



# Insuring a better future

how to attract the best students into insurance

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The CII is the world's leading professional organisation for insurance and financial services, with over 95,000 members in 150 countries.

We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of technical expertise and ethical conduct in the profession through research, education and accreditation.

Our Charter remit is to protect the public by guiding the profession. For more information on the CII and its policy and public affairs function, including examples of the range of issues in financial services

and insurance that we cover, please see: [www.cii.co.uk/policy](http://www.cii.co.uk/policy)

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# Executive summary

This report presents the key findings of the CII's recent research on students' attitudes towards insurance as a career, and makes recommendations for how the sector can attract a new generation of talent for the future.

As part of our wider commitment to promoting skills in insurance and financial services, the CII commissioned YouGov to undertake research measuring students' attitudes towards insurance. In December 2009, YouGov surveyed 1079 university students and 676 secondary school students in the UK. In February 2010, YouGov conducted two online discussion groups drawn from the survey respondents, one of university students and one of secondary school students. Each brought together a mix of those who felt hot, warm, and cold towards the insurance sector\*.

To our knowledge, this research represents the first study of students' views on careers in insurance and financial services. As such we hope that it will provide the sector with vital information about the current state of play, and that it will prove an important measuring stick to assess progress in the future.

## Key findings:

### Image and awareness

The image of insurance lags behind other sectors, with only 1% of students saying they are interested in working in the sector when they graduate, compared to 22% who want to work in professional services, including law and accounting. The main reason students do not want to work in insurance is that they perceive it to be dull, with the top three words associated with insurance being 'boring', 'confusing', and 'untrustworthy'. But these negative perceptions are most likely due to lack of knowledge about the sector and the breadth of opportunity that exists.

### Lack of stakeholder engagement

Inextricably linked to the first point, students say that they get most of their initial careers information from the Internet and media, but family, friends and work placements are most influential in their career decision-making. The insurance profession has done comparatively little to engage with these sources of information, resulting in low awareness and understanding of insurance amongst student communities and careers advisers.

### Impacts of the recession

The recession has had some impact on students' outlook, with some students expanding their career options in favour of jobs perceived to be more stable and socially valued. While there has been a backlash against careers in financial services and banking, insurance has not been impacted positively or negatively. It could be a golden opportunity for the sector to raise its profile.

### The value of work placements

Work placements and internships are among the biggest influences on students' careers choices, with most students agreeing that they provide an opportunity to gain valuable experience (78%), new skills (63%), and new insight into the industry (83%). Insurance placements are few and far between, but there is good reason to think they are successful. Over 70% of university students interested in insurance as a career say that a work placement has influenced their decision.

### Learning from other sectors

Changing students' minds won't be easy, but the insurance sector can learn from successful initiatives in other professions and business sectors. Students themselves agree that more should be done to get the message out in the media, working directly with schools and universities, and providing information online.

\* The charts and statistical data in this report are drawn from the surveys. Anonymous quotations seen in grey are taken from the focus groups, and attributed quotations in purple come from supporters of our Discover Risk campaign. Full data is available from the CII upon request.

## Recommendations

### 1. Offer more structured work placements

Structured work experience, placements and internships are highly valued by students and are a major influence on their career choices. Insurance employers of all sizes have yet to make the most of this important method of student engagement, leaving other professions such as accounting and law to influence and acquire talented young people.

The best way to show students that insurance is exciting, intellectually challenging, and rewarding is to let them see it for themselves. The CII can help – see the Appendix for the results of our university research on how to develop a successful placement scheme, at little or no direct cost to the employer.

### 2. Improve cross-media profile and presence

Students were clear that much of the stigma they associate with insurance comes from the media. Students also say that they use the Internet as a primary source of basic information, in conjunction with others they may trust more like family and friends. Promoting and improving communications with the media and online – starting with providing accurate information – will be vital to attracting Generation Y and below into the industry. The CII's new 'Discover Risk' campaign, [www.discoverrisk.co.uk](http://www.discoverrisk.co.uk), has already seen good success, but much more can be done.

### 3. Engage directly with students in education

The 'Big 4' accountancy firms' strength in this area compared to insurance is striking. 20% of university students said that major accountancy firms had come on campus visits, compared to 3% for leading insurers. To encourage students to learn more about the profession, the CII has dramatically increased its engagement with schools, colleges, and universities. More employer engagement in this area would help to get the message across – not just to educate students, but also careers advisers and teachers.

# Introduction

Recession or no recession, the insurance sector has struggled to promote itself effectively to those beyond it. It operates in a vacuum; consumers' only touch points with it are motor, property and travel – and their only memories of it are when something goes wrong. Advertising campaigns do nothing to shine a light on the breadth of opportunity within our sector. Thus we have had a situation whereby people fall into insurance.

**None of this is new. What this research offers is hard data to back up the anecdotal evidence about image and engagement problems. There is a lack of understanding, a lack of clear opportunity, a lack of structure and a lack of awareness – all driven by a lack of employer outreach.**

With some honourable exceptions, including Allianz, Aviva, Lloyds and Willis, few employers appear to grasp the need to engage with students at an age younger than the final year of a university degree – if at all. Students hear a little about our profession, but many will have already been courted, placed, viewed, analysed and acquired by other employers from other sectors – professions that understand the need to ‘catch them while they’re young’.

