

**Title:** Year in Industry: Barriers, Challenges and Motivations

**Presenter:** Mark Sumner, Alice Shepherd  
University of Leeds

### Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Gain an overview of key themes in the literature on positive aspects of Year in Industry on graduate employability and academic performance
- Appreciate themes arising from qualitative work in two different academic disciplines at the University of Leeds
- Consider aspects of their own institution's information and support models regarding Year in Industry and the extent to which differential support is targeted or needs to be targeted towards students from disadvantaged backgrounds

### Session Outline

There is a growing body of evidence (Crawford and Wang, 2016; Jones et al, 2015) that completing a Year in Industry improves degree classification, graduate employability outcomes and career progression (Hergert, 2009). This project focuses on the under-researched aspects (Anderson and Novakovic, 2017) of how students decide whether to do a Year in Industry, and the extent to which there may be social mobility barriers to completing one, given that unpaid internships and lack of social mobility in accessing professional graduate roles have received widespread attention (APPG on Social Mobility, 2017; The Guardian, 2017).

The project is based on a comparative study between two very different contexts at the University of Leeds; the Business School and School of Design. The norm in the Business School is for a student to complete one, paid placement lasting 9-12 months during their Year in Industry. In the School of Design, students typically complete several shorter, often unpaid, placements during the year. Overseas placements are becoming more common, with up to one fifth of placements on some programmes in the School of Design in 2016-17 being outside the UK. These two schools could be considered as two ends of a spectrum of placement contexts, which contributes to the generalisability of our findings to other disciplines and institutions.

There is limited published research on Year in Industry in Russell Group institutional contexts. This study aims to contribute to the literature in that area as well as influencing policy and support models for students deciding whether to do a Year in Industry,

placement students when they return to final year, and non-placement students. This Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence project has included both quantitative and qualitative data and has involved student interns as co-investigators.

## **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

A short plenary section (approx. 10 mins total) is used to provide an overview of the common challenges that students could face during their decision making for enrolling on a Year in Industry module, based on the findings of our quantitative and qualitative work. Using this as a brief the delegates will be asked to explore these challenges to develop potential solutions to improve engagement with opportunities that support employability and skills development. This activity will last approx. 25 mins to allow reflection and feedback from the delegates. The discussion/activity sections will explore the following:

- What factors affect students' decisions about whether to do a Year in Industry or not?
- What barriers and challenges are there for students in taking a Year in Industry? Are these linked to social capital, in your experience?
- Does your institution target information and support (financial/practical/both) to particular groups of students to encourage Year in Industry uptake at your institution? If so, how does this work?

Our experience is that this topic tends to generate questions and debate and therefore we would leave approximately 10 mins for Q&A towards the end of the session.

## **References**

- Anderson, P. & Novakovic, Y. (2017): Listening to student views on the transition from work placement to the final year, *Accounting Education*, DOI:10.1080/09639284.2017.1315604
- APPG on Social Mobility (2017) *The class ceiling: Increasing access to the leading professions*
- Crawford, I. & Wang, Z. (2016) The impact of placements on the academic performance of UK and international students in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 41:4, 712-733, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.943658
- Hergert, M. (2009) Student perceptions of the value of internships in business education, *American Journal of Business Education*, 2:8, 9-13
- Jones, C., Green, J. & Higson, H. (2015): Do work placements improve

final year academic performance or do high-calibre students choose to do work placements?, *Studies in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2015.1073249

- The Guardian (2017) Ban unpaid internships that penalise working-class young, say MPs, 17 January 2017