UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

POLICY ON OPTIONAL PLACEMENTS

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Summary

What is this document about?

This Policy sets out the University's approach to optional placement learning (i.e., placements that are not a mandatory element of a student's course or professional training). It explains why and how the University encourages and supports its students, and its placement provider partners, in finding, developing and undertaking placement opportunities as part of their university experience.

It also sets out the expectations that the University has for its students, and those offering placements to students.

Who is this for?

This Policy applies to all optional placements (as detailed in paragraph 1.5 and 1.6 below) undertaken by students of the University of Portsmouth, and to all involved in managing and supporting them, including University staff and those providers offering placements.

How does the University check this is followed?

The University Executive Board has ultimate responsibility for ensuring this Policy is followed and will promote this Policy to staff and to students via the Executive Deans of Faculty and the Director of Student Employability & Employment. Failures to follow this Policy should be raised with the Director of Student Employability and Employment.

Who can you contact if you have any queries about this document?

For any questions, please contact the Director of Student Employability & Employment.

1. Introduction

1.1. The University of Portsmouth believes that placement learning can provide enormous benefit to students in their academic development and in their future careers. Placements allow students to apply their learning, develop their practical skills, reasoning and judgement, and provide opportunities to reflect on employment practice and future career paths.

1.2. The University therefore encourages students to seek out, and take part in, placement opportunities that are available to them, and will support students in finding, developing and undertaking placements, and in maximising the benefit they can take from this form of learning.

1.3. The University will also support providers who wish to offer placements, by providing guidance and assisting them in developing placement opportunities.

1.4. In support of these aims, this Policy sets minimum criteria which placements must meet and will be underpinned by processes to ensure that students are appropriately supported and that placements are undertaken safely.

1.5. This Policy applies to:

1.5.1. optional 'year in industry' placements undertaken as part of a 4-year undergraduate sandwich course with placement or as part of a 5-year integrated masters course;

1.5.2. optional industry placement undertaken as part of a 2-year postgraduate taught course with professional experience, where the placement is managed by the central optional placement team;

1.5.3. self-employed placement years; or

1.5.4. any other similar placement which is not expressly exempted from this Policy.

These are referred to in this Policy as 'placements'.

1.6. This Policy does not apply to:

1.6.1. part-time term-time or vacation work, and/or internships that are not a planned part of an academic programme or which do not contribute to the student's course learning outcomes;

1.6.2. extra-curricular volunteering opportunities and/or volunteering opportunities within credit-bearing work-based learning modules;

1.6.3. short placements which are part of a credit-bearing work-based learning module within a student's course;

1.6.4. study abroad placements; and

1.6.5. placements that form a mandatory part of a student's course.

1.7. References in this Policy to any University employee (for example, a Head of School or Director of Student Employability & Employment) includes reference to their authorised delegate or nominee.

2. Principles

2.1. The University will actively promote placements to all eligible students, and will support students in finding and undertaking placements.

2.2. To be approved by the University, placements must:

2.2.1. align with the student's programme of study and course learning outcomes;

2.2.2. meet HESA's minimum requirements and the applicable faculty and/or school minimum

standards for duration, course alignment and content;

2.2.3. meet any applicable accreditation requirements;

2.2.4. be appropriately remunerated, meeting the national minimum wage, subject to exceptions agreed under paragraph 2.3;

2.2.5. provide appropriate and valuable work experience to the student, avoiding precarious employment and employment on a 'zero hours' basis;

2.2.6. include appropriate provision for supervision (academic and placement provider) and pastoral care;

2.2.7. align with the University's ethical principles and applicable policies;

2.2.8. meet all other applicable requirements, such as those imposed by UKVI;

2.2.9. be accessible to students regardless of any protected characteristics (e.g. gender, race, age, disability) except where permissible by law;

2.2.10. be safe and appropriate for the student to undertake in all the circumstances.

2.3. The University will not promote or approve placements that do not align with these principles other than by exception, with the written approval of the Director of Student Employability and Employment.

2.4. The University will not promote or approve unpaid placements where the University is the employer.

2.5. The University will not promote or approve placements where a student is expected to pay a fee to the placement provider or any third party to secure access to the opportunity.

3. Placement approval

3.1. All placements must be approved in accordance with this Policy and its supporting processes. Approval of placements is the responsibility of the Director of Student Employability and Employment.

3.2. Placements may only be approved following completion of a formal risk assessment prescribed by the Director of Student Employability & Employment.

3.3. All students planning to undertake approved placements must commit to the University's standard student undertakings before approval will be given, covering preparation for the placement, conduct and management of any issues arising (including in particular any wellbeing concerns), and compliance with University and provider policies and guidance and the law.

3.4. All providers wishing to provide approved placements to University students must commit to the University's standard placement provider undertakings as part of the approval process, covering (inter alia) the provider's commitment to a beneficial work experience and to the wellbeing of the student; the proper management of the placement; communication with the University; management of any issues arising (including in particular any wellbeing concerns), compliance with University policies and the law, personal data protection and provision of appropriate insurance covers.

3.5. Where a self-employed placement (SEP) is proposed, the approval process will be completed by the Student StartUp team in collaboration with the placement team

3.6. All approved placements will be subject to oversight by the relevant Head of School and Director of Student Employability & Employment, and must be supported by the allocation of an appropriate School contact with responsibility for academic supervision and support of the student while on placement.

3.7. The University will maintain a register of approved placements to support the delivery of its ongoing obligations to its students while on placement. This will include a record of any non-completions, changes to provider, dismissals and early terminations. Only students on approved placements may be registered as placement students.

3.8. The University will require appropriate reporting from both provider and student during the placement, to provide assurance and to support the student experience.

3.9. To ensure adequate time for preparation and protect all concerned, placement offers must be communicated to the placement team in compliance with the optional placement approval process.

3.10. Placements that do not meet these requirements will not be approved, unless authorised in writing by the Director of Student Employability and Employment.

4. Progression

4.1. Progression onto an optional placement year will be subject to the student passing all modules at the relevant level prior to the placement start date.

4.2. Students that do not meet these criteria will not be permitted to progress onto their placement, unless authorised in writing by the Head of School.

4.3. Prior to commencing a placement, the placement team should provide a briefing for the student, covering:

4.3.1. the student's role and responsibilities, including the student undertakings;

4.3.2. the placement's academic content, including aims, intended learning outcomes and how they will be assessed, and the opportunities for re-assessment;

4.3.3. how the student will be able to evaluate their time on placement;

4.3.4. the contact the student should expect with the University during their placement, including details of their placement officer, School contact and visit arrangements; and

4.3.5. guidance on how to raise concerns.

4.4. The student is responsible for:

4.4.1. providing the University and the placement provider with information about their individual needs (for example, a disability) which is relevant to the completion of the placement;

4.4.2. meeting any conditions applicable to their visa or other conditions on their study;

4.4.3. completing any required pre-employment checks, such as medical screening or Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks; and

4.4.4. any other requirements arising from their individual circumstances.

5. During placements

5.1. While on placement, a student is both:

5.1.1. an employee of the placement provider; and

5.1.2. a student of the University.

5.2. University policy is to treat a student on placement as a 'student first'; that is, with respect to the University, the student's status as a student takes precedence over their status as an employee of the provider.

5.3. During a placement, the placement team remains responsible for the management, support and wellbeing of the student on behalf of the University, with the support of the relevant School. This should include:

5.3.1. maintaining appropriate and regular contact with the student via the placement officer;

5.3.2. ongoing supervision and monitoring of the placement and the student's progress; and

5.3.3. provision of appropriate pastoral care and support.

5.4. Appropriate support should take account of all relevant circumstances. Students on self-employed placements and placements involving international travel are likely to require additional support, as are students with additional support needs. In each case, the placement team should determine the appropriate levels of support, referencing the University's other applicable policies and drawing on support and advice from the School, the student support teams and the University as necessary.

5.5. For the avoidance of doubt, students on placements will continue to have access to all University support services available to students generally.

