

Situation description on practical placements in SPAIN

Author

Universidad del Pais Vasco: Carlos Ochoa Laburu

The first issue to be addressed has to do with the obligation to do a Practical Placement in an Entity external to the university, the duration of this placement and the type of entity in which this placement should take place. All of these items depend on which is the type of studies that we are considering

There are some studies like Health Sciences (Medicine, Nursing), or Educational Studies in which the Practical Placements are compulsory and scheduled and credited in the Program of Studies. The type of institutions in which these Practical Placements should take place are also well defined (primary, secondary or tertiary education schools, Hospitals, Health institutions, etc.). These type of placements are usually the issue of general agreements at national (and/or Autonomous Community) level between Ministries of Education and Ministries of Health, Labour or others involved in Social Welfare.

There are a second type of studies like technical studies (architecture, engineering) or other professional studies (law, business). The Practical Placements periods for students of this type of technical studies are not compulsory in Spain university system. It depends again on the type of institution and the type of studies that was considered.

- A short period, two or three months (300 to 450 hours), usually in summer holidays after the student has passed more than 50% of the study program credits. These period can or can not, it is a decision to make by the school, to be used to amortize study credits for elective subjects.
- A long period, a full semester, that can be used, also a decision to make by the academic authorities in the school, to prepare and read the Diploma Project.

For engineering students it is obvious that the Entities in which to spend these periods are manufacturing or engineering companies. For architecture students, it would be appropriate construction companies or architecture firms. But for other professional studies not of technical fields but social sciences, like business or law, the Entities in which to spend these periods can not only be private companies but public administration institutions, non government organizations or even university departments or institutes.

There are finally, other type of studies like experimental sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, etc.), humanities (Philology, Philosophy, Geography, History, Classical studies, etc.) or art. The type of Practical Placement desirable for these type of studies, probably, is much more related with work in research projects and or field or lab work and much less, although always possible, in private companies.

Although the Practical Placements are not compulsory for university students in Spain, the Spanish Government considered them a good practice, so issued some regulation trying both to promote the so called **Cooperative Educational Programs** and to care for abuse of them either from enterprises or students These regulations are Royal

Decree 1497/1981 of the 19th of June, modified by Royal Decree 1845/1994 of the 9th of September and its main issues are:

- **Labour situation:** Such Practical Placement programs do not establish a contractual relationship between the student and the Entities as, by their nature, they are strictly academic and not labour related. But this should be clearly stated in the agreement signed between the Student, the Entity and the School.
- **Compensation:** There is not obligation on the Entity to pay any compensation to the student for their work as they are an educational action but most Entities pay for the travel and subsistence expenses of the student an amount that at most should equal the minimum interprofessional salary for a full working day. On average it is something between 300 and 500 €/month
- **Duration:** It should be clearly stated in the agreement signed between the Student, the Entity and the School. Maximun 450 hours for practical periods, 6 months for a Diploma Project.
- **Insurance:** As Practical Placements are part of the educational process of the students and these are not employees, **universities establish a civil responsibility policy** to cover injuries that the intern may suffer in relation to his internship and students are obliged to sign for that insurance policies.
- **Confidentiality:** Students are obliged to keep strict confidential care of the data and information that they could gather about the Entity during the placement and this should also be clearly stated in the agreement signed between the Student, the Entity and the School

Learning objectives and evaluation system depend on each university but in any case should be explicited in the contract signed between enterprise, university and student. It is usual to give to the student 1 credit for 30 hours worked. In case of the Diploma Project the student should present a report and defend it in a public presentation.

There should be a tutor from the enterprise and another from the university.

The system in Spain combines all types: University, Enterprise and Student driven. The role of the Universities is more of dissemination and marketing between enterprises the Practical Placements system.. Some times depending on the disponibility of Human Resources (Career centers) and of the interest of a particular degree should look for specific placements. Meany enterprises come to the university for students and many students look for themselves the placements.

Some universities have very well designed procedures, even certified under quality standards, and web based systems to provide for the management of it.