



Work related learning Focus:

**Ulster University**

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# 1. Foreword

Welcome to a series of three focus pieces on placement provision. These have all been commissioned through a wider piece of consultancy work undertaken with Nottingham Trent University and include a perspective on placements by Nottingham Trent University, Ulster University and Leeds Trinity University. We express our thanks and gratitude to all three universities who have openly engaged in the review of their provision and for their desire to share this with the wider sector.

In this first piece, Ulster University, as a provider with a clear focus on placements, provides a case study that will be of interest across the HE sector. In this foreword we wish to emphasise the importance of embedding approaches to work related learning that can enhance students' employability across the curriculum. It is apparent that Ulster University place employability and placements firmly within the boundaries of learning and teaching. This approach exemplifies the importance placed on work related opportunities and ensures that, as much as possible, placement provision is embedded within courses as opposed to being seen as separate or in addition to the curriculum.

This approach is advantageous, as by embedding work related learning opportunities it ensures they are seen as important by both the academic and student body. Further, by ensuring each experience is linked through to learning outcomes and assessment, this approach allows students not only to develop the necessary qualities, values, behaviours and skills gained through work related learning activities - but also to foster academic learning through reflection, analysis and critical evaluation.

Increasing graduate employment prospects, through enhancing and embedding employability as an essential component of learning and teaching, ensures that both students and staff are engaged. This is significant in the age of increased fees, increased loans and increased competition amongst graduates for employment.

We extend our thanks to Ulster University for their willingness to engage in this piece of work and their openness to share their approach wider within the sector. Their method of ensuring every full-time undergraduate student has a compulsory and assessed work experience element as part of their course provides a valuable benchmark for institutions to consider.



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## 2. Key Features

### Key Features of the Ulster University Work Based Placement Learning Model

- The term *Work Based Placement Learning* (WBPL) is used to capture any form of work based learning that enhances Ulster University students' employability and personal development.
- Ulster University has a strong tradition of sandwich placements and integrated professional practice. 40% of Ulster undergraduates undertake a sandwich placement and this is available on 83 courses.
- The approximate number of students undertaking year-long sandwich placements and integrated professional practice placements during 2015/16 was 2000 (1627 of these were sandwich placements).
- The development of WBPL is central to the University's 'Five and Fifty' strategic plan and underpins its Learning and Teaching Strategy. It aims to provide all Ulster University students with WBPL opportunities in a wide variety of settings in the UK and internationally.
- From 2015, the university required all full-time undergraduate students to undertake a compulsory and assessed period of work experience.
- Placement provision, preparation, monitoring and review is the responsibility of each Faculty and within this the Schools of study. The Careers and Employability team provide support to Schools of study for WBPL and to enhance students' employability.
- Schools of study are required to produce annual career development plans which outline support within courses for WBPL.
- There are 112 programmes with named placement tutors but some tutors are responsible for more than one programme. There are 64 placement tutors responsible for sandwich placements, others organise and co-ordinate managed placements in allied health disciplines and social work.
- A flexible approach is applied to WBPL to utilise the expertise and networks already in place in Schools of study, to meet the diverse needs of students, courses and employers and to encourage innovative practice.
- Students undertaking placement gain an additional level 5 undergraduate qualification that is worth 60 credits.
- The Careers and Employability team have created a suite of modules at level 4 to bring accreditation to part-time work experience and vacation internships and students can also access an open Work Experience Skills Builder module.
- All Faculties have an Employability Committee which reports to the University Subcommittee for Employability.
- Placement preparation is embedded within courses and academic staff work in partnership with the Careers and Employability team to deliver this.

- > The Careers and Employability team manage the *Recruit* placement management system which is used to advertise, apply for and track WBPL opportunities and applications.

### 3. Context

Ulster University was founded in 1984 but its roots go back to the establishment of Magee College in Derry-Londonderry in 1845 and the School of Art and Design in Belfast in 1849. It is located in Northern Ireland and operates across four campuses; Belfast, Jordanstown, Coleraine and Magee. It also has London and Birmingham campuses. It aims to offer a student experience that equips its graduates with the skills, knowledge, confidence and connections to achieve their career ambitions.

