

**Heriot-Watt  
University  
Placement  
Handbook  
for Students**

[www.hw.ac.uk/students/careers.htm](http://www.hw.ac.uk/students/careers.htm)

# Heriot-Watt University Placement Handbook for Students

Welcome to one of the most exciting aspects of your degree – your Industrial placement!

This is your opportunity to apply all the knowledge you have developed during your studies and discover what the working world is like. Your placement will be challenging but extremely rewarding. Research shows that students who do a work placement achieve better results, are more employable and earn more after graduation!

This handbook is intended to provide guidance to any student undertaking an industrial placement as part of a programme of study. It is not intended to replace other school or university guidance, so please continue to also refer to your School, Programme and Module handbooks.

## Placement requirements

It is your own responsibility to successfully secure a placement. The University provides resources to support you in your search. Placements may be advertised directly through your department and the Careers and Graduate Futures Service will give advice and information on other sources of potential placement opportunities. You may also find your own vacancy or apply speculatively to companies/organisations.

You must ensure that your placement is appropriate to your programme of study and future career plans - if you have concerns please discuss these with your Placement Co-ordinator. It is important that you are flexible and open-minded towards the opportunities that are available; the fewer constraints you put on your placement, the wider your choices will become and therefore the easier it will be to find a placement. Some students place too much emphasis on the company they wish to work in and do not look carefully at what other roles and organisations could offer in terms of professional and personal development.

It is important to ensure that your applications are of a high standard; keep in mind that thousands of other students might be applying for the same role as you, so the quality of your application determines your success.

### University requirements in brief:

- The placement must be relevant to the degree you are studying and provide an appropriate level of experience.
- Placements are expected to be full time and paid. Unpaid or part-time placements are only approved in specific circumstances within some programmes.
- You must be able to afford to live on the salary provided and get to your placement on time every day. Make sure you investigate accommodation and transport options in advance.
- Your placement must be in a legally recognised registered organisation or enterprise where you will experience working with colleagues in a professional environment. A placement working from home will not be authorised by the University.
- You must keep your Placement Co-ordinator informed of your placement search and update them on applications you make.

- Your employer must complete the necessary University health and safety checks (prior to you commencing your placement), they must agree to provide an induction, ongoing support and be prepared to liaise with the university regarding your performance (e.g. placement visits, phone calls, employer report).
- Your placement can take place inside or outside the UK, however some programmes may specify a UK only placement, so please refer to your placement supervisor for guidance. Please read the section on overseas placements for more information. If outside UK students must have their own travel insurance.
- You must attend all placement preparation seminars, lectures and meetings.
- If you are studying on a Tier 4 visa, you must ensure your placement complies with all UK visas and immigration (UKVI) visa regulations.

Whilst on a placement, you have a dual role; you are an employee and also a full-time student of Heriot-Watt University. You are expected to behave in a professional and responsible manner at all times, which upholds and enhances the reputation of the University.

## Roles

There are a number of people and roles involved in ensuring your placement is a success. You may find in some departments that the same member of staff fulfils both the Placement Co-ordinator and Tutor roles.

### Placement Co-ordinator

This is the designated member of staff within the School who manages and oversees the placement process and documentation on behalf of your School / Department (with support from/delegation to Tutors as required).

They will approve all placements on behalf of the department; ensure that insurance and health and safety arrangements are in place and arrange to conduct risk assessment if required and that records on placements are kept up to date.

## Tutor

An Academic member of staff within the school will have responsibility for ensuring that your individual placement and its structure/content are appropriate to your degree programme. They are also responsible for liaison with the Work-based Supervisor. In conjunction with the Work-based Supervisor, the Tutor is responsible for monitoring your progress during the placement. After the placement, the Tutor should liaise with the Work-based Supervisor regarding performance and associated feedback.

### Work-Based Supervisor

As well as a University-based Placement Co-ordinator and tutor, you will have Work-Based Supervisor who will be the person to answer any queries and help you settle in. You should consult with your supervisor when setting objectives for the duration of placement and completing your induction checklist. You should agree to meet regularly with your supervisor in order to track your progress and receive feedback on your work. It is always a valuable exercise to review your time on placement with the help of others and assess its relevance to your academic course.

