

Case Study 1: NCI Work Placements



Introduction and Context:

One of the selling points for the National College of Ireland NCI is its work placements programme. Currently, the college organises work placements on the Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate (PG) programmes (QQI Levels 8 and 9) in both the School of Computing and the School of Business. Typically, a student on the UG programme can opt to do a work placement in the third year of their course subject to guidelines. In the School of Computing, work placements (internships) are at PG level.

As tripartite, signed agreements between the college, employers and students, all work placements are with employers who advertise the roles through the college's career office, although some students secure their own work placements.

Unit/School	Programme	QQI Level	Work Placement/Internship Duration	Work Placement Start
School of Business	BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management	8	8 - 12 months	June / September
	BA (Hons) in Business	8	8 - 12 months	June / September
	BA (Hons) in Marketing Practice	8	8 - 12 months	June / September
	BA (Hons) in Accounting and Finance	8	8 - 12 months	June / September
School of Computing	BSc (Hons) in Computing	8	6 months	January / February
	BSc (Hons) in Technology Management	8	6 months	January / February
	MSc in Cybersecurity*	9	12 weeks	May - August/ September - December
Early Learning Initiative	N/A (Internship is paid, but not accredited)	N/A	Flexible - ELI determines requirements	Flexible - agreed with post-holder

Table 1: NCI Programmes offering Work Placements in academic year 2021-22.* At PG level in Computing, the terminology used is Internship.

Key Features

1. **Diversity** – NCI's increasing range and diversity of work placement and internship offerings. As well as credit-bearing placements within UG and PG degree programmes, NCI's Early Learning Initiative (ELI) also offers paid Internships for NCI students (29 applications for 5 internship jobs in 2021-22 year).
2. **Student Support** – Students are supported at different stages through their programmes in preparation for their work placements. Business and HRM students are required to take the Career and Management Skills module. Students may also avail of

Careers Support such as talks, CV preparation and dedicated academic supervisors during their placements.

3. **Dedicated Staff** – The work placement programme is enabled by teams of dedicated staff:

- a. the Career Development and Employability team
- b. Academic staff including the work placement programme director, Academic Supervisors, faculty and associate faculty.

4. **Feedback** – Student feedback on their experiences during their placements is obtained utilising tools such as surveys and focus groups and through direct supervisor site-visits and/or weekly meetings to students. Focus groups are generally conducted during in-depth programme review when preparing for QQI programme revalidation. The Graduate Outcomes Survey is more frequent and is sent out annually to all graduates at the end of a programme

5. **Quality Assurance** – This includes external examiner reports, reviews of grade classifications, learner feedback to lecturers, and surveys of learners as part of QQI programme reviews and revalidation.

The Student Voice

Student feedback about the work placement programmes has been overall positive. Responses to the 2022 and 2023 surveys highlighted three common themes:

- i. the development of skills for work and college
- ii. the acquiring of real-world, professional experience
- iii. the opportunity for personal and professional growth that the work placement programme had provided.

An overall positive sentiment reflected the feeling of support from colleagues in the companies and organisations in which the students did their work placements. Figure 1 provides a sampling of the comments relating to the three themes identified.

