



Union School of Theology Placement Policy

Approved by Academic Board April 2018

Policy reviewed by Academic Board September 2018. Next policy review date September 2021

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2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This policy has been developed in accordance with the following regulations, policies and procedures. This list is not exhaustive:

- [Union School of Theology Student Handbooks](#)
- Union School of Theology Placement Handbook
- [QAA 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student complaints'](#)
- [Open University Handbook for Validated Awards](#)

3. INTRODUCTION

Union School of Theology (UST) arranges opportunities for students to be placed in appropriate Christian churches or organisations in order to develop their academic, personal and professional potential as Christian workers and leaders. UST works with students to develop their skills and experience in various forms of Christian vocational ministry, and to enable them to reflect on their practice. UST is also committed to helping students to reflect on Christian

theology as it is applied in practical Christian ministry contexts. The following document sets out procedures of UST in relation to this for students on the BA theology programme. It is to be used by both the individual student and a designated 'local supervisor' of the placement as the basis of agreement on which the placement is to be conducted. This policy document is to be read alongside the module specifications for its placement modules, and the appropriate programme handbook and regulations. These ensure that the learning delivered, and support provided, are developed, agreed and managed in accordance with formally stated policies and procedures.¹

4. PLACEMENT OVERALL GUIDELINES

In all types of placement, the appropriate legal checks are required regarding the student working with children and vulnerable adults.

Students should not work more than the amount of time agreed beforehand between the student, UST and the local church/organisation, and as set out below. The student is not allowed to undertake pastoral work which might make the student vulnerable physically or emotionally. The student is not allowed to undertake pastoral work which is beyond his/her level of competence, such as working with people with a known mental illness or profound personal problem and which might require specialist intervention, unless there is an agreed level of professional support to do so. The student is not allowed to work alone with a child or vulnerable adult.

The cost to the student of fulfilling a placement is the responsibility of the student concerned, but the placement provider is expected at least to cover the cost of travel between home and placement location; to reimburse legitimate expenses incurred in the fulfilment of any duty; and reimburse the cost of board and lodge for the student if the placement is away from the student's home. The placement has freedom to make any further financial contribution to the student it considers appropriate. School costs are included in the student fees for the year. Students should already have completed a DBS check as part of the admissions process for UST (see [Admissions Policy](#), Section 8.6), and should make sure it is up to date to cover their time of placement with the church.

5. THE PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Students are offered two kinds of placement in order for them to develop their skills and experience for future vocational Christian service.

a. Extra-curricular ministerial placements

These are offered to all first-year campus-based students as an experiential introduction to local church ministry and as part of their personal spiritual and pastoral formation and

¹ UK Quality Code for Higher Education, B10, Indicator 2.

development. Students are attached to a congregation for the whole of the first year, during which they are expected to attend reasonably regularly, and gain experience of three key tasks:

- Where appropriate preaching approximately twice a semester to gain experience in preparing and delivering sermons, or undertaking other appropriate speaking activities such as leading Bible studies
- attending at least bi-monthly a leadership meeting to gain insight into the management of church life
- undertaking occasional pastoral visiting to gain experience of the provision of pastoral care.

In such extra-curricular placements, the amount of 'working-time' expected of the student is kept at as low a level as possible so that the placement does not become intrusive upon formal studies. Students are advised to give no more than one evening in each month to attendance at leadership meetings, and to set aside on average one day in each month for sermon preparation. At the end of the year, students are free to end their attendance and involvement at the designated congregation. There is no formal assessment of the work experience but there is contact between the church and the UST Pastoral Dean to ensure that the placement is purposeful and useful to the student and for guidance to be offered to the student with respect to his/her competence and professional development.

b. Formal Placement modules – Level 5 and 6

For students registered with the University of Chester, the Placement modules are optional. For students registered with Open University, one placement module is required at level 5 and one at level 6.

The ten-credit Open University validated Placement module at Level 5 involves 70 hours of service in the chosen church/organisation under the local supervision of a designated leader within that body. This can be taken in a block, or spread across several months.

The twenty-credit Open University validated Placement module at level 6 involves 140 hours of service in the chosen church/organisation under the local supervision of a designated leader within that body. This is ideally taken as a block (c. one month) or can be spread across several months in smaller sections.

The precise form of placement will reflect the particular gifts and interests of the student and is agreed between the module leader (usually the Pastoral Dean), the student and the designated local supervisor but requires active participation in some aspect of the ministry, speaking at least once to the congregation/body or an internal organisation thereof in the

presence also of the local supervisor. During the placement the student will meet at least weekly with the local supervisor to ensure the fulfilment of the module conditions and the agreed plan, and for guidance and feedback on the work performed. Students are also invited to seek guidance from the module leader (usually the Pastoral Dean) during the placement, who will visit the placement (or make a call by VOIP to student and supervisor) to assist in the effectiveness of the placement opportunity or to intervene should a dispute arise that cannot be settled by mutual agreement between the student and the local supervisor.

The local supervisor will maintain contact with the module leader (usually the Pastoral Dean) during the placement in order to ensure its smooth operation and its relevance and helpfulness to the student. At the conclusion of the placement they will complete a 'supervisor's report' indicating the local supervisor's assessment of the suitability and competence of the student in relation to their ministerial/leadership development, and assessing student against a set of criteria based on module Learning Outcomes. In Ministry Placement 1 this report is discussed with the student by the supervisor. In Ministry Placement 2 the student is invited to contribute comments as the report is being written.

6. RESPONSIBLE PERSONS

In extra-curricular placements the person responsible for UST is the Pastoral Dean or their designated representative; and in the local church the 'local supervisor', who will be the senior minister or their designated representative and who must be an experienced and suitably qualified member of the leadership team.

In the placement modules, the person responsible from UST is the module leader. In the local church/organisation the responsible person is the 'local supervisor' who will be the senior minister/leader or their designated representative, who must be an experienced and suitably qualified member of the leadership team.

The 'local supervisor' is responsible to ensure that the placement is properly undertaken by the student, to communicate as desired or necessary with the module leader, and to ensure that the church fulfils its reasonable obligations of care for the student. The local placement supervisor will ensure that the church does not make more demands than agreed for the placement upon the student, provides any necessary equipment for the placement to be fulfilled, and covers the legitimate expenses incurred by the student in fulfilling the placement. In the case of the placement module, the church will, if required, provide suitable board and lodging free of charge during the placement.

7. CHOICE OF PLACEMENTS

Students are invited to propose their own choice of placement agency for the placement modules or may be offered suitable alternatives. The location of the placement must be agreed by the placement tutor (usually the Pastoral Dean). Care is taken to make a risk assessment where appropriate, and to match the individual student's prior experience, gifts, preferences and requirements, such as a placement within a local church for those with a vocation to that ministry, or with a Christian organisation for those whose vocation is to administrative or representational work, or with a mission organisation (including overseas). This is part of the due diligence UST takes in preparing a learning experience by means of a placement. This involves ensuring that the placement provider has the human and material resources to create a positive learning experience for the student, that the local supervisor has the training and support to contribute to the enhancement and assessment of the skills and learning of the student, and an appropriate practical learning context is provided.² UST ensures that local placement supervisors have appropriate training, support and guidance for the function, and understand the role they are expected to play.³ UST will provide induction, training and guidance to the Placement Supervisor as to the criteria to be assessed in the placement report, which will be completed in discussion with the module leader (usually the Pastoral Dean).⁴ Where a student has a continuing recognised role at their home / sending church or mission organisation, placements are usually arranged there unless prevented by necessity.

The purpose of placement is to test and develop individual skills and gifts in preparation for service in the sphere chosen by the student. It also involves deploying theological understanding in various practical ministry contexts. The ability to think theologically in ministry situations, and use theological resources to deal with issues encountered in pastoral or vocational ministry contexts is a key skill that should be embedded in experience during the placements, so that it can be continued throughout future ministry work.

8. PLACEