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Senate

**Subject:** **Delivery and Management of Student Placements**

**Origin: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching)**

**Executive Summary:** This paper sets out the strategic importance of placement opportunities for undergraduate students. It summarises a range of projects that have been/are underway to enhance the current and future delivery and management of placement provision. The development of practices at School-level is not addressed in this paper. A feasibility study is proposed to assess the resources that would be required to extend placement opportunities with the objective of seeking to ensure that from the undergraduate intake in 2012/13, this and subsequent cohorts of students across all programmes have the opportunity to undertake a placement (broadly defined) during their studies.

**Senate Action Required**: Senate is invited to comment on the paper and support the proposal for a feasibility study.

**1. Background and Strategy**

Student placements are strategically important to the University. They offer students personal development opportunities and valuable experience of the workplace. They are recognised by staff, students and potential employers as providing a “value added” factor to a student’s academic experience. In many cases they enhance students’ job prospects and starting salary. Placements also allow Loughborough to maintain and grow its links with external organisations regionally, nationally and internationally.

There are several different activities under the ‘placements’ umbrella. These include but are not limited to the following:

* 45 week work placements leading to a Diploma in Industrial Studies (DIS) or a Diploma in Professional Studies (DPS)
* 45 week combined study and work placement overseas leading to a Diploma in International Studies (DIntS)
* One year study abroad leading to a Diploma in International Studies (DIntS)
* One semester or one year study abroad with the award of credit that contributes towards degree classification
* PGCE placements

The 45-week Diplomas are governed by Regulation XI. The regulation was revised in March 2010 to reflect the fragile employment market, and changes in work patterns, to allow a degree of flexibility in placement activity. Students are able to combine shorter work and study placements within their 45-week placement portfolio.

Loughborough is known as a leading HE provider of placement opportunities in the UK. In 2009/10 there were approximately 1200 students on 45-week work placements, PGCE placements or studying abroad for one year or a semester. Of this total, approximately one-third of the undergraduate cohort was engaged in placement activity.

However, placement opportunities are distributed unevenly across the academic Schools. This distribution tends to reflect the nature of academic staff research and their engagement with external organisations. In some programmes satisfactory completion of a placement is a regulatory requirement. In others the work placement tradition is not strong but study abroad opportunities are well developed.

**In a highly competitive HE environment it would be to the benefit of Loughborough students and the University as a whole if, from the undergraduate intake in 2012/13, this and subsequent cohorts of students across all programmes had the opportunity to undertake a placement (broadly defined) during their studies.**

Achieving this ambitious objective has implications for the sourcing, quality oversight, management and administration of placements.

**2. Current responsibilities**

Schools are the critical location for the oversight of placement activity. The external connections of academic staff contribute significantly to the identification of placement opportunities for students. In addition, Schools have responsibility for the academic quality of placements, and the academic support of students during their placements. The detailed management and administration of placements also takes place within the Schools. **Hitherto a devolved model of responsibility has evolved with limited oversight and input at institutional level.**

Several central Services do, however, play an important role in supporting placement activity, notably **the Careers and Employability Centre,** which

* hosts an academic placement tutors’ forum twice a year in order to share knowledge and effective practice
* contributes to identifying and alerting students and Schools/Departments to placement opportunities through its links with graduate employers and with the Enterprise Office
* offers guidance and advice to Schools/Departments on placement activity, derived from professional connections and employer links
* works closely with Health and Safety in FM to ensure that appropriate advice is available to Schools/Departments on risk assessments
* runs sessions in Schools/Departments for students to prepare them for placement application.

**Institutional-level evaluation of placements** takes place as part of the five-year Periodic Programme Review process.

**3. University-wide oversight of placement provision**

While the academic oversight and much of the management and administration of placement activity does and should occur within Schools, complementary University-level scrutiny and support is necessary, particularly as the scale of activity increases significantly.

Over the last eighteen months a number of projects have been carried out

* to enhance the institutional quality management of placements
* to ensure greater consistency in the student experience across the University
* to increase the range of placement opportunities available.

A summary is set out in Appendix 1.

**The development of practices at School level is not addressed in this paper.**

These projects have anticipated some of the outcomes of a SUMS (Southern Universities Management Services) study of placements at Loughborough that reported in October 2010. The SUMS report emphasised significant strengths of our placement system but also highlighted weaknesses (Appendix 2). Many of these are being addressed.

As the activity expands the need remains for central oversight

* to ensure that placement quality and management of risk remain consistent
* to facilitate institutional-level data analysis to inform placement development, and
* to maximise the identification of placement opportunities across subject areas through a coordinated approach to external organisations.

