**Doctoral Innovation Placements**

**– Guidance for Students and Supervisors**

**Purpose and Benefits of Doctoral Innovation Placements**

Loughborough University Doctoral College have established a scheme to support Post Graduate Research (PGR) students to gain innovation experience outside of their PhD research project and team. These placementsare a fantastic opportunity for doctoral students to apply their PhD skills in a new setting, to gain ‘hands on’ experience of innovation in practice and develop a broader perspective on future career options. Placements enrich a student’s training by providing experience of a workplace and culture outside of their usual academic environment. Through this, students gain new transferrable skills around communication, commercial awareness and leadership, which enhances their future employability.

Placements enhance Employability, Future Collaboration and Networks

Over 50% of PhD career ‘next destinations’ are outside academia and training in an applied context equips students well for their future career. The benefits of a Doctoral Placement reach far beyond the student experience, to Businesses, the University and wider Research Community.

[Research](file:///\\ws3.lboro.ac.uk\GradSchool\Jill-Rebecca%20Job%20share\NPIF%20Innovation%20placements\C2%20Work%20Wisdom%20and%20the%20PhD%20Caroline%20Pope.pdf) by Dr Caroline Pope**\*** (University of Edinburgh) states that placement returnees reported:

* increased confidence interacting with different people and in different work situations (76.9%)
* more open to new ideas and activities (61.5%)
* managing their PhD and time better (46.2%)
* more confident conducting their PhD research (44.6%)

Further articles on the value of placements for doctoral students can be found in [Higher Ed](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2017/05/08/importance-internships-phd-students-essay) and [AAAS](https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2017/06/through-internships-phd-students-expand-their-skills-and-explore-their-options)

UKRI supports doctoral placements:

*‘UKRI believes that partnerships with the users of research are important in shaping doctoral training, through better understanding of industry’s needs, concerns and aspirations. By working with companies, UKRI seeks to train students capable of becoming future leaders in industry’*

The benefits of a Doctoral placement reach far beyond the student experience:

* For > 50% of PhD’s, their career ‘next destination’ is outside academia and receiving some training within an applied context equips them well for their future career.
* For PhDs who continue in academia, an understanding of business drivers and challenges equips them well to build future collaborations with industry and other external partners
* Valuable insights into ‘impact’ opportunities for academic researchers and their work
* Helps to build external networks for the students, the PI and the University

(>65% returnees report**\*** benefits in Knowledge Exchange)

* An opportunity to develop new relationships with external partners for future collaborations (>60% returnees report**\*** benefits in establishing partner relationships with University)
* Students return to their PhD reinvigorated, with new skills and a clearer understanding of the value and impact of their research within the broader innovation landscape.

**How to set up a Doctoral Placement**

Doctoral placements require the student to commit a significant period of time (up to 3 months) during their PhD funded period. It is imperative that students discuss an interest in a placement with their supervisor as early on as possible. This will help them to plan the timing to maximise the value of a placement for the student, whilst minimising potential disruption to their PhD progress. Initial discussions between the student and supervisor should explore the aspects listed below prior to completing an ‘[Expression of Interest’ form](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/).

1. When is the best time to undertake a placement?
2. What would be the length and format of the ideal placement? [Placements can be undertaken as a single block of up to 3 months, or as a part time placement alongside their PhD studies, of no more than 6 hours per week for up to 1 year]
3. Will the placement form an integral part of the PhD or be a distinct activity?
4. What type of organisation and location would be preferable to host the placement? [large / small / local / commutable / away from home]
5. Is the supervisor / student able to find a suitable host using available contacts and networks or are they interested in one of the pre-identified Doctoral College hosts?

**Placement length and format**

Different lengths, formats and locations for placements should be considered to encourage the widest possible participation in this activity. Single block placements <1month or part-time placements of 6hrs a week (or less) for up to a year will not require a leave of absence. Placement blocks of 1 to 3 months will require a leave of absence as well as funding to support the student during that period.

**NB.** Students who take a Leave of Absence for an Overseas placement must take out travel insurance as they will not be covered by the University policy. See [Overseas checklist](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) for details.

