



## Barriers and Enablers of Student Engagement in Employability Activities: A Comparative Analysis Pre- and Post-Placement

Myles Dempsey and Sue Beckingham

Sheffield Hallam University

### Abstract

Higher Education (HE) plays a critical role in supporting students to develop the skills (Beckingham, 2023), confidence, and awareness needed to navigate the transition into employment. Co-curricular employability activities contribute to this process by providing opportunities for students to gain experience, reflect on their development, and begin to construct a professional identity. However, engagement with these activities is often uneven, with many students not fully recognising their value until later in their studies. This research explores how and why students engage with co-curricular employability activities, focusing on the shifts that occur before and after work placement. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study examines student experiences across this transition point, viewing engagement as part of a broader process of personal and professional development rather than simply participation in activities. Preliminary findings identify common barriers, including time constraints, limited awareness, and a lack of perceived relevance during the early stages of study. Enablers include mentorship, peer influence, and exposure to professional environments, all of which shape students' understanding of employability (Lock and Kelly, 2022) and encourage greater engagement. Work placement emerges as a significant turning point, helping students connect preparatory activities with workplace realities and future career aspirations. These findings highlight the importance of designing employability provision that is meaningful, accessible, and appropriately timed within the student journey, supporting confidence, professional identity development, and progression towards graduate employment.

### Keywords

employability, student engagement, work placement, professional identity, career development

### References

- Beckingham, S. (2023). Baseline skills: Scaffolding soft skills development within the curriculum. In: Carter, J., O'Grady, M., Rosen, C. (eds) *Higher Education Computer Science: A Manual of Practical Approaches*, 2nd edition. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29386-3\\_17](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29386-3_17)
- Lock, E. & Kelly, K. (2022). Gateways, not pathways: Student expectations regarding undergraduate study and employability. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 13(1), 65–78. <https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2022vol13no1art149>

### Citation:

Dempsey, M. & Beckingham, S. (2026). Barriers and enablers of student engagement in employability activities: a comparative analysis pre- and post-placement. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Enquiry*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.7190/jostle.v1i1.581>