

“I do and I understand”: The importance of placements for the self-perceived work readiness of Health Sciences students

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There exists a growing literature that explores employers' oft-voiced concerns that new graduates be *work ready* on being employed (Hager & Holland, 2012). Work readiness has been defined as “the extent to which graduates are perceived to possess the attitudes and attributes that make them prepared or ready for success in the work environment” (Caballero, Walker, & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2011, p. 42). But of as much interest to educators is whether students perceive *themselves* as work-ready when they graduate. That students reflect on their work readiness is vital for their learning, especially in the case of work placements (Smith et al., 2007). This paper investigates the impact of a community health placement programme on the perceptions of work-readiness of Health Sciences graduates.

POPLHLTH 302: Health Service Placement is the capstone course for Bachelor in Health Sciences (BHSc) students at the University of Auckland. It aims to enable Population Health students to develop through experience the competencies that they will need to be employed in a broad range of roles in the health sector, including health policy analysis, health management, health information and health promotion. It provides students with the opportunity to gain a critical understanding of an organisation through day-to-day engagement with the provision of health services, and thereby to transition from university to work and to develop life-long learning attitudes and skills. ~30 students enrolled in POPLHLTH 302 completed a questionnaire before and after their placement about their skills, confidence and readiness to participate in the health workforce, and their knowledge of it and the health needs of the NZ population. This paper will report on the findings of the study and reflect on its significance for educators concerned with pathways through and out of higher education, and with partnerships with industry.