

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Paper No CPF/18/14

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM
18 April 2018

Agenda Item 9

WBL EXTENSIONS

To consider a paper on guidance for WBL and extenuating circumstances.

ACTION

For discussion.

ACTION FROM ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW

GUIDANCE ON WORK-BASED LEARNING AND EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

FOR DISCUSSION

Extenuating Circumstances are defined thus:

Extenuating circumstances refer to something unforeseeable or unavoidable e.g. you couldn't write because you suffered a broken arm just prior to an examination. They are normally circumstances beyond the student's control which either prevent the student from taking an examination(s) or submitting coursework, or which affect academic performance in coursework or examination(s). Extenuating circumstances will usually be health related or of a personal nature.

While securing a placement is ultimately an individual student's own responsibility, colleges and course teams are expected to provide support and assistance, and to know at least a year in advance the number of placements likely to be available.

Most courses undertake work-based learning (WBL) in semester two, or over both semesters, with the Board of Examiners in June. The module is normally 40 credits at level 5.

There is a requirement for students to complete a total number of hours on placement, as specified in the module description. Colleges should calculate a date beyond which it would not be possible to complete the required number of specified hours, and inform students of this date. Students may be able to complete the assessment in time, however.

CMA requirements apply in terms of published information for start and end dates of courses: where students need to extend WBL over the summer, they will need to be able to support themselves financially for longer than initially expected. In addition, their marks will not be considered until the supplementary boards, which will affect any students holding offers for articulation routes.

1. Colleges should provide clarity in the module handbook in terms of timelines for students to complete the requisite number of hours; the adequacy of the time served on placement should be signed off by the placement supervisor, perhaps as a pass/fail component.

Examples of Extenuating Circumstances for WBL

Where a student is unable to submit work for assessment by the deadline specified by the Course Team, normal guidelines on extenuating circumstances should be followed, and additional circumstances which might be applied are cases where a student is made redundant or where a college decides to terminate a placement, or where an opportunity requires AccessNI clearance, which was not known in advance. Where placement is not completed in time due to dismissal and the student is not subject to disciplinary action or the fitness to practise protocol pursuant to that dismissal, a new placement should be found and where appropriate a resit opportunity should apply, subject to the regulations.

Students who start a placement late without the application of extenuating circumstances will know from the outset that they will be unable to complete the total number of hours required for the module. If they do not then submit work for assessment, this is not unforeseeable, and hence does not constitute an extenuating circumstance. The Board of Examiners will record a non-submission and offer the student a resit opportunity in August.

WBL modules in semester 1 of year 2: particular issues

Where WBL is a semester 1 module and the student has not completed the placement by the end of the semester, or submitted work for assessment, a non-submission should be recorded and the student should be offered a resubmission opportunity in August. The expectation is that the missing hours will be made up over the summer.

Where WBL is a semester 1 module, and the student presents acceptable extenuating circumstances, due to the exceptional nature of the module, the following guidance applies:

2. For WBL first sits from semester 1, where the period to be completed is no more than 10 working days, students may make these hours up during the two-week Easter break and the revision week before the examination period. Alternatively, students may defer to August without penalty.
3. For WBL first sits from semester 1, where the period to be completed is more than 10 working days, students must defer the first sit to the summer period and present their submission for the first time in August.

Finally, the University's regulations have an expectation of 40 credits of work-based learning at level 5. The QAA *Characteristics Statement*¹ for Foundation Degrees (2015) defines WBL thus:

'[WBL] ... enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher-level learning within both the higher education provider and the workplace. It is a two-way process, where the learning in one environment is applied in the other.'

In line with this definition, there is an expectation that WBL will normally occur towards the end of the Foundation degree, ideally in the second semester of final year, thereby enabling students to apply their level 5 skills and knowledge to the level 5 WBL module. Students who have only completed 120 credits at level 4 would be ill-equipped to undertake WBL in semester one of year two, especially where the other 80 level 5 credits would cover skills and knowledge which would apply in the work situation.

¹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Foundation-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf>