

## ASET Viewpoints

### Troubleshooting for Placements - Everyday Troubleshooting

The majority of placement students have high quality, positive work-based learning experiences. However, problems can and do occur. If we accept things can go wrong, we can work to reduce and mitigate these risks; by developing sound processes (<http://www.asetonline.org/resources/aset-good-practice-guides/>), addressing problems promptly, and knowing what to do and who can help when things go wrong.

#### What challenges do you face?

As Higher Education Providers (HEPs) strive to increase the number and diversity of students benefiting from work-based learning experiences, the range of challenges also inevitably rises. These typically may include:

- A mismatch in expectations between students and placement providers
- Lack of clarity in job descriptions and levels of responsibility
- Issues around professional behaviour, including work ethic and poor attendance/punctuality and ultimately dismissals
- Unpaid placements and the consequent financial burden students face to support themselves and complete the placement
- International placements which can be complex, both for the student and the supporting staff; from homesickness, to handling local bureaucracy and cultural differences
- Students with disabilities including mental health issues - when and how can we best support students' decisions to disclose?

#### Everyday Troubleshooting

There are some simple steps we can take throughout the placement process which will reduce the likelihood of problems arising and offer solutions if they do.

##### Pre placement

A large number of potential issues can be prevented by ensuring that placement providers and students know what to expect, have similar expectations, and by encouraging early communication if problems arise.

- Implement a robust approval process and ensure all paperwork, including tripartite agreements and risk management, is completed before the placement starts
- Ensure all parties have contact details for placement staff, and that students know how and when they will be contacted
- Brief students - be mindful there may be challenges making the transition from Higher Education to the workplace. Consider the balance between support and encouraging resilience and the development of self-confidence



## On placement

- Develop and communicate clearly written, accessible, transparent processes to support all parties, throughout the placement. Including a clear complaints process. Be aware complaints can include accusations relating to racism, sexism, bullying and victimisation. Ensure the processes cover recording and sharing these as well as signposts to other specific HEP policies
- Things are not always what they seem - ask questions and actively listen so you can get a clear understanding of the situation, this may involve speaking to other parties
- When considering a response ensure it is proportional (<http://www.asetonline.org/resources/aset-good-practice-guides/>) and be clear whose processes need to be followed and when - HEP, employers, or both. Remember you are not alone, draw on expertise from across your HEP e.g. Counselling Services, Student Support Services, Health and Safety Managers, Careers, Disability and Equality Service, Finance
- Have in place robust, fit for purpose processes to manage emergencies and problems incurred out of office hours. Who should students contact and how?

## Post placement

- Seek out and act on feedback from previous placement students - what challenges did they encounter?
- Do you have a system in place to communicate with staff across your HEP when there has been a negative experience with a placement provider? What strategic/institutional decisions are taken about the relationship?

## What is your responsibility?

When faced with challenges it is your responsibility to work within the parameters of your HEP's policies and processes, seeking out advice and support from experts in the appropriate support services as required, to enable you to facilitate successful outcomes for placements.

When thinking about more significant events such as terror attacks or natural disasters, you'll need to create more detailed plans and the Trouble Shooting for Placements - Crisis Management Viewpoint provides more advice on this.

## Remember

Being responsive and agile to the issues raised by students or employers is essential; problems which are dealt with well, and to the satisfaction of all parties, can lead to enhanced relationships with employers and good / improved experiences for students.

Try wherever possible to support and empower students to resolve issues themselves, as this is a great learning opportunity which they will benefit from in the long term.

We also encourage members to engage with ASET and our wide range of member services which includes our Good Practice Guides, Staff Development Workshops, Regional Hubs, LinkedIn forums, Viewpoints and conference.

Thanks to those who attended the December 2017 ASET Regional Hubs, whose discussion and ideas informed this Viewpoint.

*ASET is the Work Based and Placement Learning Association, and our aim is to advance the prevalence, effectiveness and quality of work based and placement learning in Higher Education by promoting research into that system of education and publishing the useful results thereof. Work based and placement learning is that which is part of the Higher Education experience, an integrated part of a programme of study, and that is structured to appropriate learning outcomes and assessment.*

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**For more information please contact:**