The Careers and Employability Centre would be an appropriate central point for the provision of this oversight and support in view of its current placement activity and its connections with a wide range of graduate employers.

It is proposed that a feasibility study should be carried out in 2011 to define precisely the nature of the enhanced role that the Centre might assume in relation to the Schools, and to consider the resource implications both for the Centre and for those Schools in particular where placement activity is not well developed.

This study should take into account that the effective sourcing, delivery and quality management of placements requires a clear division of responsibility between academic, management and administrative functions and also close working between Schools and Support Services. The study should:

* clarify these various functions, notably the distinction between academic and management/administrative roles within the new Schools
* determine the kinds of management/administrative responsibilities that are most effectively discharged in Schools and in Support Services
* consider the additional resources that are needed to meet our strategic objective, particularly in Schools where placement activity is not well developed, and in certain parts of the Support Services.

It would be necessary to have input to the study from Schools including ADEs/ADTs, and from relevant support services, notably the Enterprise Office, and to report to ALT and Operations Committee by December 2011 at the latest.

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**Appendix 1: Project work to enhance provision**

1. **Code of Practice on Placement Learning**

In June 2010 Senate approved a revised Code of Practice on Placement Learning and associated Health and Safety policy for implementation from the start of 2010-11. It is available online at: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/ar/policy/aqp/appendix/11/index.htm>

The University’s Code of Practice sets out what is expected of the School/Department, the student and the partner provider, in relation to placement learning contexts.

It is recognised that practices will differ between University Schools/Departments, depending, for example, on the industrial or professional setting of the placement learning, or the number of students from the School/Department involved in placements at any one time. However, the features identified in the Code should be present in all placements across the University.

1. **Modelling placement activity**

With a view to ensuring consistency and equity of placement experience for students across the University, the content of all placement module specifications has been reviewed and a framework has been developed. Placement tutors have agreed to review their module specifications with a view to revising the content in line with the framework (where appropriate), for implementation in 2011/12.

A review of programme regulations has also been undertaken. It is hoped that, with effect from 2012/13, we can move to a position where all programmes are able to offer placement opportunities.

**3. The development of a corporate IT system to manage placements**

The current administration of placements is variable across Schools/Departments, not least as there is no single IT system for managing student placements. Schools/ Departments have purchased or developed their own systems, and while many of these systems work well in individual cases, they are not integrated with other corporate applications, such as LUSI or Learn.

It is essential for insurance and duty of care reasons to record that risk assessment and health and safety checks have been carried out. Without a central record, it is difficult for the institution to demonstrate that it is fulfilling its obligations and complying with regulations.

For these reasons, a project has been underway through IT Services to acquire/develop and implement a University-wide IT system to support the administration of student placements. All Schools/ Departments have been consulted to ensure that their needs are met by the University-wide system.

The introduction of such a system would greatly enhance the management information available institutionally on individual student placements and on the organisations (including sections of organisations) within which placements are located.

**4. Identification of placement opportunities**

The Careers and Employability Centre and the Enterprise Office have worked closely to share links and coordinate interactions with a range of external organisations in order to increase the range of placement opportunities for students.

**5. Work Placement Fee**

In anticipation of higher tuition fees from 2012 consideration has been given to the level of the fee for work placements that lead to a DIS/DPS. Current thinking in Operations Committee is that the fee should not be increased significantly from 2012.

A separate piece of work has been carried out to set out clearly for students the range of institutional support they receive as part of their undergraduate placement. This work is almost complete.

**Appendix 2: SUMS Study**

A Placements Project carried out by the Southern Universities Management Services (SUMS) reported in October 2010. Findings emphasised a considerable number of the key strengths of placements at Loughborough but also highlighted weaknesses.

These included:

* The diversity of systems used across departments
* The variation in student experience with regards to placement support and provision
* The duplication of administrative processes and reliance upon specific individuals who held key information sometimes without backup
* Lack of ownership of the development of a placement strategy within the University
* The need for greater collaboration with central sections such as the Enterprise Office, Careers and Employability and Counselling and Disability Service
* Issues around management reporting which resulted in
  + no overall strategy for placement development across the institution
  + no immediate information about the location of students with specific employers
  + concerns about employers receiving approaches from different departments and being subject to varying procedures and duplication of requests for information
  + inability to undertake detailed statistical analysis to inform placement development
  + issues around health and safety and data storage
  + lack of awareness of first point of reference when problems arose.