

Hospitality Placements; Do student's expectations meet reality? How do the selection and application processes affect these expectations?

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1. Summary

Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to examine whether or not student's expectations of hospitality work placements are met in reality. The aspect of the application and selection processes and the affect these have on student expectations will be discussed. The research will aim to discover whether there is a relationship between the application and selection processes taken and the extent to which students felt their expectations were met. The wider issues surrounding work placements will be identified and then related back to the affect they have on the issue of student expectations. The purpose of this project is to also identify any recommendations or changes that could be made to future placement processes to more successfully match student's expectations of the placement to the experience in reality.

Design

The method that will be used to gain the required data will be quantitative research in the form of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will also include an aspect of qualitative research to allow the respondents more freedom in their response, this will allow for the collection of important primary data. The sample frame of 50 students will aim to be surveyed with a high response rate predicted due to the easy and quick attributes of the questionnaire. The questions will be designed to gain the required information needed to meet the objectives of the research study. The data will be analysed in the form of charts, tables and graphs where appropriate.

Findings

The data gained uncovered some interesting findings in relation to this area of research. The application and selection processes were found to be significant to the student's expectations but no pattern was found regarding the specific nature of the application processes taken and the affect they have on a student's expectations. The results show

that the students are very much affected in different ways regarding these processes. Each individual has ideas and aspirations that they aim to achieve from their placement experiences and the strength the selection and application processes varies considerably from student to student. Other significant results were also uncovered surrounding various aspects of work placements including; the relationship between the university and the employer on expectations and students future career aspirations following the placement experience.

Value

The importance of work placements within the hospitality industry have been identified, both in regards to a student's career aspirations and personal and professional development. Therefore it can be seen that securing the most suited placement to the student is vital in achieving the greatest potential of the experience. Matching the expectations of the student to the placement that is most likely to meet them in reality will prove valuable in achieving career goals and personal fulfilment. This research study will aim to help and develop ideas and answers surrounding the aspect of the application and selection processes on the affect on student expectations. It will also aim to highlight any other significant issues and recommendations surrounding meeting student expectations of the overall placement experience.

2. Introduction

2.1 Context

The importance of a work placement within a sandwich degree is vast as the student gains many advantages towards their academic and life experiences. 'Placement is an important component of third level hospitality management programmes and is one of the most vital experiences on which graduates base their career aspirations' (McMahon and Quinn, 1995, p.13). It is important as the student gains practical industry knowledge as well as putting into practise theories and skills gained through their degree course. For students to gain their full learning potential it is important that the right placement is chosen for each student and they each understand what they hope to gain from the overall experience. A study on undergraduate placement experiences by Jameson et al (2006, p.368) found that 'for some participants the placement did not live up to expectations'. It is important to understand a student's expectations so that they can be met in reality by the experience. This is viewed as a problem area 'The major problem, for all placement students and their employers, is the differential between experience required and knowledge expected' (Townsend et al, 1993, p.32). Obviously the information provided to the student at the selection process proves very important regarding this aspect. The role of the university also needs to be taken into consideration due to 'widespread support for the view that higher education institutions play a part in forming and bridging expectations' (Kelley-Patterson and George, 2001, p.316). It will be useful to understand how the student's expectations are influenced by the information provided by employers/universities and whether this relates to the outcome of the expectations in matching the reality.

2.2 Overall Aim

The aim of the study is to examine and understand whether the decision making and selection processes affect student expectations of their work placement and whether these expectations were met in reality.

2.3 Objectives

1. To work out if there is a relationship between the information given about the placement and the specific nature of the selection and application processes to the expectations of the student in relation to the placement.
2. Explore the relationship between the employer and the academic organisation to determine if the strength of this relationship has an effect on student's expectations and subsequently the delivery of these expectations by the employer.
3. To discover if, due to expectations not being met, students career aspirations change direction following their placement experience.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The importance of work placements

The first aspect to consider regarding university work placements is their importance and significance in a student's academic and personal development. 'Placement is an important component of third level hospitality management programmes and is one of the most vital experiences on which graduates base their career aspirations' (McMahon and Quinn, 1995, p.13). Reiterating this point, Doyle (2001, p.16) from Springboard states that their 'research confirmed that work experience is the single most important factor in influencing young people's career choices.' The fact that work placements are valued highly in relation to a student's career decisions is echoed throughout other literature. Rayfield (2005, p.43) states the industrial experience 'typically assists students in making vital career choices,' and Jameson et al (2006, p.361) suggests that placements help in 'providing a basis for making career decisions.' This is only one of numerous benefits acknowledged from completing a work placement. Other advantages recognised include; obtaining 'an insight into management and management methods,' (Barber et al, 1997, p.106), 'enhancing employability,' 'identifying transferable skills,' (shu.ac.uk, 2009), 'developing skills other than those associated to academia,' (Rayfield, 2005, p.43) and 'providing a learning experience which can only be achieved by working for a company,' (Fowler and Tietze, 1996, p.30).