**Suitability and Safety of placement host**

For the EPSRC funded Doctoral Innovation Placements, the Doctoral College worked with R&EO Partnership Development team to identify suitable placement hosts representing small and large companies, including Loughborough based Nemaura (Medical Devices and Pharma) and DNV GL (Oil and Gas business) and Liverpool based Unilever (Fast Moving Consumer Goods).

Over 20 host [placement adverts](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) were advertised to students via the Loughborough Doctoral College website, the Doctoral College Bulletin and targeted emails. Only a handful of these were successfully matched with a placement student and they may be willing to consider offering the same or revised placements in the future.

In addition, students can use their own and their supervisor’s networks to identify potential hosts, if desired. The suitability of placement hosts must be assured using the [Host Organisation Declaration Form (HODF).](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) The HODF is required to ensure that the host environment is safe and suitable to host Loughborough PGR students for a Doctoral Placement. Additionally, students must carry out a [risk assessment](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) in discussion with their host prior to starting their placement.

If a student will travel overseas during their placement they must complete an Overseas checklist as part of their Risk Assessment.

**NB.** Students taking a Leave of Absence for an Overseas placement must take out their own travel insurance as they will not be covered by the University policy

**Funding**

For the pilot, EPSRC NPIF funding was used to support EPSRC funded / CDT affiliated students. This funding is no longer available however it may be possible for the Doctoral College to allocate EPSRC DTP funding to support future placements subject to [EPSRC placement guidelines](https://epsrc.ukri.org/skills/students/guidance-on-epsrc-studentships/placements-and-internships/).

Other UKRI funding bodies may offer placement funding in future

Some host organisations offer funded placements such as the [UKRI Policy Internship scheme](https://www.ukri.org/skills/policy-internships-scheme/)

[Santander Mobility and International Exchange](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/funding/funding-current/travel/) schemes may fund overseas placements

**Expenses:** To reduce administrative burden on the DC and DCO it is recommended that, if placement students are eligible for funding administered by the Doctoral College, they should be awarded a placement allowance that includes an element to cover student stipend plus an amount related to expected expenses (accommodation, travel). The student then has responsibility for using the allowance as they feel is appropriate.

**Placement Eligibility Checks**

To be eligible for a placement, students must meet the following criteria, to be checked by the Doctoral College following submission of the student ‘[Expression of Interest’](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/):

1. For EPSRC funded placements, student must be EPSRC funded or affiliated to EPSRC CDT
2. Supervisor and DDP must be supportive (signatures required on EoI form)
3. Student must be making satisfactory progress in their PhD at their previous review board
4. Tier 4 Visa students are not eligible for block placements requiring a Leave of Absence (due to Visa constraints) but could be considered for local placements, averaging up to 6hrs per week spread across a year (capped at a maximum of 20 hours per week).
5. Ideally students should not be in the final 6-months of their PhD, although this should be considered on a case-by-case basis as it may be beneficial for the student in relation to supporting post-PhD employability.

**Application to host organisation**

Once the eligibility of the student is confirmed and a suitable host is identified, the student should apply direct to the host for a placement using a CV and covering letter. It is the responsibility of the host organisation to determine the suitability of candidates for their placements and if necessary to conduct interviews / competitive selection processes. Once a student has been offered a placement they should notify the Doctoral College.

**Request for Leave of Absence and Placement Funding**

Once a student has been offered a placement they should provide costs of any expected travel / other placement expenses to the Doctoral College and complete a [Placement Application Form](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/). The Doctoral College will then:

- Check [HODF](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) has been completed signed off by the placement host

- Agree the level of funding to be offered, based on expected expenses provided by the student

- Provide the student with [Risk Assessment form](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) and [Overseas checklist](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) (if appropriate) to be completed before the placement starts

Once the form is signed off by the student, supervisor, DDP and DC nominee, it will be submitted to the DCO who will then arrange the Leave of Absence and payment of any agreed funding award

**Process for short or part time placements (<1month or up to 6 hours per week)**

Students will still be subject to the following eligibility criteria:

1. Supervisor and DDP must be supportive (signatures required on EoI form)
2. Student must be making satisfactory progress in their PhD at their previous review board
3. Ideally students should not be in the final 6-months of their PhD, although this should be considered on a case-by-case basis as it may be beneficial for the student in relation to supporting post-PhD employability.

