Work Placements

Contents

[Work Placements 1](#_Toc37693726)

[Work Placement Process Pathway 2](#_Toc37693727)

[Stage 1 – Submission of Appropriate Paper-Work 3](#_Toc37693728)

[Automatic Process 3](#_Toc37693729)

[Student Disclosure 3](#_Toc37693730)

[Stage 2 – Information Dissemination 4](#_Toc37693731)

[Dynamic Information 4](#_Toc37693732)

[Employer Liaison 5](#_Toc37693733)

[Related Skills and Support Information 5](#_Toc37693734)

[Good Practice Example 5](#_Toc37693735)

[Stage 3 – Employer / Student Match Process 6](#_Toc37693736)

[Student Led – Answering Advertisements 6](#_Toc37693737)

[How is the advertisement disseminated? 6](#_Toc37693738)

[Staff Led – Undertaking Match Process 6](#_Toc37693739)

[Good Practice Example 7](#_Toc37693740)

[Stage 4 – Interview process 7](#_Toc37693741)

[Successful Applicants 7](#_Toc37693742)

[Unsuccessful Applicants 8](#_Toc37693743)

[Stage 5 – Work Placement Attendance 8](#_Toc37693744)

[Stage 6 – Work Placement Completion 8](#_Toc37693745)

[Stage 7 – Evaluation 8](#_Toc37693746)

[Work Placements – Further Resources 9](#_Toc37693747)

Many students will be expected to undertake some form of work placement during their time at university. This may involve a whole year in industry or a one-off ‘taster’ session. It will very often be linked to some form of assessment.

Research demonstrates that on average disabled people are more likely to be out of work and get fewer interviews despite making at least twice as many job applications compared to non-disabled people. They are also less likely to be selected for work from interview. Of those disabled people who are or have been economically active the Institute for Employment Studies found that one in six reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment in a work-related context, usually at the hands of an employer and/ or a potential employer.

It is important that this negative experience is not replicated in the Higher Education setting particularly where course progression may be tied to successful completion of work experience. Furthermore, it is perhaps even more important for disabled graduates to be able to demonstrate to a future employer that they have had appropriate work experience so as to dispel prejudicial assumptions and enable them to successfully find work.

This section is primarily intended to support staff who have the responsibility for facilitating and monitoring student placements. Its aim is to help them ensure that whatever the type of placement disabled students receive the same benefits as their non-disabled peers from the experience.

# Work Placement Process Pathway

The main content of this section is presented in what has been termed a ‘process pathway’. This breaks down the placement process into a series of stages and highlights the different issues to be considered at each point, as follows:

* Stage 1: Submission of appropriate paperwork.
  + Automatic process
  + Student disclosure
* Stage 2: Information Dissemination.
  + Dynamic information
  + Employer liaison
  + Related skills and support information
  + Good practice example
* Stage 3: Employer / Student Match Process.
  + Student led - undertaking match process
  + Good practice example
* Stage 4: Interview Process.
  + Successful applicants
  + Unsuccessful applicants
* Stage 5: Work Placement Attendance.
* Stage 6: Work Placement Completion.
* Stage 7: Evaluation.
* Work Placement - further resources.

# Stage 1 – Submission of Appropriate Paperwork

Where students need to submit paperwork (application form, CV, etc.) to be considered for a work placement the following sorts of questions need to be considered by the Placement Team:

* How are disabled students who have disclosed or are in possession of a Learning Contract (a written agreement between disabled student and university that includes specific recommendations satisfying Equality Act 2010 ‘reasonable adjustments’) identified?
* If they need specific support to complete paperwork, is it offered? (E.g., dyslexic students, visually impaired students, deaf students, students with mental health difficulties and students with Asperger Syndrome may all need support in this area).

