FOCUS ON: LEARNING DESIGN

DESIGNING PLACEMENT LEARNING

DESIGNING PLACEMENTS ON YOUR PROGRAMMES

Placement Learning is learning that is planned and integrated into a programme and normally takes place in another organisation with the support of a placement provider.

This guidance focuses on the design of placement modules and year-long placements and aims to prompt reflection on new or existing placement learning.

INTRODUCTION

As per the [Guidelines on the design of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes](#), **all undergraduate programmes must have opportunities for a placement**. These placement opportunities include:

- **Micro** - placements embedded within a module.
- **Mini** - constituting an entire module.
- **Maxi** - comprising a year. These normally do not contribute to classification (i.e. placement is Pass/Fail only). The placement year is normally placed between Parts 2 and 3.

Programmes which offer a 'maxi' placement should also offer either a 'micro' or a 'mini' placement since a significant number of students may not be able to commit to a full year placement.

[Placement preparation](#) is a key part of the placement and should be incorporated into the credit-bearing learning experience of the placement itself. Where this is not feasible, placement preparation can be classified as 'preparatory learning'.

Expectations around placement learning may be mandated by professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). In such cases the requirements of the PSRB must be met.

SIZE & SHAPE OF MICRO & MINI PLACEMENT MODULES

- Placement modules must meet the **[minimum 20-credit](#)** module size.
- Placement modules larger than 20 credits should be delivered in **multiples of 20**.
- Modules with placement opportunities meet the acceptable criteria for **delivery over more than a single semester** and can take place outside the Academic Year, including **vacation times**. This takes account of the time involved in securing placements, engaging in a work-based setting, and self-reflection on action.

Find out [what students have to say](#) about their Professional placement year.

Duration of Work-Based Opportunities in Micro & Mini Placement Modules

To help students benefit from their placement experience and to achieve their placement learning outcomes, it is recommended that:

- **The minimum threshold for a 20-credit module to be categorised as a 'mini' is 70 hours of organised work-based opportunities.**

- **20 credit modules with less than 70 hours of organised work-based opportunities should be categorised as 'micro'.**

- The remaining notional learning hours should be designed to ensure parity of student workload and standard assessment load between modules of the same credit weighting.

ACCESSIBLITY & FLEXIBILITY OF WORK-BASED OPPORTUNITIES

Schools should, wherever possible, provide work-based opportunities which are **inclusive** and available to all students.

Overly prescriptive parameters around work-based opportunities can create barriers for students. Schools should, where possible:

- Provide flexibility as to how work-based opportunities can be organised (e.g. delivered in a block or undertaken on day release throughout the academic year) and what they involve (e.g. work shadowing and project working in addition to periods of 'employment').
- Consider sector-specific workload patterns and cycles when planning timelines and assessment distribution.

Where work-based learning opportunities are not possible in face-to-face workplace settings, **comparable simulations and virtual learning environments can be considered as alternatives** to help students achieve the learning outcomes. If the placement is a compulsory element of a professionally regulated programme, please check the appropriate regulator's threshold for alternative professional training as this may impact the student's qualification to enter the profession.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning outcomes should reflect the contribution of the work-based learning opportunities.

For micro and mini placement modules this can be achieved by ensuring that skills and attributes to enhance employability are explicit in learning outcomes and integrated effectively with discipline-specific knowledge and skills outcomes.

> **Learning outcomes for micro and mini placement modules which you can use and/or adapt to your context:**
> By the end of placement modules, it is expected that students will be able to:
> - Critically reflect upon experiences, knowledge, skills and attributes developed through engagement with the module and work-based learning opportunities.
> - Apply and reflect upon skills associated with the placement setting or sector in the context of their programme, career exploration or both.

If your programme has a year-long placement, **an additional Programme Learning Outcome (PLO) is required to differentiate between the programme variants** with and without the placement year.

It is the responsibility of the placement module convenor to ensure the work-based learning opportunities enable students to achieve the learning outcomes.

Disability, Inclusion and Reasonable Adjustments

In the UK employers must make reasonable adjustments to ensure workers with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. Students may feel uncomfortable disclosing disabilities or health conditions to placement providers or worry about being discriminated against because of doing so. For further guidance see the Careers guidance on Disability & Inclusivity or seek advice from the University's Disability Advisory Service.

Could your students be eligible for a Placement Bursary? Funding is available to support home and EU students from underrepresented groups with the additional costs associated with undertaking a placement (e.g. travel and childcare).

