

## Dublin Institute of Technology

### Summary Report of Working Group on Structured Work Placements

#### Introduction

A working group was set up in 2012 in response to the EUA and NQAI Reviews of 2005 and 2011 respectively and was additionally informed by the HEA paper 'Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape' (February 2012), which includes the process and criteria for institutions seeking designation as a Technological University. The membership of the working group was drawn from across the constituent colleges of the Institute and met between February 2012 and September 2012 (membership and terms of reference attached). Staff from the Directorate of Academic Affairs supported the process and representation from the student body through DITSU was sought. In addition to the meetings, the team engaged in research on current practice in Ireland and internationally and a significant data gathering exercise in order to inform its thinking.

The working group was tasked with developing guidelines on best practice for the assessment of learning associated with different types of work placement and making recommendations on how work placements should be managed and assessed.

For the purposes of this report the working group defines the Structured Work Placement as follows:

'A Structured Work Placement is a learning activity where a student is placed in a work setting for a defined period of time. It allows the student to gain relevant professional experience in a work environment. A Structured Work Placement can refer to periods spent by the student in the industrial/commercial sector, to hospital or clinical placements, in a research environment, and other professional fieldwork settings. Some placements run in parallel to taught modules for a defined period and students attend both (such placements are sometimes referred to as internships.) The Structured Work Placement will constitute a module within a programme. The Structured Work Placement will carry an ECTS weighting, with specified learning outcomes and assessments. It is usually a requirement for progression/award purposes that the students pass the work placement while the placement does not usually contribute to the award classification.'

A number of recommendations were made by the Working Group: these are presented below and are followed by the Guidelines and Good Practice for Structured Work Placements.

#### Recommendations

Recommendation	Action owner
DIT should consider how best to support the organisation, management and assure the quality of work placements at College and School level.	Academic Council/DIT/Colleges
Colleges should take a formal view on whether programmes would benefit from the inclusion of a structured work placement and how this might be	Colleges

achieved. Colleges are requested to report back to Council on this matter.	
DIT should maintain centrally a register of programmes with work placements.	Co-ordinated by Quality Assurance Office
DIT should adopt the Guidelines for Good Practice for implementation at School and programme level. The following specific recommendations are extracted:	Academic Council, Colleges and Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools should establish and maintain a database of placement providers, where not already in existence.</li> </ul>	Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placements should be selected according to explicit criteria which provide a high quality learning environment for students.</li> </ul>	Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrangements should be in place in relation to health and safety, insurance and where appropriate Garda vetting.</li> </ul>	Schools, DIT and host organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate preparation of the student should take place pre-placement and a DIT and Placement location supervisor should be allocated.</li> </ul>	Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placement host should have a clear understanding of expected learning outcomes and assessment forms, guidelines and policies should be available to all concerned.</li> </ul>	Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A placement agreement contract should be signed by all parties.</li> </ul>	Schools and host organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrangements should be made for on-site induction of the student.</li> </ul>	Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Throughout the period of the placement a communications system should be established between all parties.</li> </ul>	Schools and host organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placements should be assessed on a 'pass/fail' basis but some derogation will be facilitated in exceptional circumstances.</li> </ul>	Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A post placement review should take place involving all parties.</li> </ul>	Schools

# Guidelines and Good Practice for Structured Work Placements

## 1. Introduction

This policy outlines a set of guidelines for best-practice in the development and operation of Structured Work Placements in DIT. The aim of the policy is to ensure the quality and parity of work placements across the institute. For the purposes of these guidelines a Structured Work Placement is defined as follows:

A Structured Work Placement is a learning activity where a student is placed in a work setting for a defined period of time. It allows the student to gain relevant professional experience in a work environment. A Structured Work Placement can refer to periods spent by the student in the industrial/commercial sector, to hospital or clinical placements, in a research environment, in the community/voluntary sector, and other professional fieldwork settings. Some placements run in parallel to taught modules for a defined period and students attend both. (Such placements are sometimes referred to as internships.) The Structured Work Placement will constitute a module within a programme. The Structured Work Placement will carry an ECTS weighting, with specified learning outcomes and assessments. It is usually a requirement for progression/award purposes that the students pass the work placement while the placement does not usually contribute to the award classification.

Some activities may exist whereby student learning takes place through placement in external environments, but which do not fulfill the criteria of a Structured Work Placement. Aspects of this policy may be relevant for such activities.

The template provided in Table 2 below supports the implementation of structured work placements and the guidelines that follow.

## 2. Context

Professional or experiential learning through work placements has been a widespread activity across DIT for many years, and is an important component of DIT's goal for the provision of relevant, professional and practical career focused education.

Structured Work Placements can have an important role to play in each of the three activity areas highlighted in the National Strategy for Higher Education: 1. Teaching, Learning, & Assessment; 2. Research; and 3. Engagement.

### Benefits of Structured Work Placements:

Structured Work Placements provide a range of benefits to students, to the placement host, and also to DIT.

Benefits to the student can include the following:

- Gains valuable experience – research shows that over seventy per cent of employers prefer students with work experience.
- Offers an opportunity to develop a range of personal attributes (e.g., time management, self confidence and adaptability).
- Development of key interactive attributes (e.g., team working, interpersonal and communication skills).

<b>Table 2: Key Principles for Structured Work Placement</b>			
<b>Key Principles</b>	<b>HEI</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Host Organisation</b>
<b>Building the relationships</b>			
<b>Commitment</b>			
<b>Programme documentation and Design</b>			
<b>Preparation for Placement</b>			
<b>Placement Agreement</b>			
<b>On Site- Placement Induction</b>			
<b>Communication</b>			
<b>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b>			
<b>Assessment</b>			
<b>Post Placement Evaluation</b>			

- Offers a platform to transfer theoretical knowledge into a real-life environment.
- Allows students to see their particular area of study from a commercial perspective.
- Experience gained through living and working in another culture.
- Short-term financial benefits - some placements are paid.
- Offers an opportunity to explore career possibilities and make potentially valuable contacts.
- Prepares students for graduate employment.
- Placement supervisors can give references, which can be valuable in the job market in addition to a reference from an academic tutor.

Benefits to the placement host or employer can include the following:

- Offers the opportunity to evaluate students operating in a real work environment for an extended period and, in doing so, provides a basis for employers to assess future potential graduates.
- Provides an additional staff resource for on-going work, new projects, or temporary needs.
- Releases permanent employees to focus on other work.

- Benefits from new talent for a short-term period.
- Enhances the reputation as an employer.
- Establishes and expands links with the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Benefits to DIT can include the following:

- Establishes and expands links with industry partners.
- Benefits from the experience, added maturity, and focus the structured work placement brings to the student.
- Provides new business contacts and maintains existing contacts.
- Facilitates DIT staff keeping in touch with industry developments.
- Programmes which include placements are appealing to prospective students.
- Graduates are more employable.
- Using employer contacts to ensure that their commercial or industry-related teaching is up-to-date.
- Using links to encourage employers to participate on course validation panels in the development of subject areas, to present guest lectures, or to participate in seminars.

### **3. Key Principles for DIT Structured Work Placements**

#### **3.1 Programme Documentation/Student Handbook**

- The Structured Work Placement should constitute a module, with associated module descriptor that clearly outlines learning outcomes, ECTS credits, assessment procedures, number of permissible repeats.
- The number of ECTS credits associated with the placement should reflect the duration of the placement period.
- In addition to the module descriptor the programme document should contain a section outlining the following:
  - Rationale for the placement;
  - Benefits of the placement;
  - Roles & responsibilities of the key personnel involved in the placement, *e.g.*, student, DIT supervisor, industrial supervisor, placement coordinator, *etc.*;
  - Method of selecting placements and assigning students to placements;
  - Code of conduct expected of students;
  - Procedures for reporting and dealing with problems that may arise during the placement;
  - Alternative arrangements for students in the event that a placement is not available;
  - How students are prepared for placement;
  - Detail on the assessment of the placement;
  - Templates for student learning logbook (where applicable).

### 3.2 Building the relationship prior to Placement

Building the relationship prior to placement is extremely valuable in terms of developing clear systems / responsibilities between employers, the school and the student. A number of recommendations are provided and are summarised as follows:

- The school should develop a skills list template, broad enough to include learning objectives and personal development skills
- The school should develop stronger communication with the employer prior to commencement of placement through site visits, familiarisation trips and guest lecturing opportunities
- The School should prepare the student for interview
- The School should provide Induction for students prior to commencing placement
- The employer could be given an opportunity to meet as a group before placement takes place. This could be done by providing guest lectures on their organisation and insight into working in the industry
- The employer should develop a 'job description' and to link this to students' skills list
- The employer could introduce a Shadow day – where student can shadow someone in the area where they will be working, prior to starting placement
- The employer should conduct interviews (person/telephone)
- The student should develop learning objectives & personal development goals and conduct research on the company in which they will be working
- The student should visit the employer, if possible, prior to commencing placement
- The student **must** actively participate in Pre-Placement preparation.

