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**Subject:** Student Placements

**Origin:** Anne Mumford, Morag Bell

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**Executive Summary:** At its July 2011 meeting Senate considered a proposal by the PVC(T) that all undergraduate students across all programmes commencing with the 2012 intake should have the opportunity to undertake a placement (broadly defined) during their studies. It was noted that academic placements such as study abroad and student international exchanges should be included within the definition. Senate agreed that a feasibility study should be undertaken specifically on work placement activity. This paper reports on the key findings of that study.

**Actions Required:** Learning and Teaching Committee supported the findings of this paper at its meeting on 16 February 2012, and recommends the actions below to Senate.

## Background

At its July 2011 meeting Senate considered a proposal by the PVC(T) that all students across all programmes commencing with the 2012 intake should have the opportunity to undertake a placement (broadly defined) during their studies. It was noted that the placement should include such activities as study abroad and student international exchanges. Senate agreed that a feasibility study should be undertaken specifically on the work placement. It was recognised that academic placements are vitally important but that the processes for developing and sustaining them are somewhat different and that they should be the subject of a separate study. The outcomes of this work on academic placements will be reported to the Schools shortly.

Anne Mumford was asked by Morag Bell and Caroline Walker to draw together the various strands of the work placement feasibility study and to:

* review current activity across the University which provides students with professional work experience (largely 45 week placements);
* consider whether we can scale up existing placement opportunities and create new types of opportunity;
* identify what changes we might need in our procedures and systems;
* comment on the support required to deliver this vision and where this support might be located.

The study was informed by:

* a report undertaken by SUMS;
* activities already undertaken prior to the Senate meeting in July 2011;
* a review of information systems which might be purchased/developed;
* a report by the Careers and Employability Centre (CEC) which reviewed current practice and reported on a survey of exhibitors at the Careers Fair;
* meetings with Deans and their colleagues in all Schools;
* meetings with colleagues from CEC, IT Services, Marketing & Communications and with the PVC(T);
* the views of the Steering Group set up by the PVC(T) to oversee the work.

This paper focuses on key findings and seeks Senate’s support for these. More detail can be seen in the reports and notes of the meetings. (They are available from Anne Mumford.)

This placements work links to a wider discussion about partnerships which is taking place in the University and, although relevant, it is not expanded on here.

**Key Findings**

It is essential that in seeking to deliver the proposed vision we do not undermine what we do so very well at Loughborough University in providing 45 week placement opportunities for around one third of all undergraduate students, most of whom take up this opportunity at the end of their second year. We assist students in finding professional work experience relevant to their studies with supportive companies and organisations, and we provide excellent support from the University both for the students and the companies and organisations with whom they are placed.

The following actions are proposed in order to deliver the vision articulated to Senate:

1. The University should adopt the description “professional work experience” as an appropriate over-arching phrase to summarise the range of opportunities at graduate level that would distinguish them from other work opportunities for undergraduates. Our traditional 45 week “placements” would sit within this.
2. The range of professional work experience opportunities offered by Loughborough University should be made available on all programmes and expanded beyond the current 45 week placements leading to a DIS/DPS to encompass a more flexible range of opportunities which may include:
   * opportunities as part of the academic programme;
   * day release work experience in semester;
   * vacation placements.
3. There should be formal recognition of this greater range of opportunities which may be through:
   * credit bearing modules within programmes;
   * the Employability Award.
4. A greater range of opportunities for all forms of professional work experience (including the 45 week placements and shorter/more flexible opportunities) should be sourced. Key to this are:
   * Careers and Employability Centre for both sourcing new opportunities and encouraging others to seek new opportunities, which the CEC would collect and pass on to appropriate Schools;
   * Enterprise Office for sourcing new opportunities.
5. We shall need to ensure that there is clarity of roles between Schools and Support Services, noting the following:
   * that the main link between the University, the employer and the student for 45 week placements should remain with the School;
   * that there may be benefits of sharing support between Schools where there is less of a tradition of professional work experience or where the scale of activity is smaller than in other Schools (as happens now);
   * that there would be merit in having central support for new, more flexible opportunities which are not credit bearing and where academic input to the provision is not required.
6. There should be sharing of good practice between Schools in the organisation and delivery of professional work experience for students, e.g. regarding:
   * the balance of roles taken on by academic and administrative staff;
   * the ways in which academic staff are allocated to student visits to maximise the benefits gained for both the member of staff and the University;
   * offering professional work experience as part of a formal module.
7. A database should be put in place for recording student engagement with professional work experience, which is linked to the current student information system.

Effective implementation of the actions above, notably 4 to 7, has resource implications. If Senate is minded to support the recommended actions, detailed work can proceed into the additional resources required, including their type and location, and the timescale over which they would need to be in place. A strategy for the promotion of these professional work opportunities can also be drawn up.

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