If work experience opportunities are based on a first come first served basis students who delay submitting paperwork because of difficulties in completing it will be disadvantaged. Students who experience difficulties completing paperwork may need to be invited to complete it before their non-disabled peers. Dyslexic students may need additional time, especially if they need to make an appointment with their dyslexia support tutor to discuss completion of paperwork.

## Automatic Process

Where there is any kind of automatic registering process, where all students are eligible for a work placement, ways of identifying disabled students who have disclosed or are in possession of a ‘Learning Contract ‘need to be built into this process.

Knowing if there are any disabled students in the cohort is part of anticipatory duty and will act as trigger for appropriate support processes to kick in. For example:

* Letters to be provided in large font for a visually impaired student
* Liaison with student or Disabled Student Support Team for a deaf student who will need to use the interpreter service

## Student Disclosure

Processes to identify disabled students can only occur if disabled student themselves have disclosed their disability to the University. In most cases this will have happened, and staff can consult the student and their ‘Learning Contract’ to see if any specific issues need to be addressed.

Student self-censorship caused by fear of the repercussions of disclosure can be a significant barrier to inclusion however and efforts need to be made to create an atmosphere where students feel it is safe to disclose a disability. Furthermore, early disclosure avoids later difficulties for students and staff. Look at your initial work placement processes. Are there opportunities built in for students to disclose information? For example:

* Do work placement forms include a section for students to indicate specific circumstances that may need to be taken into consideration when they are selected for a particular job?
* Does literature advertise the need to disclose information and explain to students how the Equality Act 2010 applies to employment?
* Are students provided with a contact that they can go to if they want to discuss issues in person?

Wording of University forms and correspondence needs to be considered carefully. Staff need to be clear that standard procedures are not disadvantaging the few or that assumptions are not being made about what a disabled student will or will not be able to do without consultation with that student. If negative rather than enabling language (for example, what are you not able to do, rather than how can we support you to do…) is always associated with disability in university literature and correspondence, students may feel less likely to disclose information.

Should the case arise where you know a student is disabled but has not declared this to their employer you do not have the right to tell the employer that the student is disabled without their permission. In such cases try to speak to the student to find out their reasons for not wanting to tell the employer of their status.

Use this opportunity to discuss the benefits of disclosing this information to their employer and to stress that the University has an obligation to ensure students are not discriminated against whilst on work placement.

Explain to them that the Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against them when they are applying for a job. Not only this but employers have a duty to make “reasonable adjustments” to reduce or remove any substantial disadvantage caused to a disabled job applicant or employee by employment arrangements or any physical feature of the workplace.

In practice this can mean anything from providing students with specific equipment or support personnel to tailoring aspects of the job to meet their needs. This can only happen however, if the employer has the information on which to act!

## Stage 2 – Information Dissemination

* How are work placement opportunities and information being disseminated?
* Is the communication method fully accessible, or as appropriate, is it available in different formats? For example, are letters in large print?
* Are deadlines by which certain activities must be completed obvious and student obligations that are part of the work placement process transparent?

### Dynamic Information

It is more likely that whatever dissemination method is being used to communicate work placement opportunities to students (pin-board, on-line forum, etc.) that it will be regularly updated and need to be checked frequently by the student.

Where this is the case staff need to ensure that disabled students have the same level of opportunity as their non-disabled peers to check the information regularly. For example, students with mobility difficulties may be disadvantaged if they are required to come into university to view a pin-board daily.

* **Tip:** You may want to consider using mobile phone text alerts or other innovative methods to communicate with disabled students where gaining access to changing information is a problem.
* **Tip:** A small number of disabled students will have link / support workers who may also need access to the same information and resources as the students they work with. To avoid delays, as appropriate, and with the specific consent of the student, you should therefore make sure they are enrolled on on-line information sites.

### Employer Liaison

An important role for any placement unit is that of employer liaison, this includes recruiting and retaining partner employers. While it is important not to over-burden employer partners with bureaucracy, we also have a duty to students to ensure that they will not be discriminated against, either directly or indirectly throughout the whole placement experience (including recruitment).

Efforts need to be made to ensure that employers understand their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act, in a similar way they understand their responsibilities for Health and Safety. In turn employer / University agreements need to reflect those responsibilities in their dealings with each other and students.

* **Tip:**As part of an employer / University service agreement you may want to implement a version of the national [Disability Confident Scheme](https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/), whereby employers agree to interview all disabled students who meet the person specification.
* **Tip:** It may be possible to foster greater disability awareness amongst employers by incentivising inclusive behaviour – for example awarding a university logo to inclusive employers who demonstrate disability awareness and encourage disabled applicants.

### Related Skills and Support Information

Students will probably be invited to take part in workshops and attend meetings or seminars on employability skills – completing a CV, interviewing techniques, career planning, etc.

Tailoring workshops to cover issues specific to disabled students is one way of supporting students and encouraging a safe environment for disclosure. Beware how you advertise these however, disabled students particularly dyslexic students, have often had negative school experiences of being singled out and sent to ‘special’ classes.

It is worth stressing those workshops will focus on practical work-based skills and successful self-marketing strategies.

### Good Practice Example

Dyslexia workshops have been provided by Faculties in SHU to help students prepare for placements. Issues covered include:

* Disclosure
* CVs
* Application forms
* Finding own placements
* Positive self-marketing – i.e., highlighting the strengths inherent in dyslexia.

Past workshops were specifically designed to dovetail into College mainstream Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) sessions being attended by all students. For example, if students looked at CVs one week, the dyslexia session group would look at CVs, but with an emphasis on dyslexia, i.e., checking progress on individual CVs, providing advice and tips on composing CVs and how to present themselves in a positive light.

# Stage 3 – Employer / Student Match Process

In different Faculties and HE Institutions this match process will work in different ways, broadly speaking however the match process will either be predominantly student led or staff led.

### Student Led – Answering Advertisements

Where students are expected to respond to in-University work placement advertisements the same applies as in stage 2 ‘information dissemination’. Consideration needs to be given to:

### How is the advertisement disseminated?

Is the communication method fully accessible for disabled students?

Can all students who are interested in applying have an equal chance of meeting the deadline?

* **Tip:** Consider within the work placement team – should certain students see advertisements first if they need longer to apply so that they have an equal chance to compete against non-disabled students? (I.e., it may take some disabled longer to complete relevant paperwork or digest material – this could include some dyslexic students, deaf students, some students with mental health difficulties or autistic students).

### Staff Led – Undertaking Match Process

Where the match process is staff led, staff should consider the feasibility and equity of placing disabled students first. This is particularly the case where students have specific requirements that mean they need to be close to home. For example, a student who needs regular medical attention such as kidney dialysis, or a student who has difficulty accessing public transport.

The same applies for students who will need additional time to prepare for placement, such as visually impaired students who may need to learn the layout of new surroundings or autistic students who may need to take part in pre-placement visits.

The second issue to consider where staff carry out the employer/student match process is that care be taken to ensure that staff, either wittingly or unwittingly, are not putting disabled students forward for jobs because of negative assumptions about their capabilities. If staff are unsure about the suitability of a job, that otherwise meets the abilities of a disabled student, they should check with the student first.

### Good Practice Example

Previously, staff in the work placement team in the Sheffield Hallam University Faculty Science, Technology and Arts (STA) have all attended disability awareness workshops to help them understand the requirements of their disabled students more fully.

# Stage 4 – Interview process

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a disabled person when they are applying for a job. The duty of employers to make “reasonable adjustments” to reduce or remove any substantial disadvantage caused to a disabled job applicant by employment arrangements or any physical feature of the workplace equally extends to the application process itself.

The University also has a duty to make sure that they do not send any student into an environment where they know they will be discriminated against. As part of ‘employer liaison’ (see Stage 2), the Placement Team needs to be in communication with their employment partners to ensure that they have sufficient awareness and skills to be confident that they will not discriminate against disabled students in the interview process. In practice this means effective and timely communication needs to take place between the Faculty placement team, employer and as appropriate the [Disabled Student Support](https://portal.shu.ac.uk/departments/lsss/dss/Pages/default.aspx).

Issues such as ensuring that the physical environment in which an interview takes place is accessible, that appropriate personal support (e.g., British Sign Language interpreter) are available and that any tests used in the interview are not discriminatory may all need to be considered. For example, it may be the case that dyslexic students undertaking a written test will need to be allowed additional time and the University should have an agreed policy on this that they can offer to the employer as a recommendation.

### Successful Applicants

In some cases, disabled students with specific requirements, will need to meet with their employer before the placement starts to discuss specific support issues or the provision of equipment or personnel (i.e. particular type of computer, or British Sign Language interpreter). This type of pre-placement meeting should be encouraged and facilitated by the University in co-ordination with [Disabled Student Support](https://portal.shu.ac.uk/departments/lsss/dss/Pages/default.aspx), as it will help avoid problems that could otherwise arise and possibly dispel any employer myths.

Such meetings will need to be timely, ideally at least two weeks before commencement of the placement so as to allow for any issues raised to be addressed.

Disabled students themselves may not always ask for this pre-placement meeting even if it would be beneficial because of fears over how they may be perceived by their new employer. Placement teams should consider how to disseminate the opportunity for such a meeting to take place and the rights and responsibilities of the student, Placement Team and Disabled Student Support in organising such a meeting.

* **Tip:** [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview) – Do you and your students know about the Access to Work Scheme? Where students are eligible Access to Work specialists can undertake audits of workplaces for accessibility and provide employers with money to cover the cost of reasonable adjustments.

### Unsuccessful Applicants

Are there policies in place to deal with the situation where a student feels they have not been offered a placement because they are disabled? Placement teams should find out what support the University will offer such a student and what steps they can take to find out if this is the case. Furthermore, if this turns out to be the case the employer has broken the law and the Faculty/University need a pre-determined position as to what action to take.

# Stage 5 – Work Placement Attendance

Once students are on placement do disabled students have a specific and confidential contact (either supervisor or other nominated person) that they know they can contact regarding any issues related to their work placement and disability?

Some placement opportunities will include supervision of some kind. Where this is the case measures need to be put in place to ensure the supervisor knows the student, they are supervising is disabled. They should also be made aware of any relevant specific agreements between the employer and the University about care for the student and where applicable and with the specific consent of the student, they should have had access to the student’s ‘Learning Contract’.

Depending on the length and type of placement some students may still want to access University support such as Study Skills support over the duration of their placement.

# Stage 6 – Work Placement Completion

Consideration needs to be given as to whether there are there policies in place to deal with the situation where a student feels they have been unsuccessful because of issues related to lack of disability support by the University or employer. It is important to be prepared for this situation, even if it never occurs, the University needs to be able to be able to robustly demonstrate that all the appropriate support has been offered at every stage.

Therefore, it is particularly important in Stage 2, as part of the employer liaison process that the employer understands and agrees to any specific responsibilities in relation to any disabled students they employ.

# Stage 7 – Evaluation

Consideration needs to be given to how the experiences of the disabled student are being captured and reviewed, both the students experience of university disability support over the placement period and their experience of employer support. Once captured thought needs to be given as to how any comments will be acted on. This needs to be considered as part of the annual review process.

# Work Placements – Further Resources

Institute of Education UCL - [Providing Work Placements for Disabled Students Guide](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10158/)

[My Plus Students Club](https://myplusstudentsclub.com/) - provides careers advice and follows that up with consciously trying to put students and employers in contact with each other. Their aim is to facilitate increasing the employment opportunities for disabled people

[Business Disability Forum](http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/)  building disability-smart organisations

[The British Dyslexia Association](https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/)  offering dyslexia information, advice, and services