3.2 The selection and application process

Considering the significance that a work placement can have on a student's career choice and life decisions, it is important that the most suitable placement is found. 'In order for students to attain their "ideal" industrial placement experience a considerable amount of time and effort is required during the placement application process,' (Rayfield, 2005, p.43). Many different variables are present in the application and selection process, Sheffield Hallam University (shu.ac.uk, 2009) states their process of aiding students in selecting a work placement includes; advertising placements on the university intranet, presentations from the placement support team, help compiling CVs and implementing an online preference form for all placement seeking students to match their needs to placements. After this process the placement employer will then follow their own individual application methods of which there are a range of different practices, whether this is through presentations, interviews or workshops, or a combination of all or some of these methods. Townsend et al (1993) explains that at the University of Northumbria rather than impose one particular model on all students, they have now come to a situation where they deal with the student individually. This is because 'students have changed their outlooks and they now want to check out placements themselves and have very strong ideas as to what they want to do,' (Townsend et al, 1993, p.30). This is an important idea to consider with regards to the process in which the student goes through to secure a placement, how does the whole application process affect a student's decision making? The student as an individual cannot be overlooked as different people react and relate differently to each stage of the process. Barber et al (1997, p.109) regard the coupling of student to placement a challenge and claim 'Finding placements of good quality, which benefit employers and students alike and further the idea of mutual dependency is a constant challenge.'

Differences in the selection process have been identified. Doyle (2001, p.16) states that using 'assessment centre techniques to find your ideal placement student,' is an ideal method, while an example from Procter and Gamble (Townsend et al, 1993) explains their comprehensive method; they provide interview notes for the lecturers and they do first and second interviews; they provide job descriptions and students are asked if they would like to spend half a day, or a day, in the department first. Some employers, due to geographical location, will only be able to carry out a telephone interview. To what extent does the nature of the application process affect student's expectations of the placement?

'It is imperative that students apply to firms that are able to meet their expectations,' (Rayfield, 2005, p.43). This, it's been discovered, is not quite as easy as it sounds. It's been widely reported that matching the expectations and requirements of a student to the most suited placement/workplace has been found to be a challenge. Kelley-Patterson and George (2001, p.322) propose that 'a number of conflicting demands and significant differences in expectations have been revealed.' Related to this, Townsend et al (1993, p.32) state 'the major problem, for all placement students and their employers is the differential between experience required and knowledge expected.' Bridging the understanding between all parties involved needs to be achieved to meet expectations and ensure the employer and student gain the most out of the experience. Did the student feel there was sufficient communication between the other two parties during their decision making process? Waryszak (1997, cited in Jameson et al, 2006) suggests that the failings of a work placement can often be blamed on student's unrealistic expectations. It has been suggested that this aspect of placements also brings some advantages, 'it is argued that the clash of expectation and experience provides scope for personal development and learning,' and also 'the confrontation of one's expectations with the reality of the workplace during the placement is an important preparation for post-degree employment, (Jameson et al, 2006, p.361).

3.3 The relationship between the institution, employer and student

The relationship and understanding between the three parties, (the university, employer and student) has been touched on previously. This can be viewed as an important aspect to research in relation to the realistic views student's gain of work placement during the application process. Downey and DeVeau (1987, p.18) suggest it is beneficial that 'hospitality-program administrators evaluate and monitor their industry and academic ties.' Reiterating this view, to get the best out of placements from an employer's view, Doyle (2001, p.16) states they should 'ensure they are in regular contact with the college or university, especially the placement officer.' Although this is viewed as important some issues within these relationships have been documented. According to Downey and DeVeau (1987, p.20), there is 'substantial disagreement between hospitality educators and industry recruiters regarding the content, structure, and administration of internship programs.' This could be due to 'the complex mix of variables involved in organizing and running a placement programme,' (Townsend et al, 1993, p.30). Advice in overcoming this obstacle has been identified in various literatures. Townsend et al (1993) suggest; more

interaction between institutions of higher education and the employers and also that parties must become more open to criticism and interact with regular debriefing on the success or otherwise of student placements. The key party here is the student; do they feel that the employer and the University were partners in the process?

An aspect to consider as to whether the placement met student expectations is the involvement of the university following the completion of the placement. According to McMahon and Quinn (1995, p.15) a 'student learns from the experience through structured post-placement debriefing,' and Jameson et al (2006, p.364) state an 'apparent lack of reflection raises doubts as to whether placements are achieving their potential for experiential learning.' Do students feel that the debriefing from the university was sufficient in confirming the value of the work placement experience?

3.4 The student experience and expectations

Baum (1991, p.8) suggests that, 'The International Hotels Association (IHA) may have a useful role to play in assisting the industry and educators to reach agreement on the essential "core" competences.' Other institutions across the UK have also addressed concern regarding this issue, and developed "the partnership agreement". 'This code of good practice for the student, the college and the employer was produced through the co-operation of institutions in the UK involved in the education and training of hospitality management students (Council for Hospitality Management Education) and the Hotel Employers' Group,' (McMahon and Quinn, 1995, p.15-16).

There are conflicting observations on how the work placement is viewed by students after the experience is over. The 'quality of the student's learning experience tends to vary considerably,' (Townsend et al, 1993, p30). Rayfield (2005, p.43) suggests the 'general census amongst returning sandwich placement student is that their time in industry exceeds their expectations,' and research quoted by Fowler and Tietze (1996, p.30) shows that '82 per cent of those who have completed a placement valued their placement highly.' This is by no means consistent throughout other research. A study by Kelley-Patterson and George (2001, p.321) shares views from a student reflecting on their experience, '(I was) failed by the University – students should be fully informed about what they are being involved in bad or good,' and Jameson et al (2006, p.362) states that research indicates 'that a large number of placement students are discouraged from entering the tourism and/or hospitality industry by their experiences.' This idea is echoed throughout other

literature (McMahon and Quinn, 1995 and Lucas 2004). 'Poor impressions created by work placement may prompt hospitality graduates to seek careers elsewhere,' (Lucas, 2004, p.88). This illustrates that some student's expectations, prior to placement, haven't been met in reality as their opinions and aspirations change direction following their experience. Is this the case at Sheffield Hallam University and if so, could it have been avoided?

3.5 Career aspirations

With hospitality and tourism organisations facing a shortage of people entering into the industry, it is important to ensure work placements meet or exceed expectations. Doyle (2001, p.16) states 'as an industry we are facing a crisis in the number of graduates and young people coming into our industry.' 'It is predicted that there will be a shortage of skills in the next decade,' (Burke and Ng, 2006, p.488). A response from Baum (1991, p.3), relating to this issue suggests 'the link between college education and industry's requirement is the subject of particular interest,' due to a shortage of high quality management recruits. Considering this fact, the ability to match students to the correct work placement for their personal and professional needs is one of increasing importance.

The literature found offers few recent references. It is worthwhile in finding out why this is. Does this suggest that these problems, as outlined in the literature review have now been resolved? The research will be used to answer this question.

4. Method of Investigation

Following the ideas and anomalies discovered during the reviewing of the literature, research will be carried out with the aim of explaining how the selection and application process affects a student's expectations of hospitality work placements.

4.1 Hypothesis

The hypothesis for the study is: The selection and application processes do affect the students' expectations of the work placement.

The null hypothesis for this study is: There is no relation between the selection and application processes affecting the students' expectations of the work placement.

4.2 Primary Research

The method will be designed to answer the questions identified by the literature review. The research method proposed for this project focuses on quantitative research in the form of questionnaires. This method was chosen because a large amount of students need to be surveyed to gain the required information. Scheuren (2004, cited in Davies et al 2009, p.307) states questionnaires are used 'to collect data from a sample of respondents in order to learn something about the larger population.' In the questionnaire an aspect of qualitative research will also be included in the form of an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire. The mixture of the use of qualitative and quantitative data has been decided upon as both prove useful in regards to this particular study. The qualitative aspect of the questionnaire is important as the student will have the opportunity to express any points they feel may prove relevant to the study, as by using quantitative methods this would be lost. Brannen (1992) suggests that using a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods is advisable if it provides the necessary results for a specific study.

The sample size will be 50 students and will reflect a range of hospitality industry sectors and locations. All students will be in their fourth year of a hospitality degree having completed a placement in 2008/09 and are attending Sheffield Hallam University. The sample frame for this piece of research includes 50 students, this implies the size isn't very large and the sampling method doesn't need to be considered as all students will be surveyed. Distribution of the questionnaire will be carried out by using an online survey

tool (kwiksurveys.com) this will create a link that is easily sent to the participants via email or social networking sites. It creates a simple, easy to complete online questionnaire. The response rate for this chosen method will gain the desired number of respondents as it's easy to complete and there will be no need for emailing or posting back the responses, as the responses will be recorded on kwiksurveys.com and able to view under a login and password. The results can be viewed collectively or individually, which will allow for the required data analysis. In regards to the timing of the responses it's hoped due to the questionnaires being quick to fill out and the results being instantly able to view online, the required responses should be received within two weeks of the questionnaire going live.

In regards to the questions and the style of the questions used they will need to be designed to answer the questions identified in the literature. The questions will therefore be designed to acquire the data regarding; the significance of the selection and application processes in affecting expectations, the understanding between the university, employer and student and the issue surrounding career directions altering due to work placements not meeting expectations.

Mainly ordinal questions will be used to include ranking style questions and multiple choice questions as these will both prove useful in this area of research. In regards to the qualitative, open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire this will allow respondents more freedom in the way they choose to answer and could provide some useful primary data which will prove valuable for this study.

The chosen research method is both simple to administer and effective. The data will be analysed in charts, graphs and a tables as appropriate.

4.3 Ethics

Regarding the ethics of this research project the results will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study. No questions relating to the respondents identity (sex, gender) are required and therefore will not be included in the questionnaire.

5. Findings & Analysis

The aim of this research regarding student work placements was to discover whether the selection and application processes affected the expectations they had of the experience and whether these were met in reality. The findings from the questionnaire have uncovered some interesting and useful results in response to the proposed question. 45 of the total sample of 50 questionnaires were filled in, showing a high response rate.

The key topics and questions to be identified by the literature review were as follows;

- The significance of the selection/application process in affecting the expectations of the work placement

- The understanding between the institution, employer and student regarding the content and structure of the work placement, did the student feel the university were partners in the process?

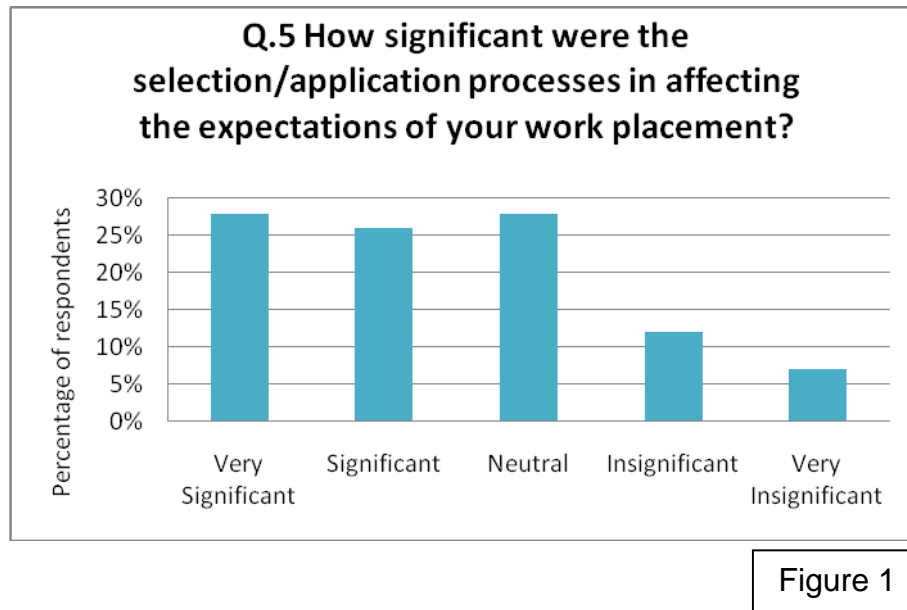
- The debriefing from the university, do the students feel that this process was sufficient in confirming the value of the placement?

- The issue surrounding student expectations, prior to placement, not being met in reality and therefore their career aspirations changing direction following their experience

The following tables and charts show the results from the questions asked that most closely relate to these issues that were highlighted in the literature review. The other questions will be used to further analyse the data.

5.1 Results

5.1.1 The selection and application process



The results gained from this question show that 28% of the respondents answered that the selection/application processes were very significant in affecting their expectations, 26% answered significant, 28% neutral, 12% insignificant and 7% very insignificant. This shows that over half the respondents viewed the selection/application processes as significant or very significant. This therefore verifies that these processes prove important in building student expectations of work placement. The 'neutral' result equalled that of 'very significant.' This shows that over a quarter of respondents felt these processes made no affect at all. 8 respondents considered these processes to be insignificant or very insignificant. This could be due to those students being focused on a specific placement opportunity before the whole procedure of securing a placement began and so therefore these processes didn't act as an influence. The student could have followed any process and still felt the same regarding their expectations.

5.1.2 The relationship between the institution, employer and student

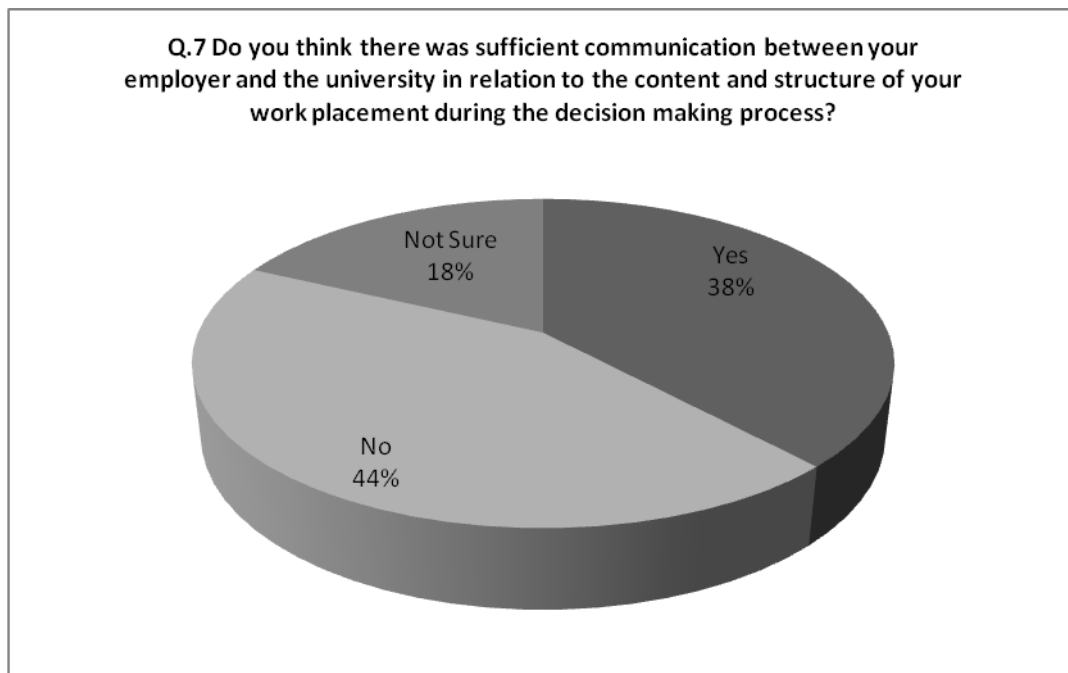


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that 44% of the respondents thought that there was not sufficient communication between the employer and the university in relation to the content and structure of the placement, 38% believed there was sufficient communication and 18% were not sure. The respondents that answered 'not sure' could perhaps be stating one of two answers; that they were unaware there was any form of communication that actually took place between the two parties or that they were not sure if it was sufficient enough for their needs. The results showed that 20 people out of 45 believed that there was not sufficient communication between the university and the employer in relation to the content and structure of the placement during their decision making process. This therefore highlights that this is an issue that could affect the expectations of the students not being met in reality.

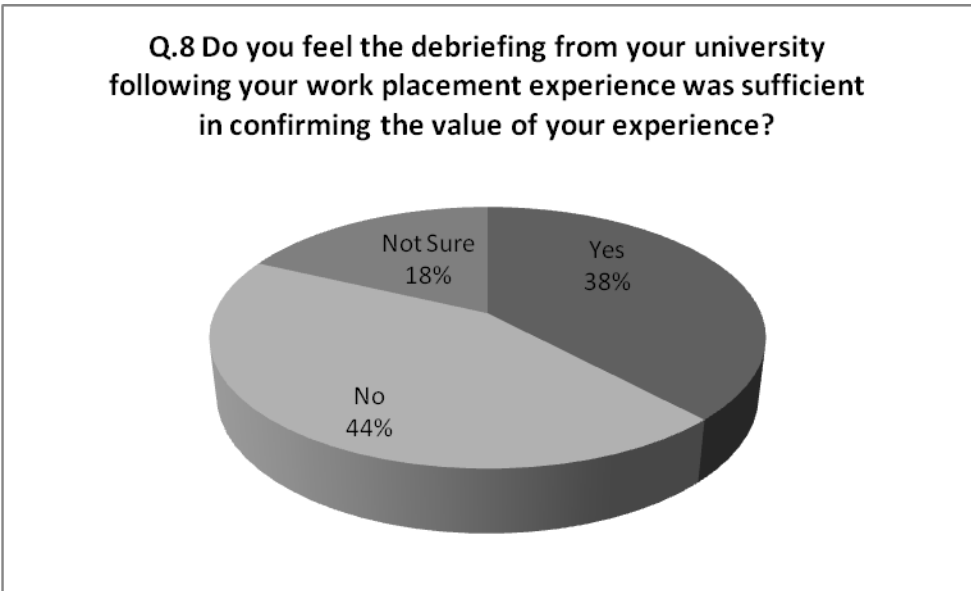


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows that 44% of the respondents felt the debriefing from the university was not sufficient in confirming the value of their experience of the work placement. This is the same percentage of respondents that answered no in the previous question, this finding is important to analyse to understand the relationship between the two questions. 38% of respondents considered the debriefing to be sufficient in confirming the value of the experience and 18% were not sure. These results again show a majority vote towards the negative answer and prove useful when analysing the results, along with the previous questions results, relating to the role of the university.

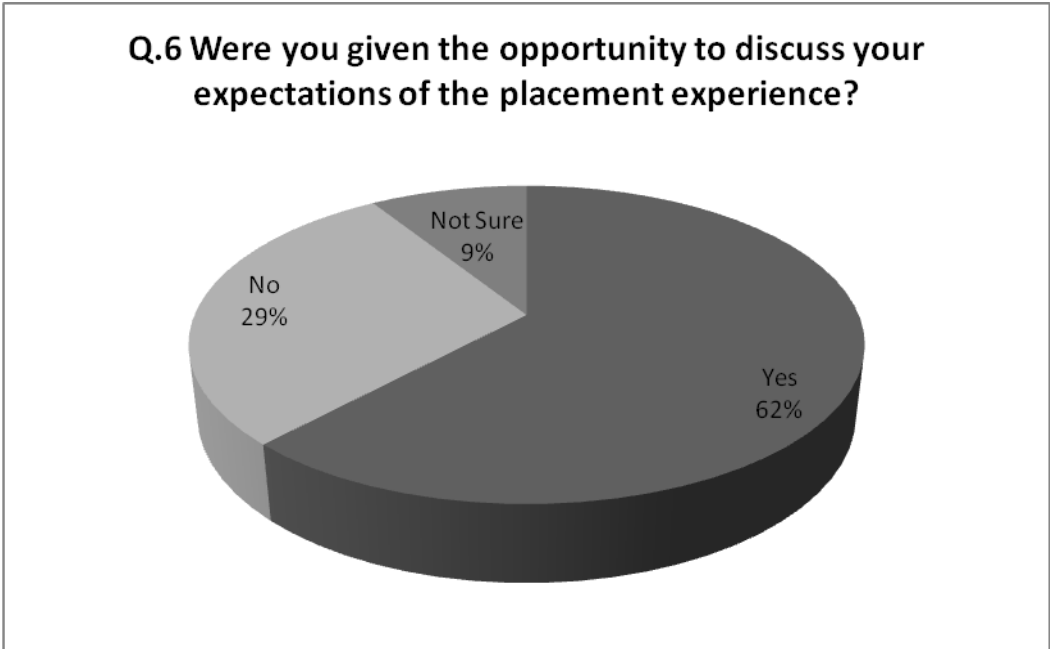


Figure 4

Figure 4 shows that 62% of the respondents stated that they did feel they had the opportunity to discuss their expectations of the placement, 29% stated that they didn't and 9% were not sure. This illustrates a positive outcome in relation to this issue. In further studies it would be useful examining exactly why the respondents that answered no felt this way.

5.1.3 The student experience and expectations

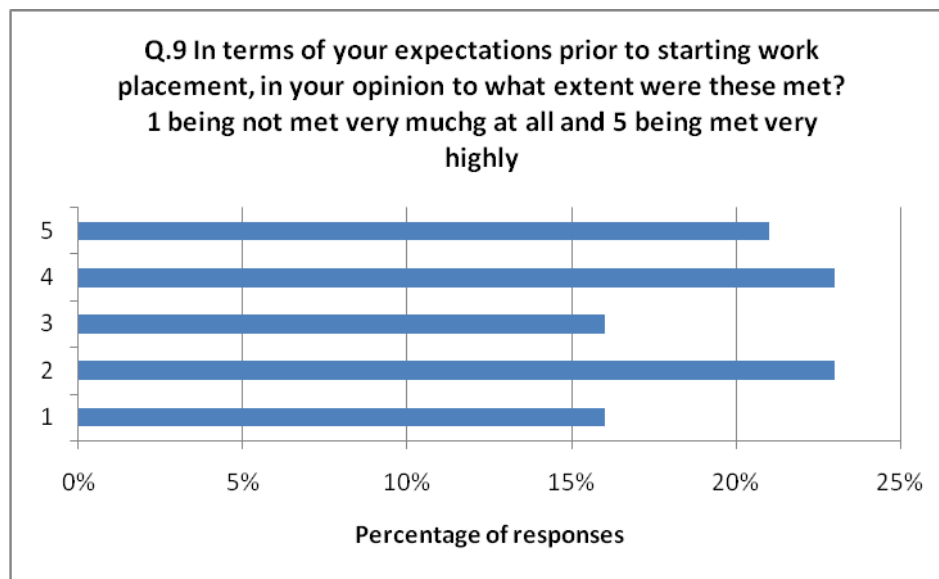


Figure 5

The results from question 9 have supplied interesting data. Figure 5 clearly illustrates the fact that the results did not follow a pattern and that not just one or two of the answers were popular. There is a very even distribution between the results. 16% of respondents stated that their placement met their expectations at the lowest level possible and 21% stated that their placement met their expectations to the highest level. Close to a quarter of the respondents answered 2 and 4 in relation to the extent their expectations were met. Combining the results from the respondents that answered 4 or 5 shows that 45% of the students felt that their expectations were met highly, showing a positive outcome. No specific conclusions can be drawn from this answer but it's clear to see the range of opinions on this issue.

5.1.4 Career aspirations

Q.10 Following your work placement are you still looking for a career in the hospitality industry?

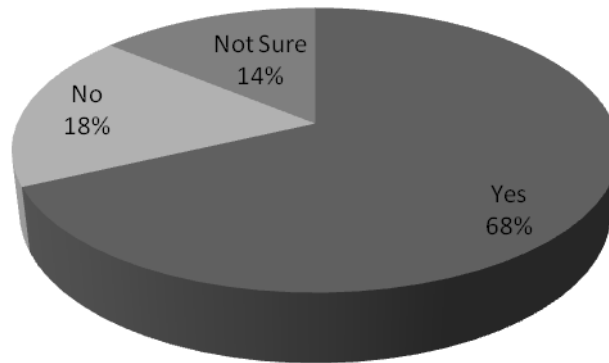


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that 68% of respondents are still looking for a career within the hospitality industry, 18% are not and 14% are not sure. This equals 30 people out of 45 still hoping to develop a career within the hospitality sector. This is a promising result and shows that considering the negative results from some of the previous questions regarding expectations not being met, this does not seem to have affected the students overall career aspirations.

5.2 Analysis

The analysis of the results will be organised in relation to the objectives set for this research study. This will help demonstrate whether the objectives have been met in light of the data collected.

Objective 1 – To work out if there is a relationship between the information given about the placement and the specific nature of the selection and application processes to the expectations of the student in relation to the placement.

During the analysis of the results it's important to discover and begin to understand any relationships or patterns that have occurred within the data. In response to the question 'how significant were the selection/application processes in affecting the expectations of your work placement? (Q.5) 54% of respondents stated that they were very significant or significant, suggesting that these processes do affect the choosing of a work placement. Considering this, there was no specific correlation between the processes that the student had gone through. The results showed a varied response with some people having attended an interview at the place of work, some a visit to the place of work and others an interview at the university.

These results suggest that it's not the specific processes that the students went through that necessarily affected the choosing of the placement but it should be viewed on more of an individual basis. Different aspects of the process will affect the student's decisions on various levels depending on the individual and their expectations. For example, students that wanted an international experience may have only been influenced by the location and not the application processes experienced.