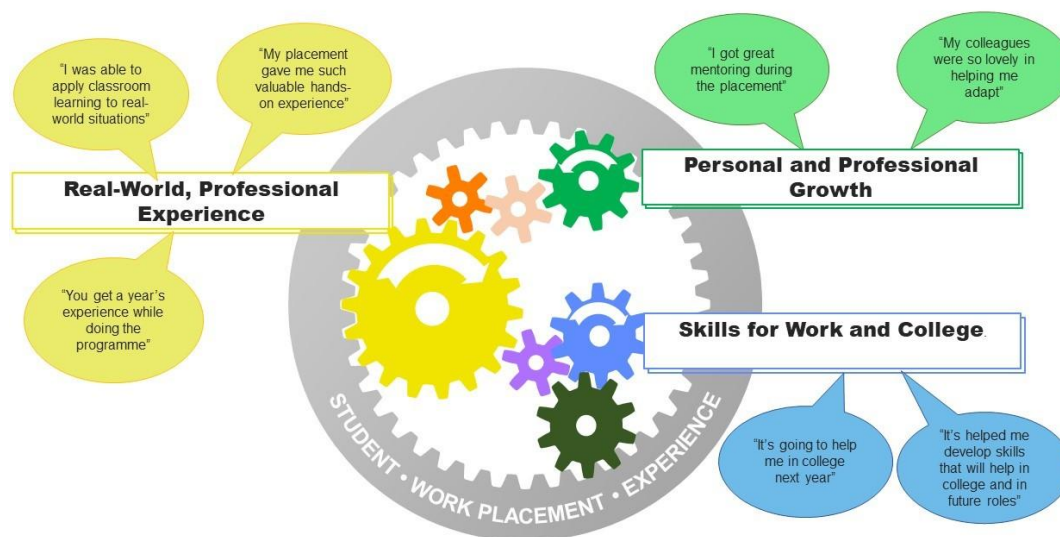


Figure 2: The Student Voice: Key comment areas about Work Placements (feedback provided by Programme Directors)

Graduate Outcomes and Grade Classifications

Data from the **NCI Graduate Outcomes survey**³ for the November 2021 graduating cohort indicated that the work placement programme positively impacted graduate outcomes and student grades.

Table 2 provides high-level information on First Destinations of graduates who had completed placements as part of their programmes.

Table 2: Graduate Outcomes - First Destinations following graduation.

		School of Business	School of Computing
A: Undergraduate students			
Total number of graduates from UG programmes who had undertaken placement	76	18	58
Available for work and employed in graduate role following placement		17 (94%)	51 (88%)
B. Postgraduate students			
Total number of graduates from PG programmes who had undertaken Internship		N/A	6
Offered permanent positions in Internship companies, post-graduation			4 (66%)

In the section below, Figures 2 (School of Business programmes) and 3 (School of Computing programmes) show First Class Honours grade attainment among students on programmes with placement options. The data presented does not include 2nd Class Honours attainment, however it must be emphasised that this is also an indicator of high academic achievement.

Figure 2: School of Business – 2021 % First Class Honours degree attainment among students taking placements and those not taking placements.

BAHACF	BA (Honours) in Accounting and Finance
BAHBMD	BA (Honours) in Business
BAHHRD	BA (Honours) in Human Resource Management
BAHMRP	BA (Honours) in Marketing Practice

It should be noted that 62% of the graduates (with work placements) from the BA(Hons) Human Resource Management (BAHHRD) and 80% of the graduates (with work placements) from the BA(Hons) Business programme, obtained their degrees with 2nd Class Honours classification.

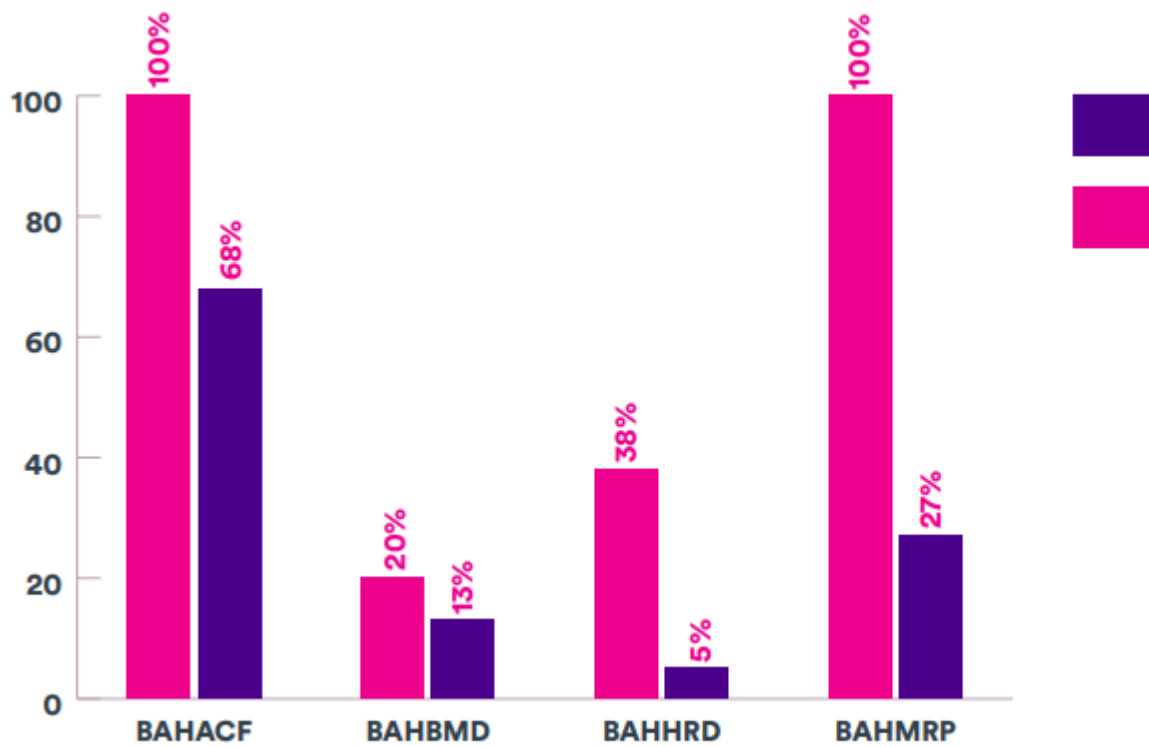


Figure 3: School of Computing – 2021 % First Class Honours degree attainment among students taking placements and those not taking placements.

BSHC	BSc (Honours) in Computing
BSHTM	B.Sc. (Hons) in Technology Management
BSHBIS	BSc (Hons) in Business Information Systems
MScCYB	MSc in Cyber Security

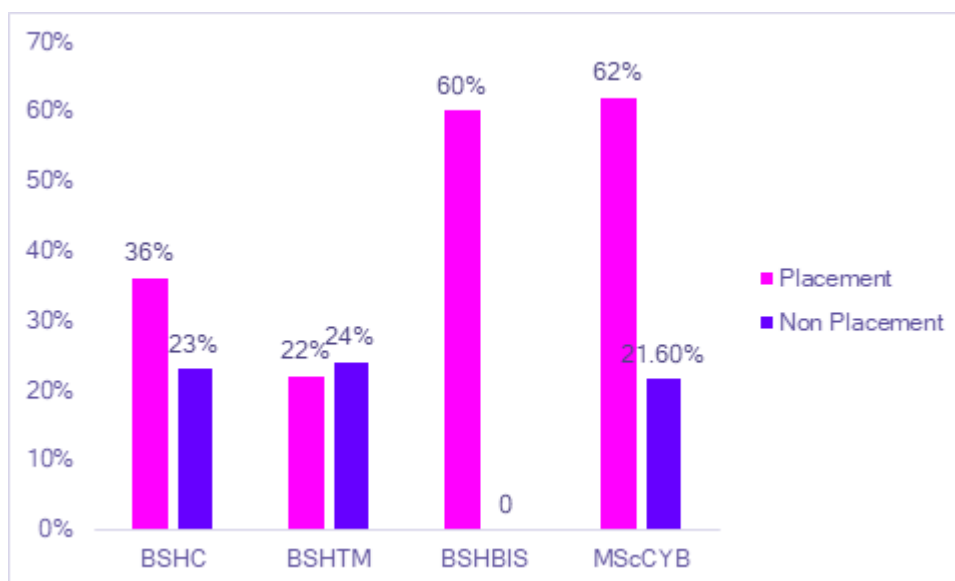


Figure 3: School of Computing – 2021 % First Class Honours degree attainment among students taking placements and those not taking placements.

BSHC	BSc (Honours) in Computing
BSHTM	B.Sc. (Hons) in Technology Management
BSHBIS	BSc (Hons) in Business Information Systems
MScCYB	MSc in Cyber Security

Lessons Learned and future areas for development.

Based on feedback from the Programme Directors, the following have been identified as key lessons learned and areas for future attention:

1. Automation of the tri-party agreement process would improve the administration of Work Placements, particularly as student numbers increase.
2. Promotion, student feedback and impact assessment are continually needed.
3. Resourcing levels to be kept under review, as the numbers of programmes incorporating Work Placements expands.
4. Where entry criteria for placements apply, keep these under review, in the interests of equity of opportunity for students.
5. Additional engagement with SUSI to streamline recognition processes for undergraduate learners (on SUSI grants) who return from Placement to their final year study.

Conclusion

Overall, the work placement initiative is highly successful, enhancing NCI's programmes and the student experience (demonstrated through student feedback, grade classifications and graduate outcomes). An increasing number of students are opting to undertake work placement, indicating a potential for greater collaboration between NCI and industry. We will consider a model of resourcing and service provision that is linked to programme and student enrolment planning, so that an expanding work placement programme is quality-assured.