

# FLP-PILOT-ID72 Completion Report

Report Category	Report Requirement
<b>Overall Rating</b> (Fully Delivered)	
Summary	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>The main aim of this FLP pilot project was to assess the likely viability of offering master's degrees with embedded professional experience within SEED and SoSS, either through adapting existing provision or through introducing new programmes.</p> <p>Primary market research was undertaken by the external market insight agency Red Brick (involving a quantitative survey with 761 prospective PGT students from the UK and internationally and qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 prospective students and 17 employers) to ascertain stakeholder preferences around PGT programmes with integrated professional experience:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) To assess student interest and evaluate key programme features.</li><li>2) To ascertain employer needs.</li></ol> <p>The Student &amp; Market Insight team also undertook a competitor analysis of the provision of master's programmes with integrated professional experience for SEED and SoSS related subjects in Russell Group and other UK universities.</p> <p><b>Context</b></p> <p>Significantly more attention has hitherto been paid within SEED and SoSS to integrating professional experience into undergraduate provision. It is, however, challenging to integrate professional experience into master's provision. This is the case given that master's degrees are typically taken over a single academic year, while standard undergraduate degrees take three years and there is also the well-established model of extending undergraduate degrees with an entire placement year.</p> <p>The project, however, provides an occasion to highlight key insights from University of Manchester surveys with PGT offer-holders (2024 survey), UG final year intentions survey (2024) and UG Second Year intentions survey (2025). These surveys demonstrate the central importance of work experience within master's provision in recruiting students. For instance, gaining relevant work experience during master's study was ranked by our 2nd year undergraduates as the single most important feature for them when considering PGT studies (selected as extremely/very important by more than 70% of respondents). This offers an important lesson for the FLP programme as a whole, in that current 2nd year UG students considering PGT (either now or in future) are considerably more likely to want work experience on a programme than part-time study, flexible study pace, or so on.</p> <p><b>Models by which to embed professional experience</b></p>

The project has identified a set of models by which to embed professional experience within master's provision:

1. Part-time placement: optional 30-credit course unit in Semester 2 that entails 2/3 days per week of professional experience over 10-12 weeks and that runs alongside other studies.
2. Consultancy project: 60-credit group consultancy project around an issue relevant to a client.
3. Research dissertation: dissertation focused on an issue identified by the student as part of a prior professional/industrial experience or as part of a Living Lab research problem that has been pre-identified by an organisation.
4. Capstone placement: 60-credit professional experience course unit that entails full-time professional experience over 10-12 weeks during the Summer, along with the completion of a project report or a reflective e-portfolio.
5. Extended degree (short): Extend the master's degree with an additional 12 weeks of full-time professional experience (60 additional credits). (This would require revised regulations or an exception to existing regulations).
6. Extended degree (long): Extend the master's degree with a full year of professional experience.

Notes: 1) While a block placement (30-credit course unit in Semester 2 that entails full-time work over 6 weeks) would in principle represent another option, this is likely to be difficult to offer as an option for existing provision. 2) The preferences expressed by employers would suggest that 15-credit placement course units are likely to be too limited to provide a placement that would enable a student to make a suitable contribution to their organisation, and an employer to adequately assess whether or not to offer the student a job afterwards.

### **Identification of key programme features**

The project has identified a range of key programme features that would make provision attractive to both prospective students and to employers:

- Length of the degree: the shorter the course the better for prospective students. It would typically be ideal to integrate professional experience into the standard 12-month master's degree rather than to extend the degree. The cost sensitivity of prospective students provides a challenge to a model of integrating an additional Semester or entire year of additional professional experience via a placement onto a master's degree, unless the placement is paid or additional accreditation is secured.
- Optionality: students are given choice of whether to integrate professional experience within their degree or whether to focus on developing capacity for research. Such optionality would be essential given the competitive nature of placements.

- Placement length: there is some tension between the perspectives of employers and prospective students on the ideal length of a placement (with students preferring shorter placements and employers longer ones), but a placement of length around 3 months would represent a balanced length across these two groups. Placements, however, are more likely to be paid if they are undertaken for an extended period and on a full-time basis.
- Continuity: placements that provide continuity within the working week would enable a student to make an effective contribution during their placement, which would provide the basis for an adequate assessment of the student for employer recruitment pipelines.
- Payment during placement: whilst payment is important, students want to see a long-term impact on their career. The nature of the work they will be doing and the reputation of the organisation can be more influential than whether a placement is remunerated. This opens up possibilities for leveraging service learning.
- Dissertation: prospective students generally prefer a placement to a client dissertation (with 72% of the total survey respondents seeing this as appealing). Employers would also tend to prefer students undertaking placements, given that they tended to see dissertations as too academically-focused.
- Support: prospective students realise that placements will need to be acquired on a competitive basis, and thus they value structured support from the University for them to acquire a placement.
- Impact: prospective students are attracted to a master's with integrated work experience so that they can immediately apply their academic learning and for the long-term benefit to their careers. They recognise the possibility of strengthening their professional networks as a result of a placement, with the possibility of the experience leading straight to a job.
- Inclusion: On-going attention would need to be paid to sourcing placements that are appropriate for students with disabilities.

### **Competitor analysis**

Our competitors are tending to operate with an under-developed approach towards integration of work experience into PGT provision. This is evident in the limited range of programmes within their portfolios that include professional experience as an aspect of provision, but also in terms of their awareness of the value of such a feature to prospective students. For instance, if the mention of a placement is buried within the main body of information about a course (as occurs in many cases), then it is unlikely that a university will be featuring the scope for work experience within its conversion strategy for offer holders. There is relatively little provision for master's with integrated professional experience amongst Russell group competitors for SEED and SoSS subjects.

	<p><b>Other outcomes</b></p> <p>The project also led to a range of other outcomes, that include underpinning market insights, materials to support a pivot towards the integration of professional experience in PGT provision, planned inputs into institutional change processes relevant to PGT provision, identification of supporting infrastructure to assist in introducing professional experience into master's provision in ways that will match market expectations, and identification of strategies to leverage market insights for marketing and recruitment.</p> <p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p>It is recommended that a selection of PGT programmes in SEED and SoSS are re-designed or developed to allow students to choose between a research-focused and a professionally-focused emphasis to their master's studies, and that attention is given to establishing supporting infrastructure and developing an alignment between new provision and marketing/recruitment. Such an approach would have implications for the extent to which PGT programmes with integrated professional experience would develop the capacity to engage in independent research for all students.</p> <p>As a research-intensive university, though, master's provision that is aligned to research expertise in various ways underpins our reputation and our core offer to students. It is thus recommended (at least in the first instance) that this shift takes places in disciplines where there is a close alignment between the focus of PGT degrees and professionally-relevant work. It is recognised that a pivot towards integrating professional experience into the University's PGT provision will entail significant adjustment. The changing nature of the aspirations for PGT study of prospective students, though, means that without such a pivot the University will find it challenging to diversify its current student audience.</p>
<p><b>Deliverables</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market insights that demonstrate the central value to prospective students of master's provision that is characterised by a robust integration of professional/industrial experience.</li> <li>• Materials/publications to assist staff within SEED and SoSS (as well as staff in other settings across the Faculty of Humanities and the University as a whole) in understanding market insights that demonstrate the central value to prospective students of master's provision that is characterised by a robust integration of professional/industrial experience.</li> <li>• Input into the University's Postgraduate Taught Review around the central value to prospective students of master's provision that is characterised by a robust integration of professional experience via contributions to be made by the Market &amp; Student Insight team.</li> <li>• Input into the online programme/course portfolio sprint within SEED in Autumn 2025 to identify four new online programmes/courses (via the Project Director who has been designated as Chair of the sprint).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication of market insights by the Student &amp; Market Insight team through a range of communication channels (e.g. newsletter/Insight Sharepoint) and working relationships.</li> <li>• Identification of a set of models by which to implement professional experience within master's provision.</li> <li>• Identification of key features of provision (e.g. curriculum design features) that would effectively integrate professional/industrial experience into master's provision.</li> <li>• Overview of competitor provision that entails the integration of professional/industrial experience into master's provision (including an indication of key features and assessment of its effectiveness in matching market insights).</li> <li>• Identification of specific strategies to leverage market insights around the value of professional/industrial experience within the process to recruit students onto master's provision.</li> <li>• Identification of supporting infrastructure to assist in introducing professional/industrial experience into master's provision in ways that will match market expectations.</li> </ul>
<u>Relevance</u>	<p>The pilot has provided a robust body of market insight for the immediate stakeholders in SEED and SoSS to develop their PGT provision in response to emerging University, Faculty and School priorities (including both on-campus and online provision), with ongoing curriculum and portfolio development under discussion in both Schools. Key staff within both Schools were either present at the project's implementation workshop or will receive the full reports. Stakeholder needs have been met at least to an initial extent given specific programme developments within SEED and SoSS related to the integration of professional experience in PGT provision, but the longer-term impact of the project is still to emerge.</p> <p>The completed pilot outcomes would suggest that the University should consider placing significant emphasis on learning within the workplace as a fundamental aspect of its drive to promote flexibility in learning. This would suggest that institutional needs and priorities connected to the Flexible Learning Programme should be adapted to prioritise activity that integrates professional experience (which would include service learning) into the University's PGT provision.</p>
<u>Efficiency</u>	<p>The project was not primarily focused on establishing improvements in efficiency, but insights around the relevance of supporting infrastructure for managing relationships with organisations providing placements would point to the value in terms of shifting from what is currently primarily an agenda that is set at individual course-unit level to a programme-based approach that also entails at least some sharing at departmental, school, faculty or institutional levels.</p>

