

Stakeholder Perspectives on Internships and Volunteering

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INCOPS Report #2

Integration of Work-based Learning in
Peace, Conflict and Security Studies (INCOPS)



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Stakeholder Perspectives on Internships and Volunteering

Project INCOPS, Intellectual Output 2

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Integration of Work-based Learning in Conflict, Peace and Security Studies (INCOPS)

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The integration of practical experiences into university curricula has become a standard across various disciplines and study programmes. However, there is often still a gap between theory and the training of analytical skills on the one hand and practical experiences, which students gain at workplaces and during internships, on the other hand. Peace, Conflict and Security Studies are no exception in this regard, even though scholars and employers have stressed the necessity for a closer integration of theory and practice. This is of particular importance for programmes that aim to qualify for a career in the field of peacebuilding, foreign and security policy, or conflict resolution. INCOPS proposes a more comprehensive and systematic approach to overcome existing limitations. INCOPS develops and apply a tailored concept of the Work-based Learning approach to systematically integrate theory and practice in university teaching and curriculum development with a particular focus on the role of internships and voluntary work.

Project Partners:

University of Marburg (DE), Center for Conflict Studies [coordinating institution]

Babeş-Bolyai University (RO), Centre for International Cooperation

University of Coimbra (PT), Faculty of Economics

University of Coventry (GB), Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations

University of Kent (GB), School of Politics and International Relations

Utrecht University (NL), Centre for Conflict Studies



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Executive Summary

The INCOPS project examined the integration of Work-based Learning (WBL) in Peace, Conflict & Security Studies (PCS) programmes. Through eight focus groups and a multitude of interviews at six institutions across five countries, combined with a survey gathering 175 individual responses, this work package sought to scrutinize existing WBL methodologies and challenges. Central to this exploration were internships, volunteer work, and inclusive practices, particularly looking at their utilization and perception among an array of stakeholders such as students, alumni, and educators.

Starting with an explication of WBL and its critical role in PCS curricula, the project overview segues into an assessment of the necessity for WBL and the hurdles institutions face in its deployment. The study's findings, sourced from a detailed survey and focus group interactions within the INCOPS consortium's universities, indicate a widespread incorporation of internships in PCS studies. These internships vary in length, ranging from four months to a minimum of ten weeks, contingent on the institution.

The research also sheds light on the accessibility obstacles for students with mobility challenges (widely understood) in WBL engagements. Further, the analysis underscores the virtues of WBL in equipping students with tangible skills and insights pivotal for PCS vocations, whilst also navigating the complexities of assimilating such practical elements into academic frameworks.

In essence, the findings summarize the current landscape of WBL in PCS education inside of the INCOPS consortium, underscoring both its importance and the intricacies of its implementation. The overarching narrative advocates for a balanced and equitable approach to practical learning opportunities, aiming to better prepare students for the professional realm of peace, conflict, and security.

Recommendations include establishing shared expectations between students and providers to focus on learning, creating a formal internship

framework, and integrating WBL into classroom activities to enhance academic learning. Additionally, forging long-term partnerships with internship providers can ensure inclusivity, ease WBL integration, and align internships with PCS educational goals, ultimately benefiting both students' practical skills and theoretical understanding. Investment in such partnerships is urged, recognizing their contribution to the quality and practical relevance of PCS education.

Introduction

The incorporation of practical experiences into university curricula has become standard practice across disciplines and study programmes. Peace, Conflict & Security Studies (PCS) are no exception in this respect. Scholars and employers have stressed the necessity for a closer integration of academic skills with experience in organisations that work in the field of peacebuilding, foreign and security policy or conflict resolution.

The project "Integration of Work-based Learning in Conflict, Peace and Security Studies (INCOPS)" aims to improve our knowledge of the various types of Work-based Learning (WBL) practices in PCS programmes across Europe. INCOPS also aims to strengthen the integration of practical skills development in undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes in Europe. INCOPS aims to develop a conceptual approach, practical tools and evidence-based recommendations that allow us to make better use of the potential of experiential learning in PCS programmes and the classroom. The project aims at creating communication channels and synergies between institutions and internship providers. Furthermore, INCOPS aims to establish a network of partnering institutions in the field of PCS including universities and organisations outside academia. Finally, INCOPS will investigate ethical and security issues around WBL activities in the PCS field and will make findings accessible to our target groups to reflect upon new strategies of integrating applied experiences.

Therefore, the INCOPS project includes six Intellectual Outputs (O1-6) to achieve these aims.

First, a desk study mapping WBL in PCS (O1). Secondly, this report looking at stakeholder perspectives on WBL, exploring needs and experiences (O2). The third Intellectual Output will address tools of WBL with particular emphasis on an e-learning tools (O3). The fourth Intellectual Output deals with Service Learning as a model of WBL and an experience report on INSPIRE (Integrating Service Learning in Peace & Conflict Studies Internships, O4). The fifth Intellectual Output emphasises WBL in practice with regard to ethical and security concerns (O5). And the final Intellectual Output focuses on policy recommendations for the integration of WBL in academic teaching (O6).

Work-based Learning in Peace, Conflict & Security Studies

WBL is an approach in higher education which aims to merge theory and practice. It entails students working in or with organisations in the field both in academic and non-academic settings in order to gain practical experience while training their practical skills and reflecting on their academic skills and learning. WBL is often integrated into the curriculum and may be used for credit recognition. Curricula may include pre, during, and post WBL guidance and activities, involving preparatory and reflective structures, supervision or mentoring mechanisms, as well as assessment and evaluation processes. Consequently, well-integrated WBL results in new educational resources, new impressions, networks, innovative ideas and critical reflection on the applicability of theories that were taught in an academic context. WBL also brings together different stakeholders such as educators, students and professional organisations.

The analysis undertaken in O1 suggests that WBL activities are of increasing relevance to both, more practice-oriented and more theory-driven PCS programmes. Over half of the approximately 100 programmes listed in the INCOPS database (see O1) offer significant WBL courses at this point. Programs often intentionally but also indirectly offer diverse “starting-points” for

integrating WBL activities in order to have students gain practical insights and advanced understanding of the field. There seems to be almost a consensus that students should gain more or less diverse work experience(s) while studying.

WBL can be considered topical based on considerations and aspirations for instance by the European Training Foundation (ETF), the European Commission via the Bologna Process or the New Skill Agenda for Europe (2016) which is closely related to the Erasmus+ programmes. Likewise, the UNESCO Recommendations concerning Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) (2015) suggests that WBL is considered an important component of education.

While WBL can be part of non-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary projects (cf. Orrell, 2011), it is integrated in a number of specific disciplines. Due to its interdisciplinary character, PCS offers a variety of perspectives to be addressed by WBL activities, including sociological, historical, philosophical, psychological, cultural, religious, political, anthropological, gender and linguistic perspectives (cf. Gross, 2017).

WBL in PCS programmes is often related to activities in peace education (cf. Alger, 1989; Bacani, 2004; Bing, 1989; Bretherton & Tyler, 2007; Cunliffe, 2017; Gross, 2017) and conflict resolution (cf. Katz, 1989). PCS programmes are also valued for being a public good where culture, ideals and aspirations are safeguarded for civilization thus being of value to society more generally. The aim of WBL in PCS is to integrate theory and practice more efficiently and extract the greatest value for the field (cf. Gross, 2017, p. 4). In PCS, integrated WBL activities should enable students to cross into conflict transformation and peacebuilding through professional preparation (cf. Cunliffe, 2017), as well as managing conflict in a nonviolent way (cf. Bacani, 2004).

The literature refers to different forms of WBL, among others internships (cf. Bretherton & Tyler, 2007), international students’ placements and community youth work (cf. McArdle & Pat, 2018), as well as curricular integrated WBL offering peace education (cf. Bacani, 2004; Bing, 1989). Other forms of WBL in PCS embrace for example forums, roundtable discussions and celebration of certain peace-related anniversaries (cf.

Bacani, 2004). WBL in PCS may also focus on specific fieldwork projects or initiatives (cf. Bacani, 2004) or volunteering.

Methodology, data, and basic description of the sample

This report is based on qualitative data based on eight focus groups and a number of qualitative interviews which were conducted across six institutions in five countries (see the appendix II for details) as well as descriptive statistics based on the INCOPS survey which was fielded at all six institutions. Focus groups were based on a common question guide which included questions on internships, volunteering, and inclusion whereby partners at Cluj, Coimbra, and Utrecht focussed on internships, Marburg on volunteering, and Kent on volunteering and internships. Coventry's student body consists of learner-practitioners who often have many years of work experience in PCS organisations. Coventry therefore explored learning of practitioner-learners. The cross-cutting issue of inclusion was addressed by all partners to an extent. Partners selected questions which were most relevant to their focus group, taking into account the range of stakeholders present. Stakeholders include students, alumni, teaching staff, administrative staff, and internship providers.

We proceeded with the focus groups in three steps. Coimbra, ran the first focus groups and delivered results at a project meeting. There, the "pilot" results and questionnaire (see appendix I) were discussed. Cluj, Coventry, Marburg, and Utrecht then ran their focus groups. Based on the analysis of the results Kent conducted focus group and detailed qualitative interviews to get at points that either had not been addressed or that needed clarification through more detailed interviews of stakeholders with specific sets of experience (e.g. students who had done volunteering as well as undergraduate and postgraduate internships).

In addition, a survey was developed based on insights from our focus groups and aimed at getting a better understanding of how prevalent certain ideas discovered during focus groups

and qualitative interviews are in the wider student population at the six universities participating in the INCOPS project. The survey was fielded at all universities that participate in INCOPS and was open to all students studying PCS widely defined (e.g. including students of International Relations). The analysis is based on 175 responses whereby students at Kent and Marburg dominate the survey, accounting for 37% and 34% of respondents respectively. Over two thirds of the respondents are female. In terms of ethnicity 17% of respondents describe themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority while 8% describe themselves as having a disability. In terms of the level of study the largest category (mode) are students in their second year of the MA (figure 1).

The median disposable income of respondents fell into the category of Euros 501-750 per month with 61% of students falling into disposable income categories of Euros 0-750 per month (figure 2). In terms of employment, 36% of students say that they do not work at all during their studies (mode) while the median student works 1-10 hours a week. A surprisingly high 55% of students say that they have been employed previously fulltime for six months or more. Finally, as far as WBL is concerned, and regarding the number of internships respondents had done the mode was 0 and the median was 1 with 36% of respondents (62 respondents) having done no internship, 36% (61 respondents) having done one internship, and 28% of respondents having done two or more internships. Moving on to subgroups of the sample, there is a clear gender imbalance with only 29% of female students not having done an internship while 49% of male

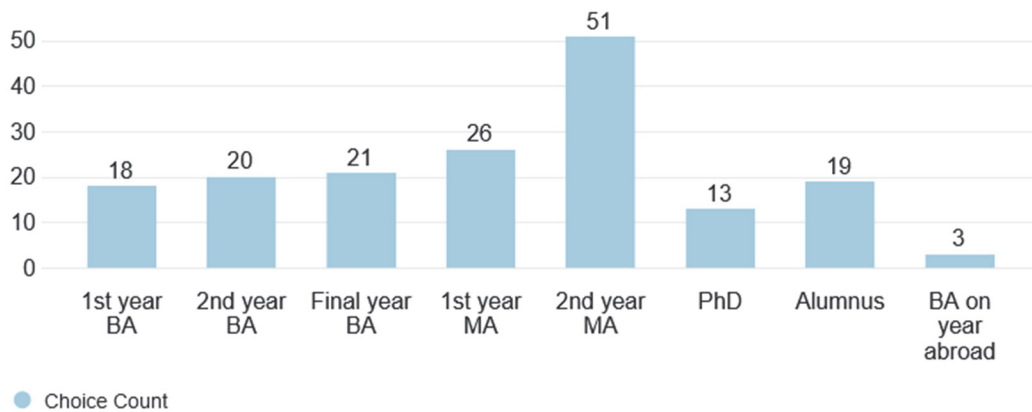
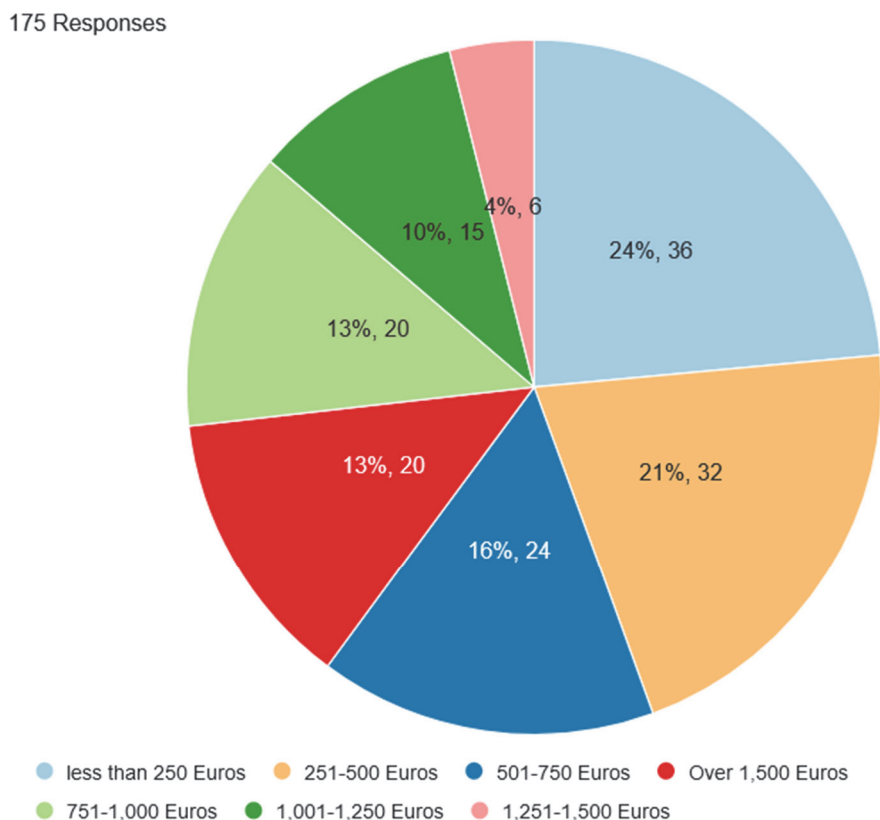


Figure 1: Level of study of respondents

students had not done an internship. For MA students, this gap is reduced with 24% of male students not having done an internship while only 16% of female students had not done an internship. For the full sample, the gender gap narrows to 4% when just looking at students who had done multiple internships. Among students who preferred to self-identify 50% had not done an internship, however, the number of respondents who self-identified is very small and hence the percentages may not at all be indicative for the

larger population. Among students who described themselves as having a disability 71% had not done an internship as part of their studies. This result is partially due to the fact that this category of respondents is skewed towards first year BA students who will not usually have had an opportunity to do an internship as part of their studies. Excluding first year BA students results in 56% of students who describe themselves as having a disability not having done an internship. Among students who described themselves as

Figure 2: Disposable income of respondents



belonging to an ethnic minority 41% had done no internship but 34% had done two or more internships, and 24% had done one internship. Regarding income, there is no straight forward relationship between income categories and the incidences of volunteering. Graphically, the relationship approximates a horizontal s-shaped line. Without a regression analysis, which may be difficult given the number of responses and required controls, little can be said about this relationship.¹

Overall, the aspects to note are the strongly female dominated sample which is probably representative of the body of students in PCS, the high percentage of students who had previously been in fulltime employment, the gender imbalance when it comes to how many internships students had done, and the much higher percentage of students who describe themselves as having a disability and reported that they had not done an internship as part of their studies. We have to be cautious when drawing conclusions since these are descriptive statistics and no controls were employed.

The project intended to look at inclusion understood widely in terms of economic, legal, social, or disability related challenges to mobility. We managed to do so to some degree, however, the recruitment of students for focus groups who can speak to these obstacles to mobility turned out to be a major challenge that proved impossible to completely overcome. In the UK, for example, information on protected characteristics is collected separately from other student information. And there is no readily available information on students' economic or social situation.

We can gather some insights regarding inclusion from the survey but even here we are limited. For example, fourteen students described themselves as having a disability. This is not a sufficient number of responses to make meaningful comparisons, especially since the sample gets split into those who have and those who

have not done internships or volunteering. Moreover, the disability category is skewed towards Kent students (50% of respondents) and first year BA students (37%). Where appropriate, we will report results related to inclusion relevant categories throughout the text and in the discussion section.

Results: focus groups and qualitative interviews – internship

Internship – minimum duration to facilitate WBL

The programmes at universities participating in this project feature internships of various lengths. At Coimbra, for example, curricular internships (i.e. internships that are a compulsory part of the degree) are required to last four consecutive months while the internship for the joint MA at Kent and Marburg is required to last at least ten weeks. The German MA programme in Marburg foresees a mandatory internship of twelve weeks. At Utrecht the internship is an optional track within the programme and has a minimum duration of ten weeks. The minimum internship duration at Cluj is three weeks. Among the INCOPS survey respondents the typical length (mode) of an internship was 12 weeks. The question arises as to what the minimum length of an internship ideally ought to be, in order to allow meaningful WBL, including skills development.

The focus group discussions (Coimbra, Cluj) suggest that stakeholders mostly agree that the ideal minimum duration of an internship is three months. It was suggested that three months are necessary to properly develop skills and for meaningful tasks to be implemented. It is worth noting that a number of students felt that a ten-

¹ If we compare the percentage of MA students only who did not do any internship and reported incomes below the median (Euros 0-500) with the percentage of students who did not do any internship and report incomes above the median (Euro 751- ∞) we find that only 13% of the former and 17% of the latter undertook no internship. We would, however, still have to take gender, university, previous work experience, academic achievement, etc. into account to come to a conclusion.

172 Responses

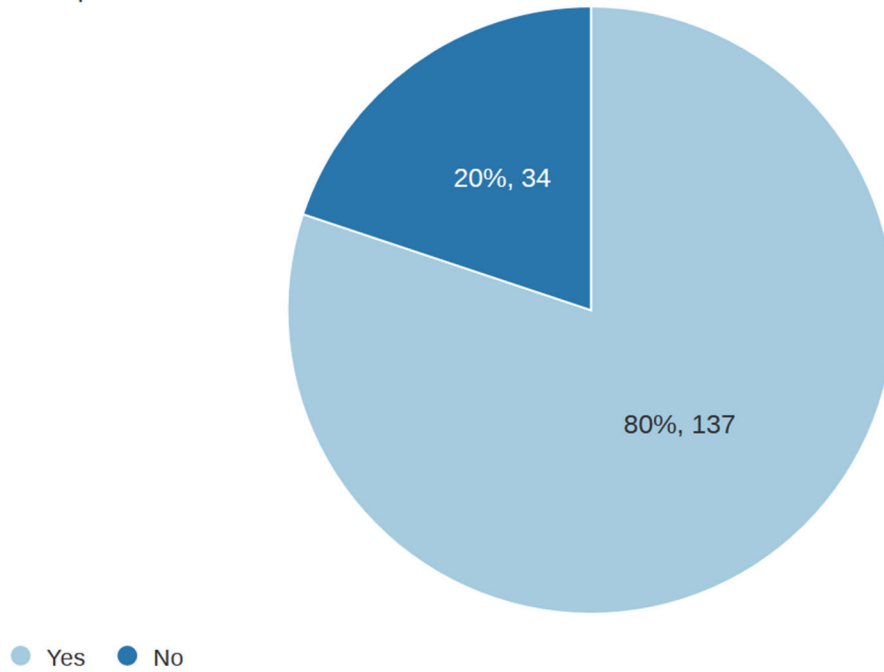


Figure 3: Percentage of students who had applied for an internship

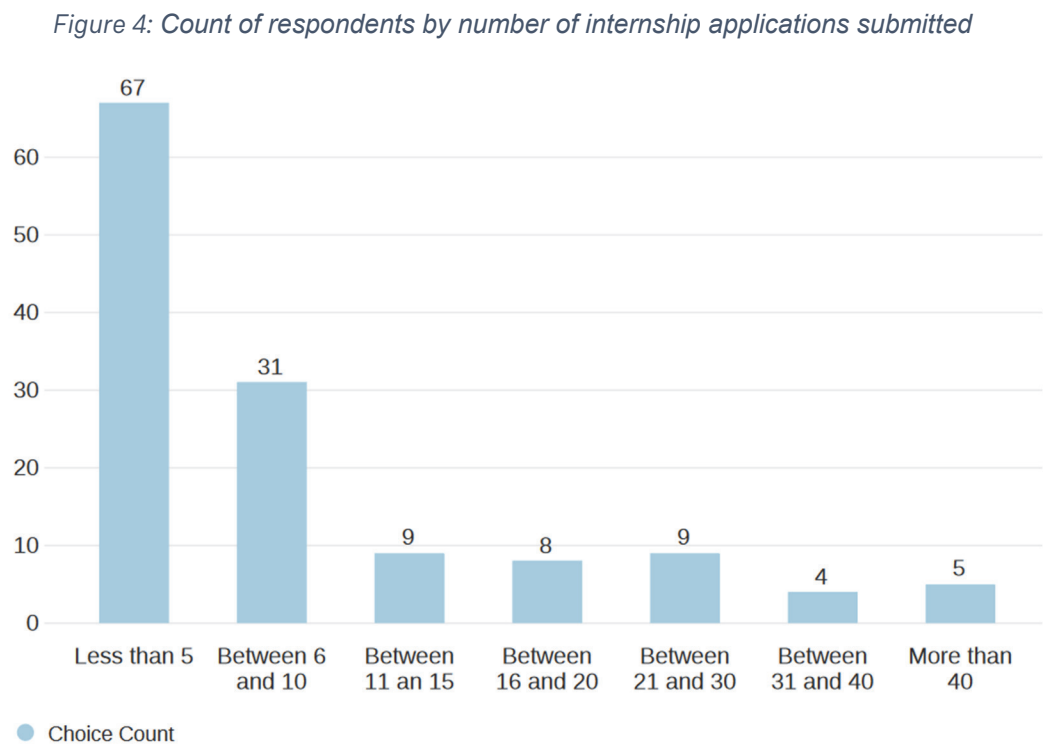


Figure 4: Count of respondents by number of internship applications submitted

week internship is too short (Utrecht). The focus group discussions also stressed that despite the ideal minimum duration being three months, WBL of almost any length is better than no WBL at all. This is because any exposure to a non-academic environment is seen as important, contributing to the students' learning process. Additionally, the optimal duration depends on the expected outcomes and the objectives to be achieved and is thus somewhat context specific (Coimbra).