Students at school, college and university know that now more than ever they need to improve their CVs with relevant work experience. Our profession has stood on the periphery of the debate, with the majority of UK insurance employers adopting an ad-hoc, reactive approach to new entrants rather than planning for them. Indeed, some employers offer unstructured placements to family members of those working in high positions. It is an uncomfortable truth that needs to be addressed as we work towards a consistent approach.

But change can come about. Some employers need only look to their European operations, where there are structured opportunities for their future workforce.

This report is not about painting a black picture. There are some small and large organisations doing excellent things, and there are students who have had a very positive experience of working in the profession through a placement – and who defend the profession against its detractors.

The CII for its part has launched its Discover Risk campaign which speaks to students, advisers and employers. Viewed by over fifteen thousand people so far, it is already becoming a place for employers of all sizes to develop their student presence. It is pleasing that some employers have already used the site to advertise placement and employment opportunities as part of their broader recruitment activity.

Together we will attract the next generation by explaining and revealing the vast breadth of the insurance profession and the manifold roles in it.

**Caspar Bartington**

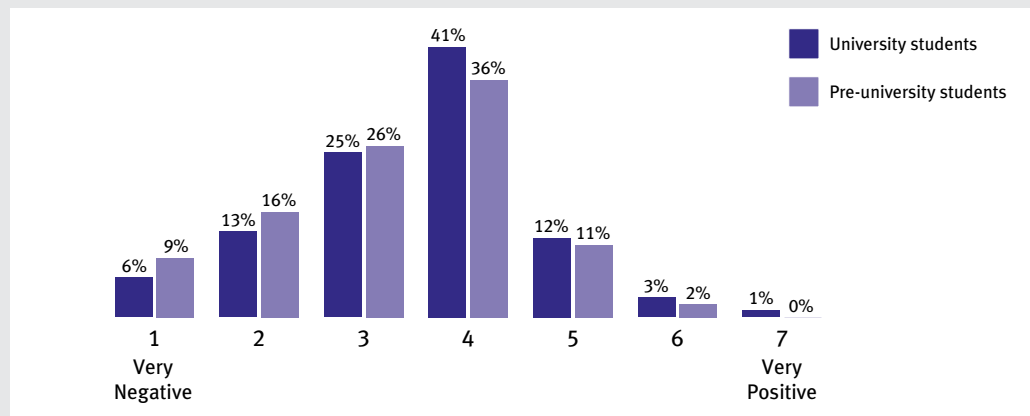
Relationship Manager – Education  
Chartered Insurance Institute

# Student perceptions

For many years, insurance has had a major image problem amongst students. At best, students are neutral about the idea of insurance as a career. At worst, they are extremely negative.

## The general perception

**Q:** What is your general perception of insurance as an industry?



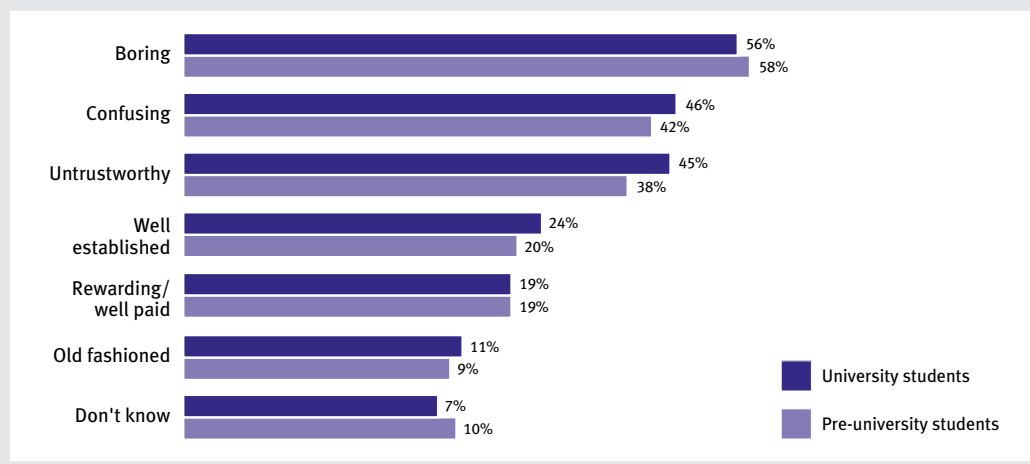
Only 1% say that they are interested in working in the sector when they leave school. Compare this to finance and banking at 15% or professional services, including law and accounting, 22%.

“Commencing a career in insurance was not an obvious choice for me – the insurance industry wasn’t really on my radar when I was thinking about applying for jobs, largely because graduate job fairs at university were dominated by Accounting, Law and IT firms.”

Faye Sadler  
ALLIANZ

## Top words associated with the insurance industry

**Q:** What words do you think of when you think about the insurance industry?



The main reason students do not want to work in insurance is that they regard it to be dull and unethical – more concerned with ‘ripping people off’ than helping. However, stability and monetary reward are seen as positives.

