

Bioscience Work Placement Case Study

Title	Assessing Placement Performance: academic credit for doing 'a good job'
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Activity	Assessing placement performance via a 20 credit level 6 academic module.
Student Group	Students from the Bioscience Program who choose to spend year 3 'on placement' (on average, around 50 students per year). The module is a level 6 module.
Aim	To show the benefit of giving academic credit for 'doing a good job' on placement.
Context / Background	<p>Within Biosciences at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), we have assessed student performance on placement via a credit-bearing module, for many years. This has often been in contrast to the experience of students from other institutions on placement along side SHU students. In the past, this has sometimes led to SHU students feeling unfairly burdened compared to some of their counterparts. To address this in pre-placement preparation sessions the benefit of gaining academic credit whilst on placement is explained, along with the skills that will be developed through completing the module (such as information retrieval, communication and critical analysis). I do also point out that students from other institutions may have less or different work to complete. Discrepancies in workloads has not been raised as an issue in recent years, so other Universities may also be requiring more academic work to be completed. We have continued to promote the idea of giving academic credit for 'doing a good job' and to use the module to help in the students' personal and professional development during their time on placement. This also tends to assist in their preparedness to cope with their final year studies.</p>
Example description	<p>Students' performance on placement is assessed via the 20 credit level 6 'Professional Practice' module (PPM) (see Further Information section). The module aims to encourage and assess the development of professional knowledge and skills during the placement period. It also aims to develop independent learning and communication skills.</p> <p>As the module involves predominantly student-centred, work-based learning, a support process exists to ensure pre-placement preparation for the module and in-placement support and guidance. In the semester before commencing placement, students attend a series of workshops designed to explain the various aspects of the module, including the 'remote support' available to them (e.g. learning centre resources) and how the module is assessed. These details are also included in the module handbook which is supplied to all students and Work Place Supervisors (WPS). All students are allocated a 'visiting tutor' (VT) (member of academic staff) at the start of their placement, who provides academic support and guidance throughout their placement. This includes discussing in detail the requirements of the PPM with the student and WPS when the VT makes their first visit to the workplace (within ~ 6 weeks of starting placement). This support continues via</p>

email and telephone throughout the placement period and with a final visit shortly before the student completes their placement. The VT also assesses the module (along with various moderators).

The module consists of three elements of assessment (see the module handbook in the Further Information section): a Placement Portfolio (including Performance Review), a Written Review and an Oral Presentation.

- The Placement Portfolio demonstrates the breadth of learning and skills acquired during the placement period, and is compiled by the student throughout the placement. They describe the organisation and department in which they are working, and discuss their role within the company. An overview of their day-to-day activities is included along with evidence and discussion of the more 'non-standard' aspects of their placement. In this section they are asked to include a range of items to show the breadth of experience gained on placement, along with a reflection on the various activities. Students can use this section to show their level of engagement with the placement and it builds upon the reflective skills that are introduced at levels 4 and 5 (i.e. prior to placement). Performance reviews are carried out by the student and WPS at three points during the placement (approximately 3 months, 7 months and 11 months). This requires the student to assess their own performance and development in key skill areas such as communication, team working, numeracy, IT, problem solving etc (see PPM handbook for more detail). The WPS also assesses the student's developing skills and will meet with the student to discuss the assessments; this gives the opportunity for both praise and identification of areas where further support may be required. Marks from the final of the three reviews are used to feed into the assessment of placement performance i.e. assessing whether a 'good job' is being carried out. The final part of the portfolio is an overall reflection on the whole placement process; students are asked in particular to consider how the placement has affected their future career aspirations.
- The written review is a substantial literature review of a topic of relevance to the placement work. Students agree a topic with their WPS and have it approved by their VT. The review develops students' investigative and communication skills. As they are working at 'level 6', clear guidance and support is often needed from the VT to ensure an appropriate standard of work. The skills developed during production of the review are key to level 6 work completed during the student's final year; for example their research project.
- On their return to SHU, students give an oral presentation on their placement experiences. This serves as a 'de-brief' session for the students returning from placement and is assessed as part of the PPM. Level 5 students are also invited to attend the presentations to learn more of the placement process and work performed at particular organisations.

Overall, engagement with the PPM seems to enhance the placement experience. It helps students to develop transferable skills in a work setting, whilst enhancing their professional and subject specific knowledge. Additionally, when students

	engage fully with all the work-related opportunities available to them, this is reflected in the marks they receive for their final Performance Review.
Results / Feedback	<p>Generally, feedback from staff and students regarding the module is favourable. Visiting tutors and other academic staff have a fairly intensive period of assessing PPM activities in and around Induction Week of the students' final year. Although this is time-consuming it ensures that students receive most feedback and marks from the module within a few weeks of starting their final year of study. This has a number of benefits: students know how they have performed on the module, which can encourage them to engage actively with their final year; feedback from the written review can help students to improve their written work (essays, practical reports, project report etc). Virtual completion of a 20 credit module prior to the start of final year study also lessens the work-load on the students. Student feedback on the placement process and the PPM is gained via a questionnaire completed in Induction Week (see attached questionnaire). Feedback is usually very positive, with most questions receiving 70+% 'satisfaction' rating.</p> <p>The module average for the PPM tends to be fairly high (at around 66%), indicating the achievements of the students. The Performance review component - which really does assess whether the student has 'done a good job' - tends to have an even higher average of around 80%. The effectiveness of learning via this module is somewhat harder to quantify. However, generally, those of our students who have been on placement (and hence completed the PPM) tend to gain better final degree classifications than those students who have not been on placement. This could imply the acquisition of skills and knowledge via this module.</p> <p>The new version shown here has come into operation for students on placement in 2008/09. The major change from the previous version is to extend the students' reflection process into the final year of study; this should allow further development of their self-appraisal skills.</p> <p>Generally, if our students complete their placement to the satisfaction of their employer and demonstrate this in the material they produce for the PPM, they obtain a good module mark; showing that they can receive academic credit for 'doing a good job'.</p>
Further information	Further information regarding the module can be found in the module descriptor and handbook. An example of the questionnaire can be viewed as a pdf.
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