An extensive range of courses are offered at undergraduate and postgraduate level and by full-time and part-time study. 451 undergraduate courses are offered. With over 25,000 students (71% undergraduate level), and 5,000 students studying for Ulster-accredited qualifications at other institutions or via distance learning, Ulster University is one the larger universities in the UK and is the largest in Ireland.

The university is currently structured into six Faculties each of which includes a number of Academic Schools of study, Graduate Schools and Research Institutes. Under a new structure which will be introduced in 2017/18, it will move from six to four Faculties and disciplines will be realigned into: Art, Humanities & Social Sciences , Computing, Engineering and Built Environment , Life and Health Sciences and Ulster University Business School.

**Faculty of Arts:** includes Schools of Creative Arts & Technology, English and History, Irish Language and Literature, Media, Film and Journalism and Arts & Humanities Research, Centre for Media Research and Irish and Celtic Research Institute.

**Faculty of Art, Design & the Built Environment:** includes Schools of Architecture, Art, Built Environment and the Research Institute.

**Faculty of Computing and Engineering:** includes Schools of Computing and Information Engineering, Computing and Intelligent Systems, Computing and Mathematics, Engineering and the Research Graduate School, Computer Science Research Institute, and Nanotechnology & Advanced Materials Research Institute.

**Faculty of Life and Health Sciences:** includes Schools of Biomedical Sciences, Geography & Environmental Sciences, Health Sciences, Nursing, Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences, Psychology, Sport and the Research Graduate School.

**Faculty of Social Sciences:** includes Schools of Communication, Criminology, Politics & Social Policy, Education, Law, Sociology & Applied Social studies, Graduate School of Professional Legal Education and Research Graduate School.

**Ulster University Business School:** over 6000 students and approximately 140 academic staff and is one of the largest business Schools in Britain and Ireland. It includes a range of Academic Departments and Research Institutes: Departments of Hospitality & Tourism Management, International Business, Management & Leadership, Marketing,

Entrepreneurship & Strategy, Accounting, Finance & Economics, The Business Institute, Graduate Research Centre and Business & Management Research Institute.

Ulster University is listed in the top 150 universities under 50 years old (Times Higher 2015) and is one of the world's top 200 most outward looking universities (Times Higher 2016). It is a cosmopolitan university attracting students from the EU and overseas and has an alumni network of over 160,000 alumni across 148 countries worldwide. Its students are also amongst the most satisfied in the UK according to the National Student Survey (NSS).

As Northern Ireland's civic university it has strong engagement with the local community but also has strong alliances with partners globally. In committing to providing students with the necessary experience, knowledge and skills that will support their graduate career and the local economy, the university places a strong focus on working with employers to understand the skills and attributes they require.

Ulster University aims to develop confident, adaptable, independent graduates who are inspired to continue learning and who have the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to make successful transitions, achieve graduate employment and cope with challenge and change. (Over 92% of Ulster University graduates have gone into work or further study within six months of graduating). As a result, many courses include a sandwich placement option and align course content to the requirements of professional bodies. 40% of Ulster undergraduates undertake a sandwich placement and this is available on 83 courses.

The university also offers 37 study abroad or student exchange partnerships. 224 students are registered to participate in projects in a variety of countries and during 2015/16, 103 students undertook ERASMUS+ traineeships where they accessed work placement opportunities.

Students can also gain official recognition for their placement and be awarded a further qualification in addition to their degree;

- > ***The Diploma in Professional Practice (DPP)*** is a level 5 undergraduate qualification worth 60 credits and is awarded for successful completion of a year in employment and the academic assessment/project.
- > ***The Diploma in Professional Practice International (DPP international)*** is a level 5 undergraduate qualification worth 60 credit points and is awarded for successful completion of a work placement overseas and the academic assessment/project.
- > ***The Diploma in International Academic Studies (DIAS)*** is a level 5 undergraduate qualification worth 120 credit points and is awarded for successful completion of a year studying abroad (usually year three of degree)

In 2015, Ulster University made WBPL an assessed and compulsory part of every full-time undergraduate course. (See section below).