“  
**I do not feel that I chose a career in risk, rather it chose me! I was unaware of the sector and the variety it offers, but once exposed to it I did not look back and I look forward to a long and successful career.**”

**John Newnes**  
 CUNNINGHAM LINDSEY

### Awareness/understanding of the industry

While the view from students seems bleak, it is due in no small part to lack of awareness and understanding of what people in the sector actually do. When asked to describe what a typical day in the industry entailed, most students said they ‘had no idea’.

**Q: What does a typical day in the insurance industry entail?**

“I have no idea about the roles in insurance.”

“Neither do I.”

“Same.”

“I don’t know... Answering phones, going on the computer, talking to customers.”

“Actually I have judged about people and I don’t actually know what they do!”

The implication is clear – raising awareness of the profession will result in more positive perceptions and opinions based on understanding of what makes the profession tick.

“  
**Highlight that it’s more interesting than it first appears (e.g. not just an office job).**”

# Making career choices

Students get most of their careers information from the media and Internet, but family, friends and work placements hold the most sway in influencing their career decisions. The insurance profession has done little to engage with these key sources of information, resulting in low awareness and understanding amongst student communities and careers advisers.

Students do not believe insurance can offer them the top two most important factors they look for in a career: passion/interest in the industry and personal satisfaction/enjoyment. However it is seen to offer the third most important, high salary/benefits.

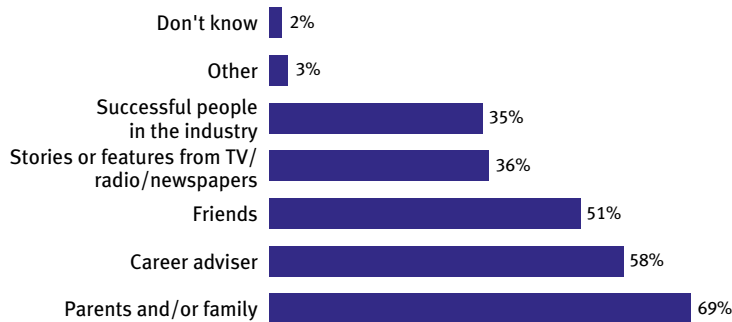
## Sources of information and advice

The most popular sources of careers advice for students are the Internet, teachers, parents and/or family. Friends and career advisers also play a big role, and over a third of students look to successful people in the industry.

“ I heard about the industry through family friends and it appealed to me immensely as an industry built upon relationships. ”

**Abigail Price**  
WILLIS

### Q: How do you get information and advice about careers?\*



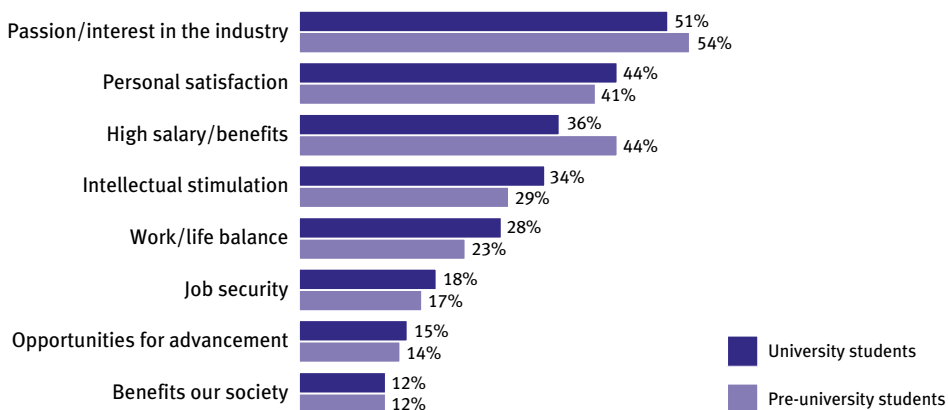
\*Chart: university students

## What students look for in a career

What students say that they seek the most is personal fulfilment. A primary factor is enjoyment: a career that is exciting, fun, and interesting. It does not necessarily need to be glamorous, but students want a job that will challenge them and that will not be repetitive or mundane.

Having invested time in education and training, they want a career that is going to enable them to progress. ‘Helping others’ and doing something worthwhile that will benefit society is also desired. Finally, monetary reward and job security are important – perhaps more important than students are willing to state – but most maintain that these factors are not worth sacrificing personal fulfilment.

### Q: Which of the following factors are most important to you when considering a career?



## In their own words

“I think a job yeah is a way to pay the bills but it’s also something to be a part of your life, help to mould you as a person, etc.”

“I’m most looking for personal fulfilment, something that would be diverse and secure.”

“I want to help people and make a difference in my life.”

“I would look for enjoyment first, then stability.”

“If you’ve worked for 3/4 years to get your degree, you want to continue achieving and progressing in your future career.”

“Personally I’d like a job with variety, that’s got a reasonably good reputation with the public, job security and good pay.”

