Contingency Planning for Placement Provision

Introduction

Placements are often a fundamental part ofe

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Any revisions to placement provision should ensure that the OfS ongoing conditions of registration relating to quality and standards (collectively referred to as the 'B' conditions) are fully met.

Some placements have a significant volume of hours aligned to modular and programme credit. How can these be accommodated?

Some placements occur over an extended timeframe, with a significant number of hours aligned to modular and programme credit. When such placements are unable to take place, alternative provision that shifts the focus away from the volume of completed learning hours, and related credit allocation, towards assessment and a demonstration of learning and competency could offer a useful reframing.

Another option regarding placements with a high volume of allocated learning hours could be to offer **portfolio placements**. Rather than one long, extended placement students complete, for example, between five and 10 short placements across the academic year, each with its own discrete assessment.

Several higher education providers are beginning to accept and embed civic duties as a form of placement. For example, if a student is volunteering for a charity or is helping within the community, there may be aspects of the activity that can be aligned to placement learning outcomes and could be accommodated as a replacement for the originally planned placement provision. Higher education providers will need to ensure that the activity and environment in which the student is operating fully meets government, public health, and institutional health and safety policies and protocols. Placements which are associated with credit should be underpinned by formal agreements between higher education providers, placement providers and students. This will ensure that civic duties that are counted as placements are safe and fully supported by the host organisation.

Several business sectors may be slow to restart and offer in-situ placements, such as the leisure, tourism and hospitality industries. Higher education providers are helping students to plan for any delays by working with them to find alternative in-situ or virtual placements within an allied sector, that will help them develop work-based skills.

When deciding on alternative provision for placements, it is essential to consider the provider's assessment policies and, in particular, any 'no detriment' or safety net policy, to be [illegible]

- Providers are repurposing some placements to be completed on campus, where this makes the completion of an in-situ placement more feasible. For example, training students as digital online champions who work with academics, other students and support services to enhance the learning experience.

Do transcripts need to note whether the placement has been completed or cancelled?

QAA has produced a supporting resource outlining the arguments for and against including a COVID-19 statement on degree transcripts.

How do providers determine whether to resume, replace, defer or cancel placements?

When choosing whether to resume, replace, defer or cancel placements, the eight principles outlined earlier offer a good starting point. Placements should only be cancelled if all other options have been fully explored.

Deferring placements may prove complex regarding progression and this option will also need to be considered alongside the reassessment schedule. Any addition of hours across semesters to make up for lost delivery must be fully discussed and agreed, because it has implications on workload for both staff and students. Similarly, extending deadlines for assessments and reassessments could build in pinch points that may be avoided by other means. There is also no guarantee that the placement will be able to run in-situ at a later date as a return to restrictions on movement ('lockdown') or other unforeseen circumstances may hinder such plans. Therefore, flexibility and forward planning are key.

Altering the diet of modules and when they are delivered may offer a pragmatic solution to some of the issues being faced regarding placement provision. However, the key here is flexibility and the consideration of an alternative plan, should lockdown measures recommence.

Semester and year-long placements may prove harder to accommodate virtually. Moving away from a focus on volume of placement hours towards a focus on demonstration of learning and competencies may overcome this issue, as may a move towards portfolio placements. Where placement hours map to modular or programme-credit, the provider has latitude to reduce the volume of hours if there is a strong enough rationale and there is transparency regarding the decision-making process (see above on awarding credit and scheduling learning hours). Where semester and year-long placements lead to a specific award title, if possible, providers should ensure that an alternative award is available and that students are not disadvantaged in the completion of their programme.

The tables in the Annex at the end of this paper present a range of questions, addressed to different audiences, that providers can use to determine whether to resume, replace, defer or cancel placements. The questions are not exhaustive.

Can in-situ placements be substituted with virtual placements?

Several providers have indicated that they are considering replacing in-situ placements with virtual placements for some forthcoming provision. In this context a virtual placement is defined as one that has the involvement of a placement provider

Examples from practice

- Working with students and placement providers to **establish a series of virtual projects that could add value for the placement provider**. For example, students working on writing a marketing, distribution and competitor analysis plan for a local company that is looking to expand nationally.

- Establishing a **virtual community placement working group** with local employers

- The frequency of placement visits (both virtual and face-to-face) has been increased.

- Student engagement online is monitored on a daily and weekly basis to check engagement and establish who may be at risk of non-continuation. Where necessary, students are proactively contacted by tutors to ascertain any further support needs and ensure they are progressing.

What are the regulatory requirements for placements?

Under consumer protection law, higher education providers must give students clear, accurate and timely information about their course. The OfS also demands that, as a condition of registration, a provider must demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies and procedures, it has given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law (condition C1). There has been concern from providers that in adapting placement provision they may be contravening Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) regulation as, in many cases, they have been unable to deliver the volume of hours stated within advertising and course literature. At the time of writing, the CMA and OfS had not issued guidance on these specific matters, therefore

a need to ensure that the working environment complies with the most up-to-date government guidance on safe working conditions, for example, social distancing or ensuring that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is available. Further information is available on the Health and Safety Executive website.

Everyone involved in a placement has an ethical responsibility to do what they can to reduce the chances of harm to the student and the harm that a student may do to others. Providers are likely to find ASET's guidance on health and safety for student placements helpful.

Providers considering a range of alternative approaches should document their decision-making processes thoroughly, including the need to ensure that no cohort of students has been overly advantaged or disadvantaged in comparison to other cohorts. Monitoring and comparison of previous years' achievement data may help elicit any adverse patterns between year groups and specified cohorts. In many cases, changes to placement provision have been made swiftly. Providers have held **extraordinary committee meetings** to document and agree such changes and worked with the students' union or guild to ensure student representation.