# Student role and responsibilities

## **Students should:**

- take responsibility for finding a suitable placement within the timescale given by their Placement Co-ordinator or Tutor
- make full use of individual departmental and central University assistance and support
- understand and adhere to any assessment requirements for placement
- attend any required placement briefings and debriefings organised by individual and central University departments
- behave appropriately at all times (before, during, after, in and out of work).

## **Students should be aware of their rights to:**

- an appropriate learning experience
- a safe working environment
- be treated in accordance with applicable legislation.

## **Once the placement has been approved but prior to commencement, students should:**

- submit promptly all requested details and paperwork to the department
- recognise that it is their responsibility to find suitable placement accommodation
- comply with all reasonable requests from the employer and inform their Placement Co-ordinator or Tutor of any changes.

## **During placement, students should:**

- take every opportunity to optimise their learning experience
- return required contact details and paperwork within the timeframes set by the department
- act within the terms and conditions laid down by their placement provider and comply with relevant Health and Safety regulations
- not give notice to their placement provider without first consulting their Placement Co-ordinator or Tutor
- inform their Placement Tutor of any problems that cannot be resolved at a local level
- before finishing placement, ensure all requirements of both placement provider and department have been met.
- Act in a professional manner at all times

## **After placement, students should:**

- submit all required assessment materials by the due date and attend any organised debriefings
- reflect on and evaluate their placement and share their experiences with potential new placement students
- comply with any terms and conditions that still apply after the placement has ended.

# Placement Preparation

There are a variety of lectures and seminars available for you to help prepare for your placement. These are supplemented by a range of online resources to help you find placement opportunities and to succeed at applications and interviews.

These sessions may include:

- Skills analysis and reflection
- How to prepare for placement applications
- How to find placement vacancies
- How to complete a good application
- Interview Techniques

One of the best forms of placement preparation is having relevant work experience. Students who have had work experience or additional responsibilities outside of their studies can demonstrate a variety of skills, which will be helpful in securing a longer, more formal placement. We therefore recommend that you seek work experience/internship opportunities in earlier years. Please visit your Careers and Graduate Futures Service for help with summer/internship/volunteering experience.

# Assessment

The assessment of the work undertaken during the placement may use a variety of methods appropriate to your programme of study. This will be outlined clearly by your Placement Co-ordinator/Tutor. In addition to how the placement is assessed, you will also be made aware of how the placement contributes to your programme's overall assessment, deadlines for the submission of assessed work and results of the assessed components of your placement should be recorded within a student record. The Placement Provider may also be involved in providing feedback on your performance while on work placement.

# International students

If you are an international student, please read this section carefully and make sure you adhere to all the regulations your visa puts upon you relating to your working rights in the UK.

The Careers and Graduate Futures Service can provide specific sessions to help international students prepare for their Placement in collaboration with your department. Working in the UK can be very different to studying and therefore these sessions will be useful.

Under current Home Office guidance if you are studying at on a Tier 4 visa, you are entitled to carry out a work placement as a compulsory part of your degree. You should check carefully that your placement has been included in your programme of study as part of your Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS). You may need to present your visa and a letter of student enrolment to your employer.

Please ensure that you have adhered to all our guidance regarding applying and accepting placement job offers. If your placement has not been approved by the University, you may be classified as an illegal worker in breach of your visa. Your visa sponsorship may be cancelled and you can be reported to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and deported to your home country.

## Obtaining a National Insurance number

You will need to apply for a National Insurance (NI) number before starting any paid work in the UK. Please read carefully the information regarding National Insurance numbers on the gov.uk website

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number>

# Students with disabilities

The University is committed to supporting all students with a disability who choose to undertake placements and complies with the Equality Act 2010, which seeks to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Advance equality of opportunity.
- Foster good relations between those with a disability and those without.

If you have a disability, mental health problem or specific learning difficulty that might impair your ability to find or undertake a placement, we encourage you to make an appointment to talk it over with your Placement Co-ordinator at an early stage. You should also consult Student Wellbeing Services and arrange to have a one-to-one appointment with a practitioner, who can talk you through all practical aspects. Your Careers Adviser will also be able to support you in your search for a suitable placement.

Before you start your placement, your employer may ask you about any disabilities or health conditions that may affect your work. You are not obliged to disclose any information to the employer, but please note that the employer is legally obliged to make any reasonable adjustment to enable you to carry out your job role. Sometimes, simply changing a work pattern, moving a desk or other small adjustments are all that is needed. The placement provider will need time to implement any changes before the start of your placement.

## Disabled Students Allowance (UK students only)

You may still have access to DSA if you are on an unpaid placement in the UK. If you are on a paid placement, you will not be able to claim DSA. Please speak to Student Wellbeing Services for further details.

## During your placement

If you develop or have a disability identified, or a disability worsens whilst on placement, you should contact Student Wellbeing Services as soon as possible. Your needs can be assessed via the relevant routes and advice can be provided about potential support and how to apply for it in anticipation of your return to the University after your placement. You should also inform the Placement Co-ordinator and Tutor as soon as possible, so that the University can offer you appropriate support and assistance.

# How to find vacancies

There are a variety of useful resources you can find on-line to help in finding suitable vacancies. Your department is likely to be notified of some placements directly and will make this information available to you. You have access to the Heriot-Watt online vacancy database **GRADfutures** through the Careers and Graduate Futures Service, which lists both placements and shorter-term internship opportunities along with Graduate jobs. Most companies also have a careers section as part of their own website; there are several websites that collate vacancies from various sources; and employers often advertise jobs on social media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter.

As well as **GRADfutures**, you may also find the links from the Careers and Graduate Futures Website helpful in your placement search:

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/careers/uk/jobs/internships-work-experience.htm>

In addition to the jobs that you find on the internet, there are also other channels for you to use: Career Fairs are a great opportunity to connect with employers; you might find jobs through your personal networks; or you can send a speculative application to a company you are interested in, even if they are not advertising for vacancies.

## How to make a placement application

You should start considering making placement applications earlier than you imagine as some placements are advertised as early as July for starting the following summer.

Whichever way you find a placement vacancy, it is crucial that you research the company and the vacancy and adapt your application to that specific role. Sending a general, impersonal CV and covering letter is the quickest way to get your application rejected. It is also worth noting that many large companies allow you to apply for only one placement vacancy per year with them, so you need to make sure that your application is the best that it can be. Although you should expect to make a number of placement applications before securing your placement, it is better to submit fewer quality applications than numerous impersonal or rushed applications.



You must always submit an application in the form that the employer has specified, and before the closing date. Many employers interview applicants on a rolling basis and close placement applications early, as soon as they have found a suitable candidate. Therefore, we highly recommend that you never leave your application until the last minute, but instead try to apply for roles as quickly as possible.

The University's Careers and Graduate Futures team is available to assist students with their applications, and it is recommended that you make use of all their resources. These include CV workshops, practice psychometric and aptitude tests, and interview preparation. Information about all the services can be found on their website:

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/careers/uk/help-options.htm>

where you can access information relating to many aspects of job hunting or book a 1:1 appointment with a careers adviser.

It is your responsibility for arranging and paying for travel and accommodation for interviews. You may attend a number of interviews/assessment days across the UK so the costs can be quite significant. It is therefore important that you plan for this expense. Some employers will refund your travel expenses for interviews.

## Overseas placements

A work placement overseas can provide an excellent opportunity to develop your intercultural understanding and further your ambition, particularly if you would like to work overseas post-graduation. A placement overseas must fulfil the same criteria as one spent in the UK, and so you must involve your Placement Co-ordinator as soon as you think you may pursue a placement abroad. The approval process for a placement overseas is more complex and can take longer, as the University needs to carefully examine any insurance provision. You should also think about potential cost implications, particularly as you may need an expensive visa and additional travel and medical expense insurance.

Many placements overseas are in English-speaking companies, although you will of course find working life a lot easier if you speak the language of your host country.

If you take a placement overseas you will be responsible for arranging and purchasing sufficient insurance cover. This must cover your travel, health and the work placement. Your Department will need copies of this before the placement is approved. In addition, travellers to EU countries need a Health Insurance Card obtained through the Post Office or online at

<https://www.ehic.org.uk>.

Overseas employers should have their own equivalent of Public Liability and Employer Liability cover in place, which should be extended to include yourself, both for injuries to and caused by you. You will need to obtain copies of this information and pass it to the Placement Co-ordinator before your placement can be approved.

## Accepting a placement

Accepting and approving a placement is a fairly easy process, but there are various compulsory forms and documents that are required from you and your employer therefore we ask that you read below carefully and follow the process closely. Failure to follow this guidance might delay your placement approval.

## Placement Acceptance Process

### Offer

Each organisation differs in the way that it makes an offer to candidates. Very occasionally, an offer may be made on the spot during an interview. Most employers will make an offer after the interview. If an offer is made verbally on the phone, it is a good idea to ask the employer to send this to you in writing or by email. You should consider the offer carefully before accepting or declining it.

