

Heriot-Watt University

Policy on Student Placements (Work and Academic)

This policy underpins the objective, as articulated in the institution's 2013-2018 Learning and Teaching Strategy, of offering students the opportunity to broaden their learning experiences beyond Heriot-Watt University. The policy is intended to set out the parameters for the planning, approval, delivery, management and assessment of student placements (work and academic) and to ensure that the University is compliant with legal and other requirements for student placements.

The policy sets out a series of key principles which all Schools must meet; but it is sufficiently flexible to allow for local variation, depending on, for example, the nature and location of the placement and requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's). Likewise, the policy is not intended to prohibit students from being able to compete for placements which are awarded competitively. The policy is designed to be used in conjunction with detailed guidelines on work placements and academic placements (both exchange and individual study placements).

The policy was extended in May 2017 to include the work-related activities of students on Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's).

Definitions and Scope

For Heriot-Watt University, the definition of student placement (work and academic) is broader than that defined in the *Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*:

"Placement learning is the learning achieved during an agreed and negotiated period of learning that takes place outside the institution, where the learning outcomes are intended as integral parts of a programme of study"

The above definition describes placement learning which is an integrated part of a programme: it is credit-rated and contributes to the overall award learning outcomes and credits. Heriot-Watt University also applies the term "student placement (work and academic)" to learning which is undertaken as an additional, but non-compulsory, component of the degree. In this latter case, the learning must also be credit-rated, and is usually recognised through an additional certificate or diploma award.

The University recognises two forms of student placement:

1. **Work placement:**
Work placement refers to an agreed or negotiated period of learning undertaken in an industrial, business or other work environment. Work placement may be undertaken over an entire academic year or may be a single semester (or a shorter block within a semester) of work undertaken during the year and balanced with periods in the University. In some programmes, the placement may incorporate part of the summer vacation. The term "work placement" also includes the work-related activities of students on Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's).
2. **Academic placement:**
Academic placement refers to an agreed or negotiated period of academic learning in the form of study at another higher education institution¹. Academic placement may take the form of an entire academic year or one semester spent studying in a different higher education institution, and may be available as part of an exchange agreement or as an individual study placement.

Scope of Policy

The term "student placement" covers a credit-rated component of a taught programme undertaken by a registered Heriot-Watt University student with an outside organisation (either an employer or another higher education institution).

The policy is applicable to all outgoing placement activities, whether these are a compulsory or optional part of the programme. The placement may be in the UK or overseas and, in the case of work-based placement, may be paid or unpaid.

¹ A period of study spent at another of the University's campuses than the one at which the student is based (the "home campus") or at an Approved Learning Partner is covered by the *Policy on Transfer between Study Locations*.

The policy is applicable also to placements within Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's), where the student is an employee of an outside organisation and also a registered Heriot-Watt University student.

Out of scope

This policy is not intended to cover learning that is not a planned part of a programme or an agreed additional component of a programme. The policy is not applicable to the following types of activity:

- Any extra-curricular work which is not credit-rated, such as part-time, term-time or vacation employment, volunteering, internships or shadow schemes, which students have arranged for themselves, even if related to the student's programme and/or even if the student was supported by the Careers Advisory Service in securing the position;
- Any extra-curricular study, which students have arranged for themselves and has not been approved as an individual study placement;
- Period of study at a different campus of the University than the student's "home" campus²;
- Incoming placements: where students of other HEIs attend HWU for a period of credit-based learning (primarily on exchange programmes) while remaining registered students at their home institution³.
- Placement components of research degrees – these are covered in the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students⁴

Principles

The following principles are intended to apply to both work and academic placements, whether a compulsory or additional component of a programme. Differentiation is made as appropriate.

1. Responsibilities and Management

- 1.1. The University has overall responsibility for all stages of placement: design, approval, delivery, assessment, monitoring and evaluation. The arrangements for assuring the quality and standards of placement provision must be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for the HWU-specific aspects of the programme.
- 1.2. Irrespective of the form and location of placements, the University remains solely responsible for the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience.
- 1.3. Although responsibility for aspects of the placement may be devolved to the placement partner, the University remains ultimately responsible for: students, including their safety; the relevance and quality of the learning activities undertaken on placement; the assessment of student performance in achieving the specified placement learning outcomes.
- 1.4. Each placement must be accompanied by a written agreement which sets out the responsibilities and obligations (including legal) of the University, the placement partner and students. In the case of Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's), there will be a written partnership agreement with each contributing employer. It should be made clear where responsibility lies for such matters as: provision of appropriate learning opportunities; the health and safety of students; assessment of students. Clarity about responsibilities of all parties is particularly important regarding placements, since the student learning is taking place away from the University. The written agreement should also include a risk assessment and procedures for termination of the placement partnership, including provision of guidance and support for students currently on placement.
- 1.5. The University and Schools must have in place appropriate policies and procedures for managing placements. A register of placements should be maintained at institutional and local levels.
- 1.6. At the institutional level, the Careers Service is responsible for co-ordinating work placements⁵; the Director of Work-Based Programmes is responsible for co-ordinating the Graduate Level

² See the University's *Policy on Transfer between Study Locations*, the operational aspects of which are managed by the Registry Officer (Enrolment), Academic Registry.

³ <http://www.hw.ac.uk/quality/exchange.htm>

⁴ <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/cop-pgr.pdf>

⁵ Schools can continue to manage placements in their own right and would not require approval from the Careers Service.

