

# 9. Placement learning

## ► **Who might find this checklist useful?**

Placement officers, placement co-ordinators, practice supervisors, admissions tutors, careers advisors, DSA assessors and new staff on induction.

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### ► What the SENDA Code of Practice requires

**5.6 Responsible bodies should not wait until a disabled person applies to do a course or tries to use a Service before thinking about what reasonable adjustments they could make. Instead they should continually be anticipating the requirements of disabled people or students and the adjustments they could be making for them (to):**

- arranging study abroad or work placements
- placement finding services. (3.14)

**3.5 In some cases, responsible bodies may arrange for a third party to provide education, training or other related services for students on its behalf. This provision remains the responsibility of the responsible body, and so is covered by the Act.**

#### **Example 3.5D**

As part of an Art History course at a university in Great Britain, students spend a month in Italy on a programme run by an Italian university. It will be the British university's responsibility to ensure that the Italian university can provide access to a disabled student who uses a wheelchair.

**3.6 However, to the extent that the provision is not made by, nor made on behalf of, the responsible body, it is not covered.**

#### **Example 3.6A**

A disabled student undertakes a work placement in a local business. The placement tutor has worked with the student and the manager with whom the student will be working to prepare both parties for the placement, and set up the necessary support. This is part of the institution's duty under the Act. However, the placement is not provided by the institution, and the local business is not under any contract with the institution. Because the student is not employed by the business he is not covered by Part 2 of the Act (employment). Any treatment that the disabled student receives on the placement is not covered by Part 4 of the Act because it is not made by or on behalf of the institution. (original emphasis)

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### ► What the SENDA Code of Practice requires

#### Example 3.6C

A university has a partnership arrangement with a college overseas. The university awards the qualification, but does not provide the teaching or any services; the overseas college provides these. The university is not responsible for any treatment that the student receives from college staff *because it is not made by or on behalf of the university.* (original emphasis)

#### Example 3.6D

Another university has a partnership arrangement with a college overseas. The university supplies the teaching on the course using its own staff. The university is responsible for ensuring that students are not discriminated against in relation to the teaching they receive *because this is provided by the university.* (original emphasis)

### **3.7 Even if an initial discriminatory act is not carried out by the responsible body, a responsible body may retain responsibility under the Act for preventing the discrimination continuing or recurring.**

#### Example 3.7A

A disabled student is being harassed by permanent staff members in the office where he is on work placement. The harassment is because of his disability. The placement tutor finds this out when talking to the student as part of his monitoring of the placement. The institution is responsible for preventing the discrimination continuing or recurring. In this case, the tutor might talk to the office manager, who agrees to take appropriate action to make sure this does not happen again.

#### Example 3.7B

Students on a language course spend two months studying at a partner institution in Europe. Despite the work that the British institution has done with the European institution to explain the needs of disabled students on the programme, disabled students continue to complain that they have been discriminated against during their stay. The British institution is responsible for preventing the discrimination continuing or recurring. In this case, the British institution might decide to sever its links with that institution, and find an alternative partner.

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### ● **What the QAA Code of Practice for Students with Disabilities recommends**

#### **Precept 11**

Institutions should ensure that wherever possible disabled students have access to academic and vocational placements including field trips and study abroad.

Where placements, including international placements, are a formal requirement or standard component of the programme institutions should consider ways of ensuring that the specified learning opportunities are available to disabled students.

Where a placement is an optional but desirable element of the programme, institutions should consider making similar arrangements to support access for disabled students.

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### What students say about current practice

#### **Tariq - Business - visual impairment**

Getting a quality work placement in a good advertising company was a tough nut to crack for my department. I know my tutor had to do a lot of negotiating with the company but we had an early three-way meeting where a lot of big issues got aired. I hadn't really realised just how much time was going to be involved in making sure that the technology I needed was available and compatible with the packages used in the company.

#### **Rob - Education - hidden disabilities**

I had a meeting with the programme leader and we jointly agreed on a "shadowing" strategy for me. One of the full-time teachers agreed to just keep a quiet eye on things and give me some support if I needed it.

#### **Meena - Technology - hard of hearing**

I kept in regular contact with my placement advisor and he did trouble-shoot a couple of tricky moments for me. At one time I felt I was being harassed because of being disabled and I know he spoke to the supervisor on my behalf. The situation did improve quite quickly and overall it was a good experience.

#### **Paula - Arts and Humanities - physical disability**

To be honest my placement was a disappointment to me. I really wanted to work with disadvantaged adolescents but my placement supervisor pushed all the time for me to work with disabled people. I really don't see myself as that disabled, despite the wheelchair, and I felt that she had a stereotyped idea of what I could do and who would give me a work placement experience.

#### **Karen - Modern Languages - cerebral palsy**

I spent a year at a Paris university which was quite successful thanks to some financial help that I got from the EU's Socrates-Erasmus Programme. It recognised that I had special needs and that it would cost me more money to study abroad than other students. I wouldn't have known about it except that my placement tutor was really switched on.

