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The role of placement in the narratives of computing graduates

Abstract:

Work placements and internships are included in university courses to improve employability, as well as for related reasons, such as improving skills and confidence. Placements and internships were highlighted in the 2016 Shadbolt Review of Computer Science Degree Accreditation and Graduate Employability – indeed the second recommendation of the review was “extending and promoting work experience”. Evidence of positive outcomes from work experience are listed in the report and elsewhere, however not all students enjoy equality of access to work placements. Since 2010, over 4000 computing students have registered to search for placements with e-Placement Scotland, which is funded by the Scottish Funding Council to work with employers to create paid work opportunities for computing students studying at any Scottish university or college. We designed a study to explore how students construct narratives as graduates with a view to considering the impact of work placement on their self-identification and graduate careers. The study was designed to explore the experiences of all students who registered and have now graduated – whether or not they did a placement. Initial perspectives were gathered via an online questionnaire in October 2016. The questionnaire covered demographic information, with a view to revealing some influence of students’ backgrounds on the take-up and completion of placements together with participants’ early career paths. A second phase will conduct working life narratives through semi-structured interviews. The overall aim of the study is to provide valuable information, to policy makers, academics, students, and employers, to improve the promotion and implementation of placements; but also to surface any real or perceived barriers to engaging with placement and other forms of work experience in meaningful ways. We will present initial findings from the study.