“If it’s financial reward, then obviously it’s important as you need money to live in today’s society. However, personal fulfilment and satisfaction is more important to me.”

Students are highly influenced by the media, teachers, and friends and family – but these sources do not offer students the information they need to make an informed decision about insurance. Students say that very little of what they know about insurance is based on actual facts or direct experience, and that there is very minimal information to be gained from their schools or universities.

In order to attract the best and the brightest, the industry needs to improve communication and make the connection between insurance and personal fulfilment crystal clear.



Get more representatives doing presentations at school/university campuses to give accurate descriptions of the positives of the industry. ””



More discussion in school about the good it is doing. ””

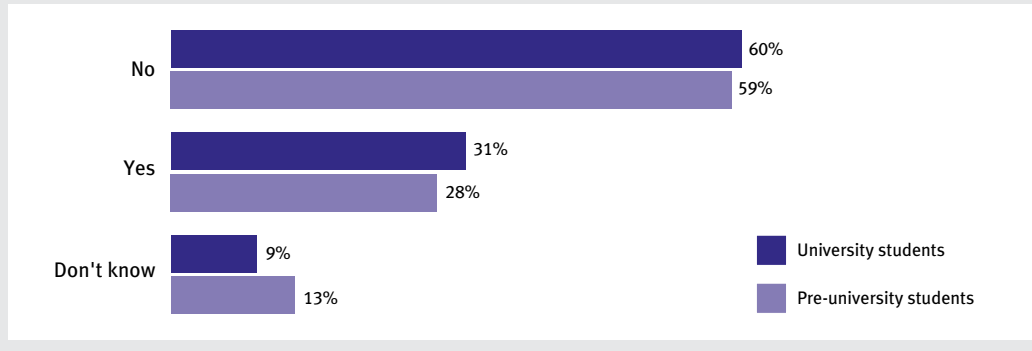
# The recession

The recession has impacted many students' outlook, with some students expanding their career options in favour of jobs perceived to be more stable and socially valuable.

## Impacts on students' career plans

While most students say that the recession has had little impact on their career plans, nearly one-third admit that it has had a real effect, especially combined with student debt.

**Q: Has the recession affected which industries or business sectors you are thinking of working in?**

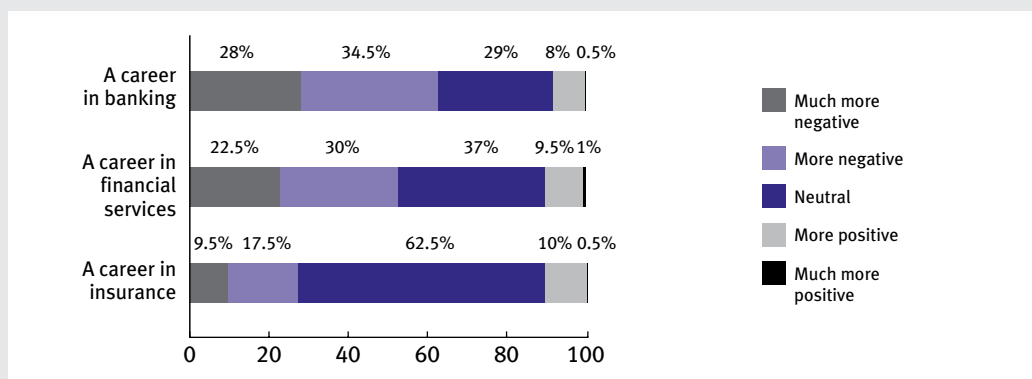


As a result, many students are considering delaying their job hunt, and even more feel that it is necessary to work harder to achieve their goals in such a competitive marketplace.

## Declining perception of financial services

The recession has had a strong negative effect on perceptions of the finance sector, although insurance has not been hit nearly as hard as banking. The majority of university students say that the recession has made them more negative about a career in banking and financial services. However, thoughts towards a career in insurance were not impacted positively or negatively due to the recession.

**Q: As a result of the recession, how have your career thoughts been affected towards\*:**

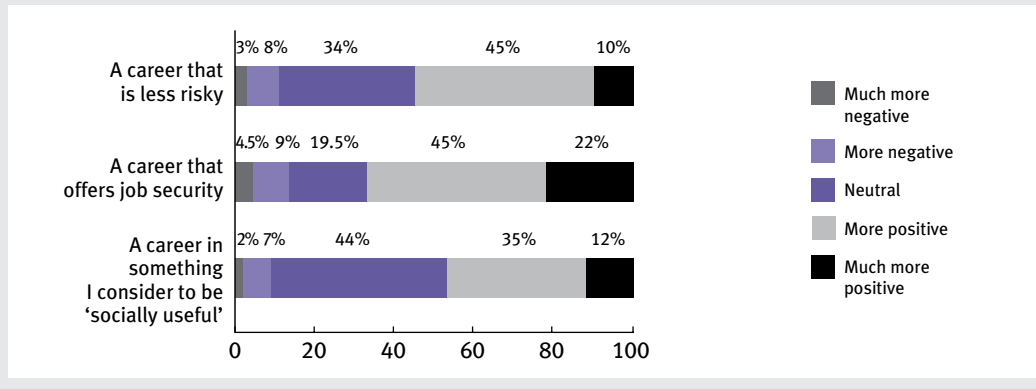


\*Chart: university students

## New values – security and value to society

The recession has caused many university students to feel more positive about a career in something considered to be ‘socially useful’, offers job security, and is ‘less risky’. Many students cited teaching as an example of one such career that they might not have considered before the recession but would now consider.