## 4. Employability and Work Based Placement Learning

The vision and mission of Ulster University is as Northern Ireland's civic university and is outlined in the 'Five and Fifty' strategic plan and vision (2016-2034). More broadly, the vision is expressed in an ambition to:

- > Encourage a diverse university community
- > Transform lives, stretch minds, develop skills and raise ambitions
- > Make a lasting contribution to society as a whole
- > Deliver globally significant research with local relevance.

For Ulster University progressing as a modern civic university means widening access and participation remains the keystone of re-vitalised values and is at the core of civic contribution.

Ulster University Learning and Teaching Strategy (to 2018) sets out its aims 'to provide opportunities which are flexible, responsive to and inclusive of the needs of students, professions, industry and the wider community' and 'to enhance Ulster's role as a sector leader for student employability as an integral part of the wider student experience'. The University has a strong reputation in Work Based Placement Learning (WBPL) and is recognised locally and nationally for its high quality professional and vocational education. The development and promotion of WBPL is central to its corporate plan and underpins the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Previously, Careers and Employability support was part of Professional Services but it was moved into Learning and Teaching (as part of the Employability and Marketing Department) which emphasised its relevance and transformed academics views of careers and employability as being central to the student experience and learning and teaching.

The Ulster University 2008-13 Learning and Teaching strategy emphasised professional education for professional life and, as part of this, employability was a strategic aim. The 2014-18 strategy was broadened to integrate employability more widely with student experience and to promote The Student Journey. Employability is a key priority in the learning and teaching strategy. Objectives for improved employability outcomes are reflected in this. Employability became - and is - an institution wide responsibility and a central objective which everyone has responsibility for.

Employability is embedded in course design and assessment and WBPL is an integral part of this. Students can choose from a suite of accredited employability modules. Where these are not delivered as part of their course, they can choose to study them on each campus as open modules. These count as an EDGE activity towards the EDGE award which is the Ulster University Employability Award. This also appears on the students' Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). The modules aim to support students to articulate the skills they can offer employers and support them in preparing for placement and graduate opportunities.

The Careers and Employability team support academic staff to map WBPL provision against a framework for employability using the Employability Development Opportunities Review Toolkit (EDORT). Courses produce annual career development plans (in conjunction with the Careers and Employability team) which also show the embedded and accredited employability modules and placement learning.

Students are made aware of employability (and as part of this WBPL) before they come into the University through marketing material and as part of their year 1 induction. The Student Employability Journey initiative also captures an aspect of learning gain and allows students' development to be monitored and their support needs identified and addressed. Now in year 2, the information is fed back to the course teams to help them target curriculum interventions that support student employability.

The Employability Sub-Committee reports to the University Learning and Teaching Committee. All Deans have to provide evidence to the committee that employability is embedded and that placement learning is in place for all students.

## 5. Work Based Placement Learning Model

There is a strong tradition of sandwich placements and integrated professional practice at Ulster University. 40% of students access a sandwich placement and this option is available on 83 courses. The term work based placement learning (WBPL) is used at Ulster University to encapsulate any form of work based learning that enhances students' employability.

The Northern Ireland 2020 strategy expects all HE students in Northern Ireland to have the opportunity for work experience. Ulster University decided to make this an assessed, accredited and compulsory part of every full-time undergraduate course from 2015. All existing courses had to identify where it was happening and opportunities for developing this. New courses and those going through revalidation have to show how they address this.

It was initially challenging for courses to have to consider other types of work experience. *"One of the issues was getting people to think beyond sandwich placement"* However, many have developed innovative practice that others have now taken and adapted. WBPL can be long/short placements, voluntary experience, part time experience, self-employment projects, community projects, etc. Student reflection on their experience and learning is integral to all WBPL modules.

Flexibility in delivery of WBPL is important to meet the diverse needs of all stakeholders and to acknowledge and utilise good practice already in place in Schools of study.

Responsibility for WBPL lies with the Faculty and its Schools of study with support from the Careers and Employability team. However, collaboration and working in partnership is regarded as the key to achieving assessed and accredited placement learning for all undergraduate students. Driven by the Faculty, they work with the Careers and Employability team to develop the approaches that work for their course, students' and employers.

