

Placements for Good

Placements for Good empowers students in further and higher education to contribute to positive social and environmental change through work-based learning in the community.

1. Introduction and rationale

Placements for Good (PfG) provides a framework for universities and colleges to develop impactful work-based learning programmes supported by NUS. It will provide students opportunity to become global citizens through real-world transformational work experience. It aims to support student employability and progress the social and environmental impact of the organisations they work for in response to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – ‘Global Goals’ for 2030 (SDGs). PfG is being created in response to the motion¹ “Placements, Apprenticeships and Education for Good” passed by student delegates at the 2017 NUS conference.

It will support student demand for meaningful work placements and responds to a growing need for employable graduates that can contribute to a just and sustainable society. This is an important addition to NUS sustainability offerings by enhancing student opportunities to harness their capabilities and contribute to a better world.

1.1. Student demand

Longitudinal NUS surveys of student attitudes towards skills for employability and sustainability have highlighted consistently growing demand for engagement with sustainability learning in FEIs and HEIs. For six consecutive years 80% of students have called for their institutions to be do more for sustainability.

83% FE and HE students identify work placements as the most relevant way to integrate sustainability into their learning (NUS, 2016). With c500 students signed up to [Dissertations for Good](#) online, there is a clear desire for students to use their education as a force for good.

This has been highlighted again by an on-going NUS student consultation on the SDGs (NUS, 2018). 48% of over 1500 students, from FEIs and HEIs, ranked work placements or volunteering as the best learning experience.

1.2. Sector demand

UK universities are increasingly stating commitments to work-based learning. Many institutions have course specific mandatory work-placements whilst some are integrating mandatory undergraduate work placements into their whole institution strategies (i.e. Edinburgh University and Leeds Trinity University). Likewise, FEIs have an inherently vocational offering within their programmes and many courses have either mandatory or optional placements. Although many institutions and some for-profit organisations offer placement programmes and internship schemes, few demonstrate quantifiable impact that are transformational for students and employers. PfG aims to provide a bespoke placement framework that supports institutions to offer their students impactful work-based learning that supports progress towards the SDGs and enhances student employability.

¹ <https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/articles/nus-backs-placements-and-apprenticeships-for-good>

1.3. Why NUS?

As a national organisation of 600 students' Unions, NUS is well placed and connected to take a lead on this programme. NUS Commercial Services has an existing network of partnerships providing excellent potential for placement hosts from various sectors. We also have a national and international reputation for our sustainability programmes for which we have well established partnerships in the third and public sectors.

Our Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) work has gained significant momentum with our Responsible Futures whole-institution sustainability programme being rolled out in both FEIs and HEIs across the UK. Dissertations for Good (DfG) is also growing, with students producing research for charity, public and business sector organisations to benefit society, the environment and a sustainable economy. The synergy between PfG and DfG provides great scope for promoting joined up thinking between student research projects and work-based learning.

2. PfG concept

PfG aims to connect talented university and college students with forward thinking ambitious charities, public-sector organisations and businesses to work in partnership for social, environmental and economic benefit. It is to be an enriching placement framework underpinned by ESD pedagogies and principles to ensure students develop skills, knowledge and experience required for a sustainable future. NUS will support institutions, train students and staff and create a community of learning at regional and national levels. Regional PfG cohorts will facilitate knowledge exchange between professional practitioners and learning institutions.

PfG will be open to all students in tertiary education institutions with priority being given to enrol Widening Participation and liberation group students. To support progression into employment or further study we anticipate PfG being most suited to students in or entering their penultimate or final year of study. For undergraduate HE participants there may be opportunity to encompass their PfG project within their dissertation.

3. How does it work?

Institutions will have the option to gain varying levels of NUS support for PfG. They may opt for a fully supported delivery of PfG, or a semi-supported programme delivery. This is summarised in figure 3.1 below. It provides flexibility for institutions to build on pre-existing work-based learning offerings or develop a completely new programme. Where institutions opt for semi-supported PfG offering, NUS will train and support institutional staff to effectively support, mentor and partner students for their placements. A breakdown of responsibilities and costs is provided in section 3.1.

3.1. Application process

1. Placement hosts* will be advertised online with an overview of possible work areas
2. Students apply online by uploading CV and submitting a short application form
3. NUS contact placement host
4. If approved placement host and student liaise to confirm placement project and work remit with NUS or institution staff facilitating meeting (possibly over skype)

*If a student cannot find a relevant placement host being promoted online they will be encouraged to contact NUS or their institutional contact to seek other options.

