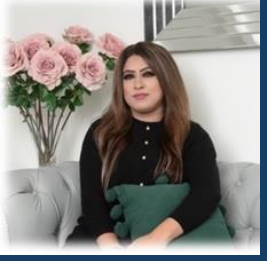


Barriers Faced by Biomedical Science Students Completing a Placement Year

Dr Kathryn Dudley, Senior Lecturer in Biomedical Science & Course Leader BSc Biomedical Science, University of Wolverhampton, School of Pharmacy and Life Sciences, Wolverhampton, WV1 1LY [✉ k.dudley2@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:k.dudley2@wlv.ac.uk)



Dr Amreen Bashir, Senior Lecturer in Biomedical Science & BMS Placements Tutor, Aston University, College of Health and Life Sciences, School of Biosciences, Birmingham, B4 7ET [✉ a.bashir6@aston.ac.uk](mailto:a.bashir6@aston.ac.uk)



KEYWORDS: Biomedical Science, placement, IBMS Registration Training portfolio, employability

INTRODUCTION

- Research shows completing a placement year is associated with improved academic and employment outcomes.
- For Biomedical Science (BMS) courses, pathology placements allow completion of the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) registration training portfolio and achievement of Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration post-graduation.
- In the West Midlands, Applied Biomedical Science placements are limited to full-time students due to the need for comprehensive skill and knowledge development.
- Completing the Registration Training portfolio is a major commitment, taking at least six-months to complete, but typically about a year.
- Many students apply to distant Trusts to improve placement chances but often face long, expensive commutes due to unaffordable accommodation.
- These placements are currently unpaid.
- Prior to 2012, Biomedical Science placement courses were funded through a non-means tested (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) bursary which has since been withdrawn (Aslam, Beard and Hepburn, 2023).
- Although placement applications for the Applied Biomedical Science course are highly competitive, anecdotal evidence suggests that students choose not to pursue this route, despite a career aspiration to become a Biomedical Scientist.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To identify the factors which influence students’ decisions to pursue a placement year and barriers to obtaining placements during their IBMS accredited Biomedical Science degree programmes within the West Midlands area.
- Once these barriers had been identified, the study sought to make recommendations for changes to practice and policy to overcome these.

METHODS

- The study used a mixed-methods approach using a questionnaire distributed via JISC Online Surveys.