**Q:** As a result of the recession, how have your career thoughts been affected towards\*:



\*Chart: university students

“

I would probably be more tempted by a more stable career choice like teaching or something compared to the private sector. ”

“

I don't think it has changed the plans, but it has made the decision for a job that has stability essential. ”

The recession is causing many students to rethink what sorts of careers they want to go into – but unlike banking, insurance has not been impacted negatively in the fallout. The sector stands to gain if it can show students the social value and stability that a career in insurance can offer.

“

They [insurers] need to make it look like it benefits society, that it's a worthwhile job rather than just a way for the rich to get richer. ”

“

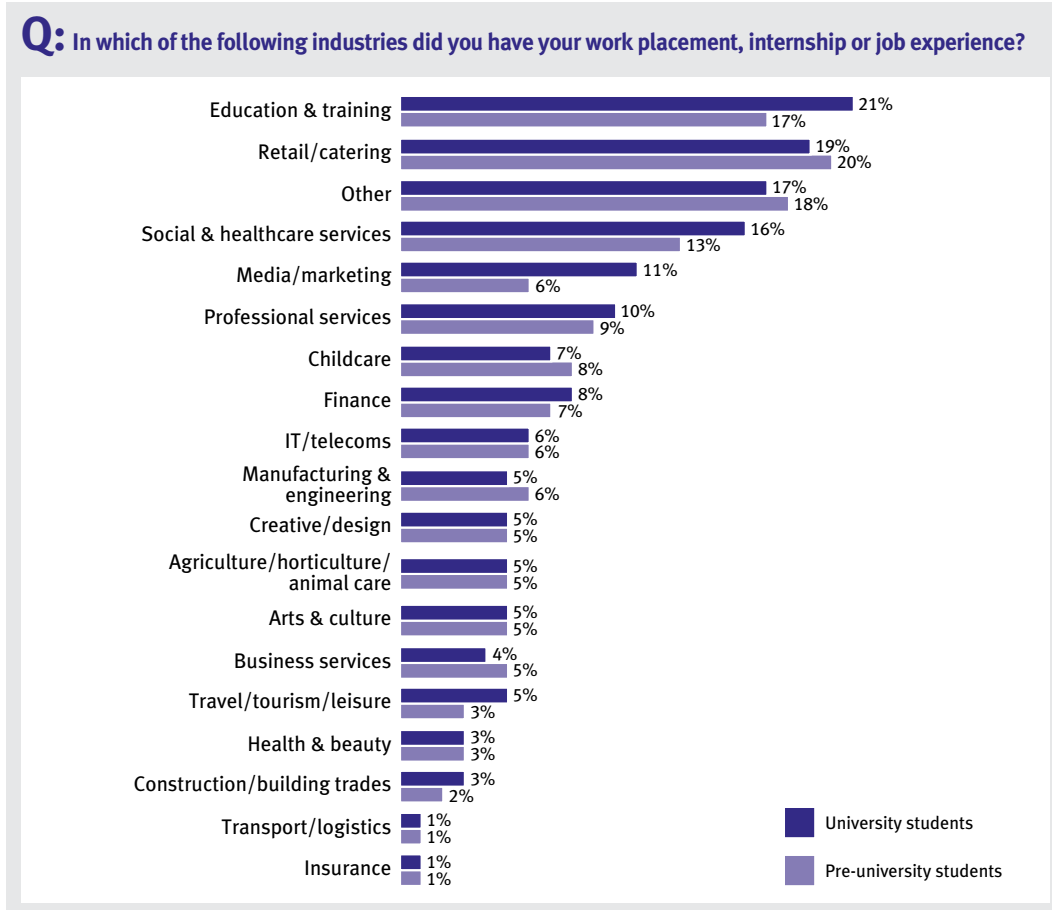
To be fair it [insurance] is a vital part of our economy and perhaps more people should be made aware of this. ”

# Work experience, placements and internships

Work placements are one of the biggest influences on students' career choices – but opportunities in insurance are few and far between. Those few students who have had insurance placements or internships agree that they gained valuable experience and new insight into the industry, in many cases influencing them to consider a career in insurance. These students are also able to act as sources of information for their peers about insurance's role in society and different jobs in insurance.

