

# COVID-19 supporting resources

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## Reaching decisions about placement provision

### Introduction

This paper sets out the key questions providers should consider when determining whether to resume, replace, defer or cancel placements. It is part of a set of QAA resources relating to placements including:

- a supporting resource on [contingency planning for placement provision](#)
- a [suite of case studies](#) from a range of higher education providers outlining how they have managed disrupted placements and their contingency plans for forthcoming placements.
- a paper relating to [placements that take place outside the UK](#)
- [thematic guidance on work-based learning](#)
- QAA Members are also able to access the recording of a webinar which took place on 15 May 2020 regarding [contingency planning for placement provision](#).

### Contingency planning principles for placement provision

In reaching decisions about placement provision, providers will wish to consider the following principles.

1. Aim to resume placements whenever possible. Coordinate with relevant agencies and placement providers, and support students to understand their options. Collaborate to ensure opportunities are inclusive, safe and supported.
2. If placements cannot run in situ, aim, where possible, to replace them with a virtual placement, rather than cancel or defer them.
3. Ensure that every module involving a placement has an alternative plan that will be used if COVID-19 restrictions resume. Use virtual placements and modified assessments where necessary.
4. Implement flexible alternative assessments if this will enable placements to run. Ensure such alternative assessments are in line with your provider's existing academic regulations and any specific policies on assessment, such as 'no-detriment' policies.
5. Rely on programme-level learning outcomes when considering alternative learning and assessment needed to replace cancelled or significantly revised placements.
6. Only cancel placement provision if you have explored the possibility of virtual placements, flexible alternative assessments and, if necessary, deferral of placements.
7. Deferring placements could be an appropriate option, but it can create challenges relating to progression and the volume of credit students may be undertaking at any one time. For these reasons, any decision to defer placements will need very careful consideration.
8. Underpin all your considerations with the aim of ensuring consistency, supporting transparency, promoting academic quality and reducing risk for your students and staff.

## **How do providers determine whether to resume, replace, defer or cancel placements?**

Placements should only be cancelled if all other options have been fully explored.

Deferring placements may prove complex regarding progression and this option will also need to be considered alongside the reassessment schedule. Any addition of hours across semesters to make up for lost delivery must be fully discussed and agreed, because it has implications on workload for both staff and students. Similarly, extending deadlines for assessments and reassessments could build in pinch points that may be avoided by other means. There is also no guarantee that the placement will be able to run in-situ at a later date as a return to restrictions on movement ('lockdown') or other unforeseen circumstances may hinder such plans. Therefore, flexibility and forward planning are key.

Altering the diet of modules and when they are delivered may offer a pragmatic solution to some of the issues being faced regarding placement provision. However, the key here is flexibility and the consideration of an alternative plan, should lockdown measures recommence.

Semester and year-long placements may prove harder to accommodate virtually. Moving away from a focus on volume of placement hours towards a focus on demonstration of learning and competencies may overcome this issue, as may a move towards portfolio placements. Where placement hours map to modular or programme credit, the provider has latitude to reduce the volume of hours if there is a strong enough rationale and there is transparency regarding the decision-making process (see additional information on awarding credit and scheduling learning hours contained in Contingency Planning for Placement Provision [[link](#)]). Where semester and year-long placements lead to a specific award title, if possible, providers should ensure that an alternative award is available and that students are not disadvantaged in the completion of their programme.

The tables below present a range of questions, addressed to different audiences, that providers can use to determine whether to resume, replace, defer or cancel placements. The questions are not exhaustive.

## Reflective questions

### Resuming placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to resume placements.

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of resuming placements?	Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of resuming placements?	<p>What are the risks of resuming my placement (for example, finances, accommodation) and do I know who to discuss these with?</p> <p>How much time do I need to make practical arrangements that would allow me to restart my placement?</p>	Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of resuming placements?
Have we considered and discussed the decision to resume placements with students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	Have we considered and discussed the decision to resume placements with students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	Have I understood and signed any revised formal agreement or documents associated with the resumed placement? Do I have any questions to ask before I sign?	Have we understood and signed any revised formal agreement or documents associated with the resumed placement? Do we have any questions to ask before we sign?
Have any formal agreements and/or placement-related documents been updated and signed as appropriate?	Have students and placement providers reviewed and signed updated formal agreements and/or other paperwork as appropriate?	Do I have all the information I need to resume my placement? If not, who do I need to proactively approach?	Has the formal agreement between the higher education provider and placement provider been revised accordingly?

