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CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)

SPORT DEVELOPMENT

2014-5

**An investigation into the engagement of
undergraduates in work experience: sport
development focus**

Jacob Morgan

St20025651

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ii Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to establish an understanding of the capability work experience has upon sports undergraduate students for various aspects; with emphasis placed on the importance of work experience engagement in regards to employability. Qualitative methods were used throughout the research with interviews used to gather information on specific samples to aid the discovery of specific data. Specific samples were drawn from the sport industry with a focus on sport development; the sample consisting of three individuals with experience in the sport development field, and specifically with the employment of recent sport development graduates and assisting with engagement of work experience with both sport development students and many others. The study outlined its main themes in the literature review, drawing upon the importance that work experience has and the benefits it can bring to an undergraduate. Other aspects are elaborated including barriers to participation in work experience and criticality. The literature review found that work experience is key to the development of an undergraduate and that it holds a variety of benefits ranging from personal skills to career specific skills therefore adding value to an individual with very little experience in the work place (Costley & Lester, 2010; Russell, 2014)

Field research for the study was conducted in Cardiff and Newport, South Wales. Interviews were conducted with the view of collecting information from individuals with a wealth of knowledge on both sport development and the sports industry as well as work experience and work placements. The participants are all graduates from sport degrees, work in the area of sport development and have a vast experience of employing recent graduates, adding to the value that their opinions can bring. Based on qualitative analysis, results show that work experience is vital to undergraduates, providing them with growth that cannot be attained within an academic environment whilst bringing a range of benefits. However, it is agreed that work experience can become more prominent in coming years through the joint effort of universities and relative organisations.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The research study investigates work experience and the effect it can have upon an undergraduate student, looking at various aspects including the benefit and barriers of engagement of work experience. The main objectives of the study were to assess and analyses:

- The importance of work experience engagement for undergraduates (focusing on the sport development field)
- The benefits work experience/ placements bring
- The barriers to work experience for undergraduates
- Potential growth of work experience for undergraduates

The study is predominantly investigating the thoughts, feeling and opinions of individuals with experience in both a sport development setting and in the running of work placement programmes and how their view of the effect of work experience on undergraduate students. Previous research suggests that work experience holds importance for undergraduates bringing a variety of benefits (Brinkman, Coughlan & Patel, 2012; Russell, 2014). However, previous research also shows that there are a number of barriers to engagement in work experience, along with issues of how it is run and the growth of work experience (Costley & Lester, 2010; Dearing, 1997; Little & Harvey, 2006).

After this introduction chapter two will review the literature found in relation to the various aspects of work experience engagement for undergraduates drawing upon; importance, benefits, barriers and critical factors. Following the literature review will be chapter three. This chapter will focus on the methodology used for qualitative interviews in order to ensure the reliability of the research. Additionally, chapter four will follow with discussion and analysis of the results, looking for emerging themes and important data. Finally, chapter five will conclude the study.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition and outline of work placements

Work experience is widely regarded as a short term experience of the workplace and a way of learning that is situated outside of an academic setting, for a variety of reasons, to improve efficiency and skills in the workplace, to enhance learning on return to an academic setting and to give knowledge and experience of what an individual wants to do and needs to know about the workplace and career opportunities are cited as most important (Bowrey, Clements & Cord, 2009; Costley & Lester, 2010; Popik, 2009). Watts (1991) suggests that work experience would help students unconsciously or automatically assimilate relevant workplace knowledge, skills and attitudes and internalise the implications of occupational changes occurring in the workplace. Hamilton (1997) suggests that work experience offers a way to increase student's engagement and focus in learning and aid in preparation for the workplace. Both of these simple definitions of how work experience should supposedly function may not be as recent when looking at the literature such as Costley & Lester (2010), however when compared to these more recent definitions that rely more heavily on academic sources there appears to be very similar meaning behind both.

An essential consideration for the researcher when looking at the concept of work experience is the fact that there are many definitions. Many theorists define work experience in their own terms, sometimes based on their own experiences with some definitions seeming narrow whereas others show deep meaningful thought drawing heavily upon academic theory and past learning; however the end results show very similar meaning and a very similar focus. Costley and Lester (2010) suggest that work experience, or work based-learning refers to any learning that is situated in the workplace or arises directly from the concerns of the workplace. This includes learning that takes place at work as a normal part of development, learning that takes places for training or coaching and learning that takes place for aspirations and interests. As this shows, even though more recent definitions appear to go into more depth in relation to descriptions and ideas, the literature shows that emphasis is being put on the beneficial aspect for the workplace being the central figure as reasoning for work placements ever taking place. When looking at this finding, it is important to recognise that the idea of work placements have become more than just a way of gaining an idea of how the workplace runs, but also a way of learning. This has been emphasized by Beard (2007), who explains that there are

many different ways of learning. Beard's first example of this is that of a degree, which has a certain requirement in order to obtain which differs to other types of suggested learning such as work experience. However, Beard emphasises importance on a healthy balance of both academic based learning and work place based learning.

A debate the researcher believes to have relevance is that of Costley & Lester (2010) who suggest an approach to work experience that contains four important components for the experienter. 1) Individual programmes where a learning contract is agreed upon 2) recognition of previous research and learning as a starting point. 3) The use of live, methodologically sound projects and practitioner research, backed by appropriate forms of learner support. 4) Valid forms of assessment referenced to generic criteria equal to that of the relevant academic level. The fourth component has relevance to a new way of measuring work experience as it allows for it to be measured in an equal and similar way to academic work which is an inherent fault of work experience in the view of Beard (2007).

Work experience is seen as having become of increased importance in the past decade with an increase in demand giving individuals a much better chance of achieving their career aspirations (Popik 2009). This is backed up by two policy documents of higher education in the United Kingdom; the Dearing review of higher education (Dearing, 1997) and the United Kingdom's government department for education and skills' white paper on higher education (2003) with both documents stressing the importance of involvement of industry in higher education to provide work based learning opportunities and increase contribution to higher education. Dearing (1997) and UKGDES (2003) explain that with the help of the industry the government believes together they are able to better the chance of employability and are capable of creating an increasingly suitable, efficient and driven workforce within the UK.