Year-long placement PLOs

1: Non-subject specific placement

By the end of the Placement Year Programme, students will have explored and developed their professional experience, skills and knowledge, contributing significantly towards their continuous learning and career prospects as graduates.

2: Where the programme requires the placement to be subject-specific

By the end of the Placement Year programme, students will have contextualised their academic learning in a placement role relevant to their programme of studies and developed their professional experience, skills and knowledge, contributing significantly towards their continuous learning and career prospects as graduates.

ASSESSING PLACEMENT LEARNING

Placement learning naturally lends itself to 'authentic' assessment. Tasks or activities that prompt students to incorporate aspects of their current and future selves through learning plans, performance and/or reflection provide opportunities for 'authenticity.'

Placement learning is immersive and iterative. Support in the form of **formative tasks and activities** are crucial for student success, whilst being mindful of the need to ensure parity of student workload between modules of the same credit weighting.

Engaging placement providers/employers and students in the **co-creation** of assessment tasks and/or assessment criteria provides opportunities to strengthen partnership working, and ensure assessment is meaningful and enhances students' skills and knowledge to help meet employers' needs. For accredited programmes, regulatory and professional bodies will often be looking for such partnership working and service user involvement in assessment. It can therefore be useful for colleagues working on these programmes to be clear on how and where co-creation has taken place.

There should be a clearly defined process if a student fails to secure an appropriate placement, and a suitable alternative assessment or programme pathway (i.e., most programmes have a non-placement variant that students can transfer to or exit with).

University policy stipulates that **Placement Supervisor reports are normally used only for formative purposes**.

The formative feedback provided (for example, on the general engagement and performance of the student) may be used as the basis for an alternative activity that can be assessed summatively, for example:

- students produce a reflective response to the feedback received.
- a viva voce at which the feedback is discussed and reflected upon.
- the formative feedback is used to inform the overall consideration of a summative dissertation/project report.

Examples of 'authentic' outputs

- Goal setting and reflection questionnaires

- Application of placement skills gained in practical or simulated contexts

- Case studies

- Presentations

- Client reports

- Reflective logs, journals, blogs, vlogs.

Supervisor Assessments

Placement Supervisor reports are only to be used directly for summative assessment in programmes where there are defined competencies which cannot be sufficiently demonstrated through on-campus activities (e.g., where a healthcare or education student needs to be assessed in the healthcare/educational environment or workplace to demonstrate competence as part of PSRB requirements).

In such cases:

These assessments must be **Pass / Fail only** and count towards the total number of assessment items on a module (unless they contribute to a portfolio assessment).

Supervisors must assess using **consistent criteria** and be **trained** to make robust assessment decisions.

Such assessments should normally be triangulated against other 'in-house' assessments of competence, with a clear quality assurance structure in place.

PLACEMENT PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

For students

- Students are responsible for organising their own work-based opportunities with the support and approval of the University unless these are regulated by PSRBs.
- Providing space within the curriculum for support is critical to the success of placement modules. This support should be provided: pre-placement; during the placement and post-placement.
- Support for placements (e.g. placement briefing, preparatory session) should be incorporated into the credit-bearing learning experience of the placement module itself.
- It is recommended that placement modules are launched to students before the end of the preceding year to allow students sufficient time to explore their options, prepare for and secure their placements and take the pressure off students juggling placement applications alongside other deadlines.
- Work-based opportunities that are not regulated by PSRBs cannot be guaranteed. This should be made clear in any promotional material and module descriptions.
- Peer support provided by former placement learners provides inspiration and motivation for students.

Signpost your students to the **University's Support for Placements**

For staff

- Module convenors should work alongside Placement Co-ordinators and Careers Consultants in the Careers and Placements Team to:
  - Help students organise suitable work opportunities.
  - Support students to integrate their academic learning with the development of their employability skills.
  - Consult with students and alumni, professional bodies, potential placement providers or research labour market information to inform the timing and content of the module where appropriate.
- To help students feel connected to the University during their placement year we advise that Academic Tutors maintain the same frequency of contact with placement students as they do with tutees on campus.

SUMMARY

All undergraduate programmes must have opportunities for placement opportunities - from short 'micro' to year-long 'maxi' placements. This guidance emphasises that placements should offer an inclusive and accessible work-based experience, to enhance employability through practical learning outcomes and authentic assessments. Support structures are essential for the entire placement cycle.

For more information on designing placement learning please contact Emma Sowden, Head of Student Placements e.l.sowden@reading.ac.uk.

To explore other guides related to Learning Design within our Focus On: series, please visit
https://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/teaching-resources