



Student Placements: A brief description of the situation in Portugal¹

Nelson Duarte, Porto Polytechnic

Ana Cristina Figueira, University of the Algarve

Student Placements (SP) in Portugal have been changing recently due to the adaptation that universities are promoting in order to meet Bologna Agreement requirements. In Portugal there are two systems of higher education: Universities and Polytechnics. Until the implementation of Bologna the main differences between these systems could be presented as follows:

University Degree: 5 years

Polytechnic Degree : 3 years (bachelor) + 2 years

On what regards SP it was not possible to identify differences between both systems. Some degrees had a compulsory placement within the 5 years, some others after the 5 years (for instance medicine or law). However not all the degrees contemplated a practical placement in their curricula. In some cases students finished their 3 or 5 years degree and they started their work without any practical placement. Some placements were required by companies supported by the Employment and Professional Formation Institute (*Instituto para o Emprego e Formação Profissional – IEFP*). This Institute is on the dependence of the Ministry of Social Security and Work. Among many other goals this institute promotes placements for people looking for the 1st job. This is another possible classification scheme for practical placements or it can fit on the enterprise driven scheme, since it should be required from enterprises and it gives some tax benefits for companies.

Nowadays, under Bologna Agreement, most of the degrees present a three years program. In some Universities it is possible to obtain a 5 years degree that is designated as ‘integrated cycles’, since in 5 years students can get a Bachelor and a Masters Degree. As some “non-supporters” of Bologna Agreement argue, the result of this process (degrees from 5 to 3 years) resulted in a concentration of subjects and those considered ‘not as relevant’ were removed. In many situations among the ‘not as relevant’ was the SP. On a 3 years degree (that used to last for 5, initially) it was difficult to include student’s placements as a compulsory subject. In most cases, Universities and Polytechnics are using the three years program for theoretical instruction, without an industry/enterprise placement.

¹ This is a non-official document based on author’s opinion. In order to present a real description of placements in Portugal it would be necessary to develop some research projects to get the real picture of student placements.



In some areas of knowledge, with a stronger theoretical basis, such as management, within the 3 years program there are some courses of simulation, where students are submitted to problems, that can be real or not and they have to solve them as if they were on a real placement. These courses usually take place during the last year of studies and they represent a significant percentage of the ECTS credits for that year, which means that these courses are perceived as important, since they are somehow replacing the practical placement of students.

In some other more technical areas such as, engineering there are professional associations that besides some curriculum contents require a practical placement supervised by one of their own associates. Only after that placement, the candidates that do already have their engineering degree can be a member of that association. These placements may be defined as “professional associations driven SP scheme”.

However, this subject of professional associations may suffer some changes soon, regarding the role they are playing on placements and curriculum organization. In 2007 the Portuguese Government created the Agency of Evaluation and Accreditation for the Quality on the High Education System (Decree-Law 369/2007) that will be the main organization to evaluate higher education degrees and institutions. According to this Law only the Agency can give accreditation for professional effects, which will represent a change on professions such as engineering, law, accountancy, medicine, among others regulated nowadays by professional associations.

Considering the recent changes that are occurring in Portugal, it can be said that it is not possible to define a clear SP scheme for Portugal. Besides University, Companies or Student driven schemes it is possible to find other types of schemes. However some changes are expected on higher education organization, including placements and professional associations' accreditation with the Agency of Evaluation, which is expected to start their functions within a short period of time. **Even recognizing the existence of specific requirements for placements in different areas, maybe with the new Agency and with the definition of some guidelines, SP will become more generalized and with rules or guidelines defined by one only institution that is the Agency of Evaluation and Accreditation for the Quality on the High Education System.** (não consegui entender...)