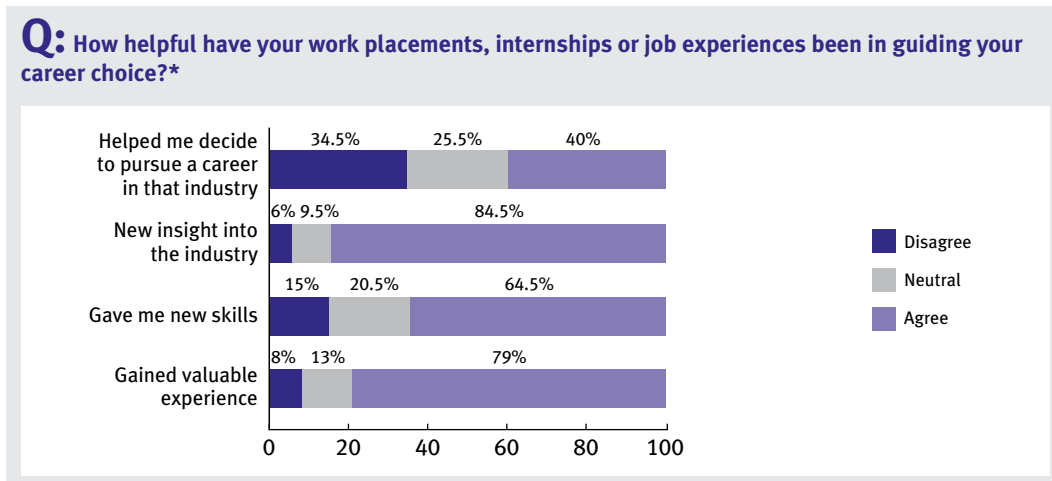
## Placements in insurance

89% of pre-university students and 81% of university students say that they have had work placements, internships, or job experience. Of these, only 1% of both groups of students had had a work placement, internship, or job experience in insurance or risk management, compared to 10% in professional services and 8% in finance.



## Benefits

Most students agree that their work placements, internships, or job experience gave them an opportunity to gain valuable experience, new skills, and new insight into the industry. Many also said that placements helped them decide to pursue a career in that industry.



\*Chart: university students

Placements are also a major factor in career decision-making. 45% of pre-university and 61% of university students say that a work placement, internship, or job experience has influenced their decisions about career choices. It is encouraging to see that these figures rise to 62% and 71% for those (few) students who say they are considering insurance as a career.

“  
Before I went I had a very stereotypical view of insurance and actuarial sciences being a boring task of sitting calculating when people would die! So it really improved my perception. And I think work placements are extremely useful and should always be encouraged!”

“  
Definitely. I would go further than that, and say in today’s current graduate recruitment market, they are essential. Employers are looking for experience more and more these days.”

### **What makes a good placement**

Students value placements, but only if they are done properly. They want to be challenged to undertake key tasks related to the job role, rather than more menial tasks, as happens in the worst-case scenarios. Well-structured and supported placements not only benefit students, they also offer employers excellent opportunities to assess potential new recruits.

“  
If done properly they are very valuable. If they are not organised they are usually a waste of time or just put you off a career.”

“  
I’d have liked to have got more involved in the actual work, rather than just doing mundane and menial tasks, plus I also felt a lot like a burden rather than a benefit a lot of the time.”

“  
The BBC have set a program where you get given various different jobs to do over the week to give you as much of an insight as possible. Everyone is very helpful and you do not feel like you are just sitting around watching paint dry.”

Students like to gain direct insight and experience of careers. Career placements are highly respected and valued amongst students, especially now when competition for jobs is fierce. Structured work placements promoted via career services and employer websites could help the insurance sector attract more talent into the industry in the early stages, when opinions are still being formed.

# Moving forward

Changing minds won't be easy. But the insurance sector can learn from successful initiatives in other professions and business sectors. Students themselves agree that more should be done to get the positive message out.

Our research and experience working with students suggest three key ways that employers and others working in the sector can attract the next generation of talented students.

## Recommendations

### 1. Offer more structured work placements

This is a key recommendation. Work placements, internships, and job experiences are highly respected by students and a major influence on their career choices. Insurance employers big and small have yet to tap into this important method of early engagement with students, leaving other professions and business sectors like accounting and law to influence talented young people. The best way to show students that insurance is exciting, intellectually challenging, and rewarding is to let them see it for themselves.

“

**It probably did change my perception of insurance. As was pretty evident from our discussion some of the large insurance companies and insurance salesmen give the whole industry quite a bad reputation. From what I saw, the people involved in the Actuarial aspects of insurance appear to be more focused on just doing a good job of the actual task given to them and not just set of making huge fortunes of money and anyone's expense.**”

“

**The best parts of the work placement were the chats that I had with different people within the industry. I was very well looked after and always went for lunch or coffee with people from different sectors and meetings were also arranged with more senior people if they had the time. The booklet that was given to me that first year actuaries need to study to pass their exams explained the basics and was invaluable.**”

We asked 16 universities what makes a good placement, and came up with our ‘Top Ten Tips for Successful Placements’ to support employers venturing into this new territory. Please see the Appendix for the full list.

## 2. Improve cross-media profile and presence

Students were clear that much of the stigma they associate with insurance comes from the media – mentioning ‘boring’ or ‘corrupt’ characters like Mark from Peep Show, Max Branning from EastEnders and Reuben from Along Came Polly. The message is strongly negative, and no counterbalance exists to show the social value of the sector – something that students say is an increasingly important factor in their career choices.

