

Application for the Exploration and Enhancement Bursary

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Supporting Students with Mental Health Issues

The project definition, broad objectives and timescales

The purpose of the project is to collate guidance from all the Work Placement units, and the Wellbeing and Disability Service within the University of Huddersfield on effective support for students with mental health issues undertaking a placement or work based learning, and to produce a good practice guide which can be made available to students, staff and placement providers.

Experience of Higher Education and successful completion of a placement can be very valuable to students at risk of, or living with mental health issues, especially those with depressive or anxiety-related conditions. The experience of successfully negotiating new environments and coping with a work place can provide significant boosts to self-confidence and self-esteem. However placements, and preparation for placement, can also be extremely stressful, and can negatively influence mental health. Some students with mental health issues will therefore seek to avoid a placement, or be unable to complete a placement, which may have a longer term effect on the outcome of their course, and their access to a future career. There is evidence that for male students dropping out of university is likely to have a lifelong effect on their earnings. Although it is not clear why this is the case, it is likely that there is a significant correlation with the development of serious mental illness. While this project will not address that problem it does illustrate the importance of supporting students who may face mental health problems when doing a placement. The guidance will help students with mental health issues to successfully navigate their placement.

The experience of dealing with a student with mental health issues can also be difficult for a placement provider, especially smaller ones with limited HR support and may mean they are unable to support the student effectively, or withdraw the placement, with negative effects for future student. It is therefore important to give providers information to help them deal effectively with the situation.

We wish to provide a source of reliable information which can be used by students, staff and placement providers to ensure that as far as possible a placement is a positive experience for all concerned. The guidance will consist of a document which will outline common concerns for students, staff and placement providers such as when to tell a placement provider that a student has a mental health issue, how to minimise the stresses of taking on a placement, how a placement provider should respond if they think a student's mental health is at risk. The guidance will then provide links to online resources,

contact information for the University's Wellbeing and Disability service, and to other organisations which support people with mental health issues.

Timescale of the project

Week 1 Induction, definition of project terms, negotiation of learning agreement, development of research skills, background research

Weeks 2-3 Interviews with 6 Work Placement units and a member of staff from Wellbeing and Disability Service. If possible, interview with student formerly on the module, who had to transfer module because of mental health issues. This student has volunteered to help with the study. We will approach this with consideration to the student's current mental health status. The student will be able to set parameters for the interview (or questionnaire if preferred) and may withdraw at any time. The student will be reminded of support within the university in case this is needed.

Week 4 Exploration and evaluation of online resources

Week 5-6 Drafting of guidance document, including consideration of the most effective format for dissemination. Circulation to contributors for comments and corrections. Begin to draft conference paper.

Week 7 Final version of guidance completed. Circulation to university Work Placement units and Wellbeing and Disability service. Dissemination within School of Music, Humanities and Media

Week 8 Final version of conference paper completed. Debrief.

Early September Presentation of paper at the ASET conference.

The supervisor's role in the project, and their research expertise, evidenced by role held within their organisation, experience, qualifications and/or publications

Dr Pat Cullum will provide overall supervision of the student, whose project will run alongside other research projects on placements which she is running. Dr Cullum will provide project direction, a regular weekly meeting with the student and informal email support. Day to day supervision of the student will be provided by Ms Stephanie Bower, Employer Engagement Administrator, who has extensive experience of work placement units and supporting students on placement. Dr Cullum is Student Experience Co-ordinator for the School of Music, Humanities and Media. Among her responsibilities are the broadening and improvement of work experience and work-based learning opportunities within the School. Pat Cullum was formerly Head of History, where she had responsibility for curriculum development and pastoral support. As a result of that work she was nominated by a graduate student for the BBC Radio 4 *All in the Mind* prize for support to people with mental health issues. Dr Cullum's current research is on work placements for Humanities students and she is also involved in an HEA employability improvement project. In 2014 she presented a paper to the ASET conference on Work Placements and Employability in the Arts and Humanities.

The student's role within the project, including details of how their own learning objectives will be set and incorporated into the project

The student will collect the data, including doing interviews and will draft the guidance document under supervision. The student's learning objectives will be negotiated between Pat Cullum and the student. Within the broader scheme of collating the data and drafting the document, the student will have some scope to follow up particular interests. The work placement module is designed to help students decide on a future career path, so depending on whether the student wants to pursue a career in research, in mental health care, or has an interest in a specific mental health issue, they will be able to shape the process and outcomes to reflect their own interests.

Why the project outcomes might be relevant other to universities engaged in placement or work-based learning

There is a widespread acceptance that the incidence of mental health issues in the student population is growing and that as the number of courses which incorporate work placements and work-based learning increase, staff teaching and managing placement provision are more and more likely to encounter students with these problems, and to have to advise placement providers who will not always have well-established human resources departments of their own. While universities often have good guidance for supporting students with mental health issues on their own courses, fewer of them have had time or space to develop specialist guidance for supporting students who are in placement. These resources will therefore fill a gap.

An indication of the students to whom this opportunity will be made available, and how you intend to recruit

The opportunity will be advertised to students on the Year 2 AIX2050 Work Placement module which is compulsory for History students and optional for English Literature, Film and Combined Honours students. There are around 75 students on the module who source a 180 hour placement typically undertaken in May and June. The opportunity will be advertised on the School's e-placement system, to which all students on the module have access, with a job description and person spec. Students will be asked to submit a CV and covering letter. These will require applicants to demonstrate research skills and confirm their willingness and ability to present at the ASET conference. Preference will be given to candidates who show knowledge of mental health issues or who want to enter a career in the area of mental health. Selection will be by the project leader and the School Employer Engagement Administrator. We will also ask Jo Mitchell from the University's Wellbeing and Disability Service to be on the interview panel. Final selection will be on the basis of evidence of ability to carry out high quality research, and knowledge and understanding of mental health issues and their impact on ability to access and sustain work and work experience.

Agreement of support from an appropriate senior manager in the university

I am happy to support this project which will improve support for students on work placements in the School and will help to improve retention and completion. I agree to support Dr Pat Cullum and the student to attend the ASET Conference in September to report on the project.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mr Hewitt." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Martin Hewitt Dean of Music, Humanities and Media