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### \* What staff say about current practice

- Undoubtedly the most complex element of the discussion and negotiation about arranging a placement for my first visually impaired student, was trying to establish what he could realistically achieve, what the employer could provide and our role in maintaining a system of monitoring. I think we probably underestimated the student, didn't fully recognise the ramifications beyond the obvious health and safety ones and didn't give sufficient attention to the amount of resource required within the department to continuously monitor things.
- At the outset our difficulty as a department was envisaging how the student was going to be supported throughout the term at an off site location. We organised a work placement support assessment through the disability service and that provided us with solutions for technology but also an enabler funded through the Disabled Students Allowance.
- Liaising regularly and well in advance with colleagues at the university in Barcelona was absolutely fundamental to establishing a really workable support package. For a start, in Britain, we simply don't have the resource of volunteers that the Spanish university could so willingly supply. Knowing of its availability made a huge difference, especially in supporting the daily transport arrangements between the halls of residence and the campus proper.
- As a university we have started to review our placement practice in the context of disability. It is becoming obvious that some students with disabilities, where observed employment-based and/or professional practice is involved, would benefit from the involvement of a specialist supervisor. At the moment we are considering how best to provide this service to satisfy the competing needs of different faculties.

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### ◆ Checklist

#### Course development and policy

Has the course development team/programme management team considered the placement issue for disabled students at the course planning or review stage?

How has the disability focus been embedded in the policies and procedures governing areas such as:

- the institution's legal responsibility to make "reasonable adjustments" and prevent discrimination
- the approval and finding of placements
- health and safety
- collaborative and responsible arrangements with placement providers?

Are the staff who are responsible for student placement learning absolutely clear about the lines of responsibility for "reasonable adjustments" in host organisations?

**See the SENDA examples above.**

What training do staff members receive in order to be competent to arrange, approve and monitor placements for disabled students, to meet the learning outcomes and to comply with disability, and health and safety legislation, etc?

Are staff aware of the issues relating to positive communication?

➔ **Go to Appendix I: Positive communication.**

#### Making "reasonable adjustments"

Is there a need to adjust the learning outcomes or assessment methods employed in the placement learning to accommodate disabled students? If not, is it being built into the next course review?

➔ **Go to Assessment.**

What "reasonable adjustments" can be made to placement learning opportunities? Do they involve adaptations to the placement environment? What are the resource consequences and who will be responsible for meeting them?

What procedures have the institution for acquiring access audits of placement providers?

What written record of the "reasonable adjustments" will the student receive?

#### Action Comments

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Does the institutional publicity and marketing include an explanation of the placement learning arrangements, including the "reasonable adjustments", that can be made for disabled students?

Are all documents related to placement learning available in an accessible format?

➔ **Go to Preparing documents for printing, visual display and electronic dissemination.**

#### **Disability disclosure**

Is there a supportive culture of disclosure for disabled students? Does it include an opportunity for students to declare disability prior to placement?

Does the disability disclosure procedure contain a clear policy of confidentiality and dissemination targeting placement issues?

What is the procedure for managing harassment and discrimination in the placement environment?

#### **Admissions and placement learning**

What are the procedures for departmental staff, with responsibilities for placements, to inform admissions tutors of the demands of the placement and the likely impact on disabled students?

During the admissions process, what is the framework for discussing the placement learning opportunity in a disability context, e.g., information interviews involving the disability officer?

#### **Transparent procedures for placements**

Are there written guidelines and agreements for students and placement providers clearly indicating:

- respective roles and responsibilities including on placement support provision
- health and safety aspects, e.g., for students with sensory impairments, physical disability, on medication, etc.
- (for overseas placements) socially and culturally specific disability information
- procedures for the termination of a placement, e.g., in the circumstance of discrimination
- the continuing support provided by the institution?

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Having obtained student consent, is there a named person at the placement who is fully briefed on the student's disability and needs, and on the procedures to ensure that students will receive induction into health and safety issues?

In matching students to placement opportunities, what criteria have been employed? For example, have the student's skills acquired as a result of being disabled been considered in a positive light?

#### **Arranging support**

Do students receive timely and correct information regarding the funding support available through the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and Access to Work Funding? Who is responsible for this?

Does the student require a support needs assessment or workplace assessment prior to the commencement of the learning placement? Who is responsible for organising this and who will provide the assessment?

If the placement is not a sandwich year arrangement, has the DSA been accessed for a placement assessment for assistive technologies, non-medical helper support and additional travel costs (above those incurred by a non-disabled student for travel)?

If the placement is a sandwich year has Access to Work funding been accessed at the earliest opportunity? Has it been considered for financing support at an interview, an holistic work placement assessment, the provision of assistive technologies, a support worker and additional travel costs?

Disabled students may need specialist on-going guidance on long, industrial or international placements. Who holds the specialist knowledge?

Does the framework for organising quality placements for students allow for the possibility that considerable amounts of additional time may be needed?

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### ◆ Checklist

### Action Comments

#### Monitoring and student evaluation

Does the faculty/school/department operate a system of monitoring and evaluating placement learning opportunities for disabled students, which includes student and placement provider feedback? Does this include procedures for recording and responding to complaints?

Are the conclusions drawn from evaluation and monitoring fed into the system of strategic planning, course development and review?

#### Alternatives to placement learning

If necessary does the department have the flexibility to provide an alternative experience that will meet the learning objectives of the course, or should the student be advised to make an alternative course choice?

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### + Additional sources of information

**Providing Work Placements for Disabled Students. A good practice guide for further and higher education institutions,** (2002), Department for Education and Skills.

**Trans-European Access and Mobility for People with Disabilities (TEAM).**

**A Guidance Resource for Higher Education Study and Graduate Level Employment,** (2000), (Eds.) Judith Waterfield & Bob West, University of Plymouth, Plymouth.

#### **The Employers' Forum on Disability**

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London  
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#### **Workable**

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