



DEPARTMENT OF  
**GOVERNMENT & POLITICS**

QUALITY REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2017

CASE STUDY OF GOOD PRACTICE

***WORK PLACEMENT 2008 – 2017***  
***DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT & POLITICS***

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# Department of Government & Politics Quality Review

## Case Study: Work Placement 2008-2017 Inclusive

### 1. Introduction & Background

The Department of Government & Politics at UCC is very proud of its accredited Work Placement programmes which are currently integral to the BSc Government and the MSc International Public Policy & Diplomacy (IPPD) degrees. The Department of Government & Politics was the first political science department to introduce placement as an embedded module in an undergraduate programme in Ireland in 2002.

The BSc Government Work Placement Programme is intended to enhance the learning experience of students, in line with best practice abroad, but also to meet the needs of the employment market. Students undertake a minimum 14-week placement at the end of Year 3 with an academic credit of 10. The MSc International Public Policy and Diplomacy Work Placement Programme has been running since 2011. The aim of the work placement is to give students experience of working in a policy-oriented international environment. Students undertake a minimum 12-week placement at the end of Semester 2 with an academic credit of 30. New placement programmes are planned, within the Department, to expand opportunities for students.

### 2. Rationale: Why Engage with Work Placement?

Embedding an accredited Work Placement Programme into a degree is in line with the University's strategic vision: "We will strengthen the student experience by providing greater opportunities for personal growth and development outside the classroom. Every programme will seek to provide students with opportunities for placement through volunteering activities, international placement or work placement." *UCC Strategic Plan (2009-2012), pg 11*

In their treatise *Work Placement in Third-Level Programmes*, Sheridan & Linehan demonstrated that placement is a three-way relationship, which is mutually beneficial to the HEI, the student and the employer:

- "The main benefits of work placements, identified by the students, include opportunities to develop independence and self-confidence, networking, and ability to put their theoretical knowledge into practice" *Sheridan & Linehan (2011), pg.3*
- "Employers outlined some of the main benefits students gained from placements, including opportunities to develop interpersonal and generic skills, the ability to put theoretical knowledge into practice thereby enhancing their future employability prospects." *Sheridan & Linehan (2011), pg 4*
- "The main benefits of work placements for HEIs, identified by the research conducted with higher education staff, include opportunities to enhance networking and mutual understanding with workplaces, integrating employability skills into the curriculum, and applying theoretical knowledge in practice" *Sheridan & Linehan (2011), pg 4*