Although work placements are seen as the main way work experience is gained, there are other ways being created that suggest not only improvement for the individual undertaking the work experience but also the employer, or the person in charge of overseeing the work experience. Another way that work experience can be gained is through project based learning. Through the notion of project based learning, a project is assigned to an individual or a group, they then have to undertake the work in whatever way they desire. This way of learning is supposed to help a student gain work experience through

independence and creativity, giving the student an opportunity to show their true potential in a work place, whilst also giving an extra person at no cost to the employer (Meredith, 2014).

By looking through the various definitions and concepts related to work experience it appears to the researcher that work experience does not have a one dimensional meaning to it but instead has many different parts meanings when looking at the literature such as the description by Costley & Lester (2010). However, having said this, all meanings whether coming from a recent academic source e.g. Meredith (2014) or an older academic source e.g. Hopkins (1990) it is clear that they all relate back to the simple view of work experience being a way of learning outside of an academic environment to enhance skills, either for career prospects or for return to academic environment. Work experience for students has been identified as providing an opportunity to enhance employability. This brings the research onto the importance and benefits of work experience and the ability it has to prepare students for a successful career in sport.

2.2 Importance/relevance of work experience (The how and why)

The Dearing review of higher education (1997) and the United Kingdom's government department for education and skills (1991) both stress the fact that work experience is becoming increasingly important within higher education and emphasises the relevance of work placements for students. With the backing of these government policies it is likely that the engagement in work experience is only going to grow in the United Kingdom as a result therefore giving more reason for students to take part in them. In a study by Suksohlert & Mujtaba (2012) looking at the importance of work experience in higher education it was found that through interviews of employers, that they believed work experience isn't only important, but is in fact vital to individuals looking to be employed as it gives employers (the respondents) more reason to give them the potential job and enhances the individuals image in the eyes of these respondents.

More importance is placed on work experience through the rise of sandwich courses, ensuring more students engage with work based learning coupled with academic learning. Sandwich courses has been a concept for a few decades now, however they have become more prominent recently with the increase of emphasis on work experience.

Hergert (2009) states that work experience is more important now than it has ever been, especially in the college and university system, helping students network between academic studies and work based learning. His research finds that universities are becoming increasingly prone to changing evolving basic courses year by year into sandwich courses in order to give students a more rounded education involving work experience coupled with academic theory based learning. Pairing these findings together shows that the view of work experience and work based learning from government and employers is that of highly and increasingly important, with a belief that it is vitally important for students to engage with this concept.

Another argument for the importance of work experience is the need for a structure that is able to bridge the gap between higher education and work. Hergert (2009) and Russell (2014) agree on this, with both believing that with a clear structure put in place there will be improved productivity for both student and potential employee when it comes to engagement in work based learning. Russell (2014) finds that work experience has a unique way of adding to the knowledge and perception of work for students and that it is so important that the government should be doing even more than they currently are to help with aiding this engagement.

2.3 Benefits of engagement in work experience

There is a wealth of literature related to the benefits of work experience. ASET (the professional body in the United Kingdom for placement and employability staff) looks at the benefits for three different groups, students, employers and academic institutions. Benefits to students that have engaged in work experience include increased employability, motivation, academic results, and preparation (ASET; Russell, 2014; Brinkman, Coughlan & Patel, 2012; Bowrey, Clements & Cord, 2010). When analysing the benefits of work experience to students it starts off with stating qualitative data found through either interviews or surveys such as the fact that it develops a range of work related skills, which are demanded by graduate employees or the fact that it gives a better direction. However it also gives quantitative data in the findings with one example looking at the fact that work experience helps networking with the statistic that in a recent survey 69% of undergraduates that undertook work placement got offered a job and that 80% of

employees conducted work placements with the primary view of recruiting these exact students.

When looking at the benefits of work experience to employers it states that it offers cost effective labour, motivated and committed staff, increased awareness of current academic developments and breakthrough thinking, meaning creative thinking that hasn't already been blinkered by the workplace. The benefits that ASET found for academic institutions include an improvement in the students' knowledge and skills set that they bring back to the academic environment, allowing these types of institutions to work with improved students.

Russell (2014) who finds that work experience enhances the portfolio, giving more weight behind any CV. In relation to this is a study by Clements, Gomez & Lush (2004) who found that students benefited academically from work experience with students that participated in work experience gaining 4% more marks on a final degree when compared to those that didn't participate in work experience. Although 4% may not seem huge, for a student that is on the border of a classification for their degree, the smallest margins become important. Brinkman, Coughlan & Patel (2012) conducted a study looking at computing students and how work experience affected their academic results. When looking at the students they found that out of every student that engaged in work experience 58% of them obtained either a 1st degree or 2/1 degree. However, when looking at the students that didn't engage in work experience they found that 37% of them managed to get a 1st degree or a 2/1 meaning that 21% more of the students in the same year managed to get a 1st or 2/1 degree when compared to the students not engaging in work experience. Both studies show that work experience engagement does in fact have a positive impact on academic results whether large or small, given huge reason to take part in it.

Engagement in work experience also enhances preparation and the surrounding aspects relating to employment e.g. confidence and readiness (Bowrey, Clements & Cord, 2010). In a study looking at learning outside the textbook and higher education for accounting students it was found that the participants that had completed work placements felt they were more confident and had better understanding of the accounting principles and taught concepts therefore also improving their grasp on the education side of their course. As well as this, it was also discovered that the individuals that engaged in work experience found

that there was more consolidation that accounting was the career path they wanted to pursue. Russell (2014) backs this up by finding (through interviews) that employers also feel that students that have completed work placements came straight into a job much more prepared than those that had not, and that employers cant place enough emphasis on how vital work experience is for preparation and readiness.

2.4 Barriers to learning

There are perceived barriers when looking at work experience mostly looking at discrimination and harassment mainly due to the fact that students are unpaid and new to the idea of work, often seeing them viewed as 'bottom of the food chain' (Hopkins et al. 1990). Also, students engaging in work experience are not covered on the Employment rights act 1996. With the status of being unpaid and there being no legal recourse for work placement participants it becomes apparent why students are possibly vulnerable to discrimination or harassment during their time in work placements (Mujtaba & Suksomlert, 2012). Due to these two facts, many in the business of using work experience to their benefit believe it is down to the individual when deciding whether or not to continue with work placements if they feel they are being unfairly treated.