Even when students were asked directly, they could not link insurance to providing a service that is socially beneficial. Better role models are needed to help break down the stereotype of a ‘typical’ person working in insurance.

“

**Media would get to most people of all ages. If the parents think its good, then they are more likely to encourage it to their children.**”

Students also say that they use the Internet as their primary source of basic information, in conjunction with others they may trust more like family and friends. Promoting and improving communications with the media and online – starting with providing accurate information – will be vital to attracting Generation Y and below into the industry.

“

**I realised what I enjoyed at school/college, talked to careers staff and then just googled really to get more info.**”

In February, CII launched the ‘Discover Risk’ campaign, [www.discoverrisk.co.uk](http://www.discoverrisk.co.uk), to explain the insurance profession to a wider student and adviser audience. The site brings employers and learners closer together, and makes the most of technology by linking to Twitter, bookmarking and YouTube and popular student networking areas like The Student Room. We hope this engaging and interactive site will challenge students’ preconceived notions about the sector and help them to find insurance job roles to match their unique talents.

“

**Having such a website in place when I was thinking about my particular career choice would have been very helpful.**”

**Phil Ross**  
ALLIANZ

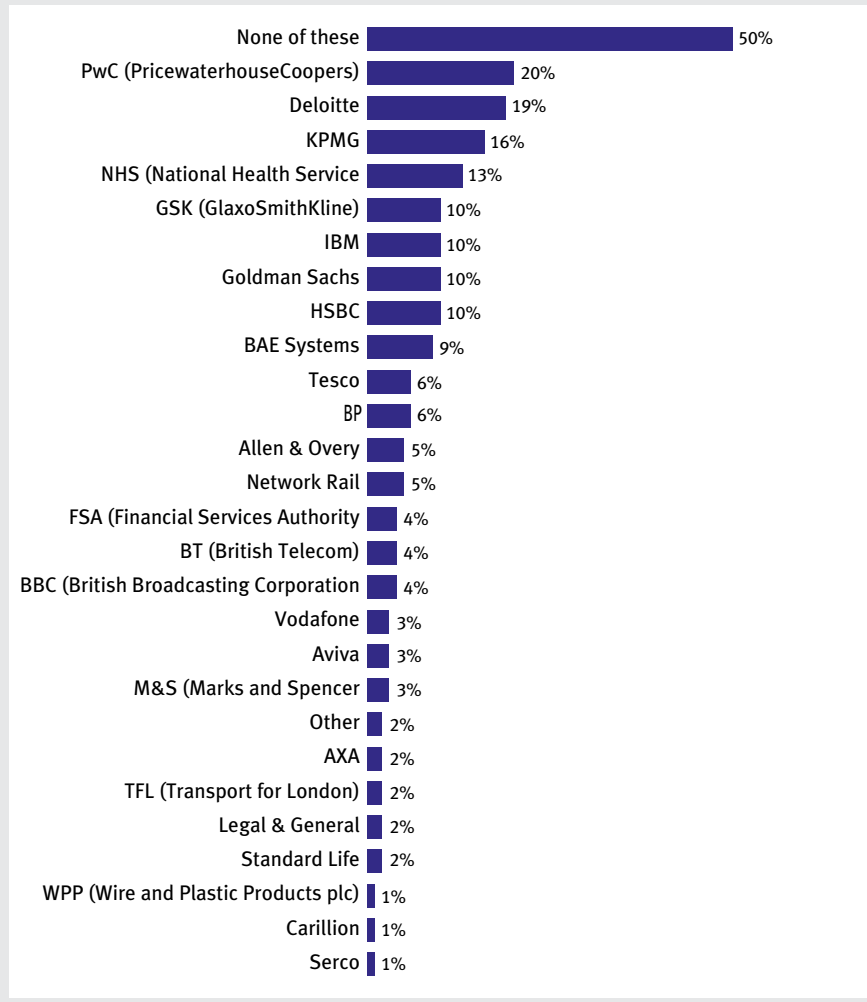
### 3. Engage directly with students at schools and universities

Unfortunately, students are currently not receiving much information about the insurance sector from their schools and universities. More employer engagement in this area would help to get the message across – not just to educate students, but also careers advisers and teachers. The ‘Big 4’ accountancy firms’ strength in this area compared to insurance is striking. 20% of university students said that major accountancy firms had come on campus visits, compared to 3% for leading insurers.

“  
**Until I started with Aviva I always thought that Insurance was boring and as soon as someone started talking about it I’d start to yawn, but not now.**”

**Phil Ross**  
 ALLIANZ

**Q: Which of the following employers do you know has come on campus?\***



\*Chart: university students

Since the end of 2008, the CII has dramatically increased its engagement with schools, colleges, and universities. The CII has organised more than 100 student-facing sessions across the UK, supported by employers. We have delivered sessions to more than 2000 students who are actively interested in the profession, and tens of thousands of other students have visited us online through the Discover Risk site or our profiles in other student-focused media.

To encourage students to learn more about the profession, the CII has built active links with more than 1500 schools around the UK, and delivers student sessions and useful facts through these partnerships.

