

# Guidance on placements

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance has been introduced to support the University's policies on placement learning. It is primarily designed for staff supporting students in learning, although students may find it a useful resource.

## 2. Approving placements

### Background checks on placements arranged by the University

- 2.1 Some placement providers – particularly in Health and Education – are selected by the University, and the University has a duty to ensure that the providers are suitable as hosts for university students. Typically, checks might involve some or all of the following on a periodic basis.
- Visits to the provider prior to making an arrangement
  - Checking the outcome of statutory reports (e.g. Ofsted, CQC)
  - Checking the provider's history of hosting placement students
  - Identifying how the provider will support students on placement.
  - Risk assessment

Faculties and individual programme teams should work out an appropriate method for running background checks which is proportionate to the size and profile of the placement provider, the number of students it will be hosting, and the time the students will spend on placement. Faculties should maintain a comprehensive record of checks undertaken, which is available for scrutiny if required.

#### *Example*

*In the School of Health Sciences, practice placement providers are visited every three years on a rolling basis.*

### Background checks on placements sourced by students

- 2.2 When a student self-sources a placement, the University still has a duty to ensure that the provider is suitable as a host for the student and is providing an appropriate level of placement. Typically, checks might involve some or all the following steps
- Checking the student's job description and employment contract
  - Looking at the employer's status in its industry or setting
  - Visiting the employer
  - Asking the employer for details of its placement schemes, and other institutions it has worked with

#### *Example*

*- All placement providers in the MChem Chemistry with a year long placement are visited during the course of their placement year*

### Individuals in charge of placement activities

- 2.3 It is recommend good practice that there are designated individuals who are responsible for overseeing placement activity. These should act as link contacts with students, placement providers, and the University. They are welcome to attend the University's **Placement Forum**.

### 3. Supporting students prior to going on placement

#### Student briefing

- 3.1 Before students go on placement, they should undertake some form of mandatory briefing or training provided by the University. Depending on the type of work placement, it might consist of:
- A non credit bearing module
  - A lunchtime seminar
  - An online programme
  - A series of drop in training sessions
- 3.2 As a minimum, students should be briefed on the following (from the University's *Policy on Placements*) by University staff:
- How the student can contact the University of Southampton (including details of School or Department contacts, and support from Student Services by email – it can be useful to remind students to keep emergency contact details, including of the University and their insurer, in their telephone and copies of these details elsewhere)
  - What contact the student can expect from the University during their time on placement, both in terms of regularity and method
  - Details of any projects or assessment they need to complete during the course of the placement
  - Implications of what happens if the placement is curtailed, including academic, immigration, and student loan company consequences.
  - What to do if something goes wrong with a placement
  - Whistleblowing procedures, if applicable to the type of placement
  - A briefing about Health and Safety, and information about the type of Health and Safety induction they should expect from their workplace
  - Information on any professional, statutory, or regulatory body requirements of the placement
  - Details of a student's supervisor and personal academic tutor.
- 3.3 It is also useful to have students who have successfully completed placements to meet with students intending to go on placement.

#### Agreement

- 3.4 A series of standard letters, drafted by Legal Services, will soon be available for placement providers. These will act as agreements between the University, the employer, and the student.

#### Student Handbook Template

- 3.5 It is recommended that all students going on placement have a form of handbook with information relevant to their placement activity. The detail of the student handbook will vary according to the type of placement. Examples of content include:
- Health and Safety information
  - A student's obligations to the University whilst on placement
  - Details of academic work expected whilst on placement
  - What support a student can expect from the University whilst on placement (for example, from the Library or Student Services)
  - How to contact a student's supervisor
  - What access to Disabled Students' Allowance a student may be entitled to whilst on placement.
  - What preparations a student should make for their next year of study (for example, how to seek guidance in choosing final year options, or choice of dissertation topic).

## Tier 4 implications

- 3.6 There are specific implications around placement activity for students who have a Tier 4 visa. Advice should be sought from the University's Visa and Immigration Student Advice Service.

## Liaising with employers

- 3.7 Although in most cases, the main relationship with the placement provider in this type of placement is in the form of an employment contract between the student and the employer, it is reasonable to expect that the University makes some contact with the employer during the course of the placement. This can include the initial introductory letter, and, if appropriate, contact with the student's supervisor.
- 3.8 It is good practice to provide a handbook, website, or other information for Employers, which guides employers through the expectations the University has of students on placements.

### Examples

- The School of Health Sciences provides a website on [Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings \(ALPS\)](#) targeted at employers on practice placements
- The Southampton Business School provides an Employer Handbook

## 4. Supporting students whilst on placement

### Emergencies

- 4.1 All students should be given information about what to do in an emergency. Students who face an emergency situation in the course of their placement (i.e. during the working day) will be covered by their employer's emergency protocols. However, it is important that students make contact with the University as soon as possible in an emergency situation, particularly if it is likely to have long term impact on the placement (see 'What happens if a placement goes wrong?'). Students should be encouraged to keep their student card with them, as it contains contact information for the University on the reverse.

