



**Faculty of Business & Law
Placement Office**

Managing Yourself on Placement

**A guide to the pitfalls and problems of placements
for 3rd year students, including regulations for the
Placement Review Panel.**

Introduction

During your period on placement, you will no doubt experience many different work situations which at times will give you a great sense of achievement, but which occasionally will leave you disappointed and possibly even a little disenchanted. This is not only quite usual,, it would be positively surprising if work did not provide a mirror image of life's ups and downs.

We hope that the time you have spent at the University working in groups and developing your personal skills will leave you well prepared for the challenges which your placement will set you. We do expect you to approach situations in a mature and rational manner and to attempt to resolve minor problems sensibly.

We also expect you to take a realistic view of your own performance and to take the appropriate steps to perform to at least a satisfactory level in the role for which you have been recruited.

However, there will be times when you may need to seek advice or help from the University. Make no mistake, we don't expect to hear from you in the first weeks of your placement. But you will benefit from the assistance of your visiting supervisor or you may contact the Placement Office staff if you feel the need for support or helpful guidance on a particular issue.

The following pages will provide an outline of the nature of some of the problems that have come to our attention in recent years. Take note of how to avoid job threatening situations and examine carefully the various scenarios which may result in problems during your placement year.

Why do we need to produce this document?

Simply, because some students make significant mistakes during their placement year which can result in dismissal and the possibility of disciplinary action, or indeed exclusion from your degree course.

We should be absolutely clear on this point. Being sacked does not mean the automatic failing of your degree but, if you have fallen foul of your organisations' disciplinary code, it could be very difficult for the University to allow you to progress. Secondly, should you be sacked by the company and the Placement Review Panel refuses to credit your time on placement, you may not have enough time to complete a further period of placement prior to returning to your degree. Subsequently you may have to return to a non-sandwich degree or complete a further year of placement, which will result in your degree being extended by a further year.

There are a small number of instances where students leave placements with the agreement of the Company and their Placement Tutor which are entirely acceptable. The difference between these two extremes will be explained in the following notes.

Problems during placement

Problems arise during the course of most placements and the great majority are handled simply and effectively between the student and their manager, sometimes with the assistance of the assigned visiting tutor.

In the first instance, students should discuss any problems they are experiencing with their manager and or supervisor. However, this has to be done in a very constructive manner. It is your responsibility to understand the true nature of any problem and to arrange an appropriate time to discuss the issue constructively and calmly with your manager. Remember people like to hear solutions so always be prepared to have one or two constructive and realistic suggestions to make to overcome any difficulties you may be experiencing. If necessary your tutor will advise you.

Problems settling into your placement

The earliest weeks when you are new to an organisation are inevitably the most difficult. Most of the problems encountered during this period arise as a result of the student's lack of familiarity with their job role.

Students are sometimes impatient with their ability to learn tasks leading to disaffection with their new role. Managers understand that each individual will require a settling in period during which times progress may be slow and instructions will have to be repeated. In some instances, students may not undertake their main role immediately, and therefore patience is required, particularly in the early weeks.

You should learn quickly and willingly but don't expect to fully understand everything within the first few days. You might be advised to take notes, which may help you when dealing with problems which re-occur. Don't be afraid to ask, especially if you are struggling with a particular task. At the same time, whilst your manager/supervisor will be more than happy to assist and help you learn the necessary skills to fulfil your role, a constant inability to remember certain tasks or ability to produce the required standard of work will tax the patience of most employers.

(Hint. Whilst placement is all about learning new skills and fulfilling your placement role, you do need to ensure that you learn, understand and apply these skills throughout your time on placement.)

Timekeeping

It is your responsibility to ensure that your accommodation and/or your travel arrangements allow you to arrive in good time for the start of the working day.

A start time of 8.30 am means 8.30am (not 8.35am). Consistently turning up late, even by just a few minutes will incur the displeasure of your boss and your colleagues. It may well be a factor in getting you sacked or at the very least, facing disciplinary action by the organisation.

There have been instances where students have negotiated a slightly later start time through a willingness to repay the time with interest at the end of the day, but this is rarely acceptable. Take care with your time keeping around your lunch break. You may be surprised at how carefully your adherence to the allotted break time is noted.

Similarly at the end of the day, you must ensure that you do not leave your place of employment before the normal working day has finished. It leaves a bad impression with employers, if staff, leave work at the appointed time every day, particularly in the current employment climate. Whilst we are not advocating that you undertake regular unpaid overtime, it is advisable to ensure that you have completed what you need to do before leaving work.

(Please note that one placement student was sacked from his work placement for persistently leaving work before the end of the normal day. He was picked up on CCTV cameras which recorded the time and date at each of the company's exit points)

Personal appearance and hygiene

Yes, there have been instances where students have lost their jobs because of unkept appearance and improper dress. Quite simply you can't go straight from work for a night on the town and then turn up the following morning wearing the same suit and shirt that you've been stood up in for 24 hours.