<u>Effectiveness</u>	<p>The project has sought to establish the basis for improvements in the portfolios of programmes that are offered within SEED and SoSS in order to match the aspirations and needs of (prospective) students in a more effective manner than occurs at present. Programme development would need to follow-on after the project for suitably revised portfolios to be realised, with scope for improved recruitment onto PGT provision and greater diversity in the PGT student population. The project further supports ways in which a more effective match could be established between programme portfolio, curriculum design and marketing of programmes.</p>
<u>Outcome</u>	<p>The project has met its immediate objectives in assessing the viability (in relation to the two key audiences of prospective students and placement providers) of potential forms of new programme provision that is focused on integrating professional/industrial experience into master's provision within SEED and SoSS; and in assessing the extent to which competitors have already integrated such experience into their master's provision.</p> <p>The extent to which the project is able to exceed its objectives will primarily depend on whether staff in SEED and SoSS (and other Schools) are able to adapt their PGT provision, and associated marketing and recruitment activity, in light of the deliverables. There is good scope for a wider impact on PGT provision across the University, given scope for the Market &amp; Student Insight team to make contributions to the University's upcoming review of its PGT provision.</p> <p>Ultimately, it is hoped that the project will be able to contribute to a shift in both mindsets and established practice across the Faculty (and in other parts of the University) around the importance of offering master's provision that allows students the flexibility to focus their programme-level learning outcomes either on research or on workplace engagement.</p>
<u>Sustainability</u>	<p>The project has highlighted the central importance of securing professional experience for prospective PGT students, with a range of options and insights for SEED and SoSS to leverage this understanding in relation to programme portfolio development, marketing and recruitment. For change to result, specific PGT programmes will now need to be identified in both Schools (and elsewhere in the University) that would benefit from pivoting towards the integration of professional experience, so that programmes incorporate the option for students to choose to emphasise development of capacity to engage in research or experience of working within a professionally-relevant (external) organisation.</p> <p>Alongside this, the project has identified a range of further support mechanisms that would assist departments in realising change at programme-level, including contracts with external agencies to</p>