5.6. While on placement, the placement provider should provide the student with appropriate line management support, supervision and wellbeing support, training, development, equipment (especially PPE) and all relevant insurance covers in line with applicable legal obligations and the placement provider undertakings.

5.7. The University will collect information from the student and the placement provider to support its management of the placement in accordance with this policy. In particular, but without limitation, this will include all information required by relevant regulators and/or government bodies such as UKVI.

5.8. Placements will usually include a formal assessment and may be linked to course credit. If the requirements of the assessment or credit are not completed, the academic status of the placement will be determined at the discretion of the relevant Head of School or otherwise in accordance with applicable University policies.

6. If things go wrong

6.1. If issues arise during a placement, the student should inform the placement team in the first instance (in addition to reporting the issue to their supervisor within the placement organisation) and seek help from their line manager at the placement provider as appropriate. They should also access the University's support services as appropriate. Similarly, the University and the placement provider may inform each other of issues arising (subject to applicable law and policies).

6.2. The placement team is responsible for managing and supporting the student on behalf of the University, referring to the School contact, or to specialist teams, as appropriate.

6.3. Decisions relating to the placement should be taken by the Director of Student Employability and Employment, in consultation with the placement team.

6.4. Issues arising from the student's status as a student (such as problems with an assessment) should normally be managed primarily through the University.

6.5. Issues arising from the student's status as employee (such as sickness absence) should normally be managed primarily through the placement provider.

6.6. In practice, most issues will affect both relationships and all three parties should be kept informed.

6.7. Minor issues should normally be dealt with informally, via discussion.

6.8. More serious issues may require the application of relevant University or placement provider policies. The following paragraphs are not exhaustive but seek to provide outline guidance.

6.9. **Student wellbeing issues** should always be reported to the University, so that the University's student support processes can be engaged. Support may also be available via the placement provider, for example, via occupational health assessments, which should also be drawn on as applicable.

6.10. **Unauthorised absences** may have an impact on the student's visa status and/or could indicate a wellbeing or mental health issue and should be reported to the placement team immediately.

6.11. **Persistent absences** may be indicative of a wellbeing issue and should be reported to the University as set out in paragraph 6.9 above.

6.12. Where a student faces **bullying or harassment, discrimination, or similar issues** while at work, these should be handled via the placement provider's grievance processes or, if necessary, via recourse to an employment tribunal. The University will provide pastoral support to the student, and may seek to engage with the placement provider in support of a resolution, but cannot provide legal advice or represent students in employment disputes.

6.13. **Issues arising from a student's conduct on placement** should normally be addressed via the relevant placement provider conduct or disciplinary policies. Disciplinary issues on placement may also engage the University's disciplinary policy, and so the University should be informed of the issue and any outcome. If the outcome of the provider's process could have a material effect on the student's ability to complete the placement (e.g., dismissal), this should be raised with the placement team as early as possible.

6.14. If a student is **dismissed, their role is at risk of redundancy or redundant, or otherwise leaves employment** at the placement provider, the University will seek to support the student in finding a replacement placement and will provide pastoral care. The status of the placement year will be decided in accordance with paragraph 5.8 above.

6.15. If the student **ceases to be a student of the University**, the placement will terminate with immediate effect. The student's employment with the placement provider may continue, subject to the placement provider's

applicable policies. Where a student's registration is terminated for a relevant reason, such as for serious misconduct, the University may inform the placement provider in accordance with its applicable policies (including its Data Protection Policy).

7. After a placement

7.1. Once a student has finished their placement, the relevant School will check that the placement has been completed satisfactorily, that any assessments and learning outcomes have been completed, and that the student has evaluated their placement experience and learning.

7.2. The placement team will evaluate the placement, seeking feedback from the student and the placement provider as appropriate. The placement team should respond to feedback received, following up issues as necessary.

7.3. The Director of Student Employability and Employment should review the ongoing appropriateness and effectiveness of placements and work-based learning as part of annual monitoring and student feedback mechanisms.

7.4. Feedback will be shared with the School who will take this into account (as appropriate) in future curriculum planning, development and evaluation, and placement management.

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