We have had occasion to counsel students in the past as a result of complaints from companies. Usually however, managers will take it upon themselves to raise personal hygiene issues with the individual concerned. Please do not give cause for such an embarrassing situation to arise.

Remember, you are working in a professional business environment and your appearance represents the image of yourself and the company to internal employees and customers alike.

Changing job descriptions

Inevitably, in many placements the role undertaken is somewhat different from the job advertised. Usually there are only marginal differences. Sometimes they could be significant. It is a fact of working life that the nature of the jobs we accept change over time according to the needs of the organisation. Therefore, we will normally support the company perspective in any role change they prescribe for you unless it involves a considerable and inappropriate change of duties and responsibilities which the University believes does not meet the requirements of your degree.

(For example, if you were working in an IT 'help-desk' environment and were unable to fulfil the role through a lack of confidence or ability, then your manager may reasonably suggest a change in role which would be more appropriate to your competences).

Similarly, from time to time, organisations can also require you to take on additional tasks which they feel need to be undertaken as part of your day-to-day role. Once again, we will normally support the organisation in this, provided it does not have any significant impact on your ability to fulfil your placement position. It is a fact of working life that employees may have to complete additional tasks on top of their normal role.

Changing locations

Remember also, what you are told about flexibility in where you work during the placement finding process. Students are often required to move location, sometimes for days or weeks. On occasions this may be for the entire placement. In the past some individuals have had to cope with moving from one country to another.

Companies are usually very good at supporting individuals through difficult changes in working conditions and locations. You will be expected to inform your visiting tutor of any proposals for change in your geographic location, but do not expect any support for this being a reason to leave your placement organisation. No student should seek to leave their placement purely due to the fact that they are being re-located.

However, should the consequences of any impending relocation significantly affect your ability to effectively undertake your role, the Placement Office will seek to resolve the situation to the mutual benefit of the student and employing organisation.

Inability to do the job

Probably the main cause for students leaving placement, is the long term proven inability of the student to satisfactorily perform the tasks set. Make no mistake, managers have a great deal of patience and are not seeking perfection. They also understand that student abilities vary and that their experience of one placement student may not be entirely matched by a successor to the role.

They are also willing to give you time to adapt to your role. However, in instances where an individual shows no aptitude for a task, or where a student has to be constantly directed, or if there are major inaccuracies in your day to day work, you can expect to receive a warning from your manager. In such circumstances you should immediately inform your visiting tutor or the Placement Office staff of the nature of the problem and the action taken.

Hopefully your tutor will be able to advise you of how to deal with the situation and he or she will liaise with the manager if appropriate. There are many examples of successful outcomes in such situations but this is dependent on the student being rational, objective and determined to work with a problem to its resolution. An attitude which suggests *'it's them, not me'* is likely to make matters worse.

Being sacked for incompetence can cause problems with your status on the course. It depends on the situation. The more your tutor knows the more help they can provide to overcome the problem.

(Please note; the Placement Office and your placement tutor are here to assist you in resolving any issues in connection with the effective execution of your role. Do not allow a situation in which you are struggling, spiral out of control before seeking help, both from your manager and the University.)

You don't like the job, you don't like the people, you don't like the terms and conditions, etc.

Unless you can actually prove to your visiting tutor that there are major issues of an insurmountable nature with the job you are doing you will be required to stay with your employing organisation for the full term of the placement. You should be aware that tutors have experienced many instances of students inventing reasons for leaving a company. These are usually as a result of other job offers (from friends, relatives and work contacts) received during the placement year.

(Changing companies during your placement year is simply not an option. Never, ever walk out of a job. Such an action may result in you failing your placement year. Failure of the year may result in your exclusion from the degree course.)

Bringing your personal life into the office

No lectures on this subject, you are all old enough to realise the importance of appropriate behaviour in an office environment. If you must have relationships which impinge on the office environment.... be discrete.

There are certain life events which will affect your work performance. If you do find yourself in such a situation, inform your manager, tell them as much as they need to know to appreciate your situation and work out what time you may need to get over the problem. Absences from work or poor performance due to a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship are not acceptable. Similarly, please ensure that your living arrangements whilst on placement, especially if you are sharing with another person, do not cause you any problems which affect your work. You are supposed to be adult enough to deal with these 'normal' life events.

Please also tell the truth. Do not make up problems simply to give yourself some time off work. We will find out.

Drugs and alcohol

Working under the influence of drugs and alcohol is a sackable offence. If you fall foul of company discipline in this highly sensitive area, you can be assured that you will receive no support from the University whatsoever.

It is also appropriate to remind you that the consumption of alcohol in social environments related to the company may be allowable but drunkenness is never acceptable. Insulting or violent behaviour in a social environment or even unguarded remarks made to individuals about work colleagues can and have led to dismissal.