The effect of the recent economic downturn is a potential reason for lack of engagement in work experience. There are various factors related to this explaining why this could be the case. Ball et al (2006) found that an economic downturn can have a negative effect on work experience engagement due to the fact that students are likely to not want to pay to participate in this when they already have a lot of other issues regarding the money that they are using/spending. For example, various students described that they did not have enough time to participate in work experience with one student stating 'Work was more important for me as it allowed me money to get by, meaning I couldn't afford to participate in work experience'. Statements like this suggest that for some students it is more important to earn money to get them through university rather than engage in work experience that could be beneficial in the future. It was also found that there can be differences dependent on family background, with students from a less wealthy background much less likely to engage in work experience when compared to their peers from more comfortable economic backgrounds. Little & Harvey (2006) agrees with these findings stating that students are less likely to participate in work experience when in a

recession as they have to fund themselves. Little & Harvey (2006) also suggests that even when not in a recession it is more likely that students from a wealthier background will show more engagement in work experience. Both Ball et al (2006) and Little & Harvey (2006) agree that this is a problem that should be dealt with and that work experience should be non-discriminatory.

Motivation and attitude is viewed as a potential barrier to work experience engagement for many (Department for business innovation and skills, 2013). In a study conducted by this organization including interviewing various students across the country, it was found that these students lacked motivation, or more commonly direction, with the view that they will instead 'learn in the future'. Other students interviewed stated that 'there was no reason to engage in work experience' which shows that there is potentially not enough knowledge being circulated regarding the benefits and the relevance of work experience engagement. Another common theme related to motivation and lack of direction was the fact that many of these students felt there was no reason to participate in work experience if they were unsure of the sort of career they want to pursue. Many students felt that participating in work experience that isn't necessarily related to the career that they planned on becoming involved in isn't worth it. Hopkins et al (1990) suggests that the thought process of these students is incorrect as this work shows that employers believe any work experience engagement is important regardless as to whether it relates to their job or the job they aspire to have.

2.5 Criticality of work experience

Engagement in work experience is one of the most critical points of preparation and readiness when looking for employment (Costley & Lester, 2010). Russell (2014) agrees with this fact with there being an emphasis on work experience engagement being vital for employment in all sectors, particularly in sport. With research as recent as these two conducting critical analysis of work experience engagement it stands as proof that it is not only important but a vital component of learning for students now as much as it has ever been. However, with all of relevant reasons for engaging in work experience there are also various barriers, with huge reasoning based on motivation and attitude and on funding. Research shows that lack of direction is a factor when considering why some students don't engage in work experience whilst another reason cited is the economic downturn and

the decrease in willingness to pay for work experience when there are paying alternatives such as part time jobs (Ball et al, 2006).

CHAPTER THREE METHODS

3.1 Definition of research

The International journal of education advancement (2007) defines the word research as systematic investigation into a study in order to gain new knowledge, establish facts and reach conclusions. It is often used to back up results of existing work, solve new problems or supporting/creating new theory (Dawson, 2009). The methodology will outline the methods used to investigate an important range of aspects for the study ranging from population sample through to data collection and analysis.

3.2 Outline of research question

The purpose of this research is to investigate and analyse the value and effectiveness of work experience and work based learning for students undergoing a sports development degree. The research will consider the influence of work based learning and its ability to prepare and aid undergraduates for a career within the field of sport development. Literature puts emphasis on and indicates importance and value of this way of learning suggesting it improves skills that are unattainable in through academic work (Beard, 2007; Costley & Lester 2010)

The specific themes of this study will look in depth into the meaning of work experience and work based learning. It will look at what the beneficial aspects are to undergraduate's students in relation to a sport development degree, finding out what employers and individuals that are currently higher up in the ladder of a sport development degree. An example of this could be finding out the perceptions and opinions of a manager at sport Cardiff or the head of a national governing body in relation to work experience for

undergraduates within the sport development programme. The Department for business innovation and skills (2013) suggest that students felt the time and effort spent on work based learning is not necessary as employers will not show bias towards them, however this finding is shown to be false by Suksomlert & Mujtaba (2012) who found that employers describe engagement in work experience as vital. Asking these individuals for honest and critical views will give sport development undergraduates a well-rounded opinion on the benefits and importance of work experience.

3.3 Population sampling

Population sampling is the process in which a group of representative individuals are selected from a population with the purpose of analysing these individuals within the realms of research (Draper, 2007). Importance is placed on sampling being done properly and correctly in order to cut out errors and ensure the collection of data (Prashant, 2010). This study will engage individuals who have years of experience not only working in a sport development setting but also in the recruitment sport development graduates. The researcher will engage/identify the individuals that will take part in the interviews by looking at job roles that sport development graduates could potentially have and using participants in this field, an example of purposeful sampling (May, 1993). It is likely that these individuals will also have the experience of undertaking a sport development or similar degree.

Purposeful sampling is appropriate in this study because the participants will have great experience within a sport development working environment whilst likely having similar undergraduate experiences as students looking to benefit from this study ensuring they are easily relatable to each other. The population study group that the researcher will be interviewing will consist of three individuals, either from a national governing body, a local authority e.g. sport Cardiff or a not for profit organisation. Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2003) explains that collecting qualitative data doesn't need many participants due to the fact that more data doesn't necessarily mean more information. This notion applies to this study and by gathering information from this side of the work experience spectrum undergraduates will get a believable and unbiased view of the true benefits and importance of work experience.

3.4 Qualitative v quantitative

There are two types of methods that can be used for research methods, qualitative and quantitative; both can be used individually whilst it is also possible to use a mixed methods approach, drawing upon the both (Hanson, 2006). Qualitative research focuses on how people feel, looking at opinions, how and why people think the way they do e.g. why they make certain choices and trying to find in depth information (Draper, 2007). Quantitative research is viewed as a more logical data lead approach which like qualitative data looks at the way people think, however, unlike qualitative research it attempts to measure from a statistical and numerical stance (Jensenius, 2014). Combining the two types of methods can often produce astute feedback when looking to learn about the opinions of a target audience for example (Journal of mixed methods research, 2007).