If a student is eligible and a suitable host is identified they should apply direct to the host for a placement using a CV and covering letter. It is the responsibility of the host organisation to determine the suitability of candidates for their placements and if necessary to conduct interviews / competitive selection processes. Once a student has been offered a placement they should notify the Doctoral College, confirming the proposed start date and funding arrangements. The student should record the placement activity in their personal development/CPD record and it should be noted in their supervisory meeting notes, including any learning or issues that arise from the placement in case of a longer-term impact on the student’s progression.

**Placement reporting and Feedback**

Upon completion of the placement students should write a brief report on their placement experience to the Doctoral College, using a [Placement report Proforma](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/doctoral-college/training-events/epsrcinnovationplacements/) This report should not contain confidential host information

**Contractual requirements for doctoral placements**

Contractual requirements vary depending on whether the doctoral placement forms part of the student’s PhD research project or is a separate activity. Key points are summarised below. Full details can be found in [DCSC19-P48](https://internal.lboro.ac.uk/info/doctoral-college/)

***1) Placements undertaken to enhance a student’s research as part of their PhD project***

***2) Placement activities that do not contribute to the student’s PhD research project***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Placement contributes to PhD research** | **Placement independent of PhD research** |
| **Leave of Absence** | NO | YES if >1month |
| **Funding** | Funded students normal PhD stipend continues Additional placement funding not expected | LoA must be taken and for funded student stipend will stop unless placement funding is available |
| **Placement objectives** | Linked to student development plan | Professional development to be agreed between host and student |
| **Academic supervisor responsibility** | Duty of care to ensure placement environment is safe; H&S training provided at induction; travel reviewed; liaise with industrial supervisor | Monitor to ensure PhD research is not detrimentally impacted |
| **Industrial supervisor responsibility** | Duty of care to ensure that placement environment is safe; H&S training provided at induction; travel reviewed; liaise with Academic supervisor. Support student to complete placement Risk Assessment. | Duty of care to ensure that placement environment is safe; H&S training provided at induction; travel reviewed. Support student to complete placement Risk Assessment |
| **Student responsibility** | Complete Risk assessment before starting placement. Adhere to host organisation H&S policy | Complete Risk assessment before starting placement. Adhere to H&S policy of host organisation. Ensure PhD research progress not impacted by placement. Request LoA and secure funding if required |
| **Contract** | Collaboration agreement between University, Host and Student in place ideally before PhD starts\* | Agreement between student and host organisation |

\*If the opportunity to partner with an external organisation arises during the PhD, potential legal issues around publication of results, authorship and IP ownership must be fully considered as they can affect the student’s PhD progression. Support can be provided by the Research Support Team in the Research and Enterprise Office.

**Use of data held or generated by an External Organisation**

During their placement students may be given access to information that is confidential or commercially sensitive and they must be sure to maintain confidentiality (including anonymisation or prior clearing of written submissions). Any restrictions / expectations around use of company data should be discussed at the outset. A data sharing agreement may be required for access to data held or generated by an external organisation, where the student wishes to use that data in their research. If this is a possibility, the Research Support Team in the Research and Enterprise Office can advise in relation to data sharing agreements.

Full details can be found in [DCSC19-P48](https://internal.lboro.ac.uk/info/doctoral-college/)

**Ethics, Data Protection and compliance**

Adopting an ethical approach is at the core of good research. PhD students should ensure that all ethical issues are considered on an ongoing basis, as well as at project inception, including considering the ethical implications of introducing new partners and new contributions (including data).

PhD students should be aware of the Data Protection considerations in their research. All students should have completed the University’s online Information Security training prior to taking up their placement: http://learn.lboro.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=10921

Academic supervisors should remember that PhD students may not be engaged to provide consultancy on projects undertaken via Loughborough University Enterprises Limited or indeed for any free consultancy for an external organisation.

The figure below outlines a 3-stage process for students:

**A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated**