satisfied are you with the quantity and quality of university undergraduates for work experience in your business? Choose all that apply from:

Levels of satisfaction	Number of responses
Satisfied	25
Would like more applicants	5
Would like better quality applicants	6
Unsure/not applicable	-

Table A17: What problems have you had in recruiting university undergraduates for work experience in the past year, 2015? Choose all that apply from:

Problem	Number of responses
Not enough time, capacity and monetary resources	7
Subject knowledge of students not fitting with the roles	6
Difficulties in recruiting and retaining work experience students as future employees	6
Not enough access to the talent pool of students from disadvantaged backgrounds	7
Competition from other businesses for the same skills and talent	13
No problems	13

Table A18: How would you rank the following business-led actions to improve access to university undergraduates for work experience? Order actions 1 to 4, with 1 being most effective for your business:

Business-led action	1 = most effective	2	3	4 = less effective	Total
Expand the pool to include candidates from all backgrounds	9	6	7	6	28
Simplify recruitment practices to make it easier for students to apply	5	8	8	10	31
Strengthen relationships with universities	12	6	6	5	29
Adopt inclusive practices to reduce unequal access	4	10	8	7	29

Table A19: How would you rank the following sector-led actions to improve access to university undergraduates for work experience? Order actions 1 to 3, with 1 being most effective for your business:

Sector-led action	1 = most effective	2	3 = less effective	Total
A single online platform for students and businesses as a one-stop shop for work experience in the UK	13	6	12	31
Guidance and support services for businesses to manage the work experience process	1	17	13	31
Targeted guidance for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to expand the pool of candidates	17	8	6	31

Table A20: Which ONE of the following would your business be prepared to increase? Choose one from:

Work experience	Number of responses
Apprenticeship training integrated into a higher education course	8
Formal work placement in industry	7
Internships - paid	10
Internships - unpaid or expenses only	1
Job shadowing	-
Insights or work tasters	5
On-the-job mentoring	1
Total	32