A qualitative approach will be used in this study in order to capture the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the individuals in question (Dawson, 2009; Draper, 2007). Qualitative methods are often used for smaller samples and to obtain more in depth information (Hanson, 2006), this was considered the most suitable approach for the study for these reasons whereas quantitative data would not apply the same level of depth of information. Reasoning as to why the researcher has chosen this type of methods is partly due to the fact that there are only three participants, making it easier to gather a large sum of information, showing that this population group is knowledgeable and they also cover all parts of the investigation undertaken by the researcher. By using qualitative methods it enables more flexibility in the research design, enabling focus on the meaning of key points raised by participants whilst giving the best chance of avoiding reliance on pre-determined assumptions of the individuals (May, 2000). In qualitative research the researcher and participant are thought to have a unique relationship allowing for the flow of rich data (Prashant, 2010).

3.5 Method of approach

Prior to the commencing of the study, an ethical approval form was required for completion. It had to be completed fully and considered by the Cardiff School of Sport Research Ethics Committee (CSSREC) who gave their consent for ethical approval for the study to be undertaken. Prior to interviews taking place, participants will be required to

complete an ethics form ensuring that they know they will stay anonymous throughout the discussion and conclusion and findings therefore allowing information to remain confidential and out of public reach.

3.6 Method of collection

Once all three participants have confirmed engagement and availability to take part in the study, through semi structured interviews the researcher will ask specific questions on how they feel and their opinion of work experience in relation to the benefits and importance to current undergraduates in a sport development setting. The interviewer will give time to answer questions, using prompts dependant on the question in hand whilst also giving the participant the chance to avoid any question they feel unwilling to answer ensuring a free flowing and information rich interview.

The researcher will collect information through communication with participants via personal meeting allowing for a relaxed environment with as little tension as possible (Dawson, 2009). Arrangements will be made for interviews to be taken in a familiar, quiet venue for the participant, encouraging free and careful thought to be put in for each question asked by the researcher. The participants will be asked to answer six questions around the subject, if they feel uncomfortable with any question they are able to choose to not answer. The questions have been developed and adapted from questions of interest to the researcher from recent studies on the engagement of work experience such as Russell (2014).

3.7 Method of analysis

When analysing data specifically gathered for the purposes of this dissertation accuracy is of high importance. In order to analyse data and information drawn from methods of collection, and as this dissertation will be using qualitative approaches the research will use thematic framework analysis. Thematic analysis emphasises pinpointing, examination and themes within data which holds high importance when looking to describe certain phenomena, particularly in relation to the opinions and views of individuals and groups (Bernard, 2005). Bernard (2005) states that this method of analysis allows for a simple

way of dealing with information. Once all data is formed the researcher will transcribe each interview allowing for highlighted areas to become grouped with other related findings from separate individuals. The highlighted findings will be used further in the discussion and results section of the dissertation (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003).

3.8 Inductive analysis

Thomas (2006) suggests that inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes or a model through interpretations made from raw data found by a researcher for example. Inductive analysis therefore has much contrast when compared with deductive analysis in which conceptual and theoretical structure is thought of prior to and tested through analysis. However, the researcher places emphasis on the importance of being able to change thoughts on the outcome of research once it has been conducted.

3.9 Deductive analysis

Deductive methods start with theory and a hypothesis to its data analysis. It can be said that deductive approaches takes the steps used by inductive analysis and reverses it (Silverman, 2000). This process, used in qualitative data gathering has an initial theory e.g. the researcher has indication that each participant will agree that work placements and work experience benefits students on an academic level. Once the theories have been tested via a pilot the researcher can draw together outcomes for each question and any varying questions and answers.

3.10 Validity and reliability

It is thought that validity and reliability are much more important in relation to quantitative data than when compared to qualitative data (Agar 1986). However when conducting qualitative research, further questions and generations of ideas come up and is therefore not just a case of creating a theory and proving it correct or false (Bernard, 2005). This information backs up the use of qualitative in this study as it allows for a more creative approach rather than a set in stone theory to be proven either correct or false. An issue

that may arise in relation to validity and reliability is the fact that the truth may not be told by participants when answering questions as it possible, however small the chances that an interviewee may not be telling the whole truth. However, with the option being given to avoid any question at will it makes it hard to see any reason as to why a participant will do anything apart from tell the truth when being interviewed.

3.11 Limitations

When looking at this methodology it appears to the researcher that there are very few limitations. However there are still certain limitations that may be important when considering future research with both relating to sample, the size of it and the demographics. Referring to the sample size and the fact that it is relatively small it is often considered to make the research less powerful (Draper, 2007). However, the sample size has been chosen by the researcher to be this relatively small size due to the importance being placed on the depth of the information being gathered rather than a broad range of data to be assessed. For future preference a larger sample would possibly benefit a broader range of people and the use of undergraduates and individuals in an early phase of their career could broaden the information generated.

CHAPTER FOUR
DISCUSSION & RESULTS

The chapter will analyse and discuss the outcomes and findings of the data collection. Sub sections will be categorised in accordance to relevant themes found in the literature review. The thoughts and opinions of the three participants interviewed will be discussed further in this section. Common/ contrasting themes will be looked at further in line with those identified in the literature reviewed. The themes have been developed to find out the value of work experience, looking at a variety of aspects including the importance it has and the effect it can have upon undergraduate students soon to be leaving higher education and looking to become employed. These themes will range from the definition of work experience to the benefits and importance of work experience for an undergraduate.

4.1 Definition

All participants were of the opinion of there being a balance between theoretical and practical based learning methods, employer 3 describing work experience as “A hands on approach to learning that can be applied back to the academic environment” and employer 2 suggesting that work experience accounts for anything outside of the academic environment. Bowrey, Clements & Chord (2009) take this view suggesting engagement in work experience enhances efficiency and skills in the workplace as well as learning within the academic setting. Although there is no set definition, the results suggest that work experience consists of working within an industry based setting with employer 1 suggesting “importance is placed upon the opportunity to gain experience within a management structure e.g. hierarchical”. Even though difficulties lie in forming a common definition, the respondents suggested that work experience provides undergraduates a way in which to understand the work place while building the bridge between theory and practice.

