

**IDENTIFYING THE KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE STUDENTS ON A WORK BASED LEARNING PROGRAMME AT A UK UNIVERSITY AND ESTABLISHING THE ACTIVES THAT WILL ADD VALUE TO THE WORK BASED LEARNING PROGRAMME FOR THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Rumbidzai Mukonoweshuro, University of Plymouth Business School, Devon, UK

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**ABSTRACT**

Previous research by Falconer and Pettigrew (2003) suggests that Work Based Learning (WBL) is an effective tool in equipping students with important skills and personal qualities sought by employers and therefore WBL helps to bridge the skills gap. This study is twofold; it takes forward the work of past research by initially, investigating the key challenges faced by international (non-UK) Chinese accounting and finance students on a Work Based Learning (WBL) programme at a UK University. Secondly, it establishes and suggests the actives that will add value to the WBL experience of international students. A focus group methodology was successfully applied to collect data and information for this research study. The data from the focus group were effectively analysed using the simplified grounded theory technique which teased out key themes from the information collected. The identified themes were categorised as results for the study which forms the theory for WBL. This research found that before commencing the Work Based Learning (WBL) programme international Chinese students perceive the programme as a worthwhile experience which will enhance their future employability prospects. In anticipation of the WBL programme, the students' two main worries are firstly, the language barrier and secondly, how easily they will fit into the working culture of a British organisation. On completion of the programme the majority of the international students concluded that WBL is an effective, active medium for the development of skills which they could not acquire in a classroom environment. They enjoyed their experience and regarded the host organisations as pleasant and friendly places in which to work. A significant number of the international Chinese students confirmed that they faced two main key challenges whilst on placement. The two challenges are firstly having insufficient language skills to communicate effectively both in writing and verbally. Secondly, their challenge was taking a longer period than they would have wished to understand and complete the tasks assigned to them. In order to add value to the experience of the international Chinese students this research suggests that the following should be embedded into the Work Based Learning experience of students; initially WBL tutors should enhance the induction programme for WBL to ensure that significant language skills are imparted to the international Chinese students, both skills of verbal and written communication should be taught to the students. Secondly, WBL tutors should provide international Chinese students with additional support while they are on placement to ensure that the students understand the tasks that have been assigned to them by placement employers. Thirdly, WBL tutors should continuously evaluate the progress of students during the placement period and establish the additional language training required and provide the training accordingly.

Keywords: *Work Based Learning (WBL), accounting education, international students*