Uncertainty can be a significant cause of anxiety. Clear, regular and frequent communication is therefore key. Students need to be reassured that, as far as possible, they will not be disadvantaged as a result of self-isolation, illness, or disruption to their course. Information about changes to exams, assessments, placements, and study opportunities should be updated regularly and publicised as much as possible. Engaging with students online, for example, through chat groups, may help to reduce anxiety and feelings of isolation. This may also need extra technical support.

Rapid communication may be necessary should circumstances change or evolve. How providers communicate with staff, students and employers will need advance consideration. Likewise, providers should ensure they are in regular contact with placement providers to ensure early notification of potential changes to provision.

Resources

Advance HE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) updates

ASET: work-based and placement learning good practice guides, viewpoints and publications: ASET Resources

CMA: Higher education: consumer law advice for providers

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Annex

Resuming placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to resume placements.

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and pl

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students resume their placement? How will this be accommodated?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students resume their placement? How will this be accommodated?	Which student services can support me in returning to my placement?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students resume their placement? How will this be accommodated?
What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?	What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?	What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?	What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?
Are health and safety considerations and risk assessments still valid?	How can students be supported in understanding their placement provider's current context if this has changed?	Who else will be in the same position and who can I get peer support from?	Are health and safety considerations and risk assessments still valid?
	What placement work has been missed and how can it be accommodated within the remaining timescale?	What placement work have I missed and how can it be accommodated within the remaining timescale?	What placement work has been missed and how can it be accommodated within the remaining timescale?
	Have students been given all the information they need to ensure a smooth transition back to their placement?		Will any changes need to be made to induction and onboarding to create a smooth transition?
	Have students been given enough time to rearrange practical considerations such as other work commitments and accommodation?		What internal communications are needed to smooth onboarding, particularly if other staff are undergoing associated challenges?

Replacing placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to replace placements.

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
What are the insurance requirements for students working remotely? Are these requirements covered by the higher education provider, the placement provider, or both?	What are the insurance requirements for students working remotely? Are these requirements covered by the higher education provider, the placement provider, or both?		What are the insurance requirements for students working remotely? Are these requirements covered by the higher education provider, the placement provider, or both?
What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students transition to an alternative placement? How will this be accommodated?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students transition to an alternative placement? How will this be accommodated?	How can I make up any shortfall in career development between a standard placement and a replacement learning opportunity?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students transition to an alternative placement? How will this be accommodated?
Will any programme or module learning outcomes need revision?	Will any programme or module learning outcomes need revision?	Have I been informed of any revised safety measures (where appropriate) relating to a replaced placement?	Do we have appropriate insurance in place (if appropriate) that covers students who may be working remotely as part of a replaced placement?
Can any learning outcomes that cannot be met be mapped to a programme/module level as appropriate, or revised?	Can any learning outcomes that cannot be met be mapped to a programme/module level as appropriate, or revised?	Do I require any additional support and/or training to help me transition to a replaced placement? Who can help me with any additional support needs?	Do we have appropriate safety measures in place regarding alternative placement provision and/or remote working?

What additional resource, if any,

What additional student support and/or training may be required to help them transition to a replaced placement? How will this be accommodated?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help them transition to a replaced placement? How will this be accommodated?	Who else will be in the same position and who can I get peer support from?	

Deferring placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to defer placements.

Academic regulations and quality teams	**Academic and placement staff**	**Students**	**Employers/placement providers**
Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement and (b) deferring the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to defer placements?	Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement and (b) deferring the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to defer placements?	What are the risks of my placement being deferred (for example, finances, accommodation) and do I know who to discuss these with? How much time do I need to make practical arrangements that would allow me to restart my placement?	Can we protect our reputation by making a clear and rational case for deferring the placement based on factors that can be understood from outside the organisation?
Have any formal agreements and/or placement-related documents been updated and signed as appropriate?	Have students and placement providers reviewed and signed updated formal agreements and/or other paperwork as appropriate?	Have I understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the deferred placement? Do I have any questions to ask before I sign?	Have we understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the deferred placement? Do we have any questions to ask before we sign?

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Have we considered and discussed the decision to defer placements with students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	Have we considered and discussed the decision to defer placements with both students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	How can I sustain the ongoing recruitment relationship I have with an employer even though my placement has been deferred?	Are there any alternatives to deferring the placement that can be created either from inside the organisation, or by collaborating with the higher education provider?
Deferral of placements assumes they will recommence at some point in the future. What plans are in place if they cannot resume?	What institutional policy has been created, or decisions made, within higher education provider governance, relating to other deferral requests? How may these be helpful?	Have I considered the impact of a	

Academic regulations and quality teams	**Academic and placement staff**	**Students**	

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Have all other options been fully explored to the satisfaction of: (a) the institution and (b) students Can placements be deferred or is there scope to offer virtual placements and/or repurposed assessments to enable the placement to continue?	Have all other options been fully explored to the satisfaction of: (a) the institution and (b) students Can placements be deferred or is there scope to offer virtual placements and/or repurposed assessments to enable the placement to continue?	Do I need any additional support with (a) career planning (b) mental health and wellbeing (c) employability and academic skills? If so, where can I go for support?	
Will cancellation of placements be temporary or is there a need to consider programme-level changes over the longer term? What additional academic and pastoral support needsd	Will cancellation of placements be temporary or is there a need to consider programme-level changes over the longer term?		

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
	Can we help students find alternative placements in other allied professions? (if appropriate)		
	Will the placement hours that a final-year student has accomplished to date provide sufficient evidence of meeting the intended learning outcomes to enable them to graduate as planned?		
	How will learning outcomes related to the cancelled placement be mapped to other modules and/or across the programme as appropriate?		

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