If a sandwich placement is integrated it will be structured for year 3 and will be 12 months in length. Professional placements also have set periods of work experience and set times. For other forms of WBPL, the approach and model is up to the School/course. It could take the form of 1 day per week, a short block, could be in year 1 or 2 or both. It could involve working on specific projects (as a consultant) for an employer. Flexibility re approaches is encouraged in order to meet needs of all stakeholders (students, staff, employers). The university has also recognised that employers are more responsive about offering opportunities if there is flexibility in approach.

The Careers and Employability team supports course teams in developing other forms of assessed and accredited WBPL. They have also created a suite of modules at level 4 to bring accreditation to part-time work experience and vacation internships. Students can also access a work experience skills builder module managed by the Careers and

Employability team. It is accredited and assessment includes: reflection (written piece), development and presentation of a poster and evidence of skills development.

## Examples of Work Based Placement Learning (WBPL) at Ulster University

The term *work based placement learning (WBPL)* is used at Ulster University to encapsulate a range of opportunities that enable Ulster students to enhance their employability, including: work shadowing, internships, placements, clinical or professional practice, summer/vacation placements, voluntary work, live projects, international programmes and accredited short-term or part-time employment.

**Year-long sandwich placement:** usually integrated into the degree and completed during third year with an approved placement provider, where the work placement is relevant to studies. If successful, the *Diploma in Professional Practice (DPP)* is awarded upon graduation. 40% of Ulster University students undertake a sandwich placement.

**Clinical placement/Practice Education/Practice Learning:** students studying for professionally accredited health, social or teaching profession qualifications undertake work-based learning, which is managed as a compulsory part of the programme of study providing relevant, realistic and quality-assured learning opportunities. Students undertake and demonstrate competence for practice in a number of different field settings or placements. School staff liaise with employers and other agencies to set up placements. There is increasing opportunity for students to arrange their own placement if approved by the Faculty/School of study.

**International experiences (Study and Work):** there are a number of options to study abroad as part of, or in addition to, a programme of study. This is often undertaken at a partner academic institution overseas as an element of a language or business-related degree. If successfully completing a period of study overseas lasting 2 semesters, the *Diploma in International Academic Studies (DIAS)* is awarded upon graduation. International study experiences can be combined with a period of work experience, often supported through Erasmus+ in Europe.

**Overseas year-long placement opportunities:** Ulster University students can access a number of opportunities sourced through their Faculty contacts, Employability or external and personal networks. The placement must be approved and if the experience is part of a programme of study, it must be approved by a placement tutor or course director. If successful, the *Diploma in Professional Practice International (DPP(I))* for placement abroad is awarded upon graduation.

**ERASMUS+ traineeships:** during 2015/16, 103 students also undertook Erasmus+ traineeships where they accessed work placement opportunities.

**Undergraduate Internships:** usually a period of work experience undertaken as a summer placement. In recognition of the importance of students undertaking work-related learning, flexible placement models were developed to provide more choice for students resulting in the accredited summer Internships. If successfully completed, students can achieve the *Employability through Work Experience module*.

**Work Experience Skills Builder:** managed by the Careers and Employability team, this is an open module that assesses and accredits part time work experience. Around 200 students undertake this module each year and they can use it as evidence for the *Ulster EDGE Award*.

**Ulster University Science Shop:** pairs students with community groups in need of specific knowledge and expertise. Completed as coursework, these are real world projects which enable students to actively engage in their learning and apply it in wider world settings, in 2015, 812 undergraduate and postgraduate students completed 265 projects for 145 Science Shop community partners.

**Tutoring in Schools projects:** 401 students experienced these real-world projects which enhanced their employability.

**Santander student and graduate Internships: internships with SMEs:** 10-week internship

**Postgraduates:** some courses have integrated placements e.g. the Masters in Management includes a 13 week internship and the Masters in Finance an integrated 6 month placement.