### Consideration

You must consult your Placement Co-ordinator before you accept an offer.

It is courteous to give your reply to an offer as soon as possible, but it is usually acceptable to politely ask for a day or two in order to make your decision, so long as you communicate this to your employer.

## Acceptance

If you accept a placement offer, verbally or in writing, then you are committed to entering into a contractual relationship with the employer.

After you have accepted an offer, you must withdraw all other open applications, including any other interviews you may have lined up. Once you have accepted an offer, you will not be able to decline it later, except in very unusual circumstances. Remember, a verbal acceptance is binding.

## Liaising with your placement coordinator

You must contact your Placement Co-ordinator immediately after you have received an offer as placements can't be confirmed until Insurance, Health and Safety checks have been completed. You will then be given acknowledgement that your placement has been approved outlining the details of what, who, when and where the placement will take place. You can then formally accept.

# Placement Approval Process

## Criteria for approving a placement

The Placement Co-ordinator is responsible for approving all placements. It is your responsibility to ensure that we receive all the necessary information by completing the documentation provided by your department.

To be approved, your placement must meet the requirements as set out in the 'Placement Requirements' section of this handbook.

## Requirements from you

You are required to inform us immediately if you are offered a placement role. We ask you to provide us with:

- Details of the placement role and your employer
- Your job description and contract details

If you have questions about your contract of employment for your placement you should seek advice before accepting.

## Requirements from your employer

We ask your employer to provide us with basic health and safety information, which ensures that you are treated as an employee of the company during your placement, and therefore have the same rights and obligations as other employees of the company.

## Risk assessment

We help you fill out a Student Risk Assessment form, which identifies any hazards you may encounter during the placement period, and the actions you need to take to reduce their risk.

## Final approval

After receiving all the information from you and your employer, your Placement Co-ordinator will complete the placement approval process. Official approval is only considered complete when you receive confirmation from your Placement Co-ordinator that your placement has been approved.

# Starting your Placement

The first month of your placement will be an exciting period of transition as you adapt from university life to the world of the workplace. Both the University and your placement provider will provide advice and support to help you settle into your new role and maximise the opportunities on offer.

## Induction

During the first week of your placement, your new employer will carry out an induction for you. An example of an induction checklist is included in this handbook as a guide to topics which should be covered during your introduction to the company and your new role. It can also act as a reminder to your colleagues of what should happen and what information you should be given as you join them. If any of the areas of the checklist are not covered during your first week, you should ask your supervisor or human resources office for assistance. Contact your Placement Co-ordinator if you have any concerns after your first week.



## Workplace Supervisor

As well as your university-based Placement Co-ordinator, you will be allocated a work-based Workplace Supervisor who will be the person to answer any queries and help you settle in. You should consult with your supervisor when setting objectives for the period ahead and completing your induction. You should agree to meet regularly with your supervisor in order to track your progress and receive feedback on your work. It is always a valuable exercise to review your time on placement with the help of others and assess its relevance to your academic course.

## Confidentiality and data protection

During your placement, you may be exposed to sensitive information relating to clients, other companies or your employer. It is very important to maintain strict levels of confidentiality at all times. Some employers might ask you to sign a confidentiality agreement at the start of your placement. If you are asked to do this, you may wish to seek advice from Citizen's Advice Bureau or a solicitor.

## Keeping healthy and reporting sickness

If you move to a new address for your placement, it is important that you register with a local doctor and dentist immediately. Do not wait until you are unwell before researching your options. You can find your nearest GP by using the NHS website [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). When registering with a new dental clinic, look for one that accepts NHS patients so that you are not treated as a private patient, or you will be asked to pay full costs.

If you are unable to attend work due to illness, you must inform your employer as soon as possible on the day you cannot attend. Your employer may require you to provide a doctor's certificate as proof of your illness. You should keep your employer updated on a daily basis if you remain too ill to go to work.

You are not legally entitled to full pay while you are sick, but you may be entitled to statutory sick pay if you are absent from work due to illness for four consecutive days.

If you have three or more consecutive days off work, you must also inform your Placement Co-ordinator.

Remember that if you are unable to attend work, and you have meetings and deadlines, it will be your responsibility to ensure your colleagues /clients are aware of your absence and how you will re-arrange meetings or meet deadlines.

