



## Exploring student perceptions of their learning through flexible internships

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### ABSTRACT

The Covid pandemic has required a more flexible delivery of student internships, but how do international students view what they have learned from their experience? This article follows a mixed-mode pragmatic approach in order to explore student perceptions of internship as a form of experiential learning. The views of Applied Management degree students at Otago Polytechnic were investigated soon after the completion of different types of internship: company placement, offshore, blended and Green Office (student-run projects to act on sustainability with internal and external partners). Surveys and focus groups were used to gain insight into students' motivation as interns, what they felt they achieved and the capabilities (or transferable skills) they valued the most, as compared to earlier research by Otago Polytechnic into the perceptions of business employers. Findings indicate that, as with employers, verbal communication, teamwork and problem-solving are among the most valued capabilities. More surprising, however, is the learners' regard for independence, responsibility and ethics, and the relatively low position of sustainability in survey results. Meanwhile, the most striking difference between the student groups was the high level of awareness and commitment of Green Office interns. These findings suggest the following improvements to practice: being attentive to students' own perceptions (and the underlying reasons for them) in the flexible delivery of internship programmes; re-evaluating the extent to which such programmes meet the expectations of employers; the further development of Green Office internships to enhance experiential learning and promote sustainability for a better future.

**Key words:** experiential learning; learner capabilities; sustainability