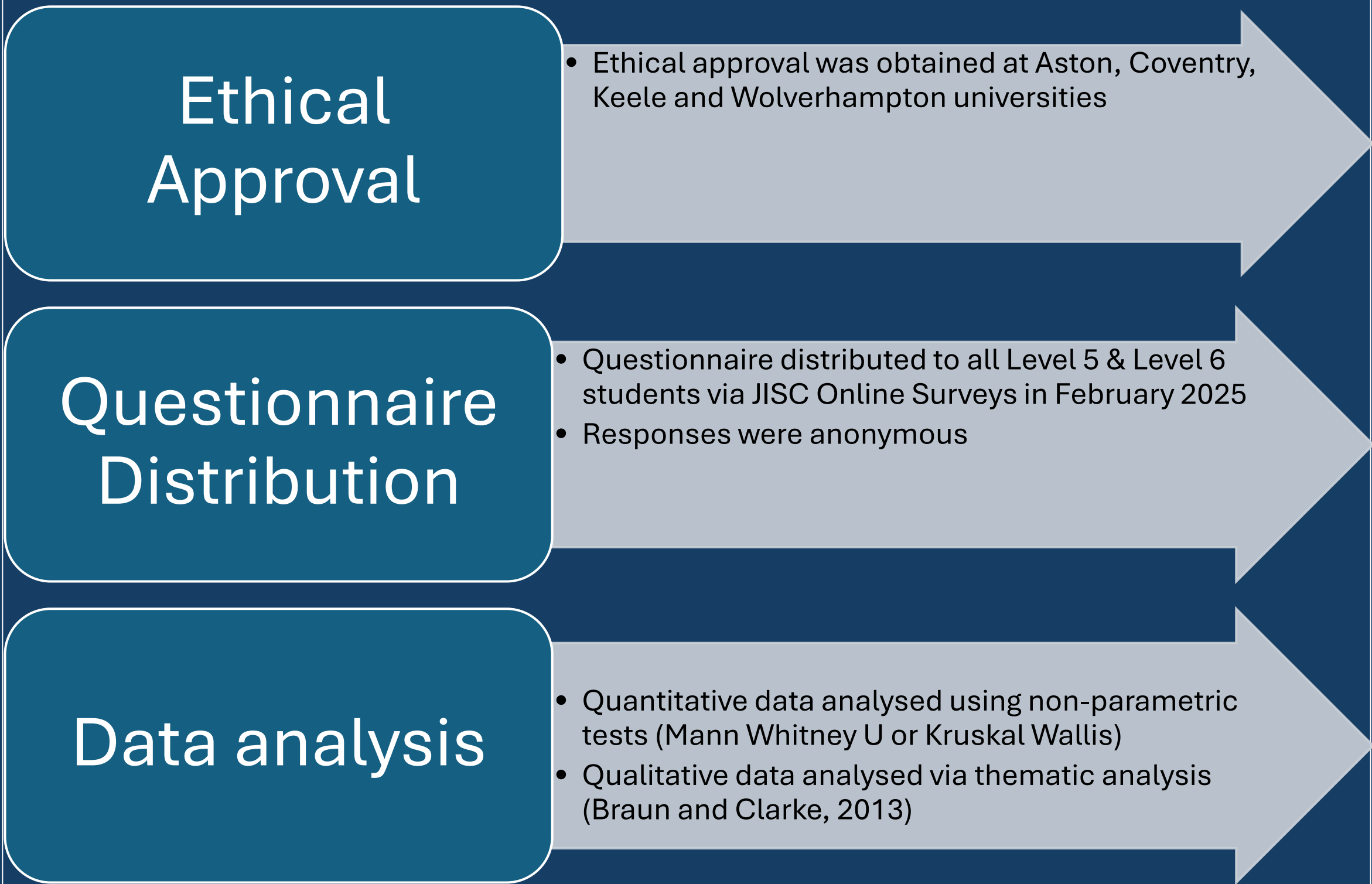


Figure 1: An overview of the study methodology

RESULTS

- 107 students enrolled in Biomedical Science courses across Aston University, Coventry University, University of Wolverhampton, and Keele University completed the questionnaire.
- The cohort included 63 Level 5 and 44 Level 6 students.
- 12.7% of Level 5 students and 15.9% of Level 6 students reported a disability or learning difference.
- 7.9% of Level 5 students and 18.2% of Level 6 students indicated they had caring responsibilities.
- 87.5% of Level 5 and 90% of Level 6 participants felt that lack of placement funding was important when deciding whether to pursue a placement ($p=0.557$)
- Significantly, 93.1% of Level 5 and 97.7% of Level 6 students felt that travel distance to placement and the cost implications of this were important considerations ($p=0.756$)
- Only 38.7% of Level 5 and 21.0% of Level 6 students felt it would be easy to manage their finances during a placement year ($p=0.063$).
- 82.3% of Level 5 and 86.0% of Level 6 students agreed that completing a placement significantly improved career prospects ($p=0.771$)
- 102 participants chose to declare their ethnicity. The Kruskal Wallis test identified a non-significant difference between participant ethnicity and placement status ($p=0.320$)
- 33.3% of students with a disability declared that they would apply for a placement regardless of whether it was paid or unpaid, compared to 42.0% of students without a disability ($p=0.013$)
- 33.3% of students who declared caring responsibilities chose not to apply for a placement year, whilst 18.2% of those without caring responsibilities chose not to apply ($p=0.020$).