	<p>source placements, establishing one or more dedicated units to source placements or to run work placement course units across an entire suite of programmes or even across the University as a whole, partnerships with major employers (e.g. similar to the BSc Accounting with Industrial/Professional Experience that is offered in conjunction with PwC), and devoting additional resources for staff time to assist with securing placements.</p>
Financial	<p>The project was completed on time and to budget. Follow-on activity after the project will be integrated into established programme portfolio development processes and strategic planning, and it will inform marketing and recruitment activity.</p>
Lessons Identified / Learned	<p><i>Systems and process</i> The presence or absence of supporting infrastructure to allow for the sourcing, support and quality assurance of placements will closely enable or inhibit intended follow-on activity.</p> <p><i>Incentives and capacity</i> Proposals do not envisage University staff directly delivering teaching that entails an integration of professional experience (at least, not on any extensive basis) but offering programmes that involve others undertaking this delivery (e.g. employers). Some additional professional services capacity (or contracting of external capacity) is likely to be required to source and support placements. Incentives are already in place where high-performing programmes are established.</p> <p><i>Policy and strategy</i> It is not a straightforward matter to ensure that our provision offers the features that students overwhelmingly indicate as what is most important to them. The project highlights a tension that will need to be addressed if master's provision is to be characterised by a robust integration of professional experience. Master's provision across SEED and SoSS at present is very substantively directed as a matter of policy and strategy towards a preparation for research, given a 60-credit research dissertation. While the capacity to undertake research is itself relevant preparation for employment outside of academia, an exclusive focus on research acts as an inhibitor to dedicating substantive time on a master's degree for gaining professional experience in outside organisations.</p> <p><i>Student experience</i> The project has identified a significant shift in the interests of prospective students for master's provision in SEED and SoSS (with many aspects of these lessons likely to apply to provision in other Schools). This shift relates to the central importance in so far as recruitment is concerned of PGT provision that directly supports engagement with workplaces. This represents a significant enabler for proposed revisions to programme portfolios.</p> <p><i>Culture</i> The University's culture currently offers wide-ranging support for PGT provision that is focused on research. A pivot towards</p>

	incorporating professional experience within PGT provision would represent a significant shift in culture. Modest levels of staff interest in professional experience compared to their interest in research can be expected to act as an inhibitor of a pivot towards the integration of professional experience in PGT provision.
Materials or publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interim presentation from Red Brick on quantitative findings, entitled 'The University of Manchester: Postgraduate Programme with Integrated Professional Experience - Quantitative Findings', April 2025. Slides available as a pdf document.</li> <li>Master's degrees with embedded professional experience, Market Insight Report: SEED/SoSS (Competitor analysis), Market &amp; Student Insight team, July 2025.</li> <li>Postgraduate programmes with integrated professional experience, Final Report, July 2025, Red Brick agency.</li> <li>Master's degrees with embedded professional experience - Implementation workshop, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025: workshop slides; and video recordings of presentations from Red Brick agency on their overall findings and from the Market &amp; Student Insight team on the competitor analysis.</li> <li>Master's degrees with embedded professional experience, Final Project Report. (Note: this report is currently being finalised).</li> </ul>
Report approval and comments	<i>To be completed by a delegated person agreed by the workstream governance group.</i>

Total costs of FLP-ID72 (Account code P132046)

Agreed budget: £24100 + agreed £150 contingency

Cost Type	Description	Costs and Total
Staff	N/A	N/A
Non-Staff	N/A	N/A
Adjustments	N/A	N/A
	<b>Total costs of the project</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catering for the final workshop: £275.40 (no VAT).</li> <li>Red Brick market research costs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Fees = £18,500 + VAT at £3700</li> <li>Incentives = £1,650 (no VAT)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>£24,125.40</u>
Final reconciliation		



	<p><b>Total income received to date from the FLP team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Red Brick market research costs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Fees = £9,250 + VAT at £1850</li> <li>Incentives = £1,500 (no VAT)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>£12,600.00</u>
Request for payment	<p>Covers remaining professional fees (with VAT), incentives for survey/interview participants and workshop catering.</p> <p>Note: at least some of these remaining costs were requested in the final quarterly report, with workshop catering as indicated above.</p>	<u>£11525.40</u>