**Graduates:** can access a *professional experience programme* – managed jointly by the Careers and Employability team and Access Digital & Distributed Learning which provides 6 months full time work based experience and attracts a bursary part-funded by both the University and employer. The graduate receives £6,000 and this is funded jointly by the University and the employer. This has been running for 7 years and accommodates 30 graduates a year.

## 6. Resource for Work Based Placement Learning (WBPL)

Ulster University has had a 24% cut in funding as an institution over the last couple of years, which equates to £1,500-1,800 per student less each year. The view is that to be effective and efficient, they need to effectively utilise the expertise, systems and networks available, work collaboratively and use the limited resource strategically to add value to or invest in areas that need it. Using a partnership approach (internally and with alumni and employers) is regarded as crucial in maximising the effectiveness of the resource available and also in engaging students with WBPL.

### *Faculties and Schools of study*

Staffing resource for placement provision and support is the responsibility of each School of study and will depend on the nature of the course, number of students etc. Different and innovative approaches are employed by each to meet the needs of the students', course and employers.

There are placement coordinators and tutors in all Schools of study. Where courses have an integrated sandwich placement there may be a full time specific role depending on size of course. In some cases there will be a team consisting of; employability coordinator (academic), placement tutor (academic) and placement coordinator. For example, in the Business School where there are 6,000 students across 6 departments, there are 14 placement tutors.

There are 112 programmes with named placement tutors but some tutors are responsible for more than one programme. There are 64 placement tutors responsible for sandwich placements, others organise and co-ordinate managed placements in allied health disciplines and social work.

All students on sandwich and professional placements will be visited by an academic member of staff. This is very resource intensive so it may be conducted on a group basis. However, this is a crucial part of the placement process to support both the student and the employer engagement.

Students on short and other forms of work experience would be monitored via the central placement management system - *Recruit* – which is managed by the Careers and Employability team. (See section on Sourcing and advertising WBPL opportunities).

Placement preparation is embedded as part of employability in every course. The focus is on students' personal development and lifelong learning; encouraging student ownership is important. All Schools of study have Employability Committees that include placement tutors and staff from the Careers and Employability team as appropriate (Work Experience Manager, Career Development Consultant, Employability Manager etc.).

### *Careers and Employability team*

The Careers and Employability team sits within the Employability and Marketing Department which has a staff of 39, this includes; a Director, a PA to the Director, 23 posts within the Careers and Employability team and 14 posts within the Marketing and Recruitment team.

The Careers and Employability team provides careers and employability support, information and guidance to students through online resources and a career development centre on each campus. They develop networks with employers, coordinate a range of career and employer events, and manage the placement management system *Recruit* and the *Professional and Career Enhancement system (PACE)* which supports the recording of students' personal development activity.

They support Schools of study to develop, deliver and evaluate employability provision. A Career Development Consultant is linked to each Faculty to support the Schools of study to embed and deliver career development modules. Partnership agreements are in place between the Careers and Employability team and each School of study and these are used to agree support, set objectives and monitor progress. In addition, they use the *Employability Development Opportunities Review Toolkit (EDORT)* to support Schools of study to review the employability development opportunities available to their students.

The team offers a number of flexible and accredited employability and placement learning modules that can be delivered within programmes of study or as part of an open seminar series; these will also appear on students' Higher Education Achievement Report and count towards the EDGE award - the University's employability award. They also accredit part-time work experience and vacation internships, offer accredited CPPD modules and manage the *student journey* website and reports.

In addition, the Careers and Employability team manage the Staff Employability portal. This allows academic and support staff to access key resources, advice and data relating to student employability.

### *Work Experience Team*

The team is part of Careers and Employability and consists of two Work Experience Managers and one Executive Assistant. Previously the roles were linked to employer engagement, specifically SMEs, but were reshaped as a result of a change in strategy re WBPL.

The team provides consultancy and advisory support as regards WBPL to Schools of study which involves working with academic colleagues, Career Development Consultants and contributing to Faculty committees and relevant university groups. They also develop a range of resources to support the development and delivery of WBPL, including guidance and guidelines on health and safety, and guidance for Faculties on developing work

experience opportunities and assessed modules. They have recently developed *Guiding Principles for Work Experience*, a resource for academic staff.