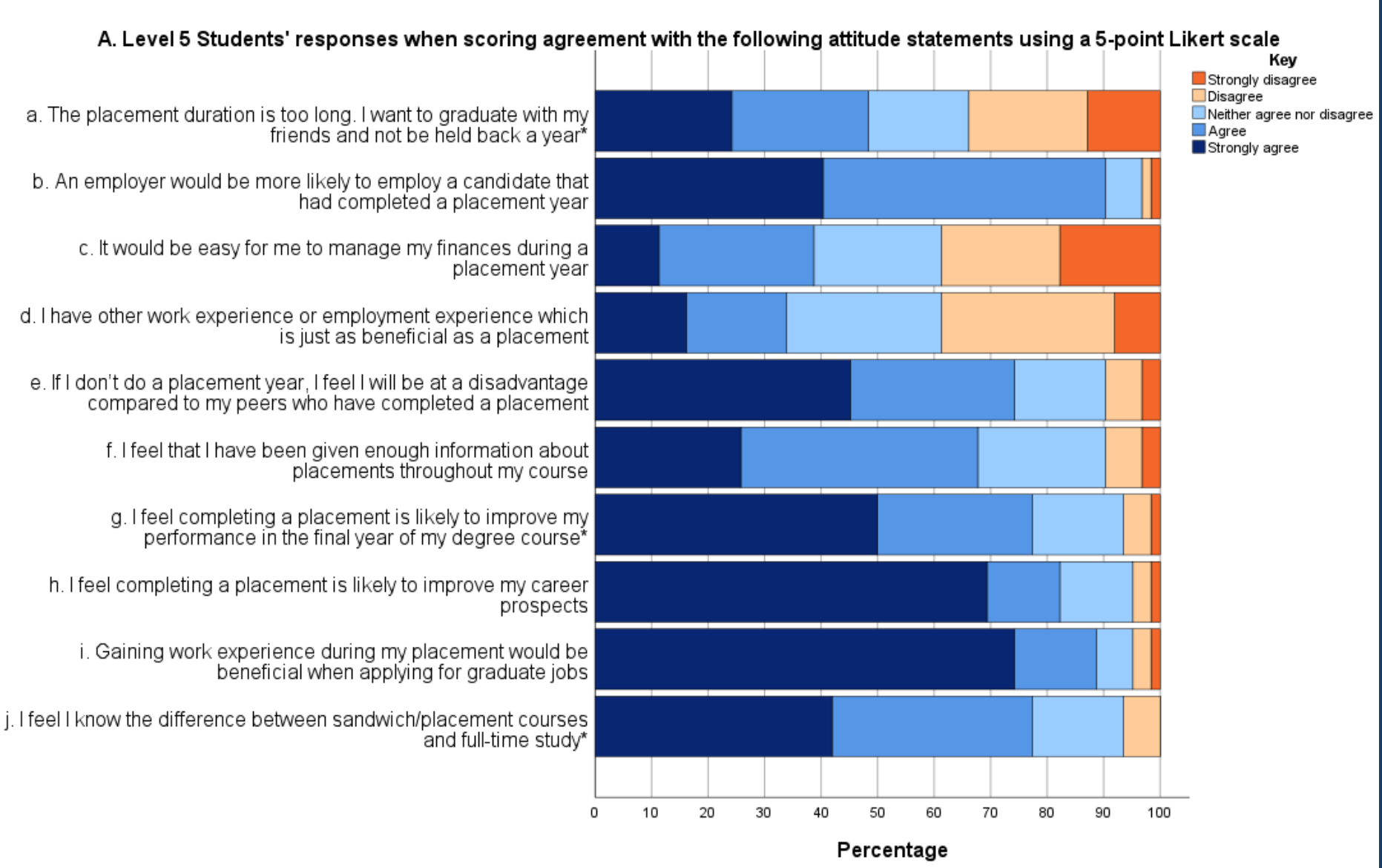
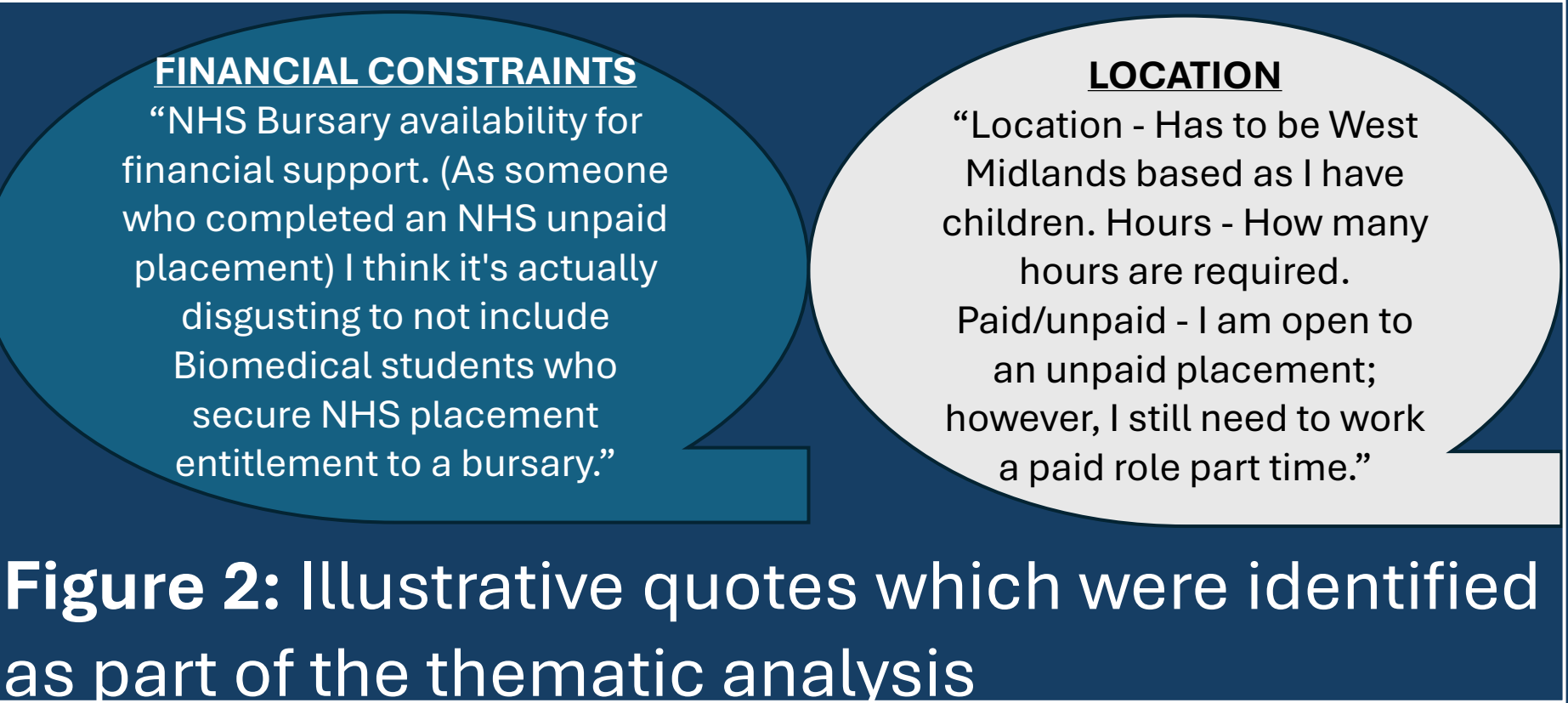


Figure 3A: Level 5 responses when scoring agreement using a 5-point Likert scale

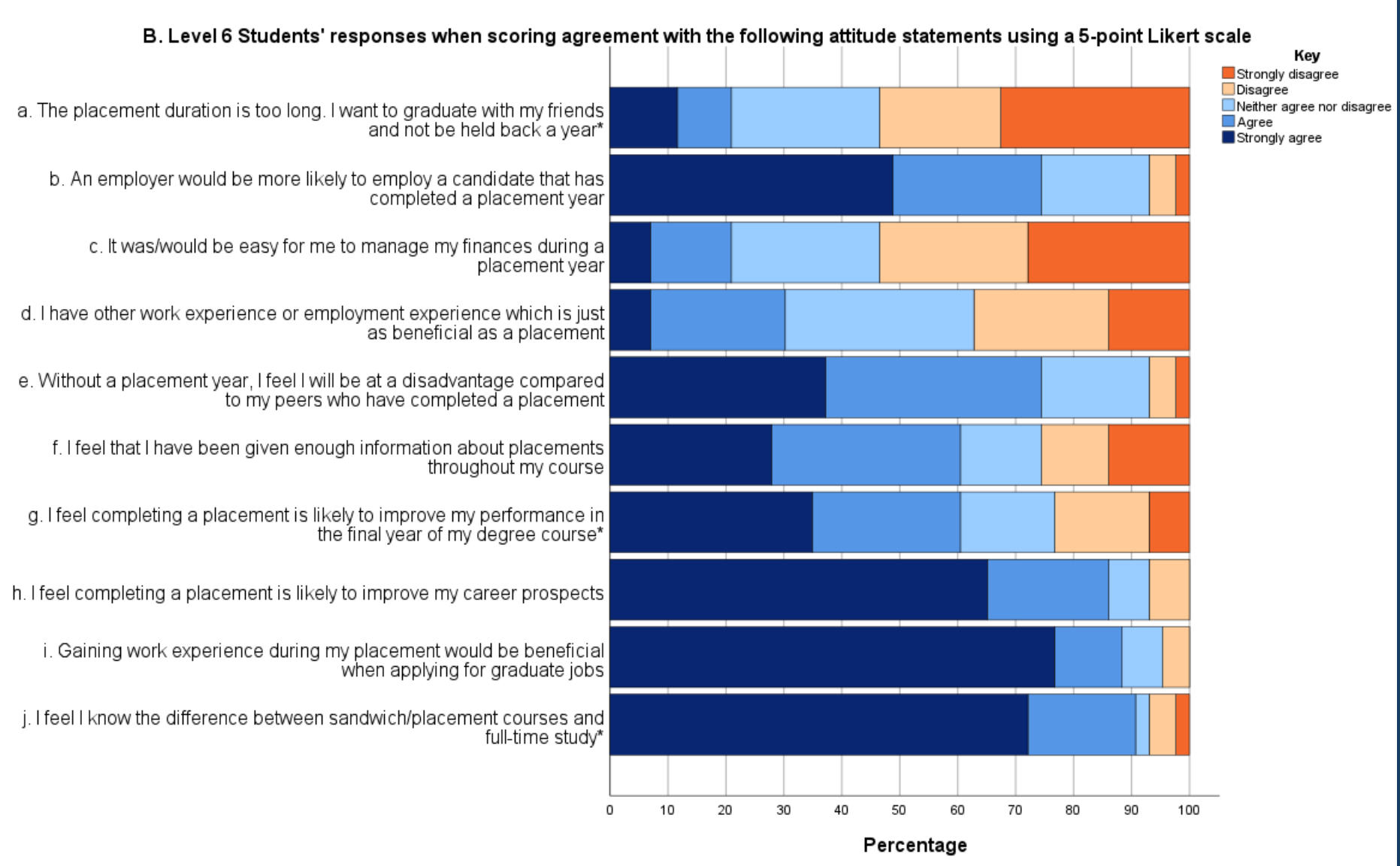


Figure 3B: Level 6 responses when scoring agreement using a 5-point Likert scale

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Key barriers to placement uptake include geographical restrictions, caring responsibilities, financial pressures, placement length and disabilities.
- Lack of placement funding including travel and accommodation costs, the inability to continue part-time work and juggling finances during placement year were key themes.
- The lack of funding further impacts those with caring responsibilities and disabilities.
- IBMS workforce plan proposes funding for departments supporting trainee Biomedical Scientists, potentially increasing availability of trainee positions (IBMS, 2023).
- NHS Business Services Authority (BSA) must review the NHS Learning Support Fund (LSF) grant to include Biomedical Scientists into the pool of professions eligible for funding, providing a non-means tested training grant of £5,000 per annum (NHS Business Services Authority, 2024).

REFERENCES

Aslam, S., Beard, L., Hepburn, L., (2023). Enhancing employability through hospital placements for Biomedical Science students. *Int J Innov Educ Res.* **11** (3), pp. 64-77

Braun V, Clarke V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research*. London, England: SAGE Publications.

Institute of Biomedical Science (2023). IBMS Long Term Workforce Plan. Institute of Biomedical Science [online]. Available at: [IBMS Long Term Workforce Plan - Institute of Biomedical Science](#) (Accessed 21/06/25)

NHS Business Services Authority (2024). NHS Learning support Fund: Financial Support for Healthcare Students. NHS Business Services Authority [online]. Available at: [NHS Learning Support Fund \(LSF\) | NHSBSA](#) (Accessed 21/06/25)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Thank you to the students at all participating universities for giving up their time to participate
- Thank you to the Training Officers in the West Midlands Regional Training Group for their ongoing support
- Thank you to Rebecca Harrison, Aimee Pinnington and Nisha Rix (Keele University) and Dr Azra Khan and Dr Natasha Marin (Coventry University) for facilitating ethical approval and data collection at each of the participating universities.