Pre-internship: Preparation for the internships

We can consider different aspects of preparedness and preparations for an internship. This extends to skills as well as procedures and information. With regards to students' skills some of the focus group results suggest that students often bring the following skills to the table when they commence their internships: capacity to adapt, competence in critical analysis, theoretical subject knowledge, capacity to learn. A number of internship providers also felt that one of students' strengths was their abilities to manage

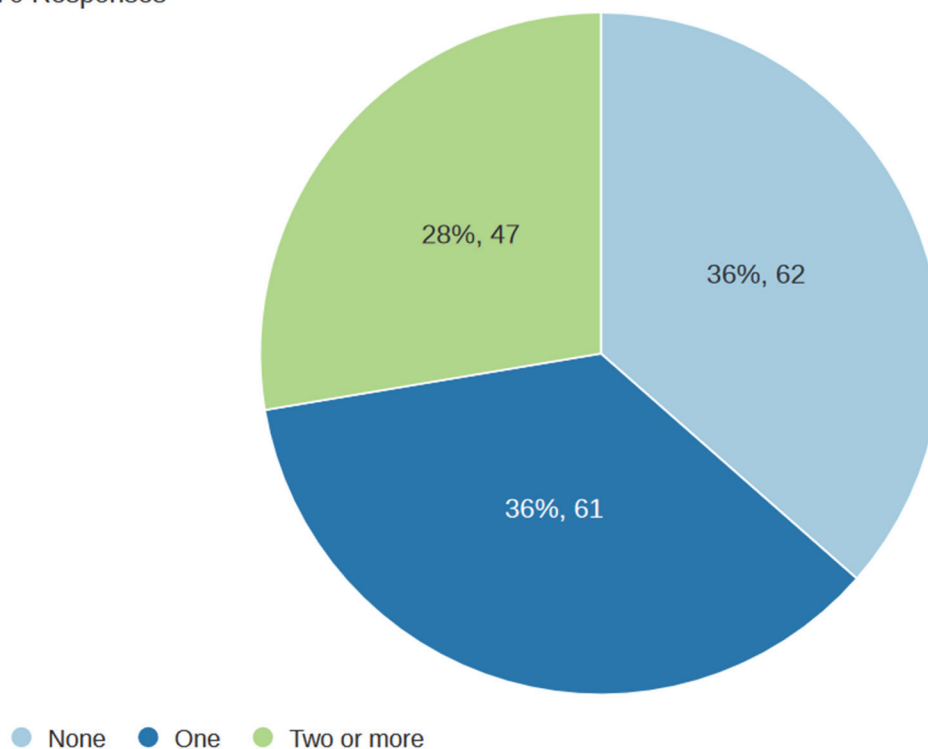
social networks (Coimbra), although some students felt that they learned this skill during their internships and felt that there was a lack of training related to these skills in the academic curriculum (Utrecht). The skills students frequently lack according to internship providers are soft skills, skills related to software such as Excel and SPSS, knowledge of databases, knowledge of textual analysis, and knowledge of relevant domestic legislation.

Another aspect of preparing for the internship is related to securing the internship in the first place. A number of points emerged from the focus groups, including some related to inclusion. Securing an internship and passing through the application and interview stages is a useful WBL experience in itself and requires a number of skills such as communication skills as well as being proactive. In the process amongst others organisational and self-presentation skills and other aspects of students' CVs are assessed which arguably provides valuable feedback and information to students.

It is probably a universal truth that students find it difficult to secure internships. Among the

Figure 3: Percentage of students who secured internships

170 Responses



97 Responses

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Median
An internship adds to the time it takes to complete my degree	1.00	10.00	5.78	6.00
Doing an internship means that I have less time to work in order to finance my studies.	1.00	10.00	5.86	6.50
I do not speak the local language	1.00	10.00	3.40	2.00
I do not have the required skills	1.00	10.00	3.13	2.00
I have caring responsibilities that make it difficult to go to a workplace every day	1.00	10.00	2.63	1.00
I have a disability that makes it difficult to find a fitting internship	1.00	10.00	1.47	1.00
The available internships did not cater to my interests	1.00	10.00	3.38	3.00

Figure 6: Obstacles to undertaking an internship
(scale 1 to 10 where 1 means “not at all” and 10 means “very much”)

respondents to the INCOPS survey 80% had applied for an internship (figure 3) with students typically submitting less than five applications (figure 4). 64% of students in the full sample secured an internship (figure 5). We wanted to know what the main obstacles are to undertaking internships. We asked students who secured an internship during their studies to judge the degree to which various factors presented an obstacle to undertaking an internship on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means “not at all” and 10 means “very much” (figure 6). The main obstacle for respondents in this subgroup was on average that doing an internship reduces the time students have to work, in order to finance their studies. The mean (median) score for this obstacle was 5.86 (6.5) while the second most important obstacle was the amount of time an internship adds to the degree with a mean of 5.79 (6), the third most important obstacle was that students did not speak the local language with a mean of 3.4 (2), and the fourth most important obstacle was that there are no internships that cater to the students’ interests with a mean of 3.38 (3). For students who described themselves as having a disability,² the results are similar to the above with somewhat higher mean values and with the main two obstacles featuring in reversed order. The third most important obstacle for this subgroup is that internships do not cater

to the students’ interest with a mean of 5.67 (median 6) and caring responsibilities that make it difficult to go to a workplace regularly with a mean of 5.0 (6). The disability itself is seen as a minor obstacle with a mean score of 2.25 (2). For students who describe themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority, the results are similar to those of the two subgroups above. The main obstacle is the time an internship adds to the degree with a mean of 6.29 (7) and that internships mean that students have less time to work to finance their studies with a mean of 5.71 (5.5), followed by internships not catering to the students’ interests with a mean of 4.62 (5), and the students not speaking the local language with a mean of 3.85 (2).

For the subgroup of students who had not done an internship during their studies, we asked what the main reason was for not doing an internship. The main reason recorded is that respondents did not have time to do an internship (41%), the second most frequent response was that students did apply for an internship but were not successful (31%) followed by not being able to afford doing an internship (15%), and no credits being awarded by the university (7%). For students who described themselves as having a disability, the main reason for never having done an internship was that they did not have time to do

² Please note that these and the next percentages are based on a very small number of responses.

an internship (50%) while not being able to afford doing an internship was the second most frequently mentioned reason (25%). Failure to secure an internship and caring responsibilities were additional reasons (13% each). For students describing themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority, the main reason for not doing an internship was the same as for the other subgroups, namely a lack of time (40%). The other three reasons were that the university does not offer credit (20%), that respondents did not secure an internship (20%), and that respondents could not afford to do an internship (20%).

The data suggests that the obstacles faced by all subgroups are quite similar with the additional time required to do internships being the dominant issue. That 31% of the students in the subgroup who had not done an internship stated that they applied but failed to secure an internship is also worth noting. Amongst those students the majority have submitted five applications or less, but some students submitted between 15 and 20 applications. Not knowing the local language is not an obstacle at all for around half of the students, but for just under a quarter of students it is a very serious obstacle (7 and above on a scale from 1 to 10). We have to be cautious interpreting the above results with regard to the subgroups of students that describe themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority or as having a disability due to the small number of respondents. Nonetheless, we may note that from an inclusion perspective finding internships that cater to the interest of the students seems to be a bigger obstacle for these groups of.

The obstacles to securing internships was also discussed during the focus groups. Students suggested that universities should make more extensive lists of internship providers available to students (e.g. Utrecht) and provide a clearer formulation of the expectations or criteria regarding eligible internships. Foreign students, in particular, argued for making more extensive lists of internship providers available to students.

As some participants from outside the host country put it, students coming from abroad lack information on internships in the host country. While they may have information on internships in their home countries (information acquired throughout their educational journey in their home countries or through family or friends) they do not have the same kind of information regarding their host countries. As an interviewee at Kent put it:

“I’m from [a foreign country], so I didn’t really know what kind of internship like usually students in peace and conflict could apply in the UK or in Europe ... which was quite ... time consuming for me to do it by myself when some other people already have their knowledge and they could just do it. So luckily...I had German friends who could tell me like which kind of website I could look into and stuff. [...] So, I think it’s quite nice, especially for international students, if we could already have the knowledge of, like, what kind of internship we could do in Europe or in the UK” (Kent).

In the absence of this information, international students often have to revert to doing internships in their home countries, just as the non-European student we quoted above. While the percentage of non-EU/non-UK students who have done an internship as part of their studies is only a little lower compared to the entire sample,³ the survey also shows that 31% of international students do internships in their home countries where they do not study.⁴ There may be good reasons for this, such as networking, however the student quoted above suggested that her primary motivation for applying for an internship in her home country was because it was easier for her to do so. However, this in part negates the purpose of studying abroad and de-

³ The percentage of respondents who have done one or more internships is 64% for the entire sample and 61% for the sample of non-EU/non-UK students. Respondents reporting two or more internships amounted to 28% for the entire sample and 23% for the non-EU/non-UK respondents. 38% of non-EU/non-UK students report not having done an internship while 36% report the same for the entire sample.

⁴ International students include UK and EU students studying abroad.

98 Responses

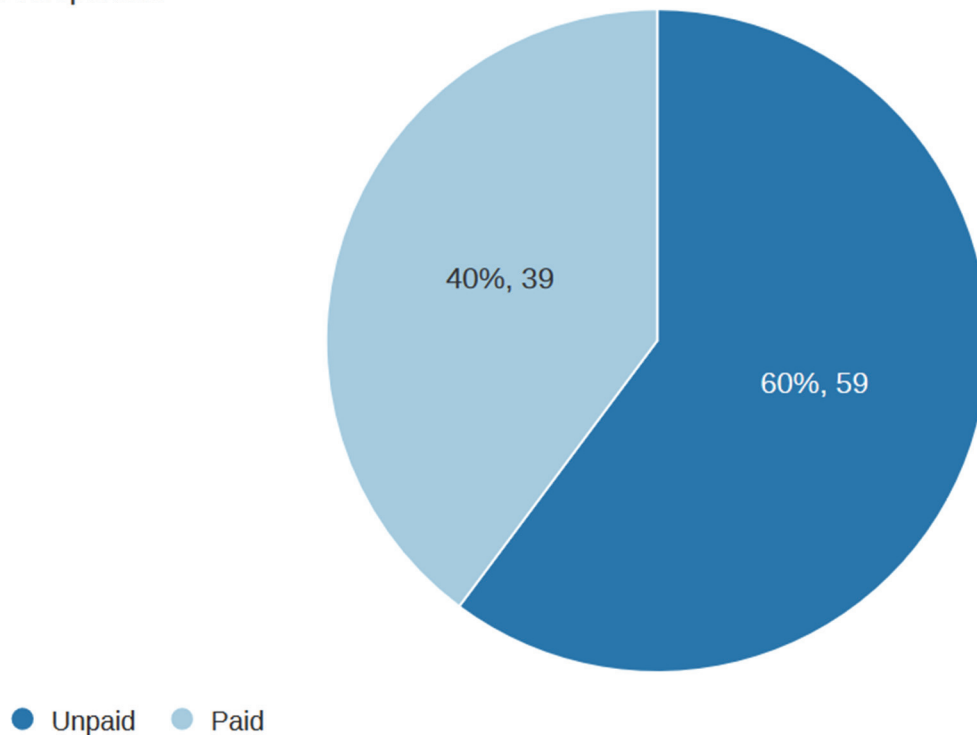


Figure 7a: Unpaid internships (full sample)

nies international students the chance to develop certain skills and experiences that are often a requirement for jobs in an international setting. For example, one international non-European student interviewed at Kent suggested that a key aspect of her learning during the internship was related to teamwork and the “European” management style, both of which are different from experiences in her home country where a more vertical, hierarchical structure prevails (Kent, Utrecht).

The demand for a clearer formulation of expectations and criteria and the related issue of having to find suitable host institutions were echoed by some teaching staff. For example, during the Coimbra focus groups staff suggested that the purpose of internships and the training they are aiming to provide needs to be clarified further. Similarly, a key concern seems to be identifying relevant host institutions to ensure that WBL during the internship is better targeted which

should also result in better internship plans. This also extends to clarifying the links between internships and integration into the labour market.

The prevalence of unpaid internships and the challenges this poses for WBL was also highlighted in a number of focus groups. This issue seems to contribute to the difficulties of securing internships and increases the stress that students experience. The survey results reveal that 60% of internships that respondents undertook were unpaid (figure 7a).⁵ Focus group participants at Coimbra suggested that the lack of paid internships is one of the reasons why students forgo curricular internships. Similarly, a participant at Utrecht highlighted that for students without funding it is time consuming and hence costly to apply for internships and that the prevalence of unpaid internships adds to the problem. The survey suggests that unpaid internships are more prevalent among no-EU a/ non-

⁵ Students were asked to answer with regard to their longest internship with 28% of students reporting that they did two or more internships.

21 Responses

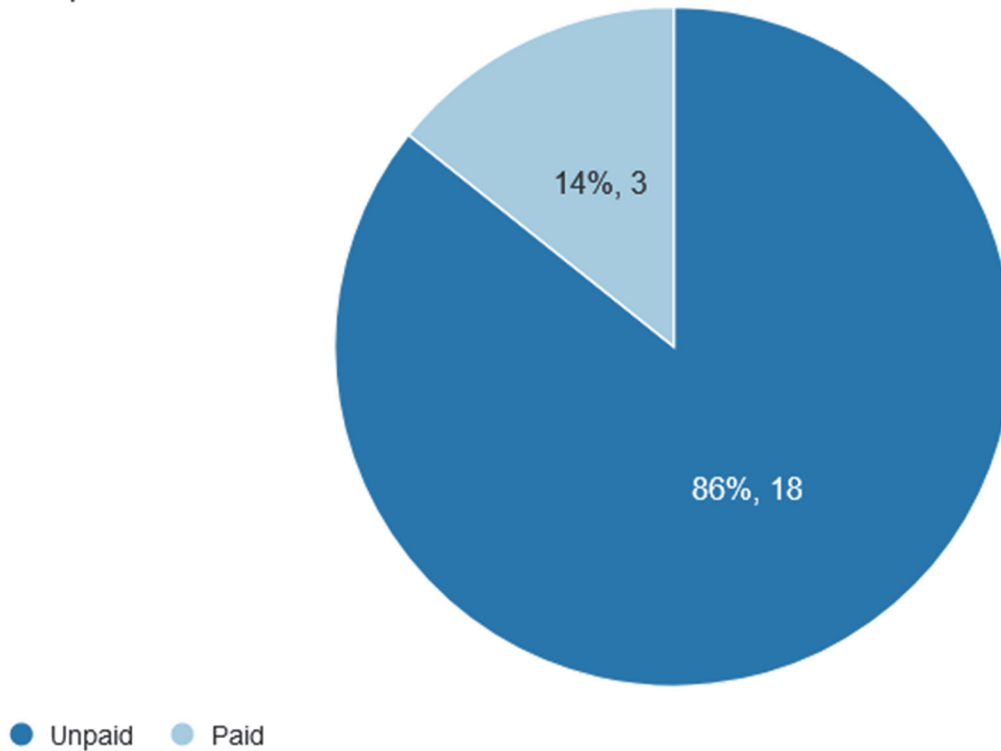


Figure 7b: Unpaid internships (non-EU/non-UK students)

UK students since 86% of internships these students undertake are unpaid as opposed to 60% for the entire sample (figure 7b). An interviewee at Kent who was an international student also suggested that she had to forgo finding an unpaid internship in the UK because it was considerably more expensive to stay there rather than go home. A Kent student also pointed out that they were able to do their internship because one parent lived in the city where she secured an internship but would otherwise have been dependent on her parents for financial help. She had considered Erasmus funding, but felt that it needed at least three months to get such funding in place and that this was not feasible given the timeline for her applications. She also pointed out that UN organisations are in some of the most expensive places (New York, Geneva) on the globe, which presents a problem for PCS students. Moreover, several students stated that they would have liked to extend their internship if it wasn't for the cost of doing an internship. Unlike students on the Kent and Marburg joint programme, students at Coimbra have used Erasmus funding to do internships abroad.

Besides the issues of remuneration, another obstacle to inclusion that has been mentioned is (lack of) competency in the local language. This is a problem many international students face when studying in countries where the language of instruction at university is different from the local language spoken in the workplace. Students taking part in the Utrecht focus groups suggested that this was a considerable obstacle to doing a fieldwork-based research internship and resulted in students pursuing non-research internships. But even when the language of instruction and the language in the workplace are the same (as is the case in the UK) some international students find it difficult to navigate the language barriers in a work-based environment (Kent, Utrecht).

Work visas were another issue students mentioned in relations to inclusion (obstacle to mobility). The issue of work visas arose in relation to doing internships outside the host country. A European student at Kent remarked that she looked at US based internships but felt that it was not possible to obtain a work visa especially given that the start dates of many internships she researched were very close.

97 Responses

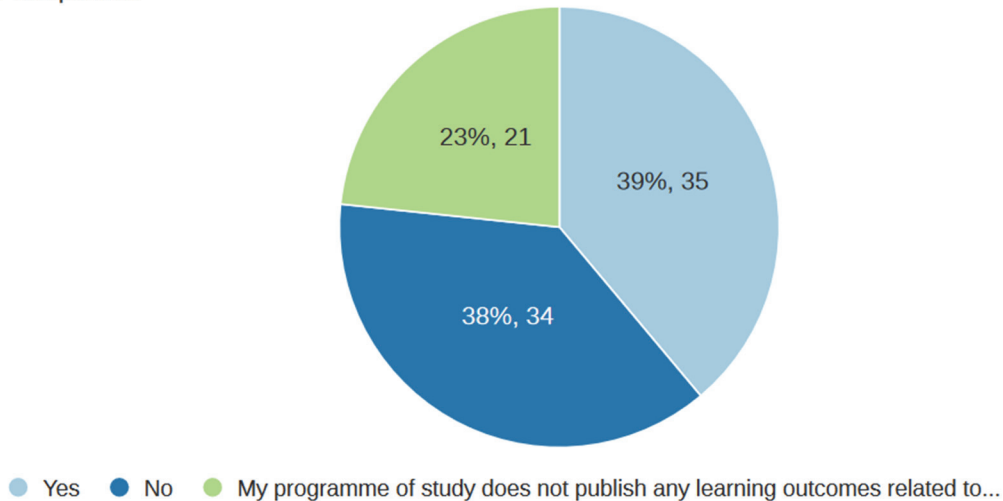


Figure 8: Consultation of internship related learning outcomes

Finally, the need for workplace specific additional training in the preparation phase was mentioned. One student at Kent suggested that it might be useful to include a briefing on how to deal with certain issues that may arise during the internship. Given that most students have not been in full-time employment prior to doing their internships they may not be familiar with how to best raise issues with an internship provider. Specifically, she was keen on being briefed on how to go about pitching additional tasks or projects to an internship provider and how best to raise issues that emerge during an internship, including those that involve criticising the internship provider.

Diverging expectations concerning employment offers through internships

Some focus groups suggested that expectations regarding the internship may differ among stakeholders. As the focus groups undertaken at Cluj most clearly state, students often see doing an internship with an employer as a first step towards securing more permanent employment in that organisation or company. At the same time, employers are generally using the interns as temporary (low-profile and non-remunerated) personnel without any prospect of a permanent position or even short-term contract. One consequence of students' expectations is, according to internship providers, that students may forgo skills development which is beneficial for their

education and training in order to focus on activities at the workplace that students believe will make them attractive to the employer and to being hired in the short term. No other focus group or interview suggested as stark a contrast in expectations as the focus group at Cluj, so this may be a country specific issue.

Definition of objectives and learning outcomes

While students' expectations are important, we also have to consider the expectations of universities and PCS programmes when it comes to providing and developing internship activities. These are usually stated in the learning outcomes. However, evidence collected for this project suggests that students are often neither aware of the learning outcomes, nor are they confronted with them explicitly. In qualitative interviews (conducted at Kent) with a number of students who had undertaken internships at undergraduate and postgraduate level at different institutions, students stated that they were not aware of the actual learning outcomes at the preparation stage/commencement stage of their internships. In order to get a better understanding of this issue we fielded two questions regarding learning outcomes in the INCOPS survey. Only 39% of respondents stated that they had consulted the internship related learning outcomes prior to the internship (figure 8). This suggests that there is an issue regarding how students are preparing and are being prepared for internships at least in terms of awareness of

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Median
Your choice of internship	1.00	10.00	6.50	7.00
Your task selection during the internship	1.00	10.00	6.16	7.00
Skills you wanted to train	1.00	10.00	6.35	7.00

Figure 9: Influence of internship related learning outcomes on ...

related learning outcomes. Increasing the number of students who consult the internship related learning outcomes is likely to be beneficial. We put a second survey question to those respondents who had reported consulting the internship related learning outcomes. We asked to what degree these learning outcomes influenced their internship choice on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means “did not influence my choice at all” and 10 means “very much influenced my choice” (figure 9). The mean (median) value was 6.5 (7), indicating that the learning outcomes had a substantial influence on internship choice.

For some internships such as curricular internships at Coimbra, for example, a formal outline of the learning outcomes is set when the sending institution and the receiving (host) institution sign a protocol or contract that details the internship the student will undertake. The institution has to ensure that students are guided and encouraged to engage fully in work tasks related to the specified learning outcomes and the defined objectives have to be in line with the tasks to be undertaken, skills to be acquired/consolidated, and the overall learning outcomes including formal learning outcomes, but also more personal ones. Such internship plans are usually not very detailed, though. Overall, there is some room for improvement when it comes to how well students are acquainted with learning outcomes that pertain to their internships.

During the internship – Learning during the internship

The role of internships in students’ skills development

“The main difficulty is the fact that I see a gap between that training at the workplace

and academic skills. Students are fast learners, and many of the competencies they acquire, it happens at the workplace” (Cluj).

This quote from one of the Cluj focus groups suggests that students acquire many of their skills and competences during internships. However, as we might expect, the nature of skills developed and the students’ experience of the actual learning process, including the feedback and appraisal process, differ widely between individuals, sending institutions, and host institutions. Nonetheless, most students who have engaged in internships value the “real-life” experience and the different perspective internships offer. This is also confirmed by internship providers and staff participating in the Cluj focus groups. The latter suggested that students returned to classes with first-hand experience and more mature. Skills development during internships in particular is valued for its contribution to learning outcomes. This is especially true for skills that studying at university does not explicitly train. According to a student from Utrecht, doing an internship allowed students to develop relevant skills for specific practice-oriented jobs. Similarly, a number of students pointed to the complementary nature of skills developed during an internship. Or, as students from Cluj put it, the internship learning allows students to “complete their knowledge and skills” and also allows them to acquire “a much better idea about the tasks a practitioner in conflict management has to perform”. Skills mentioned by stakeholders include written and oral communication skills including non-academic writing, focused writing and synthesising, protocol, networking, organising events, making contacts with external entities, teamwork, but also more sector specific skills like fundraising. But respondents also valued internships for tacit knowledge they gained about

the mind-set of the organisation they were working in and the way people in these organisations think and operate. In addition to acquiring new skills a number of students suggested that the internship also helped in forming a network of people and potential organisations for future jobs which was considered useful.

Some focus groups, however, highlighted that there is often a gap between the expected or desired skills development which is important for students' integration into the labour market and the actual limited responsibilities and skills development opportunities that many internships provide (Coimbra).