4.2 Importance of work experience

Suksomlert & Mujtaba (2012) and their research concerning work placements and the value of it, suggests that work placements has moved from being not only important but to becoming vital. This is a statement that a wealth of literature can agree on such as Hergert (2009). The Dearing review of higher education (1997) emphasises the importance of work placements engagement becoming more prominent in curriculum. One reason why work experience is of such importance is due to the fact that it allows an individual in an undergraduate student position to; become familiar with the industry, ensure they gain knowledge on the subject, meet potential employers and allow themselves to become recognisable to a number of organisations (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Hergert, 2009, Suksomlert & Mujtaba, 2012). This aspect is networking.

Huge importance is placed upon this aspect due to the fact that it has implications on the potential career paths of undergraduates. All participants agreed upon the two factors, the vitality of work experience and the networking potential. Employer 2 stated that networking is hugely important for an undergraduate, specifically in sport development saying 'every job I've had as been influenced by networking as a result of undertaking work experience'. Employer 3 agreed with this saying that work experience allows for networking, which has the potential of opening up various avenues. Engagement in work experience also holds importance due to the fact that it allows an individual to stand out, and that an employer can see this (Shaw, 2012).

Russell (2014) also suggested that work experience aids an undergraduate in a way not possible in an academic environment whilst giving them a competitive edge in relation to future search for employment. Employer 1 suggested that experiencing and actively taking part in a working environment advances an undergraduate above those who haven't done the same, therefore making them more employable. Employer 3 agrees with employer 1 suggesting that work experience allows an undergraduate to stand out from the crowd, stating that this shouldn't be undervalued. Results indicate the importance of engaging in work experience for a number of reasons, with huge emphasis placed on the aspect of networking and the fact that it can open up many doors with one employer suggesting that work experience has been the main reason for them finding the employment they have.

4.3 Particular work experience

Not being able to find relevant work experience was cited in the literature review as being a potential barrier to undergraduates engaging in work experience (Hopkins et al, 1990; Watson, 2012). Both researchers found that undergraduates felt if they were unable to engage with work experience in the field they aspire to find employment in then they felt it had no point. However, all three employers believe this to be false in their personal experience, with employer 2 encouraging an undergraduate to complete work experience in a completely different field. All employers found that individuals they were employing that had found work experience had found it within the same field of the job. Employer 1 explained that coaching would be a good starting point when looking for work experience in sport and particularly sport development. However, employer 2 believes that it is important for someone going into a sport development setting to complete work experience in a different field as this will allow them to develop a variety of new skills.

4.4 Benefits of work experience

All participants identified engagement in work experience as being beneficial for undergraduates in various ways. The findings suggest that all participants identified engagement in work experience as enhancing the development of key skills and personal skills. Employer 1 suggested that through engagement in work experience self-confidence is improved as a result of becoming familiar with potential career paths. Bowery, Clements & Chord (2010) agree with this finding with the view that through work experience an individual is able to gain an understanding of the principles that they will have to work with when they look for employment, therefore aiding the growth of confidence in relation with how to do a specific job. Employer 2 and Employer 3 both agree that basic skills such as communication and punctuation are improved as a result of work experience and that such skills shouldn't be underestimated as employers place importance on these basic skills. Employer 1 states that as an employer it is important to know that an individual that has recently got a degree has already had experience of completing full working weeks as this aspect of the working life can prove hard to adjust to for those that haven't done this. Therefore, just completing work experience can bring benefits to an undergraduate. As well as improving these key personal skills, various literature states that another major

benefit of engagement in work experience is being able to apply what is being taught in an academic environment and being able to act it out in a work environment situation (Hug & Gilbert, 2013).

All participants identified being able to apply knowledge and bridging the gap between theory and practice as beneficial to undergraduates. Employer 1 suggests that however much an individual has learned in an academic environment, it can be deemed useless without being backed up by work experience stating that “individuals that haven’t done any work experience will probably get brushed aside when looking for employment”. This finding holds importance due to the fact that upon graduating the majority of undergraduates are looking for employment. Therefore to get this employment, undergraduates are required to have work experience, so the encouragement of this way of learning could be looked at as an important part of education. Employer 1 also describes that it is easy to tell when an undergraduate hasn’t got any experience in the job they are looking to be employed in. Employer 2 and employer 3 both agree with the view of employer 1 that being able to apply theory to practice is important for an undergraduate or recent graduate when entering the work place as it allows for them to stand out, regardless of their academic performance in some cases (employer 3). Russell (2014) found that one of the benefits of engagement in work experience is awareness and preparation. Employer 3 elaborates on this suggesting that work experience gives an undergraduate an increased understanding of various aspects of working life with examples used such as how the specific industry works. For example, employer 2 describes this as a sport development student being able to grow awareness of how to work as part of a team, learning about the dynamics and environment. This point holds importance in relation to the statement by employer 3 that there is much emphasis on being able to apply theory to practice; without engaging in work experience, it is difficult from an employer’s perspective to see how an undergraduate can have awareness and be prepared for full time employment. Therefore, the findings agree on the benefits with the wealth of research identified in the literature review (Bowrey, Clements & Chord, 2010; Brinkman, Coughlan & Patel, 2010; Russell, 2014). For example, findings suggest various key skills become enhanced as well as attitude towards the working environment such as preparation and awareness of what the working environment entails. Although there are various benefits that come with engagement in work experience there are a number of barriers that need to be considered.

4.5 Barriers to learning

This section identifies the potential barriers that undergraduate students face with engagement in work experience. Department for business and skills (2013) found that one potential barrier to work experience engagement for undergraduates is that individuals sometimes lacked motivation and the right attitude it takes to engage in work experience or in some cases lacked direction. Employer 2 and employer 3 both elaborate on this barrier. Employer 2 states that the majority of students in their experience don't show enough proactivity in finding themselves suitable work placements. Drawing upon personal experience, employer 2 explains that as an undergraduate, the majority of peers didn't partake in work experience and when coming to employment employer 2 felt this gave an edge compared to peers. Employer 3 also cites motivation as a barrier, however expands on this with the belief that this could be changed through education. Employer 3 suggests that a lot of undergraduates underestimate the value of work experience and the importance of it in the eye of the employer and that this could be changed through education. As well as these mental barriers that may present themselves there are various physical barriers that need to be considered.

Little & Harvey (2006) found that many individuals involved in the process of work experience thought lack of pay was one of the major barriers. Although employer 2 can see why this is possible, the personal view of this respondent is that this is not the case for the majority. Employer 2 goes on to speak of their own experience saying "I saw the payback being able to gain employment a lot quicker than my peers. Peers on my course were still looking for jobs, as they didn't have the relevant experience so I actually managed to gain that financial hit". Transport became a common theme with majority of employers citing the barrier. Employer 1 feels that transport is a common barrier and experienced it as a personal problem "transport at the time, so I couldn't get anywhere at the time so it was just the university life" while employer 2 feels that transport is often cited as a barrier "Another barrier would be travel, so many students might not have access to a car". However, employer 2 has the same view on transport as with motivation explaining that transport may be difficult but if the individual is proactive enough then it shouldn't be an issue for the majority. The barriers outlined show various restrictions on

undergraduates ranging from attitude and motivation to transportation and economics, however, all participants agreed that if the individual has enough proactivity and can become educated to see the benefits, then for most part, barriers should become non-existent and the benefits can be reaped.

4.6 Criticality of work experience

Costley & Lester (2010) suggest that having engaged with work experience for an undergraduate is vitally important, explaining that it is equally, if not more important than having academic performance. All participants agree with this statement to some degree, emphasising the importance of having a balance of academic skills and real life work place experience with employer 1 placing importance on the idea that there are aspects of both types of learning that are only found within themselves e.g. the experience of completing a working week cannot be replicated in an academic environment. Employer 1 explains this “I would say that it’s fairly even really but there is lots you would get from academic studies that you wouldn’t get from a working environment and vice versa”. Employer 3 agrees with this statement explaining that a healthy balance is the most important for an individual, however goes on to explain that an undergraduate that has a relatively high wealth of experience tends to excel in the working environment in personal opinion.

Employer 2 also agrees with these respondents that a mix of both approaches is key to an undergraduate, however elaborates on this point by drawing upon personal experience as an employer on an interview panel. Employer 2 explains that when being on an interview panel it is decided beforehand the level of academic knowledge or academic qualifications that is the benchmark for a recent graduate to have to obtain the job. However, once this level is reached or surpassed, it doesn’t matter which individual has the highest academic level as the one who shows the most experience within a work place setting will be the one landing the job. This is an important finding due to the fact that many researchers have found undergraduates have a belief system in which they don’t feel that engagement in work experience will have future implications for them when looking for employment (Hopkins et al, 1990; Dupre & Williams, 2014). The results emphasise how critical engagement in work experience is for undergraduates and individuals looking for employment after recently completing a degree, dispelling any views between undergraduates that work experience is not worthy of their time or is of less importance

than academic studies. Bias towards a mix of both academic and work place experience is also found with all respondents agreeing on this.

4.7 Growth/ future of work experience

Literature suggests that in recent times the role of work experience has become vital, even suggesting that there is a possibility of it becoming mandatory within universities and modules for undergraduates across England and Wales (ASET; Popik, 2009; United Kingdom's government department for education and skills' white paper on higher education, 2003). There was mixed reaction from respondents, however the majority feel that making work experience mandatory would be beneficial to various aspects of working life and towards many people. Employer 1 stated that doing this would create an advanced workforce in coming years explaining that this would ensure that undergraduates have the ability to come straight from an educational setting and into a working environment, having the confidence to do this. Employer 2 explains that this is "not only very likely to happen over the next few years but explains that this has already happened in many universities becoming a successful and normal part of many modules and courses". Employer 2 agrees with employer 1 with the statement that this will improve many aspects of business, benefiting the individual and the organisation. UKDEG (2003) agrees with both respondents "Together, the government alongside higher education can create a more employable, efficient and driven workforce. Both employer 1 and 2 both have similar views on how to make this move towards mandatory work experience. Employer 1 and 2 believe that for this to become reality, a set-up has to be arranged in which organisations and university modules agree on what is best for all parties. Employer 2 states that this would ensure a clear path for an undergraduate to follow that will benefit their academic performance as the work experience will be catered for them while also providing employers and organisations with a way to benefit from the use of individuals.

Although employer 1 and 2 only see the positives in regards to work experience becoming mandatory, employer 3 has mixed views on the subject. The view of this respondent is that there will be both positive and negative aspects of work experience becoming mandatory. The positives being that those on the edge that wouldn't of done work experience without the push of it being mandatory will get an 'extra something' and thrive as a result. The negative aspect the respondent refers to is that it will have an effect on those individuals

that are against work experience thus creating a negative situation for the student and the organisation it will be engaging with. However, this respondent feels that it should be made mandatory and that in an effort to prevent the negative situation occurring, undergraduates would have to be educated in order to provide the motivation that is needed for work experience to have a positive outcome for all parties involved. Ball (2006) agrees with this suggesting that educating undergraduates will provide the motivation to go out and engage with work experience.

4.8 Limitations

Although this study provides a range of rich in depth data, the research process was not without its limitations. Due to timing issues there was no pilot study conducted. This turned out to only be a minor issue as the first interview went without any problem and lead to only minor adjustments between interviews. Sample size is considered to be a limitation in the research. Draper (2007) states that even though it is not the most important part of qualitative research, a sample size still needs to be appropriate to ensure it is as underpinned as possible. With only three participants, the study can be potentially viewed as lacking enough evidence.

4.9 Further research

One way to further develop knowledge on the area would be to increase the number of participants in a study. Increasing sample size would allow for the gathering of more data, meaning broader analysis of the chosen study. To enable future researchers to elaborate on this study, a possibility would be to conduct a research study that looked to quantitatively describe the difference between an undergraduate that has engaged with work experience compared to an undergraduate that hasn't. This could be done by monitoring a number of recent undergraduates and looking if there is a difference in the time taken to find employment between those that have engaged with work experience and those that didn't.

