

A Classification of the possible schemes for Practical Placement of Students

Student placements (SP) are specific training activities that have the main objective of exposing the student to a workplace experience in the field of the study programme to which the student is attached. SP is however a special learning activity since it takes place out of the usual learning environment and needs the collaboration of three actors: the University (U), the Enterprise (E) and the Student (S). In the regular cases, SP is a win-win-win (3W) situation, as follows:

- U has the possibility to plan and carry out a very effective training activity with a huge impact on the employability of its future graduates.
- E has the possibility to take a very early contact with potential HR for the future, participating actively at the training and having impact on the competence profile of the future graduates/employees, reducing thus the training-on-the-job needs.
- S has the opportunity to be involved in a real work exercise, usually paid, experiencing thus the contact with the real society and work conditions – an excellent social and learning experience.

In this complex context, the SP's are driven and could be initiated by any of the three actors and the real life shows numerous examples. The practice of Higher Education shows that, according to the driving actor (U, E or S), the SP process is slightly different. For the purpose of a survey on the SP organization models in Europe, the present document classifies the SP schemes according to the driving actor, as follows:

1. University driven
2. Enterprise driven
3. Student driven

1. University driven SP scheme (UDSP)

In the University driven SP scheme (UDSP), the University is initiating the process, in general as result of a specific requirement in the curriculum of the study programme.

a. University support (accompaniment, funding etc).

Because in most UDSP cases the SP is a compulsory part of the curriculum, the University provides always explicit resources (teacher accompaniment, enterprise contact and SP arrangements, sometimes some financial support, including for travel in trans-national SP etc).

b. Student duties

The student takes contact with the enterprise in the context of his/her usual duties, following an arrangement that has been already made between the U and E representatives.

c. Enterprise support (accompaniment, funding etc)

The enterprise is organizing the activity of the student during the SP period, according to a contract that is concluded with the university, which includes provisions for the activities that the student will carry out, supervising, assessment of the learning outcomes etc.

Sometimes the University organizes this activity by contacting a number of Enterprises and concluding framework contracts that establish the general rules and activities, with detailed annexes for each student or group of students concluded in each particular case.

The mediation for the U-E cooperation could be made by the teachers responsible for the practical placements or by a dedicated University structure (for example a Student Career Service unit inside or outside the University).

2. Enterprise driven SP scheme (EDSP)

In the EDSP scheme, the driver is the enterprise and there are two main motivations:

- The first is to enter into direct contact with students that have the potential to become future employees

- The second is to contribute to their training, such as at the time of recruiting, their company knowledge and internal culture be already at a certain level, reducing thus the need for further training, team building activities etc.

- a. University support (accompaniment, funding etc)

Usually the enterprise is in close contact with universities by means of a collaboration contract E-U. To select the students the company organizes sometimes job-shops at universities or asks for recommendations from the teachers. According to the size of the Enterprise, it may happen that a specific department is in charge with the SP organization.

- b. Student duties

The student is approached either the same manner as the future employee (within the job-shops or other advertisement) and during the SP time [s]he has to fulfill the tasks defined in a job description form. During the placement period the student acts like an employee of the enterprise.

- c. Enterprise support (accompaniment, funding etc)

The enterprise is organizing the entire activity of the student during the SP period.

Besides the possibility to learn more, the company offers students a labor contract for a determined period of time (this means they also receive a salary and meal tickets).

At the end of the contract, the responsible persons from the enterprise fills in an evaluation form with information about: the tasks that had to be solved by the candidate and the degree of completion, the obtained results, the candidate's personality, abilities and career perspectives. The evaluation form is then submitted to the U in order to be integrated in the mainstream assessment framework of the student learning outcomes.

3. Student driven scheme (SDSP)

A student driven practical placement situation is defined as a situation where the student is the main actor in all actions regarding the placement process. The student motivation is usually based on his/her interest in approaching already a company targeted for a future job and/or sometime even the material motivation (the salary they receive during the „summer job“). The SDPS scheme means in detail:

- a. University support (accompaniment, funding etc)

In case of non-compulsory placements, the university has no official duties. In case of compulsory placements, the placements have to be accepted by university and the quality has to be controlled by the university. The contract between enterprise and student involves as well the university with its signature. Furthermore, universities provide assistance (training courses, seminars) to the student to apply professionally for placements and jobs and supply information (e.g. online database with placement/job offers).

- b. Student duties

The student takes care of the student-enterprise contact (search for companies, placement offers, and writing of applications). Even in case of compulsory placements, he is the main actor (university does not “place/send” him to any selected enterprise) and should apply independently for a placements as he/she should train for future job applications. The student is not necessarily under compulsion to accept an offered placement, instead he can be interested on his own and applies independently from university. Students can select any placement anywhere inside the country or worldwide regarding their own interest.

- c. Enterprise support (accompaniment, funding etc)

In a student driven scheme the enterprise does not really play a role. The company only needs to publish placement offers somewhere, where the student is supposed to find them.