As they work across Faculties and within Schools of study, the team is in the unique position of having an overview of a range of courses so they can also share and disseminate best practice/approaches. They also work closely with employers to inform WBPL provision. Their role is not to source opportunities but to ensure that WBPL modules and opportunities are flexible in approach to meet all stakeholders' needs i.e. they may advise School Placement Coordinators on the type of placement that would suit a specific employer. This may be organising it for one day per week rather than as a block placement.

### *Employer Engagement*

The University collaborates with businesses across all sectors to provide WBPL for its students. As well as offering a range of placement experiences (sandwich, short, internships), employers are also involved in providing live projects, inputs to courses, contributing to events, supporting committees, providing presentations etc.

The SME Centre at the Ulster University Business School work with many small to medium-sized businesses, providing them with access to: support, consultancy, expertise, events, networking and engaging them with students - and their knowledge and skills - through placements, graduate internships sponsorships and full-time recruitment.

Placement partnerships are celebrated annually at the *Placement Employer of the Year Awards*, which recognises the dedication of local businesses, across all sectors, for providing students with the skills that allow them to apply their academic knowledge to real-life practice.

### *Funding*

Fees for a placement year, and a study abroad year, are £2,005 (2015/16). *The Ulster University Student Fund* supports students in a range of activities, by encouraging and rewarding excellence. It provides financial assistance as well as subsidising students with entrepreneurial ideas. *Santander Universities* offers a range of awards, scholarships and other forms of support for Ulster University students. Support includes mobility scholarships, internships and entrepreneurship funding.

A new Fund for *International Travel (FIT)* has been established to provide funding to students from a widening access background. The primary aim of this fund is to enable students from this background to access international experiences. This will be jointly managed by the International Department and the Careers and Employability team.

## 7. Placement Process

Information on employability, placement learning and support for this is provided prior to students coming to Ulster University, through open days/events, course information, prospectuses, university website etc. All students receive information as part of their induction and employability is embedded in courses from day one. Placement Tutors provide opportunities for the new cohort to learn from the experiences of the previous cohort of students and placement providers through pre-placement classes. Placement learning is embedded in courses but the type of experience and timing varies.

### Placement Preparation

The Placement Coordinators and Tutors review feedback from previous placement preparation and make any changes. They provide students with WBPL resources and emphasise benefits of WBPL in enhancing employability. They update and circulate placement preparation handbooks and provide guidance on sourcing, securing and learning from WBPL opportunities.

They are responsible for advertising opportunities - in conjunction with the Careers and Employability team - to the students and ensuring that these meet legal and statutory requirements. They provide guidelines and guidance (for students and providers) regarding the scope and length of WBPL, expectations, assessment method and what is required to meet the learning outcomes for accreditation. They coordinate procedures for contact with students and placement providers, for managing issues and for recording actions and outcomes. They oversee record keeping and ensure that visiting tutors are prepared for their role.

Example of areas addressed during placement preparation sessions (usually timetabled):

- > Range of work placement/experience opportunities
- > Development of career management and transferable skills including verbal and written communication skills, writing reports, interviewing skills and completing a CV
- > Professional issues and expanding student awareness of the value of work experience
- > Raising awareness of the skills, qualities and abilities employers seek in potential employees
- > The opportunity to meet and interact with employers and post-placement students
- > Assessment criteria
- > Health and safety arrangements and relevant legislation
- > Roles and responsibilities, and expectations

### During Placement

The Placement Coordinators provide students with relevant handbooks and ensure that assessment strategies are in place to support the learning process. They coordinate Visiting Tutors and all contact and support arrangements. During the placement, they address any issues or concerns; encourage students to share their learning via online

discussion and co-ordinate evaluation and feedback. They support the student to return to study and encourage them to write testimonials of their experience to facilitate pre-placement peer assisted learning.

## **Post Placement**

The Placement Coordinator and Tutors ensure processes for marking, moderation and external examination and co-ordinate evaluation and feedback processes. They analyse feedback and review findings to inform practice and provide opportunities for students to meet placement students as part of their pre-placement preparation. They also monitor and evaluate the WBPL and liaise with employers about the next intake of students, opportunities and their availability to provide additional support (talks to students, live projects, events, employers' advisory group etc.).