9% of respondents stated that they would rate their overall placement experience in terms of personal and professional development on a level of 2 (out of 5). Interestingly all of these respondents were working in the UK or Ireland having attended a presentation by the employer. Perhaps a presentation can build false hopes and expectations within a student. Also this response from a student backs up this theory, '*the presentation (from the employer) had very little to do with the reality, it was an impressive sales pitch!*'

Of the 17 respondents that rated the overall placement experience in terms of personal and professional development on a level of 5, only 2 had attended an employer presentation.

Objective 2 – Explore the relationship between the employer and the academic organisation to determine if the strength of this relationship has an effect on student's expectations and subsequently the delivery of these expectations by the employer.

The analysis of question 7 (Figure 2) shows that in regards to the relationship between the employer and the university there does seem to be need for improvement. 20 respondents (44%) stated that they felt there wasn't the required communication between the two parties during their decision making process. Of the 20 respondents that stated no to this question, 16 of them rated their expectations being met on a level of 1-3, this showing a commonality between these sets of results. Meaning the communications ties between institution and employer may help the student gain more realistic expectations of the placement experience.

The results from question 6 (Figure 4) show that 62% of respondents (28 people) stated that they did get the chance to discuss the expectations of their placement experience. It would perhaps be expected that this result had a relationship with question 9, 'in terms of your expectations prior to starting your work placement, in your opinion to what extent were these met?' There is found to be a link between the two sets of results. 27 respondents stated that their placement met their expectations between the levels of 3-5 (5 being the expectations were met highly and 1 being not meet very much at all). This illustrates that around the same amount of respondents that had been given the opportunity to discuss their expectations of the placement rated their expectations being met on average or above. 17 respondents rated their expectations being met on a level of 1-2, interestingly the same amount of respondents that answered no or not sure to the question relating to the opportunity to discuss the expectations of the placement. Of these 17 respondents 11 had answered no to the question regarding the opportunity to discuss their expectations, showing a slight correlation between the results. In reflection these two aspects are seen to link together and illustrate an important relationship for future consideration.

Objective 3 – To discover if, due to expectations not being met, students career aspirations change direction following their placement experience.

The results show that 30 students (68%) out of the 45 respondents surveyed will still be looking for careers within the hospitality industry following their placement experience (Figure 6). In relation to the results regarding expectations being met and whether the

students believed that sufficient communication was made between the university and employer, which showed negative responses, this result shows that the outcomes from these questions have not directly affected the majority of the student's career aspirations. The issues highlighted by Burke (2006) and Doyle (2001) within the literature review have not proved relevant to this study as the results showed that the placement experience hasn't greatly altered the majority of students career aspirations.

Regarding the qualitative data received from question 12 this has given some useful insights to the issues regarding this piece of research. The replies vary from positive and negative and some recommendations have been made. There were only 16 out of 45 responses to this question. These students were perhaps the people that felt strongly about their placement experience either way and the people that didn't contribute were neutral.

Positives points include;

'I feel my placement experience was very beneficial in terms of learning about the industry at a highly professional level'

'I think placements can often be about what you put in, making what you get from it. So I would recommend doing a placement to anyone and just make the most of it!'

Negative points include;

'I felt let down by the university as they didn't make contact with my employer once in a whole year and only spoke to me once.'

'We were told by the University, "you get out of placement what you put in," this can only be possible if the employer is willing to let you learn the skills you need.'

Regarding these points it's clear to see the issues that have occurred. One student writes that you get out of placement what you put in but then importantly another stating that this can only be done if the employer is willing to let you progress and learn. This again reiterates the need for communication between the parties involved. Negative issues surrounding both the university and the employer have been identified.

5.2.1 Age of the literature

In regards to the age of the literature, key references regarding the relationship between the university and the employer include; Downey and DeVeau (1987) and Townsend et al

(1993) and relation to the student experience; Fowler and Tietze (1996) and Baum (1991) showing a lack of recent references. The results show that the problems identified surrounding these issues and therefore the successes of work placements are still true currently. These include the results from question 7 and 8 (Figure 2 & 3), regarding the communication between the university and the employer and the debriefing from the university. As well as various points that have been raised in the qualitative research used to conclude the questionnaire. Important quotes include;

'The university should ensure that the experienced 'promised' is the experience provided'

'Placement students were cheap labour, to do the jobs others didn't want to do'

This therefore leads us to believe that these issues still exist and are relevant to current practices regarding work placements within the hospitality industry.

5.2.2 Limitations

Of the 45 questionnaire responses gained there were 6 unanswered questions, from 4 separate respondents. This could have been due to the fact that these questions weren't relevant to them, for example they may have not actually gone through any of the application/selection processes suggested. Although this happened it doesn't affect the validity of the data received.

In light of the results, question 11 should have been split into two questions, one regarding professional development and one regarding personal development. This would have proven interesting as some respondents may have felt differently about each aspect. One respondent wrote, *'I feel my placement was more beneficial for my personal development than anything else.'* Perhaps placement is viewed as more of a life experience rather than a professional exercise.