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students resume their placement? How will this be accommodated?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students resume their placement? How will this be accommodated?	Which student services can support me in returning to my placement?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students resume their placement? How will this be accommodated?
What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?	What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?	What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?	What communication structures are in place that enable swift communication between all parties should the placement be disrupted?
Are health and safety considerations and risk assessments still valid?	How can students be supported in understanding their placement provider's current context if this has changed?	Who else will be in the same position and who can I get peer support from?	Are health and safety considerations and risk assessments still valid?
	What placement work has been missed and how can it be accommodated within the remaining timescale?	What placement work have I missed and how can it be accommodated within the remaining timescale?	What placement work has been missed and how can it be accommodated within the remaining timescale?
	Have students been given all the information they need to ensure a smooth transition back to their placement?		Will any changes need to be made to induction and onboarding to create a smooth transition?
	Have students been given enough time to rearrange practical considerations such as other work commitments and accommodation?		What internal communications are needed to smooth onboarding, particularly if other staff are undergoing associated challenges?

## Replacing placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to replace placements.

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement in-situ and (b) replacing the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to replace placements?	Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement in-situ and (b) replacing the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to replace placements?	<p>What are the risks of my placement being replaced (for example, finances, accommodation) and do I know who to discuss these with?</p> <p>How much time do I need to make practical arrangements that would allow me to restart my placement?</p>	Can we protect our reputation by making a clear and rational case for replacing the placement based on factors that can be understood from outside the organisation?
Have any formal agreements and/or placement-related documents been updated and signed as appropriate?	Have students and placement providers reviewed and signed updated formal agreements and/or other paperwork as appropriate?	Have I understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the replaced placement? Do I have any questions to ask before I sign?	Have we understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the replaced placement? Do we have any questions to ask before we sign?
Have we been reassured that placement providers have appropriate safety measures in place regarding alternative placement provision? Can we be assured of student safety?	Have we been reassured that placement providers have appropriate safety measures in place regarding alternative placement provision? Can we be assured of student safety?	Do I need any additional academic, career or pastoral support and/or training to complete the revised placement? How and where can I access this support?	What additional resource, if any, is needed to enable the replaced placement? This could relate to the digital infrastructure, staffing, staff development or employee input to the student experience, for example.

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
What are the insurance requirements for students working remotely? Are these requirements covered by the higher education provider, the placement provider, or both?	What are the insurance requirements for students working remotely? Are these requirements covered by the higher education provider, the placement provider, or both?		What are the insurance requirements for students working remotely? Are these requirements covered by the higher education provider, the placement provider, or both?
What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students transition to an alternative placement? How will this be accommodated?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students transition to an alternative placement? How will this be accommodated?	How can I make up any shortfall in career development between a standard placement and a replacement learning opportunity?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help students transition to an alternative placement? How will this be accommodated?
Will any programme or module learning outcomes need revision?	Will any programme or module learning outcomes need revision?	Have I been informed of any revised safety measures (where appropriate) relating to a replaced placement?	Do we have appropriate insurance in place (if appropriate) that covers students who may be working remotely as part of a replaced placement?
Can any learning outcomes that cannot be met be mapped to a programme/module level as appropriate, or revised?	Can any learning outcomes that cannot be met be mapped to a programme/module level as appropriate, or revised?	Do I require any additional support and/or training to help me transition to a replaced placement? Who can help me with any additional support needs?	Do we have appropriate safety measures in place regarding alternative placement provision and/or remote working?
What additional resource, if any, is needed? This could relate to the digital infrastructure, staffing, staff development or employer input, for example.	What additional resource, if any, is needed? This could relate to the digital infrastructure, staffing, staff development or employer input, for example.	Are there any opportunities made possible by the replacement offered? How can I best capitalise on these?	

What additional student support and/or training may be required to help them transition to a replaced placement? How will this be accommodated?	What additional student support and/or training may be required to help them transition to a replaced placement? How will this be accommodated?	Who else will be in the same position and who can I get peer support from?	
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## Deferring placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to defer placements.

<b>Academic regulations and quality teams</b>	<b>Academic and placement staff</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Employers/placement providers</b>
Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement and (b) deferring the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to defer placements?	Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement and (b) deferring the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to defer placements?	What are the risks of my placement being deferred (for example, finances, accommodation) and do I know who to discuss these with?  How much time do I need to make practical arrangements that would allow me to restart my placement?	Can we protect our reputation by making a clear and rational case for deferring the placement based on factors that can be understood from outside the organisation?
Have any formal agreements and/or placement-related documents been updated and signed as appropriate?	Have students and placement providers reviewed and signed updated formal agreements and/or other paperwork as appropriate?	Have I understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the deferred placement? Do I have any questions to ask before I sign?	Have we understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the deferred placement? Do we have any questions to ask before we sign?

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Have we considered and discussed the decision to defer placements with students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	Have we considered and discussed the decision to defer placements with both students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	How can I sustain the ongoing recruitment relationship I have with an employer even though my placement has been deferred?	Are there any alternatives to deferring the placement that can be created either from inside the organisation, or by collaborating with the higher education provider?
Deferral of placements assumes they will recommence at some point in the future. What plans are in place if they cannot resume?	What institutional policy has been created, or decisions made, within higher education provider governance, relating to other deferral requests? How may these be helpful?	Have I considered the impact of a deferred placement on my programme of study? Will there be any overlapping in my commitments that may be difficult to manage? How can I mitigate against this?	
Has the governing body had the opportunity to comment on deferral plans for placement provision?	If the placement is integrated, how will other elements of teaching be delivered during any overlap?		
What additional academic and pastoral support needs may students have given their placements have been deferred?  How will any additional support needs be accommodated?	If the placement is intercalated and takes place before the final year, how will we engage students who are completing their placement after completing the taught part of their degree?		
What are the implications of deferred placements on staff and student workload?	What are the implications of deferred placements on staff and student workload?		



Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
What are the implications of deferred placements on timetabling?	What are the implications of deferred placements on timetabling?		
	<p>What additional academic and pastoral support needs may students have, given their placements have been deferred?</p> <p>How will any additional support needs be accommodated?</p>		

### Cancelling placements

This table presents potential considerations if deciding to cancel placements.

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement and (b) cancelling the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to cancel placements?	Do we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the risks of (a) continuing the placement and (b) cancelling the placement? Have we made a balanced assessment of both in arriving at the decision to cancel placements?	<p>What are the risks of my placement being cancelled (for example, finances, accommodation) and do I know who to discuss these with?</p> <p>How much time do I need to make practical arrangements that would allow me to restart my placement?</p>	Can we protect our reputation by making a clear and rational case for cancelling the placement based on factors that can be understood from outside the organisation?

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
Have any formal agreements and/or placement-related documents been updated and signed as appropriate?	Have students and placement providers reviewed and signed updated formal agreements and/or other paperwork as appropriate?	Have I understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the cancelled placement? Do I have any questions to ask before I sign?	Have we understood and signed any revised formal agreements or documents associated with the cancelled placement? Do we have any questions to ask before we sign?
Have we considered and discussed the decision to cancel placements with students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	Have we considered and discussed the decision to cancel placements with both students and placement providers? Can we fully evidence these discussions?	How can I sustain the ongoing recruitment relationship I have with an employer even though my placement has been cancelled?	Are there any alternatives to cancelling the placement that can be created either from inside the organisation, or by collaborating with the higher education provider?
If the decision to cancel placements is not mutual between all parties, have we considered how we will communicate this decision in a way that will protect ongoing relationships?	If the decision to cancel placements is not mutual between all parties, have we considered how we will communicate this decision in a way that will protect ongoing relationships?	Have I discussed and considered all the options made available to me by (a) my higher education provider and (b) my placement provider?	If the placement is part of a recruitment strategy, how will we make up this part of our selection process by other means? Will students whose placements were cancelled be given exceptions within the process?
Has the governing body had the opportunity to comment on cancellation plans for placement provision?	What support could the careers and placements team offer to students regarding cancelled placements?	Do I need to reassess my career thinking, career plan and development of employability skills because of a cancelled placement?	
Will the student's transcript acknowledge a cancelled placement?	What information can a placement provider offer to support final assessment decisions?	Can I gain work experience in other allied professions? Who can I discuss this with?	

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
<p>Have all other options been fully explored to the satisfaction of:</p> <p>(a) the institution and (b) students</p> <p>Can placements be deferred or is there scope to offer virtual placements and/or repurposed assessments to enable the placement to continue?</p>	<p>Have all other options been fully explored to the satisfaction of:</p> <p>(a) the institution and (b) students</p> <p>Can placements be deferred or is there scope to offer virtual placements and/or repurposed assessments to enable the placement to continue?</p>	<p>Do I need any additional support with (a) career planning (b) mental health and wellbeing (c) employability and academic skills? If so, where can I go for support?</p>	
<p>Will cancellation of placements be temporary or is there a need to consider programme-level changes over the longer term?</p>	<p>Will cancellation of placements be temporary or is there a need to consider programme-level changes over the longer term?</p>		
<p>What additional academic and pastoral support needs may students have, given their placements have been cancelled?</p> <p>How will any additional support needs be accommodated?</p>	<p>What additional academic and pastoral support needs may students have, given their placements have been cancelled?</p> <p>How will any additional support needs be accommodated?</p>		
	<p>Have the careers and placements team (where appropriate) been involved in discussions about the cancellation of placements?</p>		

Academic regulations and quality teams	Academic and placement staff	Students	Employers/placement providers
	Can we help students find alternative placements in other allied professions? (if appropriate)		
	Will the placement hours that a final-year student has accomplished to date provide sufficient evidence of meeting the intended learning outcomes to enable them to graduate as planned?		
	How will learning outcomes related to the cancelled placement be mapped to other modules and/or across the programme as appropriate?		

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