## 8. Sourcing and Advertising WBPL Opportunities

### Placements Found by Students

The student liaises with their Placement Tutor and/or staff from the Careers and Employability team to ensure that the opportunity is recorded, complies with guidelines and to arrange for necessary checks and administration to be addressed. Only a small number of students source their own opportunities. However, the University is keen to encourage students to take responsibility for developing their own networks and opportunities and to be self-directed. However, it is recognised that many lack the confidence to do this, so this is being addressed through employability provision and support.

### Placement Coordinators and Tutors

They liaise with the Careers and Employability team regarding WBPL opportunities. All employers and vacancies must be approved prior to it being added to Recruit, the placement management system.

### Recruit Placement Management System

The Careers and Employability team manage this central system for registering, advertising and applying for sandwich placements, WBPL opportunities, graduate vacancies, voluntary opportunities and internships. It also records students' assessment regarding placement learning. Employers can directly advertise their vacancies onto Recruit, receive applications and select students for interview. However opportunities will not go live on the system until the employer and vacancy has been approved by the Careers and Employability team. Placement Tutors can also add vacancies directly but the same process applies.

Some of the professionally accredited programmes use other systems to manage placements. For example, nursing uses InPlace to coordinate professional practice. Although some courses are still using their own system, most are gradually moving to the central system. All sandwich placements are now advertised via Recruit. All Schools of study are expected to use it to advertise all their WBPL opportunities, but one or two are still in a transition phase from their own systems. Courses can specify whether a vacancy is only suitable for students from a particular discipline. Students can also access Faculty specific resources, edit their requirements e.g. job type and location, search for opportunities and track the progress of their applications.

Recruit facilitates communication between the placement provider and University (students, Placement Tutor and academic visitor) throughout the placement process. University staff can track progress of opportunities, view student applications and record students as being placed. Staff can also create student cohorts by course or module allowing them access to files, web sites and events uploaded for their use through the placement process.

The system allows the Careers and Employability team and School Placement Tutors to track students and target those who are not accessing opportunities or not being successful in achieving these. Students can also flag up issues when on placement for their tutor to pick up. Ulster University are also encouraging more students to consider placements overseas, so this online system will be helpful in quickly picking up on any issues that need to be addressed.

Recruit enables the collection of data on the number of students undertaking WBPL - what, where and length. One advantage is that all information is on one system which supports the development of reporting mechanisms to track students' engagement with work experience during their time at Ulster University. Placement staff briefings and training on the use of Recruit is delivered annually across all campuses.

## Assessment and Accreditation of WBPL

The University Sub-Committee for Employability worked for 2 years on developing assessment for WBPL. They debated whether it should focus on competence - something employers recognised. However, defining competence and levels of accreditation with this model proved difficult.

Ulster University currently has two approved models of assessment for sandwich placements:

- Model 1 is used for sandwich placements where 3 elements are assessed: project (50%), assessment by employer (20%) and assessment by visiting tutor (30%).
- Model 2 is a new approach which can be applied to any subject area and has 3 elements: academic assessment via a project (% marked), an employer report and a visiting tutor report. Assessment of the reports will be by competency. To pass the module, a student must pass both the academic and competency assessment.

For other forms of WBPL in the curriculum, assessment is built into modules. Credits and type of assessment will vary by the WBPL and by course. WBPL can vary from 200 hours equating to 20 credits to 600 hours equating to 60 credits. An example is the Quantity Surveying module level 5 placement, which involves: 48 hours of independent study, a placement of 528 hours, tutorials of 12 hours and lectures of 12 hours - equalling 600 hours (60 credits).

Students can also gain official recognition for their placement and be awarded a further qualification in addition to their degree:

- ***The Diploma in Professional Practice (DPP)*** is a level 5 undergraduate qualification worth 60 credits and awarded for successful completion of a year in employment and the academic assessment/project.
- ***The Diploma in Professional Practice International (DPP international)*** is a level 5 undergraduate qualification worth 60 credit points and is awarded for successful completion of a work placement overseas and the academic assessment/project.