6. Conclusions

In relation to the research question and the issues highlighted in the literature, the data gathered offers answers to both the hypothesis and the questions posed in the literature review.

The selection and application process

The results gained regarding the significance of the selection/application processes in relation to expectations perhaps proved one of the most important by the findings of the research. In conclusion the results prove that these processes do affect the students expectations of the work placement significantly. Half the respondents regarded these processes as very significant/significant.

In regards to the specific nature of the recruitment processes that the individual went through there was no link found between this relating to how significant they were rated. This is down to the individual and their personal thoughts and opinions on their placement expectations, prior to the start of the entire process. This echoes some of the literature reviewed (Townsend et al, 1993). It could have been believed that if the student had visited the place of work their expectations would have been more realistic as they had experience of the organisation first hand, this actually proved not to be the case and potentially this does not make an important impact on the expectations gained.

The relationship between the institution, employer and student

Regarding the link between the three parties, important conclusions can be drawn that suggest this is still a significant issue surrounding the success of work placements. 44% (20 respondents) thought that there should have been more communication between the university and the employer regarding the content and structure of their placement. This identifies an area for improvement to assist the student in gaining realistic expectations during their decision making process. Even though this is the case it is important to address the fact that 38% (17 respondents) believed that there was sufficient communication between the two parties, only 3 people less than that who stated there wasn't. This therefore shows that there were a high number of experiences that were positive as regards to the communication made. In conclusion, added effort does need to be carried out by the university in creating an understanding of the specific nature of the experience offered between themselves and the employers and to ensure the student

feels the same. This will therefore ensure the information given to the student from the university matches that of the placement program in place at the organisation, and therefore makes the students expectations more realistic.

The literature viewed the debriefing of the work placement as an important learning experience (McMahon and Quinn, 1995 and Jameson et al, 2006). In conclusion from this research this has been identified as another critical learning tool that the university needs to alter and develop for the future. 20 out of the 45 students surveyed thought that the debriefing wasn't sufficient in confirming the value of their experience. This process could have a great impact on the experience in regards to reflection and could possibly alter how the student views their overall experience.

Expectations

The results gained regarding the expectations the students had prior to placement and to what extent these were met in reality proved interesting. The results showed that there was a link between the amount of respondents that stated that they did get a chance to discuss their expectations of the work placement and the respondents that rated 3-5 in relation to their expectations prior to placement being met, (28 respondents and 27 respondents respectively). The same amount of respondents stated that they did not get the chance to discuss their expectations and also, that their expectations were only met on a level of 1-2. In the majority of cases there was shown to be a correlation between the students that had been given the chance to discuss their expectations and those who rated their expectations being met on a high level. Therefore concluding that if the students feel they get the opportunity to discuss their expectations, their expectations should be met to higher level in reality.

The various results illustrates the different levels of how the students felt their expectations were met in reality. As mentioned earlier, no link was identified between the selection/application processes taken and the affect the students believed they had on the expectations of their placements. This is unfortunate due to the fact that if a link or pattern had been identified then benefits would have been gained from this regarding the processes that affect student expectations.

Career aspirations

It's important that a hospitality work placement confirms the career aspirations of the student within the industry rather than altering them. The results from this research show that 68% of the respondents are still looking for a career within the hospitality industry when they graduate. This is a promising result as it was found in the literature (Burke, 2006, and Doyle, 2001) that in past years there has been a decline in graduates entering into the hospitality industry. 14 respondents answered no or not sure when asked about following a career in hospitality, it is worth considering why this is and what influenced their decision. To conclude the negative issues surrounding this topic do not appear to have been identified within this research as the majority of the respondents still see themselves developing a career within the industry.

Age of the literature

The results prove that some of the issues identified in the literature are still relevant to work placements today. These include the issues surrounding the debriefing process, the matching of the student to the most suitable placement to meet their expectations and the need for understanding and forming relationships between the university and the employer. One issue that was not found to be relevant was that of career aspirations changing direction due to the work placement experience. This shows that the majority of the issues found are still affecting the success of the placement experience. The need for wider research in this area is necessary to help improve and maintain successful placement experiences that meet the expectations of the students.

6.1 Recommendations

Following the completion of this research project there has been recommendations identified for future research surrounding the subject area of the affects that the selection/application processes of work placements have on a student's expectations.

Further research could aim to discover examples of specific student's experiences where they did feel that the communication was sufficient between the employer and the university. Following this the university would be able to understand and more effectively use the communication tools to identify the needs and expectations of the student and match these to the work placement.

Another point identified during the research is that this is very much an individual process that affects each student in different ways depending on their wants and needs of placement. Considering this, a recommendation for the future could be to try and identify what is important to the individual student in regards to the learning outcomes from placement. How can the selection and application processes be managed more individually?

As mentioned in the conclusions the need for development of the debriefing process has been identified by this research project. A recommendation for the future is to rethink the debriefing process following the work placement experience. This is so that future students feel that the debriefing from the university helped them in confirming the importance of the work placement and their personal and professional developments made from the experience.

Another area for future research could be directed towards finding out why 32% of the respondents were not sure or not looking to develop a career within the hospitality industry. This would provide useful information in finding out whether it was the placement experience that was the direct cause for the changes in career direction.

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