## Resolving problems

In all work environments, occasionally things might not go to plan, and you may face challenges. Dealing with these successfully will prove to be valuable experience for the future.

Changing your placement organisation is rare and should only be a very last resort. This must only be done in consultation with your Placement Co-ordinator. Identifying problems early on and ensuring that they are addressed appropriately should prevent this situation.

## Being an Ambassador for Heriot-Watt University

During your placement you are not only representing yourself, but Heriot-Watt University too. It is very important that you are well-mannered and take all aspects of your placement seriously. If you have any concerns about any aspect of your course or the University more generally, you should discuss these with your Placement Co-ordinator before commencing your placement. They are there to support you and ensure that you have the best possible experience.

# Dos and Don'ts

The rules (written and unwritten) of the workplace can be quite different to the experience of studying at University. Every organisation has their own culture which affects how employees behave and relate to one another and following a “common sense” approach will serve you well.

Some important reminders.

<b>Dos</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
<b>Do:</b> Respect start and end times of the working day	<b>Don't:</b> Forget to register with your local doctor if you relocate for your placement
<b>Do:</b> Plan and prioritise your workload	<b>Don't:</b> Extend lunch breaks or take lots of shorter breaks throughout the day
<b>Do:</b> Check what your organisation's dress code is before starting your placement	<b>Don't:</b> Keep quiet if you think your workload is too much (or too little!)
<b>Do:</b> Think carefully about the recipients of emails before clicking “send”!	<b>Don't:</b> Use slang or colloquialisms in emails and correspondence
<b>Do:</b> Be a positive Ambassador for yourself and Heriot-Watt University	<b>Don't:</b> Use office internet, email, or mobile phones for personal use
<b>Do:</b> Familiarise yourself with your placement provider's health and safety, fire, security, absence, time keeping, dress code and disciplinary regulations	<b>Don't:</b> Forget that you are representing both yourself and the University whilst on placement
<b>Do:</b> Inform us of any problems that cannot be resolved at a local level	<b>Don't:</b> Leave it until you encounter a problem to ask about your placement provider's policy
<b>Do:</b> Report any absence to your workplace supervisor as soon as possible and let your Placement Co-ordinator know if you are absent for 3 or more consecutive working days	<b>Don't:</b> Keep quiet if you think you are being bullied, harassed, or have concerns regarding your placement
<b>Do:</b> Address colleagues and customers formally, particularly in the early days of your placement	

# After your Placement

Throughout your placement, you will be reflecting and gathering information to help inform your future career choices. Take time to plan ahead and think about which modules you might like to take in your final years to help you achieve your career dreams. It is also wise to think carefully about your dissertation, as you may want your experiences on placement to inform your research.

Following your placement, it is important that you continue to develop professionally. You will need to take the time to update and improve your CV. Many graduate roles are advertised a year in advance so you will need to start applying as soon as you start your final year. Ensure your placement year is maximised on your CV. Your placement is a substantial period of time working in a professional environment. Add all the relevant tasks you were involved in, the responsibilities you had and the skills you acquired, as well as all your measureable achievements.

Make sure you thoroughly research the support available from Careers and Graduate Futures Service and make the most of this.

# Placement evaluation

You will be given an opportunity to provide feedback on your placement experience in the same way that you would for every other module. This feedback will be collated by and used to adjust and develop the placement process. We will take care to preserve your anonymity and to handle sensitive commentary appropriately. Your employer will not receive this information.

**At the end of the placement you should:**

- Comply with any terms and conditions that still apply after the placement has ended
- Reflect and evaluate on your placement and be prepared to share your experiences with new placement students

# Finally

Securing an exciting and challenging placement can be hard work and time consuming. However, the benefits are huge:

- An opportunity to experience what it is like to apply for a graduate role.
- Skills development on placement makes you far more employable in the years to come.
- Applying your knowledge in the workplace makes you more likely to achieve a better grade in your final year.
- Many students emerge from their placement year with an offer of a graduate role within their organisation.

We hope this handbook has provided the answers to your questions or signposted you to the relevant department. However, if you do have any further questions please get in touch in the first instance with the Placement Co-ordinator for your programme.

For further information please contact the relevant University Student Placement co-ordinator:

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MSc Civil Engineering with Industry Placement

MSc Construction Project Management  
with Industry Placement

MSc Commercial Management and Quantity Surveying  
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