Apprenticeships (GLA's). The Institutional Exchange Co-ordinator for academic placements which are part of an exchange agreement. Schools are responsible for managing Individual Study Placements within the guidelines and procedures provided by the Institutional Exchange Co-ordinator

2. Design and Approval

2.1. All programmes which feature a placement must be approved by the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee as appropriate. The proposal must include the following information:

- Learning outcomes, which are clearly identified and contribute to the overall programme aims and outcomes
- Level and volume of credit
- Method and frequency of assessment
- Evidence that the learning to be undertaken during the placement will be sufficient to enable the student to achieve the learning outcomes

A rationale for the proposed level and volume of credit must be provided. Assessment may be determined in consultation with the placement provider and should be designed to test accurately and fairly whether the agreed learning outcomes have been achieved. Placement assessment should both support student learning as well as measuring achievement of outcomes.

2.2. All individual work or academic placements⁶ must be approved on a case-by-case basis. Within each School, there must be named individuals who have the authority to approve individual placements, including Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's). The case should contain similar information to that outlined in 2.1.

2.3. It is recognised that students on placement may not have exactly the same learning experiences. However, they must all have opportunities to achieve the same learning outcomes.

2.4. HWU staff must approve the location of each placement, ensuring that the student will be working or studying in a safe environment and will receive appropriate support and supervision⁷.

3. Guidance and Information

3.1. Students must be provided with appropriate and timely information, support and guidance prior to, throughout and following their placement. Information should include: the nature and scope of learning (and pastoral) support available from HWU and from the placement provider; procedures to be followed if problems occur which may impact on students' progress or their ability to meet the learning outcomes; methods of monitoring and assessment; procedures for failure or non-completion of placement. Students must be made fully aware of their responsibilities, including the norms and expectations for professional conduct and managing their own learning.

3.2. Placement and Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's) partners must be provided with appropriate and timely information prior to, throughout and following students' placement, and must be clear about their responsibilities for HWU students. Guidance should include their involvement in: mentoring or supervising; monitoring of the progress of students; reporting to HWU at the end of the placement.

4. Staff Expertise

4.1 Heriot-Watt University staff involved in placement learning must have the requisite expertise and competency to fulfil their roles. Staff development and training, as well as support and resource, should be provided where appropriate.

⁶ Individual academic placements are referred to as Individual Study Placements, whereby a student is given permission to study at another institution for an approved period as part of a programme; these are different from exchange agreements which require inter-institutional agreements to be in place. See *Guidelines for Individual Study Placements*.

⁷ At the Malaysia Campus, the Vice-Principal (Malaysia) has indicated that there will be a Placement Officer who will approve the location of placements. The approval process for placements at the Dubai Campus is the same as that for the UK campuses.

- 4.2 Placement providers must have effective measures in place to monitor and assure the proficiency of their staff involved in the support of HWU students on placement or participating in work-based learning activities; these measures should be outlined in the written agreement between HWU and the provider. In the case of work placements, training and support might need to be provided by HWU staff where employers are involved in formal assessment of students.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 5.1 HWU staff must regularly monitor the progress of students during the period of placement⁸.
- 5.2 At the end of the placement, formal evaluation must be undertaken by the University supervisor (or equivalent), which must be informed by feedback from the student and the student's supervisor at the placement location. In the case of Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's), where work-related learning is continuous throughout the programme of study, formal evaluation is undertaken on an annual basis.
- 5.3 The Careers Service should report annually to the Quality and Standards Committee on work placements, including the number and location of the placements, the success (pass/fail rate) and student feedback. The International Student Exchange Co-ordinator should provide a similar report on academic placements which form part of exchange agreements. School evaluations, including individual study placements which Schools are responsible for managing, should be incorporated in the Annual Monitoring and Review reports. Separate annual reports are produced for Graduate Level Apprenticeships.

6. Guidelines on Placements

- 6.1 The Careers Service is responsible for providing and maintaining guidelines on work placements to accompany this policy. The International Student Exchange Co-ordinator is responsible for providing and maintaining guidelines on academic placements (both exchange and individual study placements). Each set of documentation provides detailed information on operational matters, including responsibilities, approval processes and assessing placements. Separate guidelines on Graduate Level Apprenticeships will be produced in due course.
- 6.2 Providers of both work and academic placements should be given copies of the University's policy, the briefing paper and relevant guidelines.
- 6.3 The guidelines on work, exchange and individual study placements were approved by the Quality and Standards Committee in January 2013 and in February 2014.

7. Policy, Briefing Paper and Guidelines

- 7.1 This Policy on Student Placements (Academic and Work) and the accompanying one-page Briefing Paper and the detailed Guidelines (work; exchange; individual study placement) can be accessed via the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank at: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm>

Quality and External Partnerships

22 November 2011

Updated 15 February 2012; 28 February 2012 (Learning and Teaching Board)

Updated 17 May 2012 (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committee; Research and Knowledge Exchange Board)

Updated 10 February 2014, following approval of the Placement Guidelines.

Updated 16 May 2017 to include Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLA's)

Approved by the Senate, 10 October 2012

⁸ At the Malaysia Campus, the Vice-Principal (Malaysia) has indicated that there will be a Placement Officer whose remit will include the monitoring of students on placements. At the Dubai Campus, the monitoring process is the same as that for the UK campuses. In the case of the Graduate Level Apprenticeships, there will be quarterly progress monitoring.