### 3.3 Pre-Placement

- Placements should be selected according to explicit criteria which indicate their capacity to provide a high quality learning environment for students which can meet the primary goals of the placement. Where a placement is sourced by the student, the school will ensure that the placement is appropriate to meet the learning outcomes for the placement. The development of employability is a key criteria in selecting placement locations.
- Fair practices in selection, recruitment and equal opportunities will be employed in assigning students to placements.
- Where appropriate, arrangements should be in place for Garda vetting of students sufficiently in advance of the commencement of the placement – *e.g.*, for students working with children or other vulnerable populations. For programmes where Garda vetting is required for the placement, this should be indicated in the DIT prospectus and in promotional/information literature for the programme.
- Students should be prepared for placement by, for example, training in interview skills and CV preparation, pre-placement seminars and pre-placement site visits. This may take the form of a module with ECTS allocated and a formal assessment, as already exists within several programmes within the Institute. The preparation should include briefings on the operation of the placement, reporting, assessment and on the standard of behavior expected of students (including punctuality, dress, etc.) and briefings on Institute/School policies on Structured Work Placements. Students should be aware that they are required to behave on placement at all times so as to

enhance the reputation of the DIT Health & Safety issues such as training and immunization should also be addressed.

- Students should be allocated a named DIT-based supervisor and also a named supervisor in the placement location.
- The placement host should have a clear understanding of the expected learning outcomes from the placement module.
- Arrangements for assessment should be in place and assessment forms, guidelines and policies should be available to all parties at the commencement of the placement.
- Insurance cover for students on placement should be understood by all parties.
- A Placement Agreement between DIT/placement host/student is considered best practice.

### **3.4 Placement**

- Regular communication between the student and the DIT-based supervisor should be maintained throughout the period of the placement and, where deemed necessary, this should include site visits and three-way meetings between the student, the DIT supervisor, and the supervisor based at the placement location. The extent and method of communication between the parties should be clearly documented at the commencement of the placement. Consideration might be given to the maintenance of a supervision log to be signed by both parties.
- The placement should provide a period of induction for the student.
- Where problems arise during a placement, either from the student or from the placement host, there should be a clear point of communication for such issues.
- Placements will typically be assessed on a 'pass/fail' basis but in some cases may be allocated a grade. Where a student does not satisfactorily complete his/her placement, there should be clear guidelines/arrangements for re-assessment. The reasons for the student failing the placement should be communicated to the student. The placement host should be involved in the appraisal of the student.

### **3.5 Post-Placement**

- The school should review the placement experience for student/school/placement host. Arrangements for carrying out this review should be clearly articulated.

**Dublin Institute of Technology**  
**Work Placement Working Group**  
**Membership List**

Dr Sheila Flanagan (Chair)	College of Arts and Tourism
Declan Allen	School of Mechanical & Transport Engineering
Deirdre Staunton	School of Electronic & Communications Engineering
James Egan	School of Manufacturing & Design Engineering
Dr Kevin Lalor	School of Social Sciences and Law
Stacy McCarthy	College of Business
Dr Joe Coughlan	School of Accounting and Finance
Laurence Whitson	Careers Service
Jan Cairns	Quality Assurance Office
Oonagh Birchall	College of Arts and Tourism
Dr John Doran	School of Physics

## **Dublin Institute of Technology**

### **Work Placement Working Group**

#### **Terms of reference**

1. To consider current practice within the DIT, and elsewhere, in relation to the management and assessment of work placements.
2. To consider the issues that impact on the organisation and management of work placements.
3. To develop guidelines on best practice for the management and monitoring of work placements, and the assessment of learning associated with work placements.
4. To make recommendations in relation to documentation required when a work placement is being introduced to a programme.
5. To make recommendations, if deemed essential, for the academic or administrative support necessary to manage work placements.