> *The Diploma in International Academic Studies (DIAS)* is a level 5 undergraduate qualification worth 120 credit points and is awarded for successful completion of a year studying abroad (usually year three of a degree.)

The Careers and Employability team have created a suite of modules at level 4 to bring accreditation to part-time work experience and vacation internships and students can also access a Work Experience Skills Builder module. Assessment includes: reflection (written piece), development and presentation of a poster and evidence of skills development.

The EDGE Award, the University's employability award, is managed by the Careers and Employability team and encourages students to access extra-curricular experiences, provide evidence and reflect on their experiences and development. 400 students achieved it during 2015/16.

The Ulster University Placement Employee and Employer of the Year Awards are held annually to celebrate achievement and thank employers. They strengthen employer engagement and market the benefits of work based placement learning.

## 9. Evaluation

Ulster University is committed to achieving quality WBPL for all its stakeholders, and evaluation and review is an integral part of the process to inform policy and practice. This is a continuous activity supported by gathering feedback from all stakeholders and from the data provided by the Recruit placement management system.

Placement provision, preparation, monitoring, evaluation and review are the responsibility of the Faculty. Review of WBPL is undertaken at Faculty/School level to address labour market or programme concerns and successes. The School Placement Coordinators and Tutors ensure - as appropriate - academic processes for marking, moderation and external examination and co-ordinate evaluation and feedback. They monitor and evaluate the WBPL and disseminate findings from evaluations to inform policy and practice. All Deans have to provide evidence to the University Sub-Committee for Employability to show that employability is embedded and that placement learning is in place for all students.

At the University level, the Sub-Committee on Employability will review key points of strategy such as numbers of international placement, whether the trend for placement is moving towards optional. The revalidation process also reviews the model and application of WBPL within curricula.

The Employability Development Opportunities Review Toolkit (EDORT) and the annual career development plans are used to review WBPL. School Employability Committees also evaluate WBPL and report back to the University Sub-Committee for Employability.

The Student Employability Journey project surveys students as they come into Ulster University and throughout their journey to assess their development and to better identify when they need targeted support. Now in year 2, the information is fed back to the course teams to help them target curriculum interventions that support student employability.

This provides helpful evidence re the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as DLHE does not adequately convey the employability development of Ulster graduates, because many remain in the region where there are limited graduate opportunities.

## 10. Work Based Placement Learning: challenges

### Students Sourcing Opportunities

Ulster University is keen to support students to take ownership of this. They hope to increase students' confidence in developing networks and sourcing opportunities. There are no targets in place for this at moment.

### Sharing employer networks

Many courses have strong employer networks developed over years, so initially there was some reluctance from academic staff to share contacts through the Recruit system in case employers would be inundated with requests. However, this has not been an issue. Some are still reluctant to use the central system for recording opportunities meaning WBPL data will not be totally accurate.

### Engaging Students with WBPL

A high percentage of Ulster University students come from the local area and many are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finance, location, mobility, lack of confidence, lack of networks, perceived relevance (which is why placement learning is now embedded and assessed) raising awareness of and engaging students with employability remain a challenge.

The compulsory aspect of WBPL addresses some barriers to engagement and, by ensuring flexibility of approach, the University is accommodating students' needs. Mobility remains an issue. The university is keen to motivate students to go further afield in order to access a greater range of graduate opportunities. However, many lack the confidence to do this and remain in the local region where there is a lack of graduate level opportunities. This is being addressed through employability support and the expansion of flexible study opportunities overseas.

## 11. Work Based Placement Learning: future developments

- The university is keen to support student mobility and internationalisation.
- It is committed to ensuring that Ulster University graduates have the skills, qualities and attributes that employers want, and are using work-based learning provision to support this.
- Learning gain will be important because of TEF and will support the University in measuring the impact of employability provision and WBPL. This will also inform policy and practice.
- Engaging all academic staff with DLHE is also important as they need to analyse and use this data to inform strategies and approaches to WBPL within their courses.
- There will be a review of professional support services which may lead to reconfigured/ additional resources for employability and WBPL.

