Supporting Work Experience in the New Normal: Virtual Internships Post COVID-19
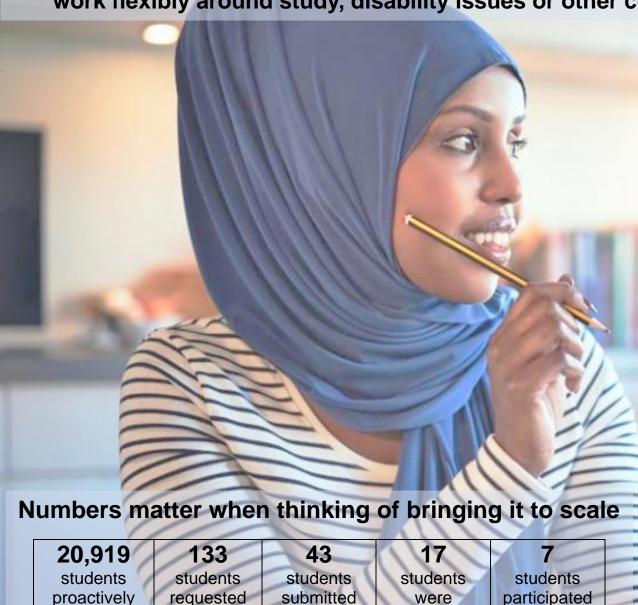
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A *VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP* is a work placement that is undertaken remotely, where the intern can be based at home and may work flexibly around study, disability issues or other commitments (e.g. other paid work or caring responsibilities).

Our study examined a pilot virtual internship scheme funded by a ring-fenced budget allocation for supporting underrepresented students and recent alumni in STEM and FBL subjects.

Internships were primarily university-based and comprised innovative staff-student partnership projects. Internships took place during a 4-month period (March to July 2022), each lasting from 6 weeks to around 4 months, for around 10 hours a week.

Data collection
Data were collected through focus groups with interns and semi-structured interviews with supervisors. Qualitative data collected through regular check-in processes by the Internship Team supported triangulation of findings.

Is 'high touch' support scalable?
Supervisors tended to offer personalised support to their interns, often meeting weekly, and focused on both the personal and professional aims of the interns. This support was supplemented by additional contact from the Internship Team in the university's Career and Employability Service.

Confidence builds in the application process, not just in the internship itself.
"I had requested the [applicant] package, but I was not brave enough to apply because I thought I didn't have enough knowledge. I was not worthy enough, and I remember [a member of the internship team] called me and said, 'Why don't you apply? We are extending the deadline.' [I thought], 'OK, that's fine. I'm gonna, but with no hope.' But I ended up in the internship."

Numbers matter when thinking of bringing it to scale

20,919	133	43	17	7
students proactively targeted (4,569 STEM 16,350 FBL)	students requested application packs	students submitted applications	students were selected as interns	students participated in focus groups

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