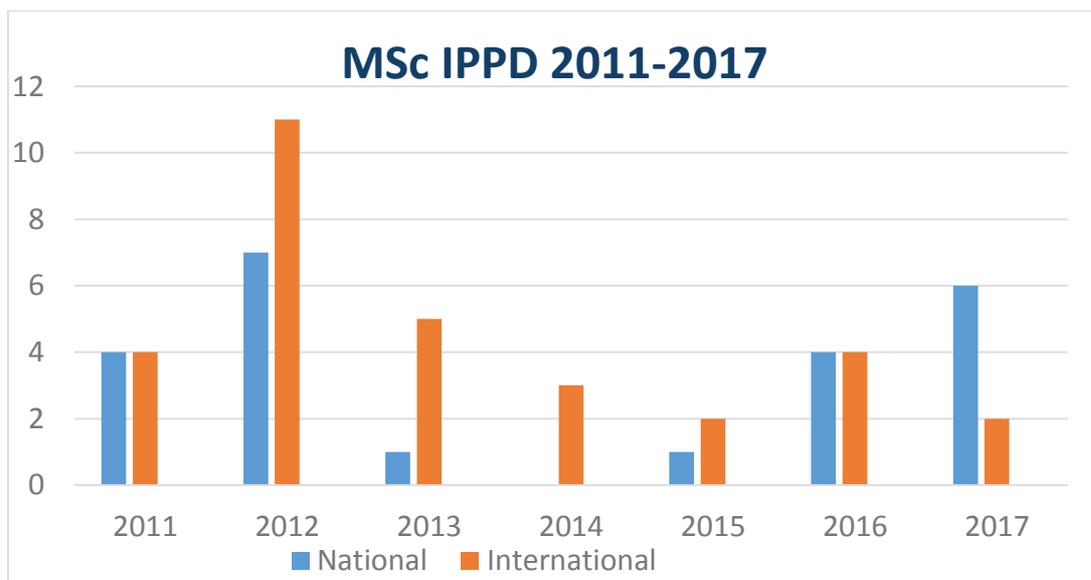
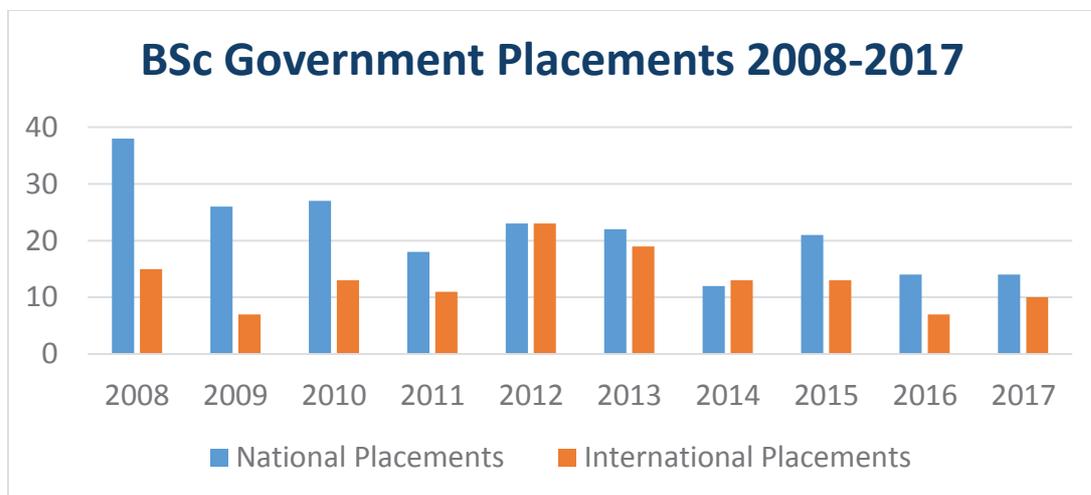
Providing our students with the opportunity to partake in a work placement programme allows them to develop their theoretical skillset in a practical setting, increasing both their learning and employability skills.

### 3. Overview of Department of Government Work Placement Programme 2008-2017

Since November 2008 the Department of Government & Politics has a dedicated Work Placement Officer to manage their work placement programmes, indicating its commitment to growing the programmes' scope and service to students.

During the review period of 2008-2017, the Department of Government & Politics has facilitated **346** BSc Government and **54** MSc IPPD students to complete their work placements locally, nationally and internationally.

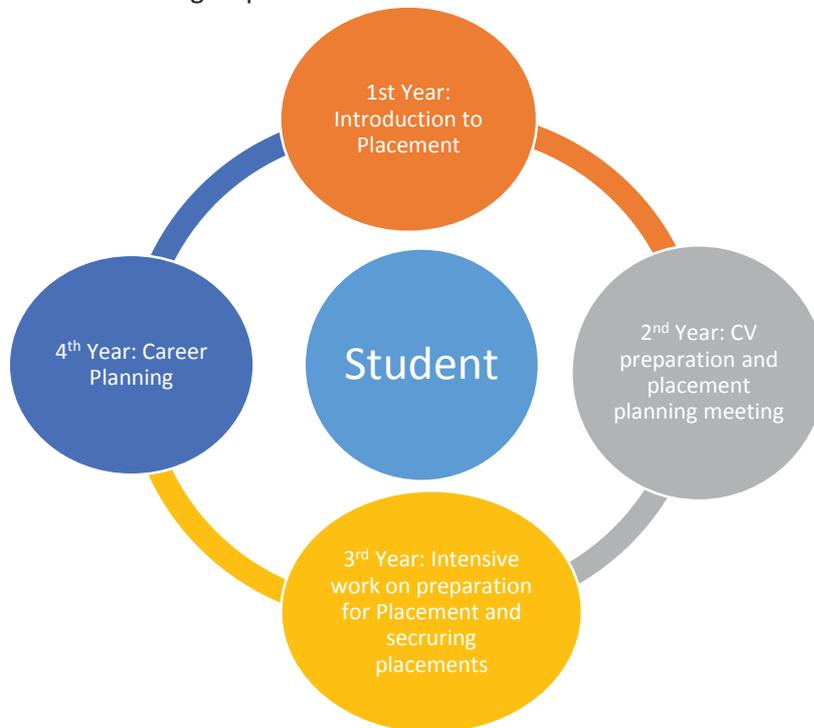
The Department of Government & Politics has a strong international element to its work placements with 40.5% of students electing to undertake their placements outside of the Republic of Ireland. This is significantly higher than UCC's average of less than 10%. This internationalisation of the Placement Programme is a unique KPI to the placement programmes within the Department.