4.10 Summary

In summary there are many themes that emerge both in the review of literature and the data collection (interviews). For example, a wealth of literature agree that engagement with work experience is vital for an undergraduate, being effective at improving the growth of an individual in a variety of ways; from personal skills to being able to apply theory to practice (Costley & Lester, 2010; Primoz & Pymm, 2011). All respondents agree with this literature, therefore suggesting that work experience has a vital part to play in the development of undergraduates and that it cannot be understated.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to the dissertation, looking at the initial objectives and analysing if they have been addressed within the research study. The initial objectives of the study included assessing and analysing:

- The importance of work experience engagement for undergraduates (focusing on the sport development field)
- The benefits work experience/ placements bring
- The barriers to work experience for undergraduates
- Potential growth of work experience for undergraduates

5.2 The importance of work experience

Conclusions can be drawn that work experience holds key important factors for undergraduate students. The main theme found in the review of literature describes that engagement in work experience is vital and that it cannot be replicated in an academic environment (Suksomlert & Mujtaba, 2012). All respondents agreed with this point. Emerging themes were found in the findings, suggesting that work experience engagement offers undergraduates a chance to advance themselves ahead of peers while also gaining the advantage of networking and getting themselves known.

Another emerging theme was the type of work experience expected for a sport development undergraduate. All three respondents explained that any work experience including relevant skills to sport development such as coaching is deemed appropriate. However, one respondent explained that an employer would not differentiate between an undergraduate that has completed sport development based work experience or work experience based in another field e.g. business. Therefore, the importance is based on having completed a fulfilling work placement regardless of the field.

5.3 Benefits of work experience

The analysis of the data outlines a number of benefits to undergraduates through engagement in work experience. Various points emerge in both the literature review and the interviews. Both agree that work experience brings growth to personal skills such as communication and punctuation, with one respondent stating that employers look at these basic skills and place importance on them when looking for potential employees. All respondents agreed that a major benefit of work experience is having gained knowledge on the working life and the confidence in themselves to be able to apply theory to practice.

5.4 Barriers to learning

Respondents identified that motivation and attitude are barriers that they see in undergraduate students. Two of the respondents suggest that this is related to understanding and that a number of undergraduates don't realise the importance of engagement in work experience. One respondent suggested that a network should be set up between universities and organisations ensuring a clear path for undergraduates to follow, potentially allowing increased numbers engaging in work experience.

5.5 Criticality of work experience

Similar themes emerge from both the literature review and interviews with the majority suggesting a mixed approach to learning, consisting of academic studies and practical work experience. All respondents agree that there are aspects of both kinds of learning

that are exclusive e.g. experience of working life can only be found in work experience and not through academic studies.

5.6 Growth/ future of work experience

All respondents identified a need for work experience to grow and that it would bring various advantages for students, employers, businesses and universities. One respondent suggested that this could be done through a joint effort on behalf of universities and organisations. Both parties would outline how it would benefit all involved; agreeing on guidelines and creating the equivalent of a university module based on work experience.

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Appendices
Appendix A

<p>1) Definition of work experience?</p>	<p>There are many different definitions of work experience, what would your definition be?</p>	<p>Work outside of academic environment for academic purposes or for future work purposes.</p>
<p>2) Sport Development specific.</p>	<p>In your opinion, what importance does the role of work experience play in the future job search for undergraduates/graduates?</p> <p>What in particular do job employers look for in job applicants?</p> <p>What does an employer like you think/feel when you interview a potential employee that has/hasn't</p>	<p>1) Key skills built e.g. experience, motivation. (Eye opening).</p> <p>2) Networking?</p> <p>3) Do employers look at these individuals as potential employees? Examples?</p> <p>4) Does it make a difference?</p>

	<p>engaged with work experience? (Importance)</p> <p>In the sport development field, what particular work experience would you look for?</p>	
3) Benefits of work experience.	<p>From an employer's perspective, what do you see as the benefits of work experience for undergraduates potentially in a sport development career in coming years?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Academic performance, knowledge & experience. 2) Examples not able to gain from academic studies? 3) People skills... 4) Key skills... 5) Popik (2009) states that work experience has become more prominent over the years, how does this statement reflect your view from the time you started work up until now?
4) Potential Barriers.	<p>When looking at potential barriers, what would you consider to be the main issues in regards to non-</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Non Pay? 2) E.g. Department for business innovation and

	<p>engagement in work experience?</p> <p>In relation to motivation and direction, does an employer like yourself feel it is important to engage with work experience regardless of whether or not it is with a career that the aspire to work in?</p>	<p>skills (2012) suggests attitude as the main problem with issues such as motivation or lack of direction whereas Ball (2006) suggest that financial reasons is the main issue with his study finding that students were unwilling to participate in work experience due to lack of funds/not enough reason to do it in regards to money.</p> <p>3) For example, key workplace skills will still be there.</p>
<p>5) Criticality of work experience.</p>	<p>Costley & Lester (2010) suggest that work experience is one of the most critical points when looking at preparation and readiness for the work place, what are your</p>	<p>1) Is it vital?</p> <p>2) When compared to academic studies, how would you rank work experience in terms of these</p>

	opinions on this statement?	aspects?
6) Growth of work experience.	<p>Various literature (Costley & Lester, 2010; Department for education and skills, 2003) suggests that students, employers & organisations would all benefit from work experience becoming mandatory. What is your opinion on this?</p> <p>Why do you think undergraduates do not engage with this opportunity?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) True or false. Would this be a progression or not? 2) Something that universities would welcome? 3) Modules working with employers

Appendix B

Theme	Employer 1	Employer 2	Employer 3
1. Definition of work experience	<p>1. Definition of work experience: Opportunity to work in a work place setting with hierarchical systems (working with different tasks etc.) Hands on approach in a busy environment that an undergraduate can apply to their academic environment.</p>	<p>1. Definition of work experience: Anything outside of academic environment, however it could be structured or flexible e.g. some individuals may just help someone without there being a title.</p>	<p>1. Definition of work experience: Work outside of the classroom that is industry based. Also, something that compliments the academic side of learning.</p>
2. Sport Development specific	<p>1. In your opinion, what importance does</p>	<p>1. In your opinion, what importance</p>	<p>1. In your opinion, what importance does the role of</p>

	<p>the role of work experience play in the future job search for undergraduates/graduates? Gives individuals advanced skills compared to an academic environment, giving them skills that are difficult to learn in school.</p> <p>2. What work experience in particular do employers look for in job applicants and what role does this play?</p> <p>Coaching is a good starting point so they know about club settings. Gives them a good look at the market they will be working in, how to engage with people and working with the issues that sport</p>	<p>does the role of work experience play in the future job search for undergraduates/graduates? A vital role. Gives an opportunity to stand out above others. Generates references (allowing networking) and gives skills.</p> <p>2. What work experience in particular do employers look for in job applicants and what role does this play? A range of experience not necessarily in sport development for a sport development students as it shows a wider range of skills.</p>	<p>work experience play in the future job search for undergraduates/graduates?</p> <p>Enabling a student to stand out from the rest, particularly in sport development the value of experience can't be underestimated, with few jobs going to lot of individuals.</p> <p>2. What work experience in particular do employers look for in job applicants and what role does this play?</p> <p>Relevant experience that allows an individual to know how sport development work setting is. Also, just being able to do simple work necessities such as being on time and being able to</p>
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	development faces such as retention. Relatable skills to make you more employable, even if it isn't in sport development field.	Also, just doing relevant work setting skills e.g. office stuff so they get used to the environment.	complete tasks given to them.
3. Benefits of work experience.	<p>1. From an employer's perspective, what do you see as the benefits of work experience for sport development undergraduates?</p> <p>For employers it is the use of volunteer network. But for student it is an advantage on those who haven't done it and an employer will notice this. I think not necessarily the skills but the change in attitude that it brings and what coming to work means and doing 40 hours a week. Also being happy and</p>	<p>1. From an employer's perspective, what do you see as the benefits of work experience for sport development undergraduates?</p> <p>Again, the importance of networking. Every job I had was influenced by work experience giving me an advantage. Also, being able to apply knowledge (theory to practice). Communication, punctuation are all things that are important.</p>	<p>1. From an employer's perspective, what do you see as the benefits of work experience for sport development undergraduates?</p> <p>Understanding the industry. Networking, being able to get a reference for future job search. Communication, planning, basic skills that are needed in the work place. Also being able to apply theory to practice.</p>

	confident of what you have learnt and applying it.		
4. Potential Barriers.	<p>1. When looking at potential barriers, what would you consider to be the main issues in regard to non-engagement in work experience?</p> <p>Sometimes isn't set up right, so it's not worthy for either party. However, sometimes something as simple as transport and finance. A network should be set up ensuring it happens and so that everyone involved gets fulfillment.</p>	<p>1. When looking at potential barriers, what would you consider to be the main issues in regard to non-engagement in work experience?</p> <p>Related to attitude, proactivity, it is out there if you want to do it. Also complacency and not knowing how vital it is in the view of employers.</p>	<p>1. When looking at potential barriers, what would you consider to be the main issues in regard to non-engagement in work experience?</p> <p>Understanding of what they are going to, the might not engage if it bores them. Not having the motivation relates to that point, not believing that should do it (value). Also simple things like transport. But if they are committed enough they should be able to get work experience.</p>
5. Criticality of work experience.	<p>1. Costley & Lester (2010) suggest work experience is one of the most</p>	<p>1. Costley & Lester (2010) suggest work experience is one of the most</p>	<p>1. Costley & Lester (2010) suggest work experience is one of the most</p>

	<p>critical points for preparation for the work place.</p> <p>Opinions?</p> <p>Correct, I would say a mix of academic and experience is the best way as there are parts of both you can only get from it. It is critical in allowing an individual to network and make connections as it can also open up job opportunities.</p>	<p>critical points for preparation for the work place.</p> <p>Opinions? I would say it is important for a mix of the two. When I've been on interview panels we look for a base academic level so it's still important however once the base level has been reached the person that gets the job will be the one with the most experience will impress the most and get the job.</p>	<p>critical points for preparation for the work place.</p> <p>Opinions? A mix of both. They need an academic understanding, but if someone has more experience than someone else and has proven they can do a job then that speaks a lot for them. However a balance of both would be ideal for an employer.</p>
<p>6. Growth of work experience</p>	<p>1. Thoughts on work experience being mandatory:</p> <p>Yes as it would create an improved work force in times to come again referring to confidence in ability to perform their job and</p>	<p>1. Thoughts on work experience being mandatory:</p> <p>Very likely to happen. It has happened in many universities and is likely to happen everywhere as it</p>	<p>1. Thoughts on work experience being mandatory:</p> <p>Good and bad. Good for those that it would give that slight push and help them thrive but bad for those that really don't want to do it as it</p>

	<p>improving people's attitudes.</p> <p>2. How do you think this could be done? As you said, through an agreement with modules at university allowing for it to be mutual, improving academic performance whilst having a planned work experience engagement.</p>	<p>will improve the next workforce coming through, improving all aspects of business.</p> <p>2. How do you think this could be done? Well it would be made clear before an undergraduate starts a course through the arrangement between a module and an organisation as long as it benefits both parties.</p>	<p>would be bad for the individual and the organisation.</p> <p>2. How do you think this could be done? Through education of the value which would motivate undergraduates to do it.</p>
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Appendix C

The researcher is seeking employers/ individuals with experience of, working in a sport development environment, completing an undergraduate degree, employing recent graduates and working for an organisation that uses work experience students.

The data collection will consist of one interview lasting approximately 10-20 minutes; including semi structured questions looking at the engagement of work experience for undergraduates, focusing on the field of sport development.

I agree to participate in this interview for the dissertation looking at the engagement of work experience for undergraduates: a focus on sport development and I understand that I am able to leave any question I feel uncomfortable with unanswered.

Sign of consent.....

Participants signature..... Date.....

Researchers signature..... Date.....