3.2. Regional training as an annual cohort of students

Regional PfG training prior to placements will be a two-day residential delivered by NUS to create student learning cohorts. The training will explore employability skills, sustainability and SDGs in the context of placements. In due course, training could be delivered collaboratively between NUS and institutions.

3.3. Placements commence for 8 – 12 weeks

PfG Placements may contribute towards students’ academic course credits and be embedded in mandatory work-based learning modules with approval from relevant institutional staff. Alternatively, many universities have placement or internship schemes that PfG may be incorporated within. In the context of PfG, ‘placement’ refers to a paid (NLW) or academic credit bearing structured work-based learning experience. Placement hosts will buy into PfG participation with costs adjusted based on their size and capacity.

Placement hosts will be supported to design impactful project-based placements. Projects will be aligned with students’ required academic learning outcomes whilst contributing to organisations’ progress for the SDGs. This aims to empower students, encourage independent working and enable them to produce something tangible. Students will be encouraged to develop their critical and reflective thinking by recording their placement learning.

3.4. PfG/ Dissertations for Good Conference

Students and placement hosts will also be invited to present on the placements at an annual PfG/Dissertations for Good conference and celebration, which all stakeholders will be invited to attend. This event will give students real professional networking experience and connect placement hosts with talented FEI/HEI students.

3.5. Monitoring and evaluation

NUS led monitoring and evaluation will measure all aspects of learning experienced through PfG for all involved. This will be conducted before, during, and after placements through student, institutional, and employer surveys and interviews. It will also be used to identify how organisations, students, and learning institutions are able to and have worked together to contribute towards regional, national, and global progress for the SDGs. Institutions will have access to this data to monitor student engagement from specific courses, levels of study and understanding of impacts on future employment.

Figure 3.1 Support packages and costs for FHEIs

Support Package	Fully supported	Semi-supported (NUS/FHEI – o)	Minimally supported
NUS PfG promotional/ communication materials for students	✓	✓	✓
PfG introduction with key institutional staff members	✓	✓	✓
Monitoring and evaluation (Section 3.1)	✓	✓	✓
Conference - delivered by NUS (2 institution staff and student places)	✓	✓	✓

Catch-up calls/general support for institutional staff	✓	✓	✓
Student 2-day pre-placement training	✓	✓	✓
Student cohort support (weekly Skype call)	✓	✓	✓
Recruit placement organisations	✓	○	
Matching students with placement hosts	✓	○	
Placement support (NUS key contact for students/ organisations)	✓		
COST – HEI	£2645	£1875	£1100
COST – FEI	£2345	£1575	£600

*All costs exclude VAT

Figure 3.2 Support packages and costs for host organisations

Full-time equivalent employees	Public/third sector	Private sector
<10 (micro-sized)	£200	£1,000
11-50 (small-sized)	£500	£1,500
51-250 (medium-sized)	£750	£1,750
>250 (large-sized)	£1000	£2,000

*Costs exclude VAT and organisations will pay students National Living Wage unless the placement is credit-bearing

4. Pilot plan

Pilot institutions will be invited to contribute to final programme development and have the option to buy-in to varying levels of support for delivery as described in section 3 above.

A limited-size PfG pilot will take place in South West England and South Wales with a target cohort of 5 – 10 English and Welsh FHEIs. Further UK-wide representation will be as advisors on NUS ESD Advisory Group. The pilot will provide a regional cohort approach replicating intentions for future national delivery. The PfG conference will be an opportunity to share pilot learning and develop buy-in for upscaling the programme nationally.

5. Legacy

5.1. Two Year Plan: Grow and expand PfG with increased national delivery

- PfG to fit with institution calendars, sandwich years, and mandatory placements
- Annual funding streams – placement host buy-in and institutional buy-in
- Seek grant funding and sponsorship for PfG development
- Marketing of successful first year to support engagement with increased number of HEIs/FEIs – c20 tertiary education institutions combined
- Continued monitoring, evaluation, and development of PfG to support stakeholders

5.2. Five Year Plan: Continued growth of PfG sign-up nationally and exploration of international offerings

- c30+ Universities and Colleges across the UK signed up to PfG with portfolio of success stories evidencing positive impacts made
- NUS support and train universities and colleges to deliver institutional 'ESD for employability training' to students prior to placements
- NUS to support placement hosts in training mentors and framing placements
- Exploration of potential pilot delivering PfG in Europe and/or beyond
- 5 years of evaluation data from students, HEIs and FEIs and placement hosts evidencing impact of PfG and areas for development
- Exploration of delivery as a 6 – 12 month graduate scheme to add value to HEIs
- Reliable income streams from institutional and placement host buy-in

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