These differences in skills development opportunities were also highlighted by several students participating in one of the Cluj focus groups. Specifically, there is said to be quite some variation in employers' levels of readiness and preparedness to integrate interns into the workplace. With respect to the capacity to manage internship activities and the competences and skills of the responsible personnel significant variation can occur even within the same organisation. One of the students described his experience in the following way:

"In the time I was in that particular organisation, I changed two departments. In the first, I was almost ignored and I performed sub-secretarial tasks, such as xeroxing documents. In the second, I learnt a lot, as they asked me to document myself a conflict situation and to help them simulate a negotiation" (Cluj).

These differences are often related to the hosting capacity of the organisation and to the concrete context in which it finds itself when the intern starts his/her programme. A state institution's officer admitted that

"Especially with the pandemics, we lost personnel. So, when you finally get your hand upon an intern after the fastidious process of receiving all the necessary clearances, you put him/her at work on the burning matters of the moment and for the tasks you are in need of" (Cluj).

While this may lead to misunderstandings and hinder skills development, it might have some paradoxical positive consequences in that it represents a more "natural" workplace environment, hence preparing the intern for a future career. In other words, as stated by an employer and confirmed by two students during the focus groups,

"Students have to get used to the reality of what a working environment means, where sometimes the employees perform lots of different tasks instead of the idealized view of hyper-stable and mega-specialized institutions" (Cluj).

Students' and employers' expectations may also differ regarding the responsibility of the employer in the internship management process as evidenced in one of the Cluj focus groups. The interns believe that "the employers' responsibility is the same as the one of the university, as we are formatted [sic] by both" (Cluj). The students stressed the importance of the internship's consequences on their future path. As one of them put it: "they [the employing organisation] need to be careful of what they teach us, as we will do the same when being employed elsewhere" (Cluj). On the other hand, the employers perceive internship activities as punctual interventions, among many others, in the students' professionalisation process. Consequently, organisations do not perceive any responsibility for what the students will do after having completed the internship. As one of them put it:

"We're just showing them what we do and how we do what we do. Different students remain with various elements of what they experienced, these fundamentally vary in function of their capacity of absorption and processing. How could we guarantee that they got them right and that they will use them in accordance with our instructions and practices?" (Cluj).

Self-directed learning

Usually, there is a range of skills development opportunities during the course of any internship, but students often do not select tasks with

skills development in mind. During internships, especially at the MA level, students usually have some say over which tasks they are going to take on or they are even in a position to propose new project ideas and tasks. What guides students in selecting tasks? Are they selecting tasks in line with a plan for their own learning and skills development? For the Kent interviews and focus groups we asked specifically about what guided students' task selection (if they had a say in selecting tasks) during their internship. The evidence collected suggests that students do neither explicitly think about their skills development in relation to task selection nor is skills development usually the driving force for task selection. One international non-European respondent reported that she was almost free in her task selection, as she was working for a small, university affiliated NGO with a number of other students. When asked if she took the learning outcomes or skills development into account when selecting tasks, she replied:

"I think I didn't really think about like the final report or anything. I think I just chose a task by my skill and then second by my interest. [...] So ... the NGO was like mainly organised by ... university students. So most of them didn't speak or write good English. So, all the translation[s] we needed to submit to the embassies and stuff. I did all the translation and writing stuff. So, in that case I took the task because I knew it was like in line with my skills and then other task I did just chose them because I was interested" (Kent).

Another student suggested that when she had the opportunity to propose tasks she did so in line with what she thought would be good for the internship provider and it was "motivated by them seeing me as a good addition to the team, ... showing initiative". Skills development was not the primary motivation.

While this seems a sensible approach, it suggests that internship programmes could attempt to prepare students better for their internships by helping them to identify skills and potential associated tasks that would also allow them to

train skills they are lacking or that are weak, rather than just enhancing skills that are already well developed.

A better communication of internship related programme learning outcomes may aid self-directed learning. The INCOPS survey provides evidence that programme learning outcomes influence task selections and which skills students decide to train. In the section on learning outcomes, we already mentioned that we fielded survey questions regarding learning outcomes. We put a question to those respondents who had reported consulting the internship related learning outcomes and asked to what degree these learning outcomes guided their decisions on task selection during the internship and which skills students wanted to train on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "did not influence my choice at all" and 10 means "very much influenced my choice" (figure 9). The mean (median) values are 6.16 (7) and 6.35 (7) respectively. This suggests that the learning outcomes had a substantial influence on these choices. It stands to reason that if more students were aware of learning outcomes, they might approach task selection and skills to be trained differently. However, it is unlikely that this measure alone will remove the pressure students feel to select tasks that allow them to shine in front of employers. We shall return to this issue in the recommendation section below.

The challenging theory-practice nexus in WBL

The theory-praxis nexus is a common learning outcome of many PCS programmes that feature internships. Unlike skills development, which is often fairly straight forward to accomplish, making the connection between theory and practice is more challenging. From an educational point of view a key justification for undertaking internships as part of a university degree is related to the theory-practice nexus. The reason for embedding an internship in a degree often is to develop the students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical work during the internship and in turn to have the practical experience students gather enhance their theoretical understanding of the subject matter. We will return to the latter aspect in another section. Was it not for the theory-practice nexus, one might argue

that internships could principally be conducted outside the university context. In most academics' experience students struggle with the theory-practice element of WBL in PCS studies. As it turns out, linking theory and practice is considered a difficult task by students who participated in the focus groups.

Several students at Coimbra provided compelling evidence in this regard. Students stated that they initially undertook curricular internship at the MA-level, but then realised that linking their experience with the theoretical framework learned was too challenging. As a consequence, they end up changing from a curricular internship to a non-curricular internship and commenced with writing a research-oriented dissertation instead, even if it was inspired by their internship experience. This is despite the fact that, as noted earlier, students usually commence internships with good critical analysis skills and theoretical knowledge.

One of the issues may well be that the tasks students are asked to undertake during their internships are not conducive to making the connection between theory and practice. Some staff members who took part in the Coimbra focus group suggested that the curricular internships students undertook were often too basic to allow students to develop a fruitful engagement with the theory-practice nexus. There is also some evidence from students participating in the Coimbra focus group that this may be the case. Students suggested that they could not really articulate their internship experience in terms of theoretical frameworks they had learned at university and felt that university and internships were two independent training activities.

However, under the right conditions, students make connections between theory and practice. For example, one interviewee at Kent who was working on Myanmar for a small NGO at the time of the recent military coup, reports that she made connections between theories of conflict resolution learned at Kent and her work for the NGO. Asked if she made a connection between theory and practice she replied

"I'll say yes ... [A]t one point I specifically thought about the negotiation and mediation class I took in Kent. Because obviously like

this military coup in Myanmar ... was ongoing. And then ... at some point it became more like civil war ... [E]verybody, was talking about how to end this. I started thinking about this, how to say like mutually hurting stalemate and the windows of opportunity kind of theories from negotiation and mediation class" (Kent).

A Kent alumnus recalls that material covered on refugee conventions at university helped somewhat when interning with UNHCR but felt that more generally across several WBL activities there was little theoretical knowledge to be applied in practice. Another Kent student reported that she was familiar with some of the topics she had to deal with in her briefings for a think tank she was interning at. This is perhaps suggestive of the more common link between university learning and practice, i.e. it is information and knowledge about certain policies and issues rather than a theory – practice nexus that students observe while doing internships.

Post WBL – Reporting and reflecting on WBL (internship and practitioner learners)

Internship reports and reflecting on WBL in PCS

A common way of assessing if learning outcomes have been achieved during an internship is through an internship report. The INCOPS survey shows that 78% of responses regarding assessment methods mention a report. Internship reports also usually encourage students to reflect on their learning and often ask students to reflect on the relationship between theory learned in the classroom and the practice experienced during the internship. Coimbra's MA degree includes such a report for curricular internships (assessed by a committee), students at Utrecht who take the internship-track also have to write an internship report, and students at Kent and Marburg for whom internships are compulsory also have to submit such a report. More generally, report writing is the most common means of reflection. Over two thirds of responses to a question about the post internship reflection process in the INCOPS survey mention an internship report.

There is some disagreement among students about the usefulness of internship reports per se, but overall students seem to find them a useful tool. Discussions which are specific to an institution's format are not included here (see individual focus group reports). Generally, a number of students suggested that the final internship report helped analyse and clarify the skills developed during the internship and that completing it was also useful in terms of CV writing.

Students in one of the Utrecht focus groups suggested that the internship report incentivises students to let their learning experience appear in a more positive light in order to pass the assignment. This point was raised by one of the students and supported by another student in the group. Nevertheless, the students felt that the reflection on the internship was useful and hence this issue does not seem to present too big a problem in terms of the reflection students engage in or their learning experience. However, it may pose some minor problems for programme directors and module convenors since the experiences of students may not quite be what they seem on paper.

Opinions on having additional opportunities to collectively reflect on the learning experience differ. When asked about embedding the writing of the internship report in a (set of) workshops, different opinions came to light. On the one hand, one European student participating in the Kent focus group argued that she just wanted to write the report and did not see much of a need for a collective reflection process on the internship experience to enhance her learning. Another international non-European student stated the following: "I felt sorry that I couldn't get the opportunity ... to share ... my internship experience with other student". She suggested that she "wanted to get more feedback" (Kent). Specifically, she would appreciate an opportunity to do a presentation on her internship experience.

There may be room to improve the internship experience by ensuring students are aware of learning outcomes and the skills they have to train. Earlier we noted that students do not usually consult the learning outcomes of the internship module prior to commencing the internship. According to the Kent students interviewed, neither do many students look at the requirements

for the internship reports before they start the internship. When asked if, with hindsight, the learning process may have been improved by considering learning outcomes and which skills to develop prior to commencing the internship, one Kent student said the following. "If you're more aware of what ... you're supposed to learn, then I think you would have ... looked at it differently." However, in this student's view the limiting factor is the internship provider and whether or not they would have accommodated requests regarding skills development and task allocation. It may hence be useful to consider more carefully which skills students ought to develop prior to an internship and to attempt to communicate this to internship providers. It may well be the case that it is easier to reach an agreement on specific tasks to be allocated and skills to be trained when there is a long term or ongoing relationship between the university and internship provider.

Reflecting on WBL practice in PCS – Practitioner-Learners

Students who engage in internships do not always have the depth of experience that is required to reflect on all aspects of learning including exploring the link between theory and practice. Practitioner-learners on the other hand usually do. Most students at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University are in fact long distance practitioner-learners with plenty of experience in the field of PCS. In other words, they are on the opposing end of the theory – practice spectrum than most "typical" university students and engage with the theories after rather than before their practical experiences. Are these students better able to link theory to practice? There was near unanimity amongst lecturing staff that practitioner-learners continually link the taught material to their experiences in the workplace. This happens through the student's own initiative, where in group discussions they will begin to reflect on their professional expertise.

This is heavily influenced in two ways. Firstly, reflection is "hardwired" into the course structure. Alongside traditional academic essays, the assessment of two modules rely heavily on learners' experiences and reflections. Secondly, this is facilitated by the lecturing staff, who will

design parts of their module to make an explicit link between the theory and practice. One lecturer on the MA Peace and Conflict Studies remarked that it means students can think through the implications of the theories that are taught to the “real world”. A lecturer on the MA Maritime Security noted that how students’ “day job” may be influenced by broader trends was part of the appeal for students to enrol in the first place.

Positive effects of including work experiences in the classroom teaching

One observation regarding the positive effects of students’ reflections on their work and on the theory – practice nexus is the unification of learners across the classroom. A lecturer on the MA Peace and Conflict Studies at Coventry noted how learners from vastly different professional experiences would “bond” when discussing the practicalities of particular ideas and concepts. This would enrich the learning experience as students from different backgrounds would begin to find commonalities. This was particularly notable in classes which mixed students from the Maritime Security and Peace and Conflict Studies MA streams.

Another positive observation centred on the participatory effect of the integration of professional experience. It was noted that the one-way direction of traditional lecturing was less applicable in the case of lectures at Coventry, and through recognising students’ experiences, the role of the lecturer was at times more of a “facilitator”.

A positive effect on university teachers was also noted. Lecturers were able to deepen their understanding of the theories that they were presenting to the class. With greater feedback of how ideas and approaches meet the realities of the work environment, lecturers found that they received valuable feedback over the utility of the ideas that they presented. This was described as “incredibly enriching” by one lecturer.

Impact of WBL experience on employment and employability

The focus groups present a fairly mixed picture when it comes to the impact of internships on the prospects of employment. We already noted

earlier that at least employers participating in the Cluj focus groups did not regard internships as a jumping board to permanent or even temporary employment. But how do alumni who have gained employment assess the impact of the internships they undertook while doing their degrees?

On the whole, alumni participating in the Utrecht focus groups thought internships to be useful when looking for jobs but essentially not decisive. For example, one student suggested that she was taught some relevant skills during the course of the internship but it “didn’t really cut it” on the job market. Another student from the same focus group suggested that the internship was mostly useful for finding a job because it gave him confidence. Another respondent stated that while the internship experience is well-received during job interviews, it is not enough and that she mostly relied on work experiences gained prior to her MA degree during job interviews. Another alumnus also noted that skills acquired during the internship were helping her do her current job.

The impact of internship experiences on employment prospects may be different for international students. One former international non-European Kent student, who is working part-time while doing a PhD, was convinced that she landed her job due to the international experience her internship in the UK provided her with. Her job featured a very international working environment with people of different nationalities and she specifically mentioned that the skills she developed in communicating with people from other cultures were crucial to landing her current job. This once more highlights how important it is to enable all international students to do internships in the universities’ host country.

The kind of internship students undertake or the status of the internship provider may affect employment opportunities. One Kent alumnus who now works in a commercial setting suggested that a good internship can go a long way when it comes to finding employment. He also suggested that the two high profile internships he completed made a significant difference to his chances of finding employment. He suggested that undertaking internships at these organisations with what he called “brand names”

definitely helped to get interviews. The more or less explicit suggestion was that being able to secure such an internship signals one's calibre. He explained that at the time he was on the job market employers in his native country were narrow-minded with employers mostly hiring from specific universities. He suggested that despite not having graduated from such a university his CV was considered because of his high-profile internships.

Volunteering experience may help with internship applications and so do prior work experiences in areas unrelated to PCS. We earlier noted that all stakeholders consider any kind of WBL preferable to no WBL. The Kent focus group bore this out, both with regard to the usefulness of prior volunteering for securing an internship and having had a job for securing an internship. A European student reported that her fairly extensive volunteering experience helped her with writing internship applications and also helped her during the interview process. Not surprisingly, she felt that in particular evidencing her skills were much easier given her volunteering experience. Confidence in her abilities was also an aspect. An international non-European student, who had been working in an unrelated field, suggested that her work experience was helpful in securing internships.⁶

Difference between undergraduate and postgraduate internships

We might generally assume that there is a progression in WBL from one study level to the next. During the Kent interviews and focus group we

explicitly selected students who had done internships at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and asked about the differences. One student reported that she took her WBL experience at the undergraduate level less seriously and more seriously at the postgraduate level when she was thinking about the job market and finding a job which is "almost not possible to do ... without any experience these days, especially in this peace and conflict area". Another student suggested that she was more confident and understood the work environment better when doing an internship at postgraduate level, including being able to deal with suggestions on how to improve. She also suggested that internship providers assign somewhat different tasks to PG interns. "I think maybe you're being trusted with a little bit more because you've already graduated once."

Volunteering

There appears to be an increasing expectation by admissions committees and employers that students should have done some volunteering. According to our INCOPS survey, 58% of respondents reported that they had volunteered during their studies (figure 10). The percentages are almost identical for male and female respondents while all respondents who preferred to self-identify had volunteering experience. Among students who described themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority 54% report that they had volunteered during their studies. Among students who described themselves as having a disability

⁶ The notion that prior work experience, even if unrelated to PCS, may make it easier to secure a PCS related internship stands to reason. However, the INCOPS survey tells a different story. We split the sample into sub-samples where one sub-sample included all respondents who had previously been employed for 6 months or more fulltime and the other sub-sample included those who had not previously been employed for 6 months or more. The results were almost identical with both samples featuring 37% of respondents who had never done an internship. The differences for those who had done two or more internships only amounted to two percentage points (28% and 26% respectively) and the difference for those who had done one internship was one percentage point (36% and 37% respectively). We have to caution that there may be reasons why splitting the sample may provide misleading answers in the absence of control variables. While the two sub-samples are quite similar in terms of gender or the university respondents attend, they differ markedly in terms of reported disposable income, level of study, and the proportion of non-EU/non-UK students. Given the numbers of responses to the survey we are unable to resolve this issue.

153 Responses

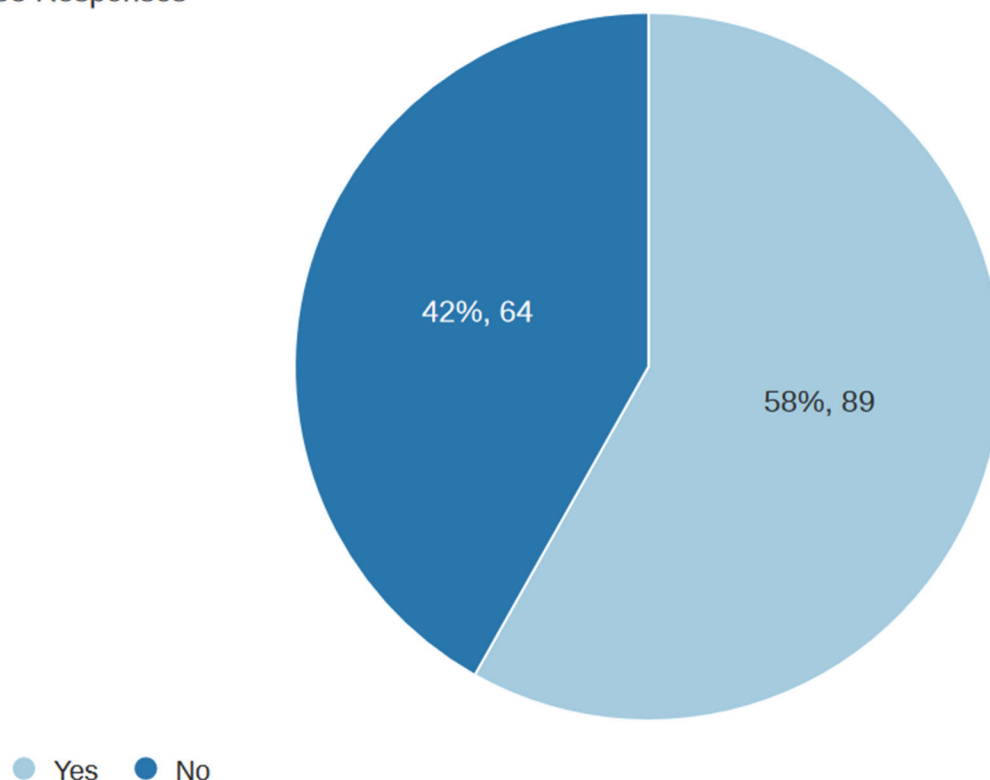


Figure 10: Percentage of students who volunteer

only 36% reported that they had volunteered during their studies. There is also a gender aspect to consider as none of the male respondents who describe themselves as having a disability had volunteered. The incidence of volunteering was highest among EU students studying in another EU country with one hundred percent of students having done volunteering during their studies while only 51% of non-EU/non-UK students had done so. Among EU students in the UK and UK students in the EU 65% had volunteered during their studies. There is no straight forward relationship between income categories

and likelihood of volunteering that could be identified in the descriptive data. Graphically the descriptive data approximates a horizontal S.⁷ Students who volunteer typically do so for up to five hours month (mode, 39%) and the median student volunteering between 5-10 hours a month (figure 11).⁸

Motives for and goals of volunteering

As we have noted above, students seem to be under constant pressure to improve their CV, be it in terms of qualifications, work experience

⁷ With the caveat that no additional confounders were taken into account we can share the following data. If we compare the percentage of students who volunteer and reported below median income (Euros 0-500) with the percentage of those who volunteer and reported above median income (Euros 751- ∞) we find that 54% of the former group volunteer while 65% of the latter volunteer. If we limit the analysis to MA students (i.e. eliminate differences in the level of study) we find that 67% of the former and 80% of the latter volunteered.

⁸ A smaller percentage of Non-EU/non-UK students may engage in volunteering but typically such students volunteer between 5-10 hours (mode, 41%) while the median is the same as for the full sample (5-10 hours). EU students studying in the UK or UK students studying in the EU typically (mode and median, 55%) volunteer for 5-10 hours a month. While a higher percentage of EU students studying in other EU countries may volunteer they typically volunteer only up to 5 hours a month (mode and median, 71%). For students studying in their home countries the mode (36%) is up to five hours of volunteering with a median of 5-10 hours. However, 13% of home students volunteer for 25 hours or more a month.

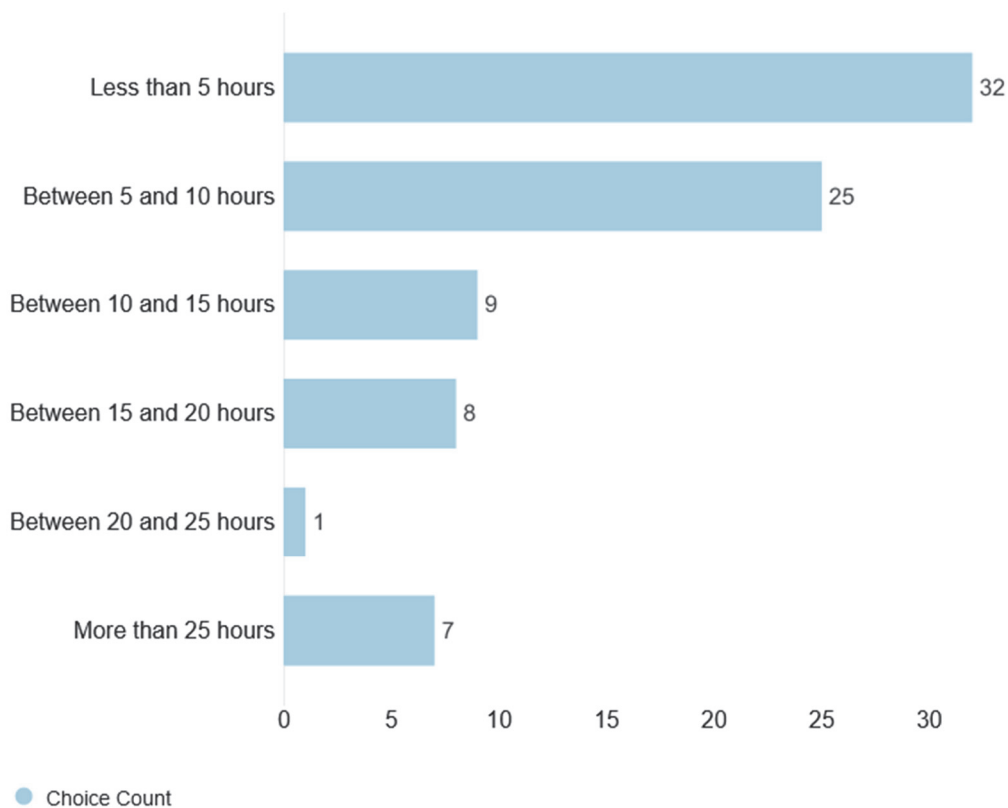


Figure 11: How many hours do you volunteer per month

through internships, international experience through semesters abroad, or volunteering. During a focus group at Marburg and qualitative interviews at Kent we gained some insights into the motives, preferences, and practices of students who engage in volunteering.