### What happens if a placement goes wrong?

- 4.2 Sometimes a time on placement goes wrong; a student has an illness, the placement provider is no longer able to host the placement, or the placement becomes unsuitable for a student.
- Depending on the type of problem on a placement, different support mechanisms should be put in place. If at all possible, the student should be encouraged and supported to stay in the placement, or one found at an alternative placement provider, in order to complete the required number of weeks of placement activity and meet the learning outcomes of their placement.
  - If the student is unable to complete the required length of placement, this can have important consequences on their academic programme. This may include:
  - Failure to meet the required learning outcomes of the programme (there should be a discussion on whether referral or repeat years are an option or whether the student can transfer to a similar programme, or whether Special Consideration regulations can be applied in this case)
  - Suspension from their academic programme (as they are no longer completing work on the programme). This can have important consequences for student loan funding.
  - Major implications for the Tier 4 students. Advice should be sought from the University's Visa and Immigration Student Advice Service before guidance is given to students who are on a Tier 4 visa.
  - Consequences for the student's ability to meet the outcomes required by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body
- 4.3 Discussion should take place with the Director of Programmes, Deputy Head of School (Education) and Faculty Academic Registrar to ascertain the best advice to give to the student.

## Staying in contact

- 4.4 Regular contact with the student is recommended throughout the course of their placement. Faculties should set clear expectations for the type and frequency of contact, depending on the type and length of placement. The minimum expectation from the University is at least one formal contact per semester. The best practice is to ensure that the student receives at least one site visit during the period of their placement, supported by regular email, telephone or skype conversations.
- 4.5 Contact with students can take the form of
- Regular email communication between the student and a placement coordinator
  - Planned skype conversations between the student and a placement coordinator in the student's Department.
  - Communication with their Personal Academic Tutor
  - A campus based day conference, where students are invited back to University for a day.

## Record Keeping

- 4.6 The University is currently investigating the feasibility of investing in dedicated systems to support the record keeping of students on placement.
- 4.7 Until then, faculties are encouraged to maintain their own records of students on placement. In particular, records should be kept of all students on placement in a resource which is accessible to more than one member of staff. Information held on the student should include:
- Student contact details when on placement (bearing in mind these are likely to be different to either their home or term time contact information).
  - The name and address of the student's placement provider.
  - The expected start and end date of the student's placement.
  - The name, job title, and contact details of the student's supervisor or line manager on placement.
- 4.8 Relevant fields should be updated on Banner to note the student is on placement.

## 5. Assessment and Achievement of Learning Opportunities – Placements

### Credit

- At the programme design stage, care should be taken to articulate the credit contribution of a period of placement to the programme's learning outcomes.
- Existing practice in the University include the following models
- A period of placement may constitute a module of the programme, carrying credit assessed to a level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- A period of placement may be a mandatory part of the programme, and completion meets a learning objective, but the placement itself does not carry a credit value
- Modules mapped against the FHEQ may be studied alongside a period of placement
- The PGCE/QTS, where the curriculum provides the award of PGCE, and the period of placement meets the government awarded 'Qualifying Teacher Status' (QTS)
- Where a placement is a required part of a programme, either in contributing credit and/or meeting a learning outcome, care should be taken to ensure that it meets existing programme regulations, or that an appropriate application for an exemption from the regulations are made to the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

### Learning Outcomes

- 5.1 When a period of placement contributes toward learning outcomes of a programme, the learning outcomes must be clearly articulated in accordance to the University's usual standards for [programme structure and design](#).

## Assessment

- 5.2 Assessment which contributes towards meeting learning outcomes for an award should always be undertaken by a trained member of staff familiar with the University's assessment framework or, if that duty is delegated to someone outside of the University, by an individual who is competent to undertake this role and responsibility.

*Example*

*Students in Health Sciences need to demonstrate the acquisition of appropriate skills to a practitioner. The School offers a programme which prepares registered professionals to achieve the standards required to become an Educator or Mentor, as defined by the appropriate Professional Bodies.*

## External Examining

- 5.3 External Examining is an important part of the University's quality assurance processes and as such it is important that any work-based and placement activity is reviewed by external examiners, as any other part of the programme.
- 5.4 External examiners should be provided with material related to, and assessment as an outcome from, periods of assessment. Where possible, external examiners should be provided with the opportunity to speak with staff, students and placement providers who are involved in the teaching and learning aspects of work-based learning and placement activity.

## Regulations

- 5.5 If the placement or study abroad period requires an exemption from the usual University regulations, for example, if referral is not permitted for a placement module, or credit is imported in a different way, then the School should seek exemption from the progression regulations from AQSC. Likewise, if separate regulations apply to a period of studying abroad, these should be clearly stated in programme regulations within the University Calendar.

## Confidential work on placement

- 5.6 It is important that placement providers requesting confidentiality of students' reports on their placement activity are aware that the report must be available to a third party for scrutiny in the event of a dispute, or at an External Examiner's request. In all cases, if a project is likely to be confidential or commercially sensitive, a conversation should take place between the student, the University, and the employer, to define the acceptable perimeters of the student's project.

## After the placement has finished

- 5.7 Students who have finished their placement may require particular support to help them transition back to the University studies.

*Example*

*Students in the Southampton Business School are invited to 'welcome back' events, to ease them back into the final year of their programme.*

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