## Insuring a better future

The benefits of attracting a new generation of talented students cannot be understated. Talent is the lifeblood of any company, industry, and economy. The UK insurance sector needs to be able to attract the best people to ensure its growth, productivity, and place in the global economy of tomorrow.

The CII has long been engaged with promoting insurance and financial services, from the Talent initiative in 2006 to the newly launched Discover Risk initiative, with the aim of improving students' knowledge and enticing the best entrants into the sector. We are encouraged by the good success of our recent initiatives and believe that much more can be done by employers to build on this work across the sector.

“  
I don't think you can really trust the media to give accurate information about many things, so I'd go to the source first.”

“  
I think the advice of our university careers service is invaluable, as are people working in the industry.”

Building our sector's skills base is not just the responsibility of central government, schools, or professional bodies like the CII. Employers can play an important role in attracting the best and brightest into insurance job roles by taking some of the recommendations of this research on board.

The recession has been a wake-up call. Our skills survey 2009 found that most firms (68%) believe that investing in skills and training during the downturn will leave them better placed in a recovery. The challenge now is to expand this investment in our future to the new talent that will lead our profession forward in the years and decades to come.

“  
I had attended a CII presentation about careers in risk during my final year of university, but apart from that I knew very little about the risk profession before I started.”

Martyn Leek  
FORTIS

“  
Like so many young people I did not consider a career in risk, but when I began working in it the benefits of having an enjoyable job became obvious.”

Sam Keep  
CENTOR

“  
They [insurance employers] need to get into university careers services, they could give direct talks at universities, or perhaps sponsor university societies? They just need to get themselves known and more involved in student life.”

# Appendix

The idea of taking on a student for a placement can seem like a diversion from the day to day aspects of work; in fact, a well-structured and supported placement offers employers unbeatable opportunities to look at potential new recruits, within a set context, and offers opportunities for existing staff members to develop soft skills related to management.

## University top ten tips for successful placements

### Projects

Project-based work suits a placement student better than other types of work. The self-contained nature of project work enables the learner to complete a piece of work and often allows the employer to observe some of the key soft skills required in the workplace. Many employers have a project that has gathered dust because it is not a priority for any existing member of staff. This is the perfect project for a placement student.

### Mentors and buddies

Any placement student should be supported in two ways. They should have a formal mentor who will be responsible for the learner's time in the workplace. They will also meet for feedback sessions and a final review at the end of the placement where the learner should take the opportunity to ask for constructive feedback. There should also be a buddy, in a junior position to the manager, who can act as a more informal support and help for the learner. In some cases, the buddy may have been a previous placement student.

### Induction

A placement student should receive the same structure of induction as a full-time member of staff. This is essential for the employer to give the right impression of the company, as it is essential for the learner to understand the nature and structure of the organisation.

### Feedback

All successful placements will feature a regular, structured feedback process. Typically, the mentor will meet with the student, monthly in the case of a sandwich year, more regularly for shorter placements, to discuss progress and suggest areas for improvement. The final feedback session gives the employer the opportunity to float the idea of the student returning for a further placement or, if they have particularly impressed, it can be used to offer the student a conditional place once they have graduated. In some cases, employers will explain that the successful student can bypass parts of the assessment and interview process, rather than securing a job with no further interview.

### Fairness

Although a student may only be within an organisation for a short period of time – anything from two weeks to a year – it is important for both employer and learner that the student should be treated the same as any other member of staff, and not just 'the placement student' to do the photocopying.

### Skills Development

We have already seen that a good placement is likely to be project-based. As well as project completion and the skills of project management, it is important that a placement student has the opportunity to develop soft or transferable skills such as teamworking, commercial awareness, problem solving, communication. These skills will stand them in good stead, particularly if they are invited back for a further placement or longer work opportunity.

## Social Interaction

Taking on a work placement student is not just about getting the job done. It is also an opportunity for an employer to sell their organisation to prospective new entrants, so it is well worth ensuring that placement students are made to feel part of the team after work as well as during it. Social events in the area are a good way for all concerned to bond and build relationships that may not be as easy in a workplace environment.

## Structure

Whether you are taking on a student for a two-week placement or a year in industry, the earlier you plan for the placement, the smoother it will be. The work required to set a placement up is not difficult, but needs thinking through, from which staff members and departments need to be briefed on the work a placement student does, to what happens on day one and identifying mentors and buddies in good time. This is also a good opportunity to set objectives for the placement period, in the same way that a full-time member of staff would receive them for their role.

## Advertise early

Students start looking for the most popular summer placements from November onwards, so employers looking for the best students should have their placement scheme in place in good time to maximise their chances of identifying a star of the future.

## Spread your net wide

You may wish to focus on your local university, but you may find plenty of students returning home for the summer near to you, even if they don't study there. Advertising using a variety of media will allow you to attract the right people who.

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tel: **+44 (0)20 8989 8464** email: [customer.serv@cii.co.uk](mailto:customer.serv@cii.co.uk) website: [www.cii.co.uk](http://www.cii.co.uk)

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