Common motivations for volunteering include the desire to make a difference and to meet like-minded people. Survey responses suggest that the desire to contribute to society and to (co-)shape developments in their cities or communities is the strongest motivation for volunteering. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means “completely disagree” and 10 means “completely agree” responses averaged (mean) 8.47 with a median value of 9 in support of the statement “I volunteer to make a difference” (figure 12). Some interviewees suggested that the experiences of injustice and “perceived injustices” are motivational factors to get involved in voluntary work. Respondents also suggested that their studies were not practical enough in terms of affecting actual change and that engaging in voluntary work allowed them to affect such change. Moreover, another motivation is the social aspect of

volunteering as students were searching for like-minded people and contacts, for example after moving to a new town to attend university. Volunteering is perceived as an opportunity to get to know people who share similar ideas and as an opportunity for making use of the social network of volunteering initiatives.

The above suggests that students have mostly intrinsic rather than instrumental motives for undertaking volunteer work during their studies. However, we found throughout the focus group that there are inconsistencies between the self-perceived motivations and a somewhat more instrumental, career focussed approach respondents demonstrated towards volunteering. Similarly, the INCOPS survey reveals that a number of intrinsic and instrumental motives matter to respondents. This is not to deny that students have altruistic motives but that they may be somewhat overstated. Nonetheless, the focus group evidence is very valuable as it demonstrates the reasoning behind the different motivations.

In this context it is interesting to compare civil society organisations’ experiences with student

and non-student volunteers. During the focus group at Marburg civil society organisations highlighted the difference between students and non-students in terms of volunteering. Students are perceived to be more goal-oriented with regard to voluntary work. In this context this means that most student volunteers come from study programmes relevant to the specific field of engagement. Often, they demonstrate a strong interest in figuring out their professional interests, to get references, to develop, to get opportunities to try out and experiment, or to find new contacts. By comparison, non-student-volunteers are perceived by civil society institutions to often be more relaxed and consistent in their commitment. Civil society organisations participating in the focus groups suggested that generally, non-student volunteers position themselves in terms of what they want and what they don't want and are hence more likely to turn down working on projects that do not fall within their interests. Thus, non-student-volunteers are often more focused on what interests them and also like to combine hobbies with volunteering. These insights speak to the perhaps somewhat more instrumental motives of student volunteers.

Even if students may have some career-related motivations for volunteering, the focus group discussions suggest that students are looking for a non-university related space and activity when engaging in volunteering activities. Survey responses regarding the statement "I volunteer to create a space in my life that is not related to university" support this with a mean (median) of 6.81 (8) on a scale from 1 to 10. Similarly, volunteers reported that they wanted to meet people from outside the university (mean 6.83, median 7) (figure 12). When we asked during focus groups whether they reflect on skills trained or developed through voluntary work students often intuitively criticized the idea of formalizing their non-formal learning experiences. Volunteering fulfils needs that are not fulfilled by studying at university. Students perceived their skills development as decoupled from the engagement with social movements and other groups they engaged with while volunteering. Therefore, reflecting on skills is less of a goal while volunteering and is also not undertaken in any systematic way. Moreover, students

stressed that volunteering was not about skill acquisition for their CVs as volunteers do not want to be seen as human capital. In general, skills are more of a by-product. These qualitative insights are not replicated in the survey where volunteers reported that developing their skills (mean 6.89, median 7) and expanding their professional networks (mean 6.81, median 7) were similarly important reasons to volunteer as the creation of non-university related spaces and contacts (figure 12). This tallies with our observation of contradictions in our focus groups. In the focus groups we also asked about the value of an institutionalised reflection process on volunteering as part of the curriculum. Some students were concerned about such institutionalised reflection as their volunteering "should not end in an internship report" as a form of "pure formalisation" which they consider "horrible extra work" (Marburg). Overall, reflection and a systematic approach are perceived as being part of an internship rather than volunteering.

Civil society organisations reported to be "happy that someone is participating, but it is not about reflecting on what the person is gaining for him- or herself". They consider reflection to be less about personal learning processes and more in terms of reflection on their concepts, quality criteria, project implementation, achievement of goals, interpersonal cooperation, or overall social goals. While this might include feedback on behaviour and volunteers' work, this is not the main focus and comes in the shape of an occasional reflection on volunteers' personal roles and achievements.

Integration of volunteering in the course of studies

One motivation for this project is to understand if experiential learning in the form of volunteering can play a role in the curriculum of PCS. To that end we asked students how they felt about this matter. Unsurprisingly, students articulated arguments for and against such an approach, with advantages and disadvantages being articulated during the focus group discussions.

Some students suggested that volunteering and studies are in a reciprocal relationship and were hence in favour of integrating aspects of

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses
I would dedicate more hours to volunteering if my programme of study awarded credits for volunteering activities.	1.00	10.00	6.71	7.00	2.40	5.75	83
I would dedicate more hours to volunteering if there was an opportunity to discuss my volunteering experiences in the classroom.	1.00	10.00	5.69	6.00	2.70	7.28	83
I would dedicate more time to volunteering if it improved my skills.	1.00	10.00	5.95	6.00	2.67	7.11	83
I volunteer to aid my skills development	1.00	10.00	6.89	7.00	2.39	5.71	83
I volunteer to make a difference	1.00	10.00	8.47	9.00	2.02	4.08	83
I volunteer to create a space in my live that is not related to university	1.00	10.00	6.81	8.00	2.79	7.79	83
I volunteer to meet people from outside university	1.00	10.00	6.83	7.00	2.61	6.79	83
I volunteer to expand my professional network	1.00	10.00	6.81	7.00	2.85	8.11	83

Figure 12: Reasons for volunteering (more) (responses from students who volunteer).

their volunteer work into the curriculum. With regard to integrating student experiences in seminars a student participating in the Kent focus group suggested a motivational reason for doing so.

“I think students are always gonna feel valued if they’re being asked about their experience and what they do, and then they’re ... going to be much more engaged ... and ... feel kind of okay I’m a grown up and they know

and I can ... contribute to what we’re doing” (Kent).

This statement has some similarities with the findings reported above regarding practitioner-learners and how having students with work experience in the classroom makes teaching events less of a one-way street.

Students also thought it desirable to have an “outside influence” on teaching which may add to or even alter the academic curriculum. Rather

than subscribing to a model where knowledge is only transferred from universities to (civil) societies, students as well as administrative representatives of the University of Marburg suggested that the university should take voluntary work experiences seriously and allow for such experiences to contribute to university learning. All stakeholders appreciated the applicability of knowledge acquired during the course of study to volunteer work and saw a potential for deepening the learning by applying academic learning while doing volunteer work. At the same time, it was also suggested that the curriculum should be designed in such a way that it will allow students to take away some insights relevant to their volunteering activities.

Nevertheless, the idea of integrating volunteering into the university curriculum was at least partly dismissed by those focus group interviewees who considered volunteering as separate or independent from their studies. These students perceived the institutionalisation of volunteering in the form of “demands” negatively. Additionally, the integration was perceived as negative if the university were to set this as a task. In particular, students underlined that voluntary work should not have to be done “half-heartedly like some university things”, as voluntary work fulfils the desire for a more active contribution besides “reading texts at home”. They argued that formal integration would rather contradict their intrinsic motivation and the notion that volunteering is free time, something relaxing, compensation, fun, and an activity that they are passionate about. Some students went so far as to suggest that they consciously separate their studies and their voluntary engagement as they perceive their studies to be too theoretical, whereas in their voluntary work they counter this “flaw” by actively engaging with societal issues. They consider volunteering a personal learning arena where they unconsciously acquire many skills that are not taught in studies. This final point at least partially contradicts students’ statements that skills development is not of interest when volunteering and is probably a better approximation of the motivation students have. It is not primarily the development of skills, but on reflection students recognise that skills

are being developed that might be useful from an employment perspective.

Awarding ECTS credits for voluntary work

The logical next step after thinking about integrating volunteering experiences into the curriculum is to consider awarding credits for volunteer work. In this focus group, during qualitative interviews and in the INCOPS survey we asked students and other stakeholders about their views on this issue. Given the mixed responses to the integrating of volunteering in the curriculum, it is not surprising that stakeholders held opposing views on awarding ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). Those arguing in favour of ECTS accreditation of voluntary work suggested that students often learn more from volunteering than from an internship and that ECTS recognition would benefit volunteers in terms of their career. Volunteering activities, so the argument, often extend over a number of years and allow volunteers to take on leadership roles. Students argued that volunteering contributes more to their life and learning trajectory than internships or university study. As one student participating in the Kent focus group put it:

“So, the voluntary work ... taught me just as much or even more than the actual courses. Maybe not teaching more, but it’s like the development I did as a person happened a lot during the voluntary work that I did more ... than ... sitting in seminars ... I definitely learned ... theoretical stuff. I learned what I was supposed to learn. But the voluntary work is very much what I think shapes you more as a person” (Kent).

While students still insisted that voluntary work is not supposed to be a career network there is still a need for recognition of their engagement for their curriculum vitae and other contexts. As a student from the Kent focus group put it:

“[T]here’s a lot of students who volunteer who put a lot of their time and effort into that, who deserve to kind of get the appreciation for it because they’re not going to be paid. So they have long days, you know, they do their

uni work still and then volunteer, which also always contributes to the campus life, doesn't it?" (Kent).

So, work and time invested in voluntary work should be recognised in a formal way from this perspective. This will also allow students to demonstrate what they have achieved.

Stakeholders suggested that ECTS accreditation would incentivise students to volunteer and allow them to make a time commitment. Volunteering comes with a significant time commitment when there are already significant demands on students' time. According to civil society stakeholders there are generally too few people who get involved. Multiple stakeholders, including students, argued that awarding ECTS credits for volunteering would reduce the time burden for students who want to undertake volunteer work. Students who are not volunteering (yet) may be incentivised by ECTS credits to engage in voluntary work. Those students who are already volunteering but face time pressures may find it easier to stay involved in their volunteering activities and not become overburdened. This is partially supported by survey responses

with a mean (median) value of 6.71 (7) for the volunteering subgroup (figure 12) and 6.25 (7) for the non-volunteering subgroup (figure 13) on a scale from 1 to 10 agreeing that the award of credits would allow them to volunteer more or start volunteering, respectively. However, while respondents in the non-volunteering subgroup mentioned the lack of time as the main reason (44%) for not volunteering ahead of not being able to secure a volunteering position (21%), credits not being awarded was only the fourth most important reason mentioned by respondents in this subgroup (10%) (figure 14). We cannot resolve this contradiction, but it is possible that respondents did not make the connection between the award of credits and time being freed up. Stakeholders also identified potential positive equality and inclusion effects. Less privileged students, who may face even greater time pressures, may be in a position to get involved if volunteering activities are awarded ECTS credits. This is at least partly supported by the INCOPS survey. As we have seen earlier, only 36% of students describing themselves as having a disability reported that they had volunteered, while 54% of students describing themselves as

Figure 13: What is likely to make students volunteer (responses of students who do not volunteer)

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses	Sum
I would volunteer if my programme of study awarded credits for volunteering activities.	1.00	10.00	6.25	7.00	2.58	6.65	60	375.00
I would volunteer if there was an opportunity to discuss my volunteering experiences in the classroom.	1.00	10.00	4.59	5.00	2.48	6.14	59	271.00
I would volunteer if it was made easier to find a volunteering role.	1.00	10.00	6.05	7.00	2.81	7.88	59	357.00
I prioritised finding an internship over finding volunteering opportunities.	1.00	10.00	7.77	8.50	2.56	6.54	56	435.00

61 Responses

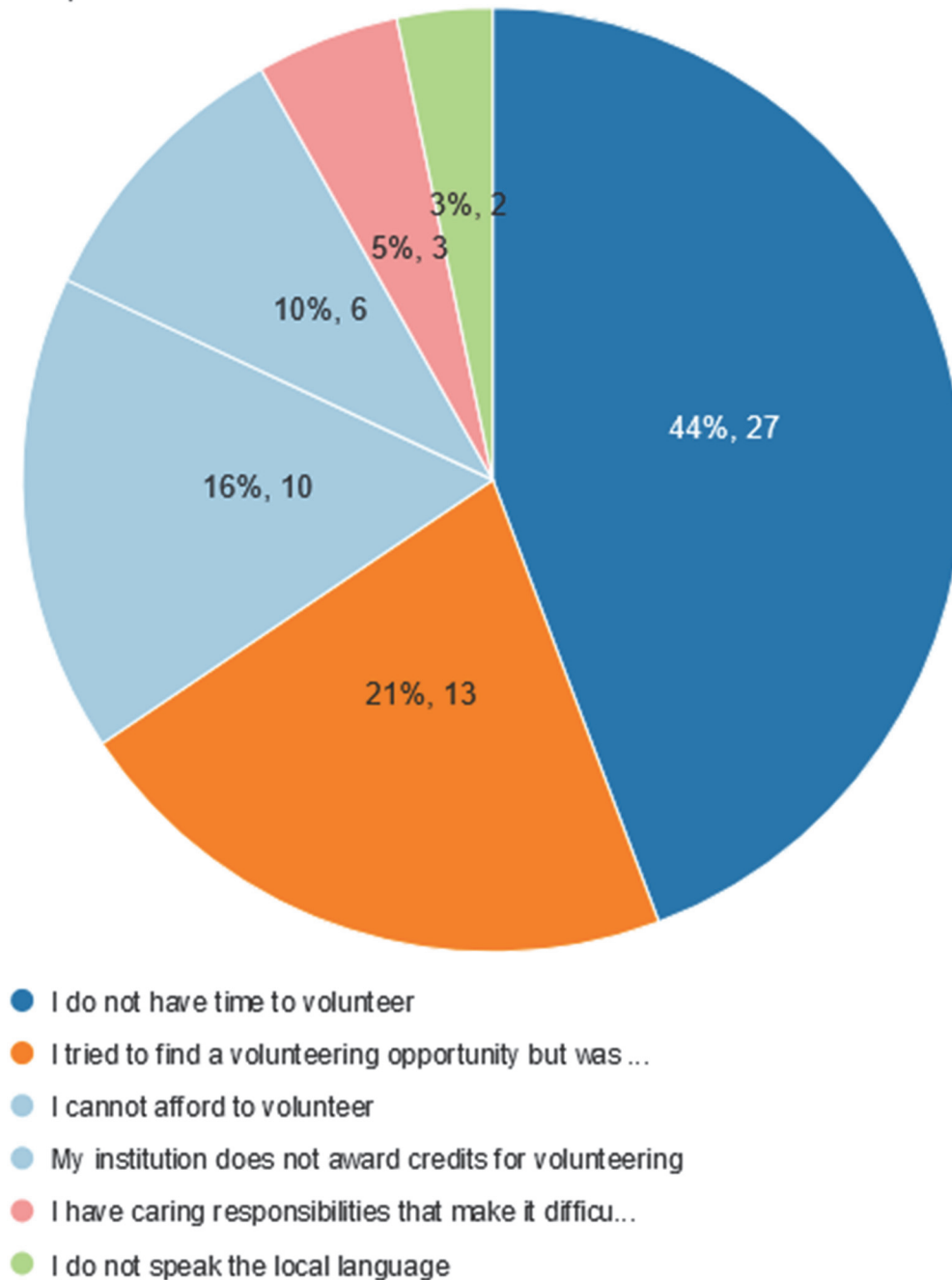


Figure 14: Main reasons for not volunteering (responses of students who do not volunteer)

belonging to an ethnic minority had volunteered. By contrast, 62% of those who did not describe themselves as either disabled or belonging to an ethnic minority reported that they had volunteered.

Students opposed to ECTS accreditation of volunteer work suggested that it is not desirable per se and that there is a myriad of administrative problems that make accreditation undesirable. Some participants were generally opposed

to awarding credits for voluntary work as they regarded grading of voluntary involvement as inappropriate. They argued that formal integration would rather contradict their intrinsic motivation of volunteering. In line with their intrinsic motivation students do not expect anything in return, not even ECTS credits. Moreover, they felt that studying at university and their commitment to voluntary work do not go together. Some students pursue a conscious separation between

their studies and voluntary engagement as they perceive their studies to be too theoretical while searching for a more practical counterpart in their spare time outside university. This means, they actively avoid the integration of the practical experience into the curriculum. With regard to the practical implementation of the award of ECTS credits, a number of practical issues were raised. Will achieving credits be related to the number of hours spent volunteering? What kind of engagement is included in voluntary work? The administrative representatives stressed that specifically the last question will be difficult for universities to address since they will have to deal with individual volunteering activities rather than more standardised procedure related to internships. It was suggested that it might be more demanding to assess learning in this context. Stakeholders also emphasised that volunteering does not only take place in established institutions but often also in non-hierarchical groups. In such a group there usually is no manager who has the authority to issue confirmation letters or compute how much time was spent volunteering or which activities a volunteer had undertaken.

There was some doubt that incentivising students to volunteer more will actually increase volunteering. Students pointed out that awarding ECTS credits is no guarantee for an increased time commitment or additional volunteers. Similarly, civil society organisations suggested that the demand on the “market of voluntary work” cannot be met through ECTS accreditation. Moreover, it was argued that even though the time commitment is one of the most important factors in determining if students volunteer or not, this could also be addressed through a longer standard period of study rather than the award of ECTS credits.

Some stakeholders were concerned that the award of ECTS credits would affect the motives of volunteers. Students and civil society organisations were sceptical about the consequences an award of ECTS credits would have on volunteers’ motives for engaging in voluntary work. Such a change may precipitate a move away from more intrinsic motives for volunteering and lead to a situation where a “university logic”, i.e. institutionalisation through formal structures

and processes of ECTS acquisition could become dominant in the sphere of volunteering. One student taking part in the Kent focus group, while supportive of ECTS credits pointed out an example of the negative impact of such incentives:

“[Y]ou always have ... people just doing it because they know they’re gonna get the credits for it. We had that in like university politics with law students... in [her home country], if you volunteer, if you’re part of university politics, you get another try at your [qualifying examination] ... so there were some people who ... were there because of that and you could kind of tell. So that’s obviously sometimes a bit annoying” (Kent).

Institutionalisation and the award of ECTS credits, some feared, may have negative effects on their own motivation since many students experience self-efficacy doing voluntary work which they do not experience at university. In fact, students argued that volunteering is deliberately chosen as an activity outside the university, as a “break” from studies, which are already very demanding. Thus, volunteering should stand on its own and should be based on supporting a cause and not serve any additional university related purpose. Stakeholders were concerned that voluntariness and other aspects of the self-image of volunteering will be lost if ECTS credits are awarded as this may be akin to the concept of wage labour. However, all stakeholders argued in favour of the idea that voluntary work already undertaken could be recognised, so that the impact of ECTS credits is minimised when it comes to choosing to do voluntary work. While this is somewhat contradictory, there was also support for replacing internships with volunteering or at least considering them equivalent, thus to a degree accepting a “university logic” as part of volunteering.

Students also expressed some concern that awarding ECTS credits for voluntary work may devalue their MA in the eyes of employers. MA degrees are already shorter than BA degrees and feature a significantly smaller number of credits for academic modules. Awarding a significant

proportion of these credits to recognise volunteering may, so the fear of students, lead to the omission of more academic content and may lead to the perception that the degree is less valuable than would otherwise be the case. This is at least partially about employers' perceptions since students insisted that practical volunteer work allows students to learn, at times even more so than other university activities.

Institutionalising the reflection process on volunteering and the theory practice nexus

Reflection is an essential part of the experiential learning process (e.g. Kolb, 2014). With regard to internships university curricula institutionalise the reflection process, often in the form of an internship report and post-internship seminars that allow students to reflect on their learning. While students were critical of the introduction of an explicit reflection seminar, the focus group discussion at Marburg eventually arrived at a conclusion that is essentially a functional equivalent to reflecting on their internship in a designated seminar. Students suggested that it would be desirable to engage in an exchange about their voluntary work within the context of their studies. This should include talking about skills, learning, the organisations students volunteer at, and the social and political issues these organisations and the volunteers deal with. Students suggested that already existing tutorials would be a good place to have these conversations. We included this idea in the INCOPS survey. Again, the sample was split into two subgroups with one including those who had volunteering experience during their studies and the other including those who did not have any volunteering experience during their studies. We asked to what extent respondents agreed with the statement that they would increase the number of volunteering hours or start volunteering respectively if there was an opportunity to discuss their volunteering experiences in the classroom. On a 10-point scale where 1 means "completely disagree" and 10 means "completely agree" the mean (median) scores were 5.69 (6) (figure 12) and 4.59 (5) (figure 13) respectively. For the sub-group with volunteers the mean is almost exactly in the middle of the scale and for the non-volunteering sub-group somewhat below, suggesting that support

for institutionalisation is mixed at best. What is also noticeable is that strong views (i.e. values 1, 10) on this issue were much more frequent for "completely disagree" than for "completely agree" which might have implications for attempting to include volunteering experiences into modules. However, if the discussion of volunteering experiences is to be institutionalised, then the focus group evidence suggests that students prefer to reflect on their volunteering experiences in the wider context of the modules they already participate in. This at least potentially opens up the possibility of advancing theory-practice reflections.

Integrating voluntary work experiences into seminars may aid the reflection process especially in the light of theoretical content. Students suggested that introducing and discussing topics relevant to civil society or organising project work in seminars may be a useful way to integrate voluntary work experiences into their studies. This would also allow students to receive feedback on a content-level and to collectively reflect on their volunteering. More specifically, students proposed to link volunteering experiences with theoretical research seminars that could be held in cooperation with organisations or groups that provide research opportunities for students. This suggests that a theory-practice connection could be made in this context. Students also suggested that more of an attempt could be made to draw on students' experiences by inquiring about their experiences and about which lecture or seminar topics students have engaged with in volunteering settings. It was felt that this would aid reflection about students' experiences.

A number of other suggestions emerged, including holding engagement and research workshops. So-called "engagement workshops" where students interact with providers of voluntary work placements could be an alternative type of engagement similar to the one described in the previous paragraph. Similarly, in the case of "research workshops" students would choose research projects and conduct research themselves and thereby also deepen engagement through developing their own research question or in the form of "commissioned research". Especially the administrative representatives

thought that students' commitment may be increased through project work and self-determined work, as motivation and time invested in the project increase when students have more say in the selection, development and execution of their project. Other proposals specific to the Marburg context included allowing students who volunteer to omit study performance (Studienleistung, not graded) and only do the exam (Prüfungsleistung, graded) or the other way around. (Above we already discussed why this may be problematic). Students also suggested developing a module of "Practical Experience" or "Political Commitment" to make volunteering and studies more compatible. This module would presumably institutionalise the reflection process on volunteering, perhaps in a seminar.

Inclusion and mobility

Inclusion is a cross-cutting theme throughout the focus groups on internships and volunteering. All stakeholders who participated in the Marburg focus group perceived being able to engage in volunteering as a privilege. Participants mostly perceived socio-economic factors as relevant to the issue of inclusion. The prevailing opinion was that white, middle-class volunteers and students are overrepresented when it comes to volunteering. It was recognised that volunteering is time intensive, and that students' socio-economic situation may determine how much time they can devote to volunteering. The issue of expenses for volunteering was also raised. Depending on students' socio-economic situation it may not be feasible to undertake volunteering unless an expense allowance, for example for mobility, is provided. Another issue identified is that students who are in receipt of student loans in Germany (German Federal Law on Training and Education Promotion, BAföG) have to complete a certain number of credits per term in order to remain eligible, thus making it more difficult to devote time to volunteering. Since BAföG receipts are a fairly good indicator of a student's social economic situation this point seems particularly

pertinent from a socio-economic inclusion perspective. From an inclusion perspective this provides strong support for awarding credits for volunteering activities.

Another aspect of the mobility issue in the context of volunteering is the spread of digital forms of participation due in part to Covid-19. Stakeholders agreed that there are advantages to virtual forms of participation. It was argued that digitalisation and virtualisation provide opportunities to open up volunteering to a wider range of students since there are fewer physical barriers to participation. There are also likely to be fewer obstacles to participation such as family commitments. It is easier to "just drop by" and in this way people who need to be heard can participate in a more flexible way. Participants also noted, however, that access to virtual participation is not universal and that an "exaggeration of digital" ways of participation should be avoided.

Discussion and recommendations

Pre-internship

WBL in its various forms is generally considered a fruitful avenue for learning by stakeholders. WBL also benefits employability, although the perception of alumni is that internship experience and a degree are not sufficient to secure a job. However, in order for internships to be most useful to students' learning they should last at least 3 months and allow students to engage in tasks that are appropriate for the study level. Some consortium members have procedures that are suitable to ensure such an outcome, others do not and it is essentially up to the students to ensure that they find an internship that is commensurate with their skills and experience. The first challenge that students face is to find a suitable internship. Our focus groups and survey showed that this can be a difficult task for students and even more difficult for male students and students who do not study in their home countries. The latter are attempting to find an internship in a country where they are less familiar

with internship providers, workplace expectations, and the local language while they are at the same time often unable to draw on their established networks (abroad). They therefore often rely on internships in their home countries which may not be the desired outcome. This suggests that non-EU/non-UK students in particular are potentially disadvantaged in their WBL and might require help to fulfil their learning potential. It is difficult to think of procedures or policies that may allow international students to benefit from better access to internships without long term collaboration with internship providers. A similar argument could be made with regard to students who describe themselves as having a disability and who were much less likely to have done an internship.

Not surprisingly, the prevalence of unpaid internships is an obstacle to undertaking WBL and affects, in particular, students without funding and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The prevalence of unpaid internships is also much higher among non-EU/non-UK students. While there is probably not much that universities can do about the prevalence of unpaid internships in general, efforts may be directed towards securing either funding for internships or work towards finding partners that offer paid internships. This is important especially from an inclusion perspective.

Students showed little awareness of the intended learning outcomes at the heart of WBL modules. The focus usually is on securing an internship rather than considering intended learning outcomes which in principle allow students to structure and understand their own learning better. This issue may be more pronounced in programmes that have no or few pre-departure briefings and activities. It may therefore be useful to engage in pre-departure briefings and activities that make students and ideally internship providers aware of the intended learning outcomes.

Making the link between theory and practice during the internship (as well as on reflection afterwards) is a key element of WBL and a key justification for including internships in PCS curricula. This aspect seems to be a real challenge for students and has, as we saw, dissuaded some students from doing a curricular internship at

Coimbra. Two courses of action offer themselves in this context. For one, it is important to ensure that the internship is as relevant as possible to PCS studies. Second, as the experience of Coventry with practitioner-learners shows, designing lectures in such a way that they allow students to make the connection between theory and WBL experiences is also key.

During the internship

On the whole, stakeholders overwhelmingly report that learning takes place during the internship and that interns acquire valuable skills and knowledge. While there is obviously some variation in both, internship providers hosting capacities and students existing skills and ability to learn, stakeholders generally benefit from internships. It is also generally acknowledged that students are fast learners and students acknowledge that internships train skills that cannot easily be acquired at university. Nonetheless, there is still potential to improve the learning experience through more detailed agreements between internship providers and universities.

There seems to be a tension between a comprehensive learning process which benefits the degree and job prospects in the long run and being of use to the internship provider. We saw that internship providers suggested as much in the Cluj focus groups. Similarly, when we asked students about self-directed learning and task selection at Kent they reported that their focus is on doing what is best for the internship provider or to select tasks in line with their strongest skills, again in order to be most useful to the organisation. This is understandable since students may sometimes have the expectation that they will secure a job with the same employer or at least secure a strong reference. It is, however, somewhat problematic from an educational perspective as WBL may consistently train dominant skills. Pre-departure briefings and skill self-assessment activities might at least make students aware of their strengths and weaknesses and allow students to come up with a list of skills they would like to train during an internship.

Such reflection could also be included in protocols or contracts between universities and internship providers.

Post-internship reflection

While there is some disagreement about the usefulness of internship reports, students on the whole agree that reflecting on the internship, which is usually required for the internship report, is a useful exercise and aids the learning process. There is scant agreement on the other hand on how best to handle the post-internship reflection period and report writing. Support for institutionalised workshops to reflect individually and collectively on WBL is mixed, not just for the internship but also for volunteering activities. In the case of internships, support for institutionalised reflection processes and forums seems to depend on individual preferences and work-style.

It is somewhat unfortunate that students do not generally seem to see the need for an institutionalised and collective reflection process. The undergraduate internship module at Kent used to offer 5 workshops reflecting on WBL and the theory-practice nexus. We consistently saw that students found it extremely useful to go through such a process collectively in an organised manner. Similarly, the focus groups undertaken at Coventry highlight the very positive effects of collectively reflecting on work experience with groups of practitioner-learners. Key positive aspects include the developing “bond” between learners as a consequence of students with varying backgrounds sharing work-based experiences and analyses as well as the increased participation rate in class. Additionally, teaching staff also feel enriched by this experience.

The challenges of including work-experience in the classroom

When teaching staff at Coventry reflected on the challenges related to teaching practitioner-learners a number of issues were identified. First, students may perceive a disconnect between theory and practice which may lead to counter-productive attitudes. Lecturing staff did

point out that at times, when presenting a concept or theory, there would be an attitude from students which suggested “this is not how things work in the real world”. This would pose a challenge to lecturers as students who took this standpoint would effectively disengage from its utility in understanding the world. This concern could in principle also apply to internships.

Another challenge relates to confidence of students and emerging hierarchies among the participants in teaching events. Lecturers noted that the extent to which students share their experiences can be patchy or uneven. This was linked to the amount of experience that a learner would have in the professional environment, whereby the more experienced professionals would often be more confident in sharing reflections. Lecturers also noted that power differentials existed which related to the type of profession which learners worked at. If for instance a learner is working in the international arena (i.e. UN) they may be more vocal than those who work in smaller local organisations or the voluntary sector. This “internal hierarchy” was noted by a lecturer who observed that some students naturally felt their voice should be more or less prominent.

The focus groups with teaching staff at Coventry clearly highlight the benefits and challenges of a more practice-focussed student body that can draw on often very significant professional experience in the field of PCS. The potential benefits are to be aspired to when considering the design of WBL elements of PCS degrees. The challenges, and in particular those related to hierarchies may also occur in workshops and seminars related to internships and other forms of WBL and guarding against these is a challenge for “traditional” degrees as much as for programmes focussing on practitioner-learners. Essentially, these can only be addressed if the teaching staff are aware of these issues and develop strategies and interventions to address them. These challenges are not all that different from managing “quiet” and “active” students in more typical university setting.

Volunteering

Students volunteer for a number of reasons. Motivations are both intrinsic and instrumental as the focus groups, interviews, and survey on volunteering have shown even though students tend to deny in focus groups instrumental motivations for being a volunteer. Some of the key intrinsic motivations for volunteering are making a difference in society, complementing the purely theoretical work at university, and finding and connecting with like-minded people outside university. More instrumental motivations include skills development and developing professional networks.

In this project we are interested in understanding if and how volunteering might be included in the PCS curricula. To this end we discussed the inclusion of volunteering in the course of study, the award of ECTS credits for volunteering, and the institutionalisation of the reflection process. Overall, there is no clear agreement among students in the focus groups or qualitative interviews. The survey suggests that there may be support for ECTS credits but with regard to reflecting on volunteering in the classroom the respondents are split. One of the most interesting result emerging from the focus groups is that there seems to be a desire by a part of the student body to keep volunteering (almost) entirely separate from studying at the university. This is not just to do with the desire to protect the intrinsic nature of students' motivation to volunteer but also with the separation of "spaces". Volunteering is seen by part of the student body as an alternative space which is separate from their studies and life at university.

With regard to awarding ECTS credits, there is a split between those who fear that this will affect their own motivation, lead to administrative complications, and attract students who do not really care for the cause or the people and those who believe that their engagement and the significant amount of time dedicated to volunteering should be recognised by the award of such credits. Stakeholders recognised that one strong argument for awarding credits is related to inclusion. Among volunteers, so the impression, white, middle-class students are overrepre-

sented. Obstacles to volunteering may be economic, or due to caring commitments and a number of other factors, all of which make it difficult to devote time to volunteering and bearing the (financial) opportunity costs of doing so. The INCOPS survey also showed that respondents who described themselves as having a disability were much less likely to have volunteered. From an inclusion perspective, then, there are strong arguments for awarding ECTS credits for volunteering activities.

There is support for a version of an institutionalised reflection process on volunteering. In the focus groups students mostly agreed that an exchange of experiences and a reflection on these experiences is to be welcome as long as it occurs within the context of existing seminars. Seminars which address related topics (e.g. civil society) would offer themselves for an exchange and reflection on volunteering activities. This suggests that students are open to discussing their volunteer experiences. However, they want these discussions to be linked to substantive discussions and teaching events which in any case engage with civil society activism rather than teaching events that focus explicitly on the reflection of skills development and employability. This once more speaks to the mostly intrinsic motivation for volunteering. Since these insights are mostly based on results from the Marburg focus group we also fielded questions related to this issue as part of the INCOPs survey. The survey results show that students who already volunteer are split on whether discussing experiences in the class room will make them volunteer more and students who do not volunteer (yet) do not find much additional motivation in such a prospect. In any case, universities are probably well-advised to consider the evidence for intrinsic motivations and (some) students' desire to keep volunteering at least partially separate from the "university logic".

Inclusion

From an inclusion perspective, it is particularly students who described themselves as having a disability that we have to take into consideration. While the number of responses here are small and while we therefore have to be cautious about

drawing strong conclusions, the results do suggest that these students undertake less internships and volunteering. We did not find clear trends as far as the relationship between disposable income and undertaking internships or volunteering is concerned.⁹ Without regression analysis, which may be impossible due to the small number of cases, we cannot tell if there really is a relationship. Non-EU/non-UK students should also be kept in mind as this group has much higher incidences of unpaid internships putting these students at a disadvantage. Moreover, about a third of these students revert to doing internships in their home countries, partially as a consequence of the costs of doing an internship in the countries where they study and partially as a consequence of not having the same information about internships in their host country as home students. Additionally, non-EU/non-UK students are also less likely to have volunteered. Finally, there is a gender gap when it comes to undertaking internships with higher incidences of male students who had not done an internship at all.

Recommendations

We consider WBL to be a central and useful component of PCS programmes. In our experience, and this has been confirmed by students and stakeholders, the transfer of WBL into university learning and vice versa is very beneficial. This is true for the students, who gain important practical experience and increase their chances for attractive job offers, as well as for the internship providers and volunteer organisations, who can involve motivated students with professional backgrounds in their work. University teaching also benefits from students being able to contribute their practical experience to teaching. In light of our data analysis, we make the following recommendations to make WBL even more effective for PCS programmes.

First, PCS programmes should do more to develop shared expectations among stakeholders. There seems to be a tension between students' fully benefitting from an internship in terms of

WBL and the (perceived) demands or expectations of internship providers. Students may expect employment or good references as a result of an internship and mostly want to be seen to do what's best for the internship provider rather than focussing on their learning. For example, we saw that students select tasks with the employers' needs rather than their learning requirements in mind. Setting out clear agreed expectations among all stakeholders regarding the purpose and goals of the internship may allow students to focus on learning and allow internship providers to support this. Setting such expectations could be based on the learning outcomes and an analysis of potential skills students aim to develop. Since learning outcomes enshrine PCS programme expectations, awareness of learning outcomes among internship providers and students are important to shape WBL and allow it to contribute to academic learning. Developing shared expectations among all stakeholders means that students do not face a trade-off between focussing on their learning and fulfilling the expectations of the internship provider, which is likely to lead to a more profound WBL experience.

Second, a formal framework for accompanying the internship experience is important for allowing students to achieve the full WBL potential. This framework should cover the pre-internship, during-internship, and post-internship phase. From setting common expectations to post-internship reflection, it might be useful to have structures in place that actively accompany the entire internship experience. The importance of shaping expectations at the outset and reflecting on skills that should be developed has already been addressed in the previous paragraph. There is, however, also a need to accompany students during the internship to ensure an optimal learning process which may benefit from exchange with university staff or fellow students. Online platforms may be of great use in this context. We will develop these points in IO3 and IO4. Finally, the post-internship reflection process, which is commonly institutionalised at universities, constitutes part of the framework. As the evidence

⁹ As suggested earlier, a regression analysis may provide such insights at least in principle but given the small number of responses and the large number of confounders it is unlikely to yield significant results.

shows, there is quite some disagreement among students with regard to how this is to be organised. However, there are good reasons to at least offer a forum for collective reflection. In IO4 we will develop a model of “service learning” which addresses the issue of an overall framework.

Third, including WBL experiences in the classroom seems a productive way of linking work-based learning with academic learning. While individual reflection embedded in internship reports will probably remain necessary, the experiences from teaching practitioner-learners at Coventry suggest that a teaching strategy that allows students to draw on their own WBL experiences has the potential to transform the classroom. Moreover, students who volunteer also felt that this was the most appropriate way of linking the volunteering experience with academic learning. Ensuring that students may contribute their WBL experiences in the classroom aids with developing reflections on the theory-practice nexus, a key aspect of WBL. It also allows for more student engagement and enriches the learning process. Of course, fostering such positive effects requires lecturers to design at least parts of their module in such a way that it makes an explicit link between practice experienced through WBL and the theory and evidence taught in the module.

Finally, there are very good reasons for developing long term relationships between internship providers and PCS programmes. The ability to secure an internship is an important skill from an employability perspective. However, having long-term relationships with internship providers that allow PCS programmes to place students with the same provider over the years are preferable in our view. For one, our evidence shows that students with certain characteristics are disadvantaged when it comes to securing internships. Therefore, if universities secured placements with internship providers, then the situation would improve from an inclusion perspective.

Second, long-term institutionalised relationships between PCS programmes and internship providers will likely help with the implementation of the three points above. Developing shared expectations among stakeholders would be significantly simplified if universities were working with the same internship providers over time. Additionally, the transaction costs will be much lower for such a scenario. Developing long-term relationships with internship providers also allows stakeholders to develop a stronger support structure for accompanying students throughout their internships. This is the case since a longer time horizon provides internship providers and PCS programmes with an incentive to institutionalise the arrangement and develop a support structure. Moreover, such long-term relationships are also likely to make it easier to include WBL in the classroom. Lecturers would be in a better position to anticipate the WBL “expertise” of students in their classroom and hence may find it easier to prepare accordingly. Finally, a key advantage of developing long-term relationships between PCS programmes and internship providers is that a proper fit between the internship and PCS programmes’ learning outcomes can be ensured, which again aids WBL. Since more than 50% of students in our sample have more than six months fulltime work experience, internships will for many students only add value to the degree that they provide learning that goes beyond generic skills. All these advantages to student learning taken together, PCS programmes should focus on developing such long-term relationships. Given the significant costs of doing so, funding schemes focussed on such activities should be a priority for funders.

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Appendix I

Focus group/qualitative interview question guide

Please collect some basic biographical information as well as information on the length of internships/volunteering, whether it was compulsory or not, whether it was assessed or not. Please also collect relevant information about the providers of internships (number of interns, do they have specific collaborations with universities etc) as well as WBL provisions of your university.

- Please note, not all questions can be fit into any one focus group. Please select questions appropriate in the context of your programmes and the priority areas of the project.
- You may want to add additional questions in the light of our discussions in Marburg. Additional topics/issues we identified are listed in the relevant section.
- Please report all additional questions as outlined on your focus group questionnaire (or as asked in the focus group) so we can add them to this question guide.

Internship focus groups

Participants

- Students who undertook internships as well as students who did not undertake internships (if such students can be identified).
- Teaching staff, programme managers, internship coordinators, employability officers ,etc. at universities.
- Non-academic partners, alumni (including, where feasible, alumni who work for internship providers or with interns).

Engagement questions

- What are your thoughts on internships? Have you done/hosted/administered one?

Exploration questions

Open-ended questions

- Pre-internship: What is involved in preparing for an internship and what are the challenges? (All stakeholders – can be made more precise for different stakeholders, i.e. how did students prepare, what do programmes provide in terms of assistance and training, how do internship providers prepare for the arrival of an intern, e.g. prior communication, briefings, agreements on what is most conducive to WBL)
- During internship: How are the tasks selected and how is work supervised? (All stakeholders – more specific questions can be added under this heading, e.g. how do students decide which tasks to engage with most, do programme directors etc. guide students on this matter, to what degree do internship providers set the boundaries for what intern engages with?)
- Post-internship:
 - What shape does the reflection process take? (All stakeholders, but centrally students – more specific questions for stakeholders: @providers – any debriefing, reflection with intern, peers? @programme – how is reflection organised? With peers? How much of it is assessed? @students – how do you reflect on your WBL experience? What is most helpful for the reflection process? Any informal channels? Formal channels? Assessment?

- How is the internship assessed and how does the assessment help with learning? What is the aim of the assessment (what are the learning outcomes covered by assessments). (If no credits are awarded for internships (no assessment): would you prefer the internship to be credited? How would this help with learning?)
- What would aid in creating a better learning environment? Have you made use of online/virtual help or apps? Have these been useful?
- Possible additional topics:
 - Specific additional questions about autonomous and self-directed learning.
 - Differences between BA and MA level internships, specifically in terms of learning outcomes, content, skills. (Most relevant to partners who have UG and PG PCS degrees with internships). WBL inform theory or theory Work-based Learning? Is there a difference in this sense between UG and PG?
 - Does volunteering make a difference for doing internships later on in the academic career? If so, how?
 - Long distance learning (COVENTRY): Technology/virtual space not relevant to WBL but to academic learning and to inclusion in academic learning. Include questions on the theory-practise nexus for students who come from practise.

Follow-up questions

- Get more detail on preparations/challenges as appropriate; details on integration of theory and practice during preparations; details on any discussion of specific skills development
- Get more detail on selection and engagement with tasks if required.
- Get details on how frequently students interact with provider supervisor and academic staff.
- Get information on communication and coordination between academic and provider staff.
- Ask if clarification is needed (tell me more, help me understand this ...)

Probing questions

Probe how preparation has affected (aided/hindered) internship activities and learning during the internship. Probe how lack of support may have stopped students from engaging in WBL.

- To what degree is selection of and engagement with tasks guided by learning outcomes, requirements of assessments, linking theory and practice?
- To what degree are providers aware of learning outcomes and academic institutions aware of practical experience provided? Do these stakeholders discuss these matters?
- @academic programmes – Is reflection a central element of internship learning outcomes and how central is the theory-practice element? Is reflection embedded in the internship setup including the pre- and during- phases? Is guidance on reflection given from the start?

@providers – is reflection on internship experiences part of the internship supervision arrangement? To what degree is it linked or coordinated with academic learning outcomes?

@students – were you aware about the reflective element from the outset? Was the process of reflection a continuous one? Did the formal process (seminars, assessment) help? How did discussing your experiences with peers aid the process? How could the process be improved to aid your reflection on your learning?

- @academic programmes – are assessments designed to aid reflection? Are assessments designed to ensure that students engage with relevant tasks, reflect on WBL in all phases or some phases (pre, during, post)? Are assessments known to students in the pre-internship phase?

@students – were you aware of the nature and details of the assessments? Did these guide your task selection, engagement or collection of evidence? Did assessments help you structure your reflection? Did your internship tasks fit the assessment/allow you to undertake the assessment?

- What specific actions could programme’s providers take? What would students have found useful to create a better learning environment? Please prompt if necessary: Would more coordination aid a better learning environment? Would learning plans help? What should these entail?

Exit questions

- Is there anything else?

Focus groups on volunteering

Participants

- “Active” students (who volunteer)
- Teachers, programme managers, university representatives, employability officers if relevant
- Non-academic partners (hosting volunteers), alumni (for example working for NGOs etc. who may have both perspectives)

Engagement questions

- What are your thoughts on volunteering?

Exploration questions

- What preparations are being undertaken prior to undertaking volunteer work (all stakeholders)?
- Is volunteering accompanied in any way (guidelines, meetings with university staff, advisors)? (All stakeholders).
- Did you reflect on your volunteering experience (students)? Did you reflect on your volunteering in the context of what you learned at university? (Students). Are there tools or processes to aid such reflection (students, providers, universities).
- Have you made use of online/virtual help or apps? Have these been useful?
- Did you have any opportunities to include your volunteering experience in class discussions or assignments? (Students)
- Can credit be awarded for volunteering at your institution? If not, do you think that there should be an opportunity for credit to be awarded? (Students, university stakeholders)

Follow-up questions

- Obtain details on who undertakes these preparations if relevant.
- Clarify if ad hoc or systematic if unclear
- Clarify if reflection on theory-practice link was involved.
- Which virtual spaces/apps?
- Clarify if this is ad-hoc or systematic if unclear.
- Ask for clarification if needed (tell me more, help me understand this....)

Probing questions

- Probe if students set themselves goals or have any specific skills development in mind before they engage in volunteering. If yes, probe what these goals or skills are linked to, i.e. the learning outcomes of their programme of study, transferable skills linked to employability, etc. Probe if providers, universities, set goals or focus on specific skills development (if involved in preparations).
- Probe if students monitor their own learning during volunteering or if stakeholders, universities do. If so, how do they monitor their learning?
- 3./5. How could the learning process and reflection process be aided by class activities, the curriculum, university support, provider support? (All stakeholders). Would a (online) toolkit for getting the most out of volunteering help? Would specific modules (assessed)/workshops (not assessed) help to systematically reflect on the volunteering experiences?
- Do virtual spaces/apps provide assistance, orientation or content that you cannot get elsewhere? Or is it just more convenient?
- 6. Would you volunteer more if you could get credits for such activities?

Exit questions

- Is there anything else?

Question Guide Inclusion

Engagement question

- If you have volunteered or undertaken an internship, what did you find most challenging? If you have not done an internship, what stopped you from doing one?

Exploration questions

- Many internships and volunteering opportunities require mobility, i.e. they have to be undertaken away from your usual study environment, sometimes even abroad. Have you experienced any difficulties with regard to mobility (e.g. did you not apply for or take up certain internships for this reason)? (Students). Have your students experienced such difficulties? (Universities, providers).
- If you haven't done an internship/volunteered, was that due to the challenges posed by mobility? (Students). Did students not do internships due to mobility challenges? (Universities, providers)?
- (NOTE: mobility can be related to among others: disability, child or family care commitments, visa restrictions, or financial restrictions (especially where internships have to be undertaken abroad)).
- If mobility issues affected your choice of internship, what characterised the internships/volunteering you undertook? How did the internship allow you to solve the mobility challenge? (Students, other stakeholders).
- How might an internship look like that does not pose any mobility challenges (from your perspective)? What role might digital/virtual elements play? (All stakeholders)
- Virtual internships are not quite the same as joining the workplace in person. What skills may be missed out on? What skills may be gained that an intern would not gain when in the workplace? (All stakeholders)
- How can we address any skills deficit that may emerge as a consequence of virtual internships?

Follow-up questions

- Ensure we have a good understanding of the precise mobility factors that affected internships.
- Ensure we have a good understanding of the precise features of internships.
- Get as wide a range of responses and as much detail from respondents as possible.

- Clarify response if necessary.
- Ditto

Probing questions

- Probe mobility issues if answers do not purely focus on mobility issues.
- We are looking for creative solutions here, so a cue in that direction may be useful. Please probe details of suggested solutions. Probe digital/virtual angle if not elaborated on.
- Probe regarding work place skills and tacit knowledge that interns acquire in the work place (tacit knowledge in this context refers to skills and knowledge that cannot really be taught in readings, seminars etc.)
- We are looking for creative solutions here. So, probe to get the most out of respondents with regard to this.

Exit question

- Is there anything else?

Appendix II – Reports

Babes-Bolyai University (Cluj), 11.02.2022

Framework and information

Within the INCOPS project, the objective of O2 is to deeply understand the framework of organization of WBL and internship activities in each of the study programmes included in the project. But understanding the way the different partner universities in this project organize their activities also implies discussing with the stakeholders involved in this process and collecting their views and their claims within a dynamic interactive discussion. This took the shape of a series of focus groups (FG) organized by the partner universities.

The present report is based on two focus groups organised between February the 11th and 13th 2022, involving teaching staff, students and stakeholders, and we have involved 13, respectively 15 participants. The focus groups were held remotely, and allowed a very active interaction between all participants. Methodologically, the focus group included international and Romanian MA students from the Faculty of European Studies (Babes-Bolyai University) at Cluj, as well as teaching staff and external stakeholders from all over the country. This allowed for a more diverse sharing of experiences and a richer exchange. We followed the set of questions following the guidelines provided by Kent. It should be noted that many of the issues listed in the alignment were suggested by the participants themselves throughout the discussion, allowing for a clearer identification of what constitutes a matter of concern or benefits arising from WBL.

One of these FGs was organized with the students of the MA programme called Comparative European Political Studies. It is an international programme organized at Cluj, in French, since 2001, in partnership with several partners: the Paris-Est Creteil University (France) and the University of Lille (France), the University of Luxembourg, the University of Szeged (Hungary) and the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar (Senegal). This MA programme has been included in an

Erasmus Mundus project named MITRA (Transnational Migrations) financed by the European Union since 2011.

The FG was organized Friday February 11, 2022, in an online format, because of the pandemic conditions. The length of the FG was of 118 minutes. The participants from each category of stakeholders were selected mainly based on their prior or present involvement in WBL-like and internship activities and naturally also based on their availability. Thus, the FG included a total of 13 participants:

- 8 students, of whom 4 Romanian, 2 French, 2 Guinean (5 women, 3 men)
- 5 employers: one officer of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (based in Bucharest), one officer of the Permanent Representation of European Commission in Romania (based in Bucharest), one adjunct director of the French University Agency (Central and Eastern Europe Office, based in Bucharest), one officer of the French Institute in Romania (based in Cluj), one coordinator within the Centre for Peace PATRIR and NGO/Think Tank (based in Cluj).

Results, interpretation and conclusion

Several relevant conclusions resulted out of the FG discussions. For the purposes of this synthetic report, we will take them one by one. To start with, several representatives of the employers indicated that, as far as students who are included in internship programmes are concerned, the difference between internships and more permanent jobs seems to be almost inexistent. To put it in the words of a respondent, “Students join us for internships with the clear purpose to stay as our employees [...]. Consequently, from Day 1 of their internship, they are doing their best to show themselves useful and available”. This attitude has, according to both students and employers, positive but also negative consequences. On the positive side, students are contributing to the development of the organization’s activities and perform in a short period of time a variety of tasks. In this way, they get used with intensive work, sometimes under stress. But, at the same time, in their attempt to prove they are indispensable, they skip some of

their progressive training steps and go directly to the most finite stages of programmes and projects, in an effort to show their capacity to provide successful results. This means that some parts of the training are not completed because of the students' preoccupation to be permanently hired by the employer.

Then, several students have pointed out the employers' variety of levels of readiness and preparedness to integrate interns. This observation was more valid in the case of students who had multiple internship experiences, as they were able to duly compare employers' skills and attitudes. But even one-time former interns noticed that there were varieties even within the same organization with respect to the capacity of managing internship activities and to the competences and skills of the responsible personnel. One of the students described his experience in the following words:

"In the time I was in that particular organization [not having a representative in the FG], I changed to departments. In the first, I was almost ignored and I performed sub-secretarial tasks, such as xeroxing documents. In the second, I learnt a lot, as they asked me to document myself a conflict situation and to help them simulate a negotiation."

These differences are also naturally related to the hosting capacity of the organization and to the concrete context in which it finds itself at the moment the intern starts his/her programme. A state institution's officer admitted that

"Especially with the pandemics, we lost personnel. So, when you finally get your hand upon an intern after the fastidious process of receiving all the necessary clearances, you put him/her at work on the burning matters of the moment and for the tasks you are in need of."

This situation naturally engenders difficulties and misunderstandings between the intern, the employer and, sometimes, the sending university. But it might have nevertheless some paradoxical positive consequences, in that it could

build a more natural environment for the development of the intern's future carrier. In other words, as said by an employer and confirmed by two students during the focus groups,

"students have to get used to the reality of what a working environment means, where sometimes the employees perform lots of different tasks instead of the idealized view of hyper-stable and mega-specialized institutions."

Thirdly, the FG discussions revealed the different expectations students and employers may have about the internships' objectives. As stated before, numerous students perceive the internship programme as a first step within the respective organization and tend to inflate their activities in order to look serious and trusty. At the same time, employers are generally using the interns as temporary (low-profile and non-remunerated) personnel without any prospect to offer them permanent positions or even shorter-term contracts.

Both sides put nevertheless a common emphasis on the formation of the interns during their stay in the organization. Several employers underlined the "real-life" experience that the interns benefit of and the opportunity to be instructed via trainings, workshops and team-building exercises. At their turn, three students explained that they were able to "complete their knowledge and skills" provided by the academic curricula and to acquire "a much better idea about the tasks a practitioner in conflict management has to perform".

However, students' and employers' expectations diverge with regard to the responsibility of the employer in this internship management process. The interns believe that "the employers" responsibility is the same as the one of the university, as we are formatted [sic] by both." The students stressed the importance of the internship's consequences on their future path. As one of them put it, "they [the employing organization] need to be careful of what they teach us, as we will do the same when being employed elsewhere". On the other hand, WBL and more generally internship activities are perceived by the employers as punctual interventions, among

many others, in the students' professionalization process. Consequently, there is no responsibility for the organizations for what the students will do after having completed the internship. As one of them put it:

"We're just showing them what we do and how we do what we do. Different students remain with various elements of what they experienced, these fundamentally vary in function of their capacity of absorption and processing. How could guarantee that they got them right and that will use them in accordance to our instructions and practices?"

The second FGs was organized with the students of the MA programme called International Relations, Foreign Policy and Conflict Management. It is an international programme organized at Cluj in English since 2016, in partnership with one international partner, Essex University. The FG was organized Friday February 13, 2022, in an online format, because of the pandemic conditions. The length of the FG was of 120 minutes. The participants from each category of stakeholders were selected mainly based on their prior or present involvement in WBL-like and internship activities and naturally also based on their availability. Thus, the FG included a total of 15 participants:

- 10 students, (5 women, 5 men)
- 5 employers: one representative of the Municipality of Cluj-Napoca (Romania), one career counsellor from Babes-Bolyai University, a representative of a SMS training company (Hum Consulting), the HR director of NTT Data (IT company), and the president of a Cluj-Napoca based think tank (Initiativa pentru Romania).

The first phase was focused on the selection processes of interns, thus the discussion about selection criteria, skills that are favoured in the process and duration of internships had been addressed. Selection processes usually include on one side, the needs of the receiving organisation, and on the other side the interview, which proofs soft skills of the student. The application process assesses the CV and usually consists also of an

interview. Curriculum vitae assessment looks at scientific performance, but also extra-curricular activities developed. We have noticed a clash between two diametrical opposed positions.

"The companies where I've sent my CV are not replying and as such I have to adopt and accept internship offers from organisation I am not extremely interested in."

The perspective of the company is different:

"Students don't put enough effort to elaborate their CVs. The documents are poorly prepared and superficial. It is important to prepare them during their studies that a CV is the imagine of a future employee and it is required to be very accurate."

The interview allows one to better grasp the motives for applying, oral skills, communication competencies, among others. Regarding the duration of internships, the Romanian mandatory length of the internship is minimum 3 weeks, but students and companies prefer 1 or 1.5 month. The general perception among stakeholders is that the ideal lengths should be 3 months, rendering it difficult to accompany tasks and to promote skills development. However, the idea was shared that it is still important to allow shorter duration internships, or even less, since it is always an experience in a non-academic environment, and thus it will always contribute to the learning process. Therefore, duration should depend on the context and objectives that are set beforehand as well as the expected outcomes. As the FG interviewed MA students, we found out that Master students have used more opportunities than BA students, though the options are still limited.

Skills identified as usually missing when students apply for a first internship relate to communication skills, soft skills, how to deal with specific software, databases and text analysis, knowledge about national legislation.

The external stakeholders participating in the focus group agreed on the importance of facilitating the opportunity for students to take in-

ternships during the study, but were divided regarding the role those internships should have in the students' training.

“As an academic and think tanker, I would suggest for our students to take the internship especially during their MA. Before they are not prepared for a real impact and will not be hired. We see this scenario for years.”

“The main difficulty is the fact that I see a gap between that training at workplace and academic skills. Students are fast learners, and many of the competencies they acquire it happens at the workplace.”

During the programme, a working plan is defined through detailing tasks and goals. The definition of learning outcomes happens at this stage in a formal way, although internships were defined by stakeholders as a “process”. Nevertheless, internship plans are usually not very detailed, apart from the protocol between institutions and the exercise of task definition that may not be fully formalised. The grading (pass/failed system) is not crucial neither for receiving organisation, nor for the intern. It is considered more a formal act.

Conclusions

This FGs highlighted the important progresses made in the process of increasing students' professionalization through internships. WBL is now a component of the students' curricula and creates a sizable difference in their capacity to understand the nature of the requirements of their future jobs. The FG reveals that students believe they are better prepared both in terms of skills and in terms of information thanks to the internship programmes.

At the same, the research reveals the complexity of the relation between the students and the organizations which host them as interns. Perceptions with regard to the nature of internships, on their objectives and on their outcomes remain significantly different. This results sometimes into misunderstandings and deceptions on both sides.

During our FG, we did not directly address inclusion issues. As international non-European students faced occasionally discrimination, the

motives given by receiving institutions were linguistic skills, not race or gender issues. It is hard to find the real reasons behind the particular contexts.

Finally, for all these reasons, universities need to approach students' placements in a more responsible and assertive way. They need to more closely follow the manner in which students are instructed and trained by the employer and to weigh the amount and the nature of the real tasks that the interns perform within the organization, beyond the initially general stated lists of activities. They also need to invent more adapted ways for integrating WBL and internship in the academic curricula.

University of Coimbra, 09.11.2021

Introductory remarks

This report is based on the focus groups organised at the University of Coimbra, on November 9, 2021, involving teaching staff, students and stakeholders. There were three different sessions, in order to discuss with these different audiences their approaches/understandings/perspectives regarding needs and experiences on WBL. Despite the focus of this Intellectual Outputs on stakeholders, the Coimbra team understood that gathering these different perspectives would be useful to better grasp needs and experiences regarding WBL in a more multi-level perspective. Since internships are the most relevant WBL approach at the University of Coimbra, these have been the only theme discussed in all focus groups. Each focus group involved around 12 to 15 participants, was held remotely, and allowed a very active interaction between all participants. It should be highlighted that the focus group with students included only Coimbra students, but the other two focus groups, involving teaching staff and stakeholders included participants from all over the country. This allowed for a more diverse sharing of experiences and a richer exchange. The Coimbra team formulated a set of questions following the guidelines provided by Kent, which set the direction of the discussion. It should be noted that many of the issues listed in the alignment were suggested by the participants themselves throughout the discussion, allowing for a clearer identification of

what constitutes a matter of concern or benefits arising from WBL. Just a final remark to note that some interviews are still to be conducted and planned to take place in January aimed at clarifying and getting some additional information on some of the issues discussed.

Regarding Coimbra, and in the specific area of PCS, WBL is to a great extent centred on non-compulsory internships. Students may undergo a curricular internship or a non-curricular one. Volunteer work is not considered for this effect, although there are some initiatives at Coimbra and partner institutions where students may do their volunteer activities, but this is still very ad-hoc and not integrated into students' training. In this context, Master students can choose to either develop a research-oriented dissertation or do that in the context of an internship. In case they chose the latter, this will take the form of a curricular internship, where they register in a seminar called "Internship" which is assessed with the public defence of the Master's dissertation (in this case called "Internship Report"). There are specific administrative rules to be followed, according to an Internships Ruling, where the application process is clarified. In this area of studies, as well as in other areas, although there is a list of entities where students can do their internship, both within Portugal and abroad, it is the student who is responsible for finding a hosting institution, which then has to be validated by the Master's Coordination, in order to assure adequacy and recognition. Moreover, at this stage, supervision at the host institution is also verified, as this is considered a relevant element for validating the internship. An academic supervisor from the Master programme is also nominated to accompany the student's progress. According to the Internships Ruling, for the internship to be eligible it must have a duration of 4 consecutive months, with a total of 616 hours (full time, 22 days per month x 5 days per week x 4 months) (art.6). These basic principles for the functioning of Internships in this area of study follow the Internships Ruling in the Area of International Relations, "Regulamento dos Estágios Curriculares no Âmbito do Mestrado em Relações Internacionais".

If students opt for doing a non-curricular internship, these are usually framed in the "Summer Internships" Ruling, both at the national and international level, with a variable duration and might be conducted any time throughout the year. Usually these take place during the Summer period mostly due to time constraints during the academic year. In this case, this is a WBL opportunity that complements the students' training but that is not directly linked to the award of the Master's Degree. This WBL experience is included in the Supplement to the Diploma.

A last remark should be made to the fact that there are no significant differences between internships at BA and MA levels. This is an issue that is currently being discussed, as we understand the excellency requirements need to be adjusted and differentiated. This is related both to the type of activities and responsibility of the students' during the internship, but also to skills' development and potential for future integration in the job market. This is an issue we believe this project might help to clarify and eventually we will get new insights on how to proceed. For the moment, internships are available to students in both study cycles, but always non-compulsory. At BA level, students might do a non-curricular internship which follows the same procedures of those at MA level, and will be recognised also in their Supplement to the Diploma. Most relevant in this regard is the fact that the criteria for selecting host institutions are the same, mainly adequacy of the scientific area, with no clear specification regarding the study cycle.

In other Portuguese Universities with training in the area of PCS, WBL is mostly non-compulsory, following the specific rulings each university defines to frame these experiences. Overall, internships are a path students choose in their training, to fulfil two main goals, as became clear from the focus groups and literature review: the linkage between theory and practice, and the experience to facilitate their integration in the job market. The former is part of an old concern among students that their training is quite theoretical and that complementing it with concrete work-based experiences would assist in complementing their training while providing space for skills-development; the latter has to do with the

competencies related to having a WBL experience, which might be recognised by potential future employers. These two goals will be further discussed in this report, as the opinions among stakeholders diverge.

The following sections include the main results from the focus groups' discussions, organised around the pre-internship experience, the internship experience itself, and the period after the internship, reflecting mainly about procedures, motivations and expectations, curriculum integration and the theory/practice question, skills development, inclusion issues, and the pandemic and the use of digital means/development of digital competencies. The main guiding questions we followed can be found in Annex 1 and were based on the University of Kent document (Annex 2).

Pre-internship experience

The section on pre-internship experience focuses on the period when students need to be prepared to be proactive learners, thus the motivations and expectations associated with this WBL experience are most relevant. Moreover, it is in this phase that the selection processes take place, thus the discussion about selection criteria, skills that are favoured in the process and duration of internships are here addressed.

Selection processes usually include curricular assessment and an interview, requiring soft skills from the student. The application process assesses the curriculum vitae and usually consists also of an interview. Curriculum vitae assessment looks at scientific performance, but also extra-curricular activities developed, from participation in a research team, to involvement with students' or other associations or an Erasmus+ experience, for example. The interview allows one to better grasp the motives for applying, oral skills, communication competencies, among others. Internships involving payment of a salary usually have a more formal and demanding selection process – but following the same criteria (CV assessment and an interview) – and are usually longer, lasting at least 12 months. Regarding the duration of internships, general perception among stakeholders is that less than 3 months is too short a period, rendering it difficult to accompany tasks and to promote skills development.

However, the idea was shared that it is still important to allow shorter duration internships, such as one-month summer internships, or even less, since it is always an experience in a non-academic environment, and thus it will always contribute to the learning process. Therefore, duration should depend on the context and objectives that are set beforehand as well as the expected outcomes. For students, it depends to a great extent on the motivation as they might opt for doing a curricular internship, assessed as their Master's dissertation, or to go for non-curricular internships with variable duration, depending on resources and time management. The fact that in Portugal most internships are not paid has been mentioned as an important factor in the formats chosen. In fact, many students do not consider this option given the financial constraints involved. Interestingly, one of the options particularly at Master level has been to apply for an international internship and use Erasmus funds to support the experience. Some of our Master students have used this opportunity, though it has still been limited.

Skills identified as usually missing when students apply for a first internship relate to soft skills, how to deal with excel, software like SPSS, databases and text analysis, knowledge about national legislation on the public sector (when relevant). Skills students usually bring to the internship and that reveal purposeful, according to the focus groups discussion, pertain to the management of social networks, capacity of adaptation, critical analysis competencies, theoretical knowledge, capacity to learn. This directly relates to the interaction theory/practice and the training provided during their studies. Critical analysis skills as well as capacity and flexibility to adjust are well assessed at the pre-internship stage, and confirmed as relevant during the internship, when usually these are still further consolidated.

From the focus group, one of the suggestions that came up was that Universities should reflect more about the purpose of the training expected in a certain scientific area, and bring other more practical areas closer. When it comes to the specific areas of peace, security and conflict studies, further connecting to areas such as literature and arts, or journalism, etc., these were referred

to as opening up new possibilities when devising training in non-academic settings. This might open up the potential range of hosting institutions for WBL.

The teaching staff participating in the focus group agreed on the importance of facilitating the opportunity for students to take internships while still studying, but were divided regarding the role those internships should have in the students' training. Some highlighted the importance for skills development and job market inclusion and on how students returned to classes with first-hand experience and more mature. Others referred to the added work brought with supervising the curricular internships and how most of these are too basic to really provide a fruitful articulation between theory and practice. However, they all ended up agreeing that the issue was mostly on the need to clarify the purpose of the internship in students' training and then identify hosting institutions for better defining relevant and adequate internship plans. Students also verbalised this tension between the importance of internships for skills development and labour market integration and the actual dynamics of most internships that end up being too limited in terms of their responsibilities. Particular importance was given to the idea that the links and articulations between internship and labour integration should be clearer and more reinforced.

A note on inclusion, which was discussed following an encompassing conceptualisation (gender, socio-economic disadvantaged, disabled, etc): hosting entities shared that they often receive requests to integrate interns with various disabilities and from very different social, ethnic backgrounds. None of the institutions had special rulings or procedures to promote or facilitate inclusion. However, these requests are viewed as common and most institutions are open and willing to accommodate these internships, treating all candidates at the same level in their selection process. In some, this is a legal requirement also. There are even examples of long-term inclusion with some of these interns being recruited after the internship. Regarding other forms of inclusion, the overall views expressed were that there are no discriminatory

practices, with equal opportunities to all candidates, selected on the basis of their merit. Teaching staff stated that inclusion rules and practices are in effect, but that in the case of disabled students, they are already a residual number and most of the times they do not apply. There is, however, nothing preventing their application or selection. There were no disabled students participating in the focus groups, although there was a gender, nationality and socio-economic diversity.

During-internship experience

This section focuses on the experiences during the internship, where, in the case of curricular internships, it needs to be ensured that students are guided and encouraged to engage fully in work tasks related to learning outcomes. This means it is at this stage that the objectives defined should be coherently in line with the tasks to be developed, skills to be acquired/consolidated and the overall learning outcomes, understood in an encompassing way (more formal learning outcomes, but also more personal ones). To formalise the internship, a supervisor is identified at the host institution, as well as an academic supervisor at the faculty, and usually a protocol between the Faculty/university and the host institution is signed. This assures a working plan is defined, detailing tasks and goals. The definition of learning outcomes happens at this stage in a formal way, although internships were defined by stakeholders as a "process" where learning is also continuously being adjusted. Nevertheless, internship plans are usually not very detailed, apart from the protocol between institutions and the exercise of task definition that may not be fully formalised (it depends on the host institution). The role of both the supervisor and the student in terms of their proactivity was described as fundamental in the process, thus the success of the overall experience has a strong human component. Also, it was underlined by stakeholders that usually the integration of interns in the team work usually occurs smoothly.

It was generally agreed that skills development during the internship is a very relevant area that fosters learning outcomes. Writing and oral skills, synthesis and focused writing, protocol,

networking, organisation of events, writing emails and letters, making contacts with external entities, communication skills, team work, experience that in many cases is relevant for job search, were all mentioned by stakeholders as clearly fundamental and visible in terms of their development and consolidation during the internship.

In the context of the focus group with stakeholders it was highlighted, however, that training opportunities are not always valued in the selection processes for the job market, because many of these are short-term and not considered relevant or consistent enough in terms of the training potential. This is interesting to the extent that it stands in contradiction with the view also expressed and mentioned that even short-term internships always provide room for growing, interaction, and further knowledge. The perception among students and colleagues is that of an always valuable experience, whereas among stakeholders this might not be so positively reflected in a selection process for a certain job position. In fact, students stated that even when internships are too limited in terms of their responsibilities, they enable students to try out certain types of positions, to get acquainted with different labour sectors, to get an idea of what certain jobs imply and inform their future labour market choices. Other students mentioned that, most of the times they were not able to articulate their internship experience with the theoretical knowledge they acquired at the university, although they valued the experience, but felt these were two independent training activities.

Finally, and of particular relevance for assessing the internship period, the delivery of a report at the end of the internship, which in the case of curricular internships is subject to an evaluation process, was highlighted and referred to as important. Usually the supervisor at the host institution and the supervisor at the academic level are members of the Master's dissertation evaluation committee, together with an external member that assesses the work, in order to assure independence. This report and its discussion, when applicable, allows assessing learning outcomes, and how these were driven by the tasks developed, as well as discussing the

articulation between theory and practice. However, still, in several cases, this exercise is limited. Several students also shared that many decide to take a curricular internship at the Master level, but then realise that linking their experience with the theoretical framework learned is too challenging and end up changing the internship into a non-curricular one and writing a research-oriented dissertation, even if inspired by their internship experience. This leads to the need for a deeper reflection on the level and framework for insertion of internships in Master's programmes who tend to have a deeper theoretical component.

Post-internship experience

This section focuses on the post-internship experience, in which students should be provided with the opportunity to share their experiences and to systematically reflect on it with peers. This is a rather limited exercise in the case of Portugal.

For the post-internship experience, one of the most relevant suggestions which gathered wide agreement was the attribution of credits (ECTS), considered as generally positive and as a way to more directly recognise the experience and work developed. The idea that internship experiences should be credited as part of students' training was consensual, but duly noting that this should occur through making sure that there is capacity from the host institutions to accommodate all the needs. Stakeholders revealed their concern in terms of their limited capacity to host all students potentially interested in doing an internship. It was also considered that providing ECTS would bring additional motivation for students to engage with this type of WBL experience. In some cases, internships are reported in the curricular path of the student in the supplement to the diploma, as mentioned above. In this way there is a formal recognition of the experience in the overall training of the student. Another suggestion, coming from the students' focus group, was to replace optional curricular units for internship opportunities which would also provide additional motivation for students to engage with this kind of experience. It seemed consensual that a proactive attitude from the student is fundamental, and that thinking about non-academic

activities that can be considered complementary to their training at the university is key. The overall idea is that students should be encouraged to do internships, reflect about this and share their experiences. Towards this end, there are, for example, roundtables organised with students that have had non-academic experiences to share these with their peers at welcoming weeks, students' associations' initiatives or university/faculty internship promotion sessions.

Despite the fact that everyone agreed upon the relevance of internships in the students' overall training, a note of caution was made regarding the need not to put too much weight on internships, in the sense that these will not solve all the issues related to academic work integration in the labour market nor serve as a panacea for the expectations students may have in relation to the opportunities that may result from taking an internship. In a nutshell, doing an internship will not naturally nor necessarily grant students a job opportunity. Participants also noted that other options should be considered in the overall training, besides internships. This was also considered to be a responsibility of the students who should seek complementary training, complementary skills, etc., as mentioned earlier.

Concluding remarks

A few notes on issues that in the case of Portugal seem relevant and should be better reflected upon:

- (better) articulation between internship and study cycle, better clarifying the differences between a BA and a MA internship
- assessments' reports after the internship should be more common and detailed, reflecting not only on learning outcomes/scientific aspects but also on more personal grounds on the overall experience
- rethinking duration of internships related to skills' development and to labour market integration
- internships are the main WBL experience in Portugal, diversification with gains to all involved is important
- motivations before, during and after are a key factor, as well as economic implications, as many times not having financial means

prevents students from engaging with this kind of WBL experience

Focus groups questions (Coimbra)

The following are the questions that guided our focus groups, in a shorter format but following Kent's guidelines. When putting the main issues to discussion, the participants engaged actively and sub-questions emerged naturally in the debate. We translated into English the main guidelines, below the ones for stakeholders, which were slightly adjusted for students and colleagues. The focus groups only focused on internships.

- What is the added value/motivation for the institution of welcoming students for internship experiences? How do you currently assess the link between teaching and the promotion of internships/experiences? What kind of skills are you stimulating that can reinforce students' training? What works better or worse? How do you think this articulation could be improved? What are the main difficulties you have encountered? And what do you feel are the main difficulties faced by the students?
- How the selection of students is processed, and then what type of procedures are implemented: who defines the tasks, is there a supervisor or someone who closely monitors the work to be developed? How is the articulation between the university/Host institution? And after completing the internship, is there any assessment/comment exercise, any conversation that allows you to reflect on the learning process, about the experience?
- How do you deal with inclusivity? (students with hearing, visual, physical disabilities; race, gender, ethnicity; use of digital means of communication; financial conditions)?
- Do you understand that this type of activity contributes to facilitating inclusion in the job market? When selecting profiles, is this type of experience valued? And why or what specifically?
- Do you think that a credits' system for these activities could be useful to attract students with a certain profile potentially better suited to your needs?

- Reflection about the pandemic impact overall, in case this is not raised along.
- Mentimeter: Identify words that you associate with the role of internships in the training of students. The cloud below summarises the main words suggested, such as experience, reality, skills development, CV enrichment, job market, learning, inclusion, training, future.

Coventry University, 24.03.2022

Lecturers on CTPSR MA

A focus group was held at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR, Coventry University) on Thursday 24th March, 2022. The focus group was attended by six lecturing staff who teach on various streams of CTPSR's MA Provision (Peace & Conflict Studies, Maritime Security, Global Diversity Governance). All staff have had over five years' experience of lecturing at Coventry. Several of the focus group supplemented this experience with previous teaching experience, additional teaching on international short courses, summer schools, and acting as external examiners for other universities.

The predominant student profile of the MA cohort on CTPSR courses are distance learners who undertake their studies on a part-time basis. Learners are therefore already in the workplace before, during and after their studies and are often mature students.

The focus group lasted one hour.

- 14.00–14.05: Introductions/Lecturing role and how long have you been lecturing MA at CTPSR
- 14.05–14.40: (3) In your experience to what extent do you feel that students make a link between their professional experience and their studies? (4) How have you encouraged student to reflect on their professional experiences to inform their learning whilst enrolled on PGT at CTPSR?
- 14.40 – 15.00: (5) How do you gauge if students take their learning from the classroom into their professional environments? Is it possible to gauge such a thing?

This report will firstly address questions (3) and (4), whereby lecturers reflected on their understanding within the classroom of the learners' journey. It will then address question (5) which asks lecturers to reflect on how they understand the impact of the learning process on the students' work environment.

In the classroom: How learners make a link between their professional experience and their studies?

There was near unanimity amongst lecturing staff that learners continually link the taught material to their experiences in the workplace. This happens through the student's own initiative, where in group discussions they will begin to reflect on their professional expertise.

This is heavily influenced in two ways. Firstly, reflection is "hardwired" into the course structure. Alongside traditional academic essays (which prepare students for the dissertation), the assessment of two modules in PGCert (1st stage) rely heavily on learners' experiences and reflections. The reason for this to be done twice (over two modules) is to offer students the chance to learn how to engage with reflective learning and improve and use it again. Secondly, this is facilitated by the lecturing staff, who will design parts of their module to make an explicit link between the theory and practice. A lecturer on the Peace and Conflict MA noted how she uses reflections from her professional experience to enrich her teaching.

This was seen as a generally positive occurrence, with those who engage with non-Coventry University courses in Peace & Conflict Studies noting the unique nature of CTPSR's provision. One lecturer on the Peace & Conflict MA remarked that it means students can think through the implications of the theories that are taught to the "real world". A lecturer on the MA Maritime Security noted that how students' "day job" may be influenced by broader trends was part of the appeal for students to enrol in the first place.

Once it became apparent that student's reflections on their work is a common occurrence, the discussion moved onto how this impacts the teaching process at CTPSR. Lecturers saw intrinsic value in the concept that learners made

the link between their experiences and the theory. They identified this in three ways:

- Firstly, the lecturers were able to deepen their understanding of the theories that they were presenting to the class. With greater feedback of how ideas and approaches meet the realities of the work environment, lecturers found that they received valuable feedback over the utility of the ideas that they presented. This was described as “incredibly enriching” by one lecturer.
- Unification of the learners across the classroom. A lecturer on the Peace & Conflict Studies MA noted how learners from vastly different professional experiences would “bond” when discussing the practicalities of particular ideas and concepts. This would enrich the learning experience as students from different backgrounds would begin to find commonalities. This was particularly notable on classes which mixed students from the Maritime Security and Peace & Conflict MA streams.
- Finally, it led to a greater awareness of the style of teaching. Lecturers agreed that the value of this integration of professional experience into learning was that it meant that the learning process became far more participatory. It was noted that the 1-way direction of traditional lecturing was less applicable in the case of lectures at CTPSR, and through recognising students’ experiences, the role of the lecturer was at times more of a “facilitator”.

Nevertheless, lecturing staff noted that there are challenges associated with integrating professional experiences into the lecturing environment. These challenges – related to power and hierarchy from within the learning group – are important and point towards lecturers’ ability to be creative in fostering an inclusive environment for learners:

- Disconnects between theory and practice – lecturing staff did point out that at times, when presenting a concept or theory, there would be an attitude from students which suggested “this is not how things work in the

real world”. This would pose a challenge to lecturers as students who took this standpoint would effectively disengage from its utility in understanding the world.

- Confidence and sharing – lecturers noted that the extent to which students share their experiences can be patchy or uneven. This was linked to the amount of experience that a learner would have in the professional environment, whereby the more experienced professionals would often be more confident in sharing reflections.
- Organisational differences – interestingly, lecturers noted that power differentials existed which related to the type of profession which learners worked at. If for instance a learner is working in the international arena (i.e. UN) they may be more vocal than those who work in smaller local organisations or the voluntary sector. This “internal hierarchy” was noted by a lecturer who observed that some students naturally felt their voice should be more or less prominent.
- Language – linked to the above two challenges is language challenges. CTPSR MA programmes are international in nature so it was highlighted that group reflection and learning would often lead to those not confident in their ability to speak English being drowned out by their English-speaking counterparts.
- Working with practitioner-learners – the fact that the cohort is practitioner-centred brings its own particular challenges. This is related to issues such as time and availability, as well as broader issues such as managing the expectation of the students. Moreover, it led to one lecturer pointing out that it has meant that learners will not deviate a great deal from what they think is “useful” for their own professional development. This influences the study focus of the students, and limits their ability to expand into other fields. Another lecturer noted that this leads to a challenge of ensuring that students know that the programmes they are enrolled on are academic programmes and not professional development programmes.

In the workplace: How do we know if the learning from the classroom goes to the professional environment?

When posed this question, lecturers noted that at first glance it is very difficult to know the impact of the taught aspects of the course on the learner's professional life. However, when the focus group began speaking about this in more detail, the more nuanced impact of the learning became apparent, with words such as "confidence", "inspiration", "ripple effects" and "change" being used. Much of this was facilitated by lecturers ensuring that reflective elements are "hardwired" into the courses, including regular contact, informal discussion with students, and reflective writing.

- Confirmation and confidence – At times this offers confirmation for students – it may not change what they are doing but through knowing their work is underpinned by academic studies, they feel more confident in taking on their professional role.
- "Inspiration" – An example was given by a lecturer of students that he has taught who put great value into the dissertation element of the studies. This was partly because they wanted to push themselves to investigate a particular area of concern. This inspiration came from the course. "Inspiration" was also used in relation to a student on the Maritime Security MA who worked in policymaking at the International Organisation for Migration. This particular student fed back to the lecturer that the MA programme had influenced her approach to policy, thus having a broader impact across the organisation.
- "Personal change can lead to professional change" – this quote, attributed to a lecturer on the Peace and Conflict MA highlights the journey that students have undergone in their workplace. This particular lecturer used the example of a student who worked at an Embassy. Through writing a dissertation on structural racism, they found the chance to step back and think critically, they were able to engage in professional development. Additionally, another lecturer recounted the experience of a student who worked for the

Church of England. This student was concerned about power imbalances characterising the leadership culture within the church. The student focused on this in her dissertation, which was later published as a report which has changed how the Church trains their Bishops.

Marburg 21.12.2021, 11.01.2022

Participants (in total):

- 7 students of the German program in Peace and Conflict Studies in Marburg, all active in voluntary work
- 4 civil society organisations based on or at least offering opportunities for voluntary work
- 2 administrative organisations on a rather higher, independent level

Perceptions of Volunteering and Difference between Student Volunteers and Non-Student Volunteers

Generally, interviewees had different socio-economic backgrounds, some grew up rather financially secured, others in classical working-class backgrounds. In the beginning of the discussions, the interviewees underlined their perception that engagement is a privilege. Furthermore, according to the interviewees the perception of volunteering depends on socialisation processes in the broader sense which encompass both socialisation within the family but also other social context like the university. While some interviewees experienced in their families a certain normalization of being involved in volunteering, others underlined that little or hardly any of their family was involved. Thus, volunteering started either already early in the childhood and youth or only at the beginning of the studies at the university. But in either way their involvement continues to this day, and the participants themselves underlined that not only their own experience but likewise research confirm that once you are active, you stay active or even become more active in voluntary work.

Moreover, perceptions slightly differed due to intergenerational differences particularly in the

variety of voluntary work that the Internet enables to be part of.

The participants highlighted the various forms of volunteering work, for example involvement in (sport and other social) clubs, baking cakes for events, but also board work.

In their perception of voluntary work the interviewees also mentioned the increasing expectations in professional careers of proving voluntary work experiences. Also, administrative actors and civil society organizations confirmed that there seems to be an increasing pressure on students to constantly improve their qualifications, via internships, semesters abroad, change of location from BA study location to MA study location, etc.

With regard to motivations for voluntary work the participants named several different approaches. What they all had in common was the will to contribute to society and to (co-)shape something in the place of residence itself. In this context, interviewees also mainly shared the experiences of injustice and “perceived injustice” as a motivational factor to get engaged in voluntary work.

Moreover, a great motivation also included the social component of volunteering as especially students were searching for social cohesion and contacts, e.g. after a change of study location. Volunteering is perceived as an opportunity to get to know people who are similar to oneself and an opportunity for using the social network of volunteering initiatives.

Regarding the groups of students in particular, they are – compared to other (full-time working) groups – more flexible in terms of time and are therefore sometimes not only motivated but also actually able to get involved in voluntary work. Here the special feature of PACS studies was also highlighted as an accumulation of very voluntarily engaged people. Additionally, in the perspective of most students the studies have particularly shown the necessity to get involved in civil society, to initiate and to change things. This is also true for the interviewed students who claim that the studies are not practical enough in terms of actual change and voluntary work makes things possible that are missing in their studies.

Besides, mainly civil society organisations highlighted the difference between students and non-students in volunteering.

Students are perceived to be more goal-oriented with regard to voluntary work. In this context this means that most student volunteers come from study programmes relevant to the specific field of engagement. Often there is also a strong interest to orientate oneself professionally, to get references, to develop oneself further, or to get opportunities to try something or to find new contacts as well. In the civil society organizations students are known to show a lot of commitment by taking on whole projects. Obviously, the “natural” problem of fluctuation has to be taken into account when working with students. Some civil society organisations had the impression that in recent years there is less consistency in group dynamics with strong impact on volunteering. Instead of having a turnover every two years in which volunteers have a sufficient time frame to integrate their friends in their voluntary activities for example, these dynamics lack at the moment. But there are always volunteers who come back after temporal or geographical disruptions (stays abroad, internships in other cities, etc.) and stay with the same civil society organisation for several years. Moreover, what civil society organisations observe too is that many people who are strongly and consistently committed to one field of voluntary engagement usually go on to work in that field later on (educational work, development work, ...).

In comparison non-student-volunteers are perceived by civil society institutions to often be more relaxed and consistent in their commitment. Generally, this group of volunteers orient towards what they want and what they don't want which means that they are more likely to say “no” due to prioritizing private interests (especially family) for instance. Thus, often non-student-volunteers are more specialised in interests, however they are known to take on less project work as the students volunteering. Besides, professionals are perceived to be particularly happy to combine personal skills, hobbies, etc. with the voluntary commitment.

Goal Setting or Specific Skill Development in and Through Volunteering

When asked about the reflection on skills in voluntary work students often intuitively criticized the idea to formalize non-formal learning experiences. Their reasons revolved around the necessity of fulfilling certain university-extern needs through volunteering so that an integration of a theoretical meta-level seems undesirable. Additionally, students perceived known categories of skill analysis in the university as decoupled from the social movements and groups they are engaged in. In brief, theoretical skill reflection is less a goal for the volunteers, rather something practical should be done when volunteering. Some students even mentioned real concerns about active institutionalised reflection as their volunteering “should not end in an internship report” as a form of “pure formalisation” which they consider “horrible extra work”. Reflection and a systematic approach are rather perceived by them as being a part of an internship, not as a part of volunteering.

Also, some civil society organisations mentioned that they are rather “happy that someone is participating, but it is not about reflecting on what the person is gaining for him- or herself”. Students confirm that the motivation for volunteering does not emerge as a wish for learning skills, as the aim of volunteering is not one’s own development. Students likewise stress that volunteering is not about skill acquisition to show off on the CV as volunteers do not want to be human capital. So, in general, skills are more of a by-product than an aim to reflect on.

In particular the civil society organizations consider reflection less about personal learning processes, but rather in terms of reflection on their concepts, quality criteria, project implementation, achievement of goals, interpersonal cooperation, overall social goals or review of own aspirations. This might include feedback on behaviour and own or volunteers work, but is not the centre of attention and rather an occasional reflection of personal role and work during for example networking events, workshops, etc.

Reflection and Integration of Voluntary Work in Academic Apprenticeship as well as Supportive Supervision (Integration of Theory and Practice).

Regarding the integration of voluntary work in the studies the stakeholders discussed both advantages and disadvantages. Some were rather in favour of the integration when seeing volunteering and studies in a reciprocal relationship. Both students and the administrative representatives considered it desirable to have an influence on teaching from the outside that might change content. Therefore, the university has to take the experiences of voluntary work seriously and not only take impulses from inside the university to its outside. All stakeholders identified certain overlaps and the potential to deepen and apply parts of what was learnt in the course of studies in a practical way through voluntary work. At the same time, it was also deemed necessary that papers and research topics have to be selected in such a way that something can be taken away from them for voluntary work.

Especially the administrative perspective underlined the necessity of honouring voluntary work and making it visible in the university to show appreciation not only from the management (eg. Dean’s offices) but also more comprehensively, so from other university actors (teachers, ...) too.

Nevertheless, the idea of integration was partly dismissed by those interviewees that considered volunteering rather independent of studies. The institutionalisation in form of “demands” tends to be perceived negatively. Additionally, the integration is perceived as negative if the university were to set this as a task. Particularly students underlined that voluntary work should not have to be done “half-heartedly like some university things”, as voluntary work fulfils the desire for a more active contribution besides “reading texts at home”. They argued that formal integration would rather contradict their intrinsic motivation of volunteering being free time, something relaxing, compensation, fun, and an activity that they are passionate about. Some students even stated that they pursue a conscious separation between the studies and voluntary engagement as they perceive their studies to be too theoretical, whereas in their voluntary work they counter this “flaw” by active engagement. Through this they consider it a personal learning field where they unconsciously acquire many skills that are not learned in studies.

Furthermore, the administrative stakeholders also pointed out that there is a tension between academia and practice as the core idea of the university is to not become too practical.

Acquisition of ECTS Credit for Voluntary Work

In general, for the interviewees the recognition of voluntary work during studies possibly depends on how this is structurally enabled and communicated. Regarding the latter, the administrative perspective underlined for example that the basic attitude represented by the university is the decisive point. The university has to show that it is desirable that students as future leaders volunteer. According to them, voluntary work also needs to be reflected in universities to make it visible as a goal and as part of the university's social responsibility.

Principally, the interviewees also differentiated between "simple" ECTS accreditation and integrating what has been externally learned in voluntary work into seminars.

On the one hand, it has been argued that ECTS could be a relief for students. This is the reason why all stakeholders favoured a framework for possible integration into the curriculum. It is considered important because for students sometimes in voluntary work they actually learn more than in an internship as they often have several years of commitment or hold a decisive role. Particularly the students were convinced that volunteering contributes more to one's own life and learning path than internships. On a practical level, the interviewees pointed out that even if voluntary work is not supposed to be a career network, it must be recognised that people need the recognition of this for their curriculum vitae and other contexts. So, work and time invested in voluntary work must be rewarded in order to be able to use it, also to show what has been learned and done.

Another argument in favour of accreditation of voluntary work was that ECTS could be an incentive for people who are not yet socially active and are inspired by the ECTS courses in voluntary work, but also for those who are committed and would otherwise have to substitute other activities and can thus stay involved. Overall, as pointed out by civil society organisations, in many places there are generally too few people

who get involved, so incentives may be needed for those who are involved that make voluntary work possible alongside full-time studies. Here the time factor influences the reason as ECTS may be a reason for non-privileged people to be able to get involved. Additionally, pointed out by all stakeholders, accreditation could counteract overburdening of those who are already involved. However, different alternatives were suggested instead of just attaching ECTS to volunteering like in an internship.

On the other hand, a lot of arguments were broad forward to underline that accreditation of voluntary work is not a desirable option. In the current system, the integration of voluntary work seems inappropriate (grading, ...) to students who made the argument that university and commitment do not necessarily go well together. In the practical implementation the stakeholders posed various questions, among them were: According to which criteria are ECTS in voluntary work supposed to be measured? (In hours?) What do ECTS mean for the voluntary work and the motivation of people? With regard to comparability: what kind of engagement is included in voluntary work? The administrative representatives stressed that specifically the last question will be more difficult for the university to answer, as compared to the internships they will have to deal more with individual content instead of standardised procedures as this might be more demanding also in terms of learning effects, how engagement can be compared and assessed. Generally, students also pointed out that ECTS should not be equated with a guarantee of an increased time investment; they were convinced that time as one of the most important factors to determine if one volunteers or not can be provided in other ways, e.g. through a longer standard period of study.

When it comes to the influence of accreditation on motivation all stakeholders argued in favour of the idea that voluntary work already done should also be recognised, so that the main focus of ECTS is minimised in the choice and implementation of voluntary work. However, in general, students and civil society organisations were sceptical about the effect on motivation and voluntary work if it is clear that volunteering is based on ECTS and not on intrinsic motivation.

Students feared that the “university logic” could become dominant through an institutionalisation of volunteering and thus have negative effects on one’s own motivation as in voluntary work, many people experience self-efficacy that they do not experience in the university. Further has been pointed out that volunteering is deliberately chosen as external to the university, as a “break” from studies, which are already very demanding. Thus, volunteering should stand on its own and its cause and not serve any further purpose in the university so that volunteering remains purely voluntary (should not become compulsory), as a project of one’s own passion. Moreover, representatives of the administration and civil society organisations shared their experience that students are more self-motivated than seminar participants and invest more time. In general, the stakeholders were concerned that the voluntary core and other aspects of the self-image of volunteering will be lost as with ECTS acquisition it rather approaches the concept of wage labour.

On a practical level, students were concerned about even more additional work in cooperation with the university when it comes to questions of credit transfer, “translation” of grades, official registration, etc. Another argument broad forward by mainly students was that the standard period of study is already relatively short in Master programmes and that there may be concerns if academic-theoretical content is omitted because voluntary work takes its place regardless of the fact that learning effects also occur in voluntary work, possibly even more through practical learning. They also emphasized that volunteering does not only take place in established institutions but often also in non-hierarchical groups where there is no person that explicitly has the competence to issue confirmations to others etc.

The civil society organisations also added the concern that with an accreditation the need and demand on the “market of voluntary work” cannot be met. Besides, experiences by civil society organisations show that there are strongly committed people even if there is no recognition of voluntary work in the university.

Support for the Learning and Reflection Process through Classroom Activities, the Curriculum, University or Provider Support

Regarding the support by the university the stakeholders argued in favour of creating stronger links between the Center for Conflict Studies (CCS) in Marburg and civil society. They considered it desirable if the ZfK could further identify opportunities for students to get involved in their close collaborations, so that not exclusively students have to bring initiatives to the CCS or “take along” the CCS. Therefore, it was suggested by both students and representatives of the administration that more information on the connection between the CCS, studies and voluntary work needs to be provided, e.g. on participation in the lecture series (Ringvorlesung). Of course, this should balance with initiatives by students themselves.

What civil society organisations additionally suggested is to more actively invite people to bring in their own experiences in the lectures and seminars. This was perceived as being part of the university’s social responsibility and that the university also publicly focuses on fostering voluntary engagement of the students. It was again stressed that appreciation of voluntary work is important as it is desired and sometimes even demanded, but at the same time there is a lack of recognition. Social society organisations and students shared their impression that there is a lot of talk about the importance of voluntary work and it is publicly perceived as important, but “when it becomes concrete, it is not so important” which seems to attest some double standards.

Besides, the stakeholders suggested some alternatives to the “institutionalisation of the voluntary work”. Whereas the idea of a specially organised “reflection seminar” was criticized, other ideas in the comprehensive study context and possible framework for integration into the curriculum were broad forward. In general, all stakeholders agreed that it needs to be recognized that volunteering students might need more time to complete the degree.

First, stakeholders suggested to integrate voluntary work experiences into seminars by introducing and discussing topics brought in from

civil society or by organising project work accompanying studies or project concept development in seminars. In this process the interviewees could also imagine to receive feedback on a content-level but also to reflect on own positions together. For example, students proposed to link the voluntary experience with more theoretical research seminars that could work in cooperation with initiatives that provide research opportunities for students. A different variant of the integration of civil society initiatives in courses could be organized through “engagement workshop” where students approach voluntary work provider in counselling interviews with target groups or through “research workshop” where students choose research projects and conduct research themselves and thereby also deepen engagement through own research question or in the form of “commissioned research”. Especially the administrative representatives thought that students’ commitment can be increased through project work and self-determined work, as not only motivation but likewise time invested increase when students make their own choices. Additionally, students suggested that seminars could increase to actively integrate students’ own experiences and initiate a certain automatic reflection if they would be asked which contacts the students have already had with topics addressed in lectures, seminars, etc.

Further, based on their personal experience students suggested that there needs to be more room also in the studies to get into exchange with fellow students to exchange on voluntary work encompassing exchange on skills and learning effects, but also aspects that are more general about working contents, the organisations themselves and other experiences. In this context, students mentioned the already existing tutorials that could be advanced.

Secondly, the interviewees also made some suggestions on a rather organisational level. From other universities it is known that voluntary work is encouraged by granting a (repeat) attempt in exams. Often voluntary work can also substitute an internship, or at least combine them as equally ranking alternatives. If there might be a possibility of having voluntary work accredited as an internship, students could rather understand why reflecting on it for example

in a report might be of interest. Another proposal revolved around being able to omit study performance (Studienleistung, not graded) and only give an examination performance (Prüfungsleistung, graded) or the other way around if one volunteers. Moreover, the students broad up the idea of increasing the compatibility of studies and voluntary work through more options and fewer compulsory modules in the curriculum. Others even suggested a profile module of “Practical Experience” or “Political Commitment”. Eventually, both civil society organisations and students agreed that peace research should increase its efforts in becoming also a service provider for the peace movement.

Mobility in Voluntary Work

Mobility in voluntary work was mostly interpreted in socio-economic terms and being able to engage into volunteering is perceived as a privilege by all the stakeholders.

All stakeholders agreed that voluntary work is often a commitment of the white privileged majority society. Therefore, certain people are overrepresented as certain honorary posts also attract certain people, particularly the middle class and students are more likely to be addressed. On the other hand, workers’ children and full-time working people less so. This is why the perspectives from other groups – like PoC and other groups concerned by intersectional structural discrimination – lack in voluntary work structures. This is why the stakeholders perceive that the very people who should be heard often cannot afford to be.

The interviewees were aware that necessary conditions must be given to enable volunteering to fulfil certain needs, such as self-efficacy, community, co-creation, or fun. Factors that determine whether or not volunteering is practised encompass time-relevant trade-offs for example with work, family situation, authority for foreigners, etc., that sometimes make it hardly possible to get involved.

All of these aspects are mostly also related to financial concerns. This is why the question of participating in voluntary work is also related to issues of funding as it makes a difference whether an expense allowance is paid or not in the decision if volunteers have to substitute paid

work with their engagement. Similarly, students also mentioned the issue of compatibility with (full-time) studies. Some students have to decide between spending time on volunteering or for instance their studies according to BAföG (German funding scheme for students) conditions which demand a certain number of ECTS per semester and to finalize the studies in a certain time frame. Others also struggle with balancing employment and their studies. This is why some students suggested that if it is considered to officially recognise voluntary work in the studies, it should also be considered to recognise paid work, e.g. if this means that there is no time left for voluntary work so there is no “exaggeration of voluntary work”.

However, the stakeholders emphasized that many people are also very committed to voluntary work despite a challenging socio-economic situation (people without social security, unemployed people, ...), the kind and scope of the respective voluntary work just differs. In general, the administrative perspective and also the civil society actors demand appropriate framework conditions in the university that should make it easy to get involved in voluntary work and make it enjoyable. For many volunteering students invest their last free time in voluntary work which was partially perceived by few students to “sacrifice themselves”. However, it should also be considered that volunteering should not be an obligation and the administrative representatives also pointed out that it must also be accepted if people do not get involved without any judgement.

The Role of Digital and Virtual Elements in Volunteering

When it comes to digitisation and digital engagement the COVID-19-pandemic has a decisive influence on the stakeholders’ perspectives. It has been pointed out by administrative structures that former discussions on digitalization had an opportunity not to be postponed as the necessity was now eventually given.

Various advantages have been pointed out that all the stakeholders agreed on. Digitalization provides opportunities to open up volunteering to new people through fewer physical barriers and other thresholds, for example with relation to

family situations. It is easier to “just drop by” and in this way people who need to be heard can participate in a more flexible way. It also opens up volunteering to external and outside influence, for instance from within the university to the outside. Added to that more frequent meetings at higher levels (state, national level) took place than normal face-to-face meetings. Moreover, digital formats enable contact to and integration of intercultural exchange, which would not be possible without internet formats and which might foster contact at eye level (in intercultural programmes).

However, stakeholders pointed out that disadvantages have to be taken into consideration as well. Main obstacles for digital formats in voluntary work arise due to a lack of access (pensioners) and a lack of infrastructure (rural area). It has been pointed out that in an ongoing process it must be learned how to include everyone. Besides, the stakeholders underlined the advantages of seeing people in person due to an increasing digital fatigue. They agreed that there should rather not be an “exaggeration of digital” in total.

Utrecht University, 21.01.2022

MA Conflict Studies & Human Rights

This is part one of a two-part report on student internship experiences during the Master Conflict Studies and Human Rights at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. In preparation for this report, two semi-structured focus group interviews were held with recent alumni from the programme. This report is structured around the questions posed in each meeting.

Focus Group 1

- Date: 21 January, 2022
- Interviewer: Dr. Chris van der Borgh
- Respondent 1: Female, non-Dutch student, academic year 2019-2020, 10-week (digital) internship at a non-profit journalistic and research organization.
- Respondent 2: Female, non-Dutch students, academic year, 2018-2019, 10-week (in person) internship at a non-profit society-focused organisation/platform.
- Duration: 1 hour

Before – Preparing for internships.

As a student, did you have enough information about the internship? Selection criteria? What was expected? How to find one?

Both respondents expressed how they felt worried/nervous/anxious about finding a suiting internship during the programme. Actually, finding one made them feel “lucky”. According to both respondents, part of this “struggle to find an internship” came from the fact that they were non-Dutch students. Firstly, because they felt that doing fieldwork research was not suitable nor preferable as a non-Dutch student. (Doing fieldwork in the Netherlands may require the student to speak Dutch and again moving abroad for fieldwork after moving to the Netherlands was not preferable.) Therefore, they felt extra pressure to land an internship position. Secondly, as non-Dutch students, they felt that they did not have a good overview of all the potential internship providers in the Netherlands.

Another issue the respondents brought up was related to the perceived criteria of the internship as stipulated by the programme. Both respondents were under the impression that a link between the internship and thesis was critical for the internship to be accepted. In other words, they felt the internship needed to be a “research internship”. The perceived strict criteria of the programme seemed to have caused worries and confusion for the respondents. In the end, both respondents finished a more practical internship that did not directly align with their thesis research but was relevant and interesting nevertheless.

How can the programme support the search for an internship?

Both respondents expressed how they wished there was a list available with all potential and relevant internship providers in the Netherlands. For example, based on the internship positions that students from previous academic years had completed. This would have been helpful and could have taken some of the stress away from searching for an internship.

The programme provides students with internship preparation sessions via Utrecht Universities Career Services. The respondents found

these sessions useful but they could have been employed more effectively. For example, by organizing them a bit earlier in the academic year (October/November).

In general, the respondents wished for a little more (personal) support from the programme, especially as non-Dutch students. Respondent 1 states that she felt that the extent of support also depended on your supervisor (from within the programme); some may have provided more (personal) support than others.

During the internship

How was the internship experience? Enjoyable? Educational? Relevant to the programme? Skills learned?

Respondent 1 had a great experience during her internship, yet it would have been better to do the internship in person. The internship was not specifically focused on doing academic research but this is what made the internship especially interesting and educational; it helped her understand how research is approached differently outside of academia. For example, with regard to drafting conclusions in a writing style that is more accessible for broader audiences and taking on a systemic way of monitoring the news. Respondent 1 stated that these acquired skills are useful in her current job but also helped her in her thesis research by exposing her to topic- and context-related empirical knowledge.

Respondent 2 agreed that doing an internship was of great value to her learning experience during the programme because it taught her about different (journalistic) approaches to research. Respondent 2 also found that specific knowledge gained during the internship (f.e. with regard to social media) was lacking in the programme curriculum and thus brought great complementary insight. Lastly, respondent 2 also found to have acquired new and valuable interview skills during her internship (from colleagues).

What was your experience with guidance and supervision from the organisation and the university? How can this be improved?

Respondent 1 recalled how her internship provider gave feedback at the end of the internship. For her, the feedback was good but came a little late. She stated that she could have improved more during the internship if she would have gotten interim feedback. Feedback and guidance from within the programme were “ok”. She had regular calls with her programme supervisor.

Respondent 2 interned at a small start-up at which she was the first intern. This sometimes made supervision and guidance a bit “tricky”. She would have preferred a more tuned communication between the programme supervisor and the internship provider. In this way, the start-up, internship organisation could have been better guided in how to supervise the intern. Although, in the end, the inexperience of the internship organisation posed no big problems to her learning experience. Apart from occasional “check-ins”, respondent 2 stated that she did not get much (personal) guidance from the programme.

How was the workload of the 10-week internship?

Both respondents expressed how they felt that the workload was doable and the tasks given clear during their internships. Yet, a 10-week internship period is generally too short, according to the respondents. This is related to finding an internship; as most internship providers only want interns that stay for a 6-month period, but also concerning the development of connections with the organisation and its employees. A part-time construction (thesis/internship) is possible but this often needs to be negotiated with both the internship organisation and the programme supervisor. In order to make this option more approachable, the respondents suggest to have more flexible deadlines for the thesis in the programme.

After the internship

Was reporting on the internship relevant? Did it help you to learn from your experience?

Respondent 1 felt like reflecting was good and useful after her internship but found the format of the internship report not helpful. According to her, some questions in the report format are redundant and may need reformulation. Respondent 1 suggests that a final, reflecting conversation with the programme supervisor, the intern and the internship supervisor would have been more useful for her.

Respondent 2 experienced the writing of the reflection report as somewhat pointless. For her, it did not add much to the internship or her learning experience. Respondent 2 again stressed the need for better information facilitation on supervision and guidance from the university to the internship provider.

What can the programme do to create a better learning environment with regard to internships?

Respondent 1 emphasizes that the programme needs to adopt better/clearer selection criteria for internship positions. This relates to the perceived “strict” criteria regarding “research internships” and link to the programme.

For respondent 2, the most important point is that there should be more support for the position of the non-Dutch student within the programme. Also, the programme should devote more time to developing specific skills related to the internship and shorter thesis track. For respondent 2, the programme’s curriculum in her academic year was too much focused on doing fieldwork research.

Conclusion

The respondents who participated in this first focus group generally enjoyed and valued their internship experiences. Both respondents found the search for an internship stressful and would have liked more support for non-Dutch students in this process. They also thought that the internship-criteria, stipulated by the programme, could be formulated/ communicated clearer and

allow for more flexibility. The internship itself was found educational and complemented the programme's curriculum. While a 10-week internship is short, the respondents valued learning professional/practical/job-related skills during the internship. Finally, the respondents found that the format of reporting on the internship may require some reconsidering.

Focus Group Report 2

This is part two of a two-part report on student internship experiences during the Master Conflict Studies and Human Rights at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. In preparation of this report, two semi-structured focus group interviews were held with recent alumni from the programme. This report is structured around the questions posed in each meeting.

- Date: 21 January, 2022
- Interviewer: Dr. Chris van der Borgh
- Respondent 1: Female, non-Dutch student, academic year 2020-2021, 10-week (digital) internship at a human rights advocacy organisation.
- Respondent 2: Female, Dutch student, academic year, 2019-2020, 10-week (in person) internship at a non-profit peace advocacy organisation.
- Respondent 3: Male, Dutch student, academic year 2019-2020, part-time (in person) internship at a private security organisation.
- Duration: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Before – Preparing for an internship

As a student, did you have enough information about the internship and finding one? What were your experiences finding one?

Respondent 1 started early with the application process and already found an internship in mid-December. She reflected on how she was somewhat pessimistic about finding an internship before because of the pandemic and the feeling that she had a lot of competition from other students. Related to the pandemic, a lot of organisations did not have the resources to provide internship positions, she thought. Furthermore, she felt that 10-week internships were often not

available and not speaking Dutch a disadvantage. Yet, she experienced a quite good support group of students in her academic year who shared lists and opportunities of potential internship positions. This was helpful.

Respondent 2 had a non-typical experience landing an internship position as the organisation approached her. Yet, when she was still searching and looking for backup plans, she felt confronted with quite stringent application criteria. Both from the programme and the potential internship providers: organisations often want interns that stay for a longer duration than 10 weeks. She felt that students are often not in the position to negotiate this duration. Respondent 2 also found the search for an internship somewhat stressful and landed her position in January.

Respondent 3 explained that he experienced the search for an internship position as very frustrating. According to him, there was fierce competition for positions before the pandemic hit which made it increasingly difficult to find an internship, especially one that is paid. For a student without governmental support, who has to spend time studying and working, it is a tough and time-consuming process to find a suitable internship. Respondent 3 found a “last-minute” internship in January.

How did you experience the role of the programme? What could've been done differently?

Respondent 1 had no expectations from the programme with regard to support in finding an internship as she didn't experience any support during her bachelor. Therefore, the support she received from the programme regarding internships (organisation lists, preparation sessions, advice) was well received. Yet, she stated that she would have liked some flexibility from the program concerning track choices in the second semester.

For respondent 3, the programme did not provide a clear connection between the internship and the short thesis. Most courses in the second semester are focused on doing fieldwork and writing a longer thesis. For students that do an internship, it is hard to navigate how to go about

writing a shorter thesis, according to respondent 3.

Respondent 2 agreed with the notions and also experienced difficulties with navigating the shorter thesis. She missed guidance from the programme with regard to what to expect from an internship. Furthermore, respondent 2 stated that she almost felt like a “second-grade student” because she didn’t do fieldwork and longer thesis. Both respondents 2 and 3 acknowledge that these experiences can vary from supervisor to supervisor, as some are more geared towards extended fieldwork/ research than others.

During the internship

What were the most important things you learned during the internship?

Respondent 1 explained how her internship taught her about the contents and practical workings of human rights advocacy. For her, this content was a very welcome addition to her learning experience during the academic year as she felt that the Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights (CSHR) programme did not devote enough time to the topic of human rights. Yet, she had hoped that the internship would have brought her more insight into the internal workings of the organisation (f.e. job-specific skills, professional interaction with colleagues). As her internship was digital and remote, this aspect was somewhat lacking.

Respondent 2 did have the benefit to experience an in-person internship. During her time in the office and on work trips to the Hague, she learned how people communicate and behave in professional settings. Furthermore, she stated that she learned how to work and write from within the mindset of the organisation. This mindset differed greatly from academia and therefore effectively prepared her for a job outside academia.

Respondent 3 interned in the private sector, at a start-up. Therefore, he felt that his experience was very different from everything that university taught. According to him, university programmes are generally directed at preparing students to work for the government, NGO’s,

think tanks or civil society organisations. His experience at a company “aimed to make money” was interesting and taught him a lot about the “realities of the private sector”. For respondent 3, this reality sometimes meant that he had to leave his moral compass and change his nuanced view on doing research in favour of the company’s aims. This experience taught him that he would rather not work in the private sector.

In hindsight, what do you think are important criteria/requirements for an internship in the programme?

In the opinion of respondent 3, most students do an internship to profile themselves as a “developing professional” for their career after the programme. Therefore, the criteria of academic relevance should be somewhat subordinate to the criteria of self-actualization and being able to market yourself for future jobs/“raise certain eyebrows on your CV”.

For respondent 2, the requirements for an internship should depend heavily on the aspirations of the individual student. She therefore endorsed a flexible role of the programme in having students themselves explain how the internship is relevant to their trajectory.

Respondent 1 is on the same level as the other respondents. She also thought that having the student explain how the internship is relevant to their own trajectory is the most important aspect. The relevance of an internship is highly individual.

Did you develop relevant skills needed for a job?

Respondent 2 explained how there is a difference between thematic-oriented jobs and practice-oriented jobs. According to her, most students look for thematic-oriented jobs after they graduate. These jobs are not abundant and often require the student to have done extensive fieldwork and research (instead of internships). Yet, practice-oriented jobs often require specific skills that are not taught in university (f.e. fundraising for a NGO). Therefore, doing an internship can allow you to develop relevant skills for specific practice-oriented jobs. Still, due to the

shortness of the internship, she was taught some relevant skills but it “didn’t really cut it” on the job market.

Respondent 3 felt lucky with his new position but explained how it is still very hard for his peers to find well-paying jobs in this field. The internship did not prepare him to such an extent but did give him “confidence” to pursue his career aspirations.

Respondent 1, who is still applying for jobs, stated that she feels that her internship experience is well received during job interviews but that it is not enough. The most important notions/assets she can use in current job interviews are from jobs she did before the programme. The Master’s programme comes as a “necessary label”.

Lastly, all respondents agreed that the internship also helped in forming a network of people and potential organisations for future jobs. This is useful.

Was the 10-week duration of the internship enough to learn the things you wanted to learn? Would you choose for a longer programme with a 6-month internship?

The respondents all thought the 10 weeks is too short to expect gaining extensive job-specific knowledge but it is a start: you can start discovering and touch upon a variety of aspects of the professional working environment.

Respondents 2 and 3 would have liked doing a longer internship but there is the aspect of financial strain coming with studying longer for a lot of students. Respondent 1 would not have chosen to extend the programme as she specifically chose the programme because of its 1-year length.

What was your experience with guidance and supervision from the organisation and the university?

Respondent 3 stated that he did not have much contact with the programme supervisor. Yet, he did not miss it, it was good to figure things out on his own. Respondent 2 also did not recall much contact with her programme supervisor but this was fine. She did not need more guidance from the programme. Experiences with guidance from

within the internship organisation were not addressed.

After the internship

Was reporting on the internship relevant? Did it help you to learn from your experience?

For respondent 3, it was good and relevant to make a list of the acquired skills during the internship. It later helped him in, for example, drafting a CV. Yet, he did feel that the programme supervisor “did not really care” about the report. Furthermore, he found it hard to be completely honest in the report because he wanted to pass and thus might have over-coloured his learning experiences as positive.

Respondent 1 had a very positive experience with the reporting. She found the format of the report and instructions clear and straightforward. For her, the reporting made her analyse and realize what she actually learned during her internship. She agreed with respondent 3 that the report somewhat incentivizes the student to put the internship experience in a positive light. Still, for her, the moment of reflection was good and educational.

Conclusion

The respondents who participated in this second focus group enjoyed and valued their internship experiences. The respondents had varying experiences finding an internship; two of them found it stressful and difficult while the other experienced an easier process. The respondents were rather unanimous about the notion that the programme might be too heavily focussed on the longer thesis (fieldwork) track. This perceived imbalance caused some difficulty navigating the shorter thesis they wrote. The 3 respondents each recall to have learned different things from the internship: for example, content-specific knowledge, professional/practical skills or that they would rather not work in the private sector. Because of the often short (10-week) duration of the internships, these learning experiences can be found somewhat shallow but nevertheless valuable for further careers. Lastly, the reporting and reflecting on the internship was generally received positively.