## 4. Student Engagement

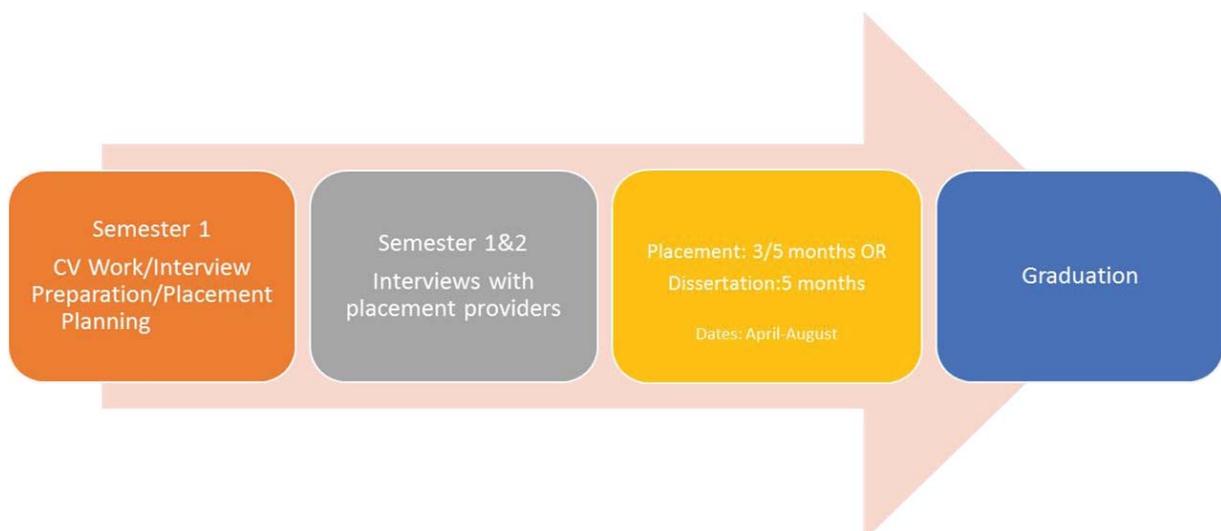
### BSc Government

Engagement with the students begins in first year when they are met during the first week and are introduced to the Work Placement Officer. Throughout their four years, students are continuously supported in their placement journey. Alumni are invited back as guest speakers and encouraged to join our social media Alumni group.



### MSc International Public Policy & Diplomacy

Engagement with in-coming students takes place in the Autumn, exploring students' career plans. Intensive work begins on CV preparation, interview techniques and securing placement opportunities, tailored to the student's area of interest. Following the end of their placements students are invited to join our social media Alumni group where graduate opportunities are posted. Alumni are invited back as guest speakers.



## 5. Assessment & Self Reflection

Assessment of the placement is important to ensure that academic credit is awarded but also that the student has an opportunity for self-reflection on the skills gained during the placement period. The assessment differs in the two programmes, to reflect the academic weighting but in both there is the strong commitment to ensuring the student comes away with an excellent understanding of both their area of work and the skills gained.

Students are required to:

- Administer their own work and carry out essential organisational responsibilities
- Apply interpersonal skills effectively in their work
- Examine ways of reconciling personal goals with professional demands and organisational realities
- Link theory and practice by providing practical experience of work to reinforce and complement the academic components of the degree
- Show that they have been able to negotiate, implement and evaluate programmes of work
- Develop and exercise thinking in a practical setting
- Reflect on and analyse the learning experience from the work placement

### Student Reflection

Through their pre-placement classes, assignment of academic and business mentors, dedicated Placement Officer, and challenging placement coursework, our students have a fully supported placement experience. This allows them the freedom to observe, engage, contribute and reflect on their placement. This reflection is very valuable as it allows students to plan their future career path.

## 6. External Engagement

Over the period 2008-2017 we have engaged with over 100 unique employers both locally, nationally and internationally. The feedback from employers has been extremely positive and encouraging, compounding our belief that we are equipping our students with the relevant knowledge and skills required by industry as well as meeting the students' learning objectives:

### BSc Government

“Through the BSc Government work placement scheme the students have an opportunity to gain real experience within their respective divisions and work directly with colleagues at both a junior and senior level. We are very hopeful that some of these students could potentially join us in the future as part of our graduate program, should they wish to join us.” **Central Bank, Dublin**

“Our current student is a highly motivated individual, and always applies herself expeditiously to all tasks assigned to her. The student's research skills are excellent, and this has made her an invaluable asset during her time here.” **Transparency International Ireland, Dublin**

## MSc International Public Policy & Diplomacy

“The student’s work is exemplary. I couldn't speak more highly of her commitment, energy, attention to detail and the new ideas she brings. She fits in great with the team and has made a great impression in the organisation” **Ibec, Dublin**

“Our MSc IPPD is more than well prepared for the role in terms of political knowledge, writing skills, and ability to have independent and valuable inputs.” **Chamber of Commerce, Cork**

## 7. Challenges

In the period 2008-2017 there have been some significant economic factors which have had a direct impact on the Work Placement Programmes. The economic downturn in 2008 led to a public sector embargo in Ireland, resulting in an immediate shut down of internship programmes in all Government Departments and most local authorities. This has proved to be a significant challenge for the programmes but the students’ flexibility in embracing international placements and a willingness to be adaptable has allowed the programme to grow our placement providers and develop new links.

A second challenge is the tradition of unpaid placements within the Political/NGO/International Relations sector. Again the Department of Government & Politics met this challenge by introducing a shorter working week for those on unpaid placement, to allow them to seek paid part time work if necessary. The Department continues to encourage employers to pay their interns and has seen an increase of 40% in paid placements over the past 3 years.

A third challenge has been the dip in number of BSc Government students selecting the programme. It is likely that this was a reaction to the economic downturn and a perception in relation to employment in the sector. The Department of Government & Politics has engaged in a number of activities to encourage interest in the programme among second level students including: ‘Government Gatherings’ held in UCC, UCC Open Day participation, School Visits, Academic Guest Speakers, Social Media and the ‘Government Times’ Newsletter circulation.

## 8. Conclusion

Work Placements will continue to play an integral part of the BSc Government & MSc IPPD programmes.

The benefits to the students are manifold including:

- Acquiring knowledge, key skills and competences relevant to the subject discipline, workplace and the later stages of the course of study
- Developing personal maturity & interpersonal skills
- Demonstrate an ability to take part in the everyday work of the placement organisation
- Self-development through critical reflection
- Increased motivation towards studies
- Enabling a more informed career choice to be made on graduation
- Concrete work experience for students’ CVs

The benefits to the Department and University include:

- Strengthening links with industry, key state agencies, government departments and politicians
- Developing an alumni group with strong employability skills
- Marketing the Department through external engagement

The Department of Government & Politics will continue to seek engaging, challenging and exciting placement opportunities for our students going forward, ensuring that they are fully supported by the Work Placement Officer, in every element of the placement process. This will enable students to explore and develop the many opportunities available to them in a safe and supportive manner.

*“The work placement for me personally was one of the best aspects of the degree as it gave me a chance to actually put what I had been learning in college for three years to use, and I know it will be invaluable to be in the future”* **BSc Government Graduate**

*“The placement provided me with valuable experience in how the different stakeholders - business, government and public - interact. It also provided me with great an opportunity to network which allowed me to secure my graduate role. Overall the placement has been greatly beneficial to my career development.”* **MSc International Public Policy & Diplomacy Graduate**

*“I have found the students to be excellent representatives of UCC and their professionalism has been matched with a willingness to work at a high level.”* **Cork Foundation**