E-mail; private telephone calls; web surfing.

Communication within an office environment should always be pertinent to the business needs of the organisation not the private needs of the individual.

There have been some examples of mis-directed or networked E-mails containing 'sensitive' materials which have landed the sender in serious trouble.

(One student managed to circulate a particularly unhelpful comment about company policy to the Chairman of the multi-national organisation for whom he was working)

Use of the telephone for personal and private conversations will be quickly noted and commented on by your colleagues. You will need to be clear about what is allowed in terms of private calls. Generally the rule is none, but there may be a certain tolerance of brief and occasional practical messages.

Personalised web surfing has also presented a number of problems in recent years. Employers have notified us of the time and cost associated with students using the web for personal and at times, quite improper use. Remember, your web surfing can be traced and some employers are tracking usage for disciplinary reasons.

You should, of course, switch off your mobile phone during working hours unless the calls you will be receiving are business calls.

Company property

You must never take anything away from the company which can be regarded as being the physical or intellectual property of that organisation. This could refer to items such as stationary, computer equipment, books and company documents. You should certainly never copy documents to disk for your own private use.

There have been recent problems with the communication of company database information to a competitor. In a very different example a student was sacked for crashing a company Mercedes during an unauthorised lunchtime drive.

It is also inappropriate to provide friends with favours. Discounts on company merchandise which are open to you as an employee of the company will not be available to friends and relatives unless permission is expressly given by your manager. Breaching such a rule may constitute theft or even fraud.

Legal, honest, decent and truthful

These four simple words should help you to maintain the appropriate standards of ethical and professional behaviour during your year on placement. Never take risks which may compromise your position within the organisation. If you are unsure of how you stand in a particular situation, consult with your manager.

Your Visiting Placement Tutor

Throughout the year you will have the support of a tutor from the University Business School. However, due to the fact that placement visits cannot be allotted until all students are placed and their location forms are returned to us, we cannot inform you on the identity of your tutor until some time in late October/early November.

If you have a problem which is sufficiently serious to warrant the attention of a tutor during the first weeks of your placement, you are advised to contact the Placement Office in the first instance. The administrative staff of the office may be able to provide you with advice or alternatively they will refer you to the Placement Manager.

Even though you may not have a tutor allotted to you during the summer months, it may also still be possible to refer you to a visiting tutor who is available to provide advice.

The simple rule if you find yourself in any form of trouble, is to first seek your manager's advice and, if still in doubt, contact your visiting tutor (if known) or the Placement Office if you have not yet been appointed a visiting tutor.

Placement Review Panel

The Placement Review Panel (PRP), which was formally established in the 2004/2005 academic year, assists in the smooth operation and successful running of the Student Placement Programme.

The Placement Review Panel will act to determine on behalf of the Board of Examiners, appropriate action for those students who are unable to fulfil or complete their placement during the course of the placement year.

The Panel membership comprises

- Head of Undergraduate Programmes
- Placement Manager.
- Supervising (Visiting) Placement Tutor
- Relevant UG Course Co-ordinator (or Programme Leader in the absence of the relevant UG Co-ordinator.)

The main responsibility of the Placement Review Panel is to determine appropriate courses of action for those students who have been unable to fulfil or complete their placement during the course of the placement year. The circumstances under which the Panel will normally convene, relate to the following instances:

- Student is dismissed from their placement organisation.
- The employing organisation has requested the student to be removed due to poor performance, attitude, and other work related issues.
- Student is unable to satisfactorily complete the placement due to illness and/or other personal circumstances.
- The firm, due to business reasons, has to shorten the placement contract or indeed, make the student redundant.
- The company does not provide an adequate placement experience in line with the agreed job description.
- Student resigns their position without prior agreement between the University, and the employer.

Students, who leave their employment under any of the circumstances identified above will be required to:

- (a) Submit a written report to the Placement Manager, outlining the nature of the placement experience and the circumstances leading to the termination of their employment
- (b) Attend an interview with the Placement Manager to formally discuss the placement position.

The Placement Manager will then convene a meeting of the Placement Review Panel, which will consider all appropriate information. In reaching their decisions, the Panel will take into consideration all appropriate evidence provided by the:

- (a) Employing organisation
- (b) Student report.
- (c) Placement manager and, or
- (d) Placement supervisor.

(Students may be required to present their case to the Panel, in addition to the documentation, which they will be required to submit.)

Panel Decisions

The Panel will normally meet within the first two weeks of a student leaving, being removed or dismissed from placement, provided that the members of the Panel are available and all relevant documentation has been collected. Decisions taken will be communicated to the student, the appropriate course teams and examination boards.

Decisions taken by the Panel may be subject to the normal student appeals process, but do not override or indeed replace any subsequent disciplinary action that may be deemed necessary, under the University's normal procedures.

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