

Improving company retention on student placement programmes:

an action research-based case study

Frank Walsh

Waterford Institute of Technology

Seán Byrne

Waterford Institute of Technology

ABSTRACT

Utilising the action research methodology, this study investigates work placement employer retention for the undergraduate BBS Degree at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), having observed some decline in retention rates. The project involved problem diagnosis, intervention planning, intervention execution and evaluation with a view to enhancing the retention rates for the 2008/9 academic year. From the theoretical perspective, there is a paucity of research in the work placement arena and this work builds specifically on the work of Ellis and Moon (1998). The action research cycle involved a survey of 130 companies who had taken WIT students in the first two years of the placement programme, workshops with the work placement team in WIT, and the making of a number of interventions with respect to enhancing placement.

The survey findings reveal differences in the ranking of importance of college selection criteria by employers, as well the impact of the placement managers' characteristics and general economic conditions on the placement process. The findings on the interventions made during the action research cycle show that the overall employer work placement retention percentage went up in the 2008/9 year, albeit by a small amount. The paper evaluates these outcomes and makes a number of suggestions for further academic research and some recommendations for the institutional practice of work placement management.

Address for correspondence:

Mr. Frank Walsh, School of Business, Waterford Institute of Technology, Cork Road, Waterford. Tel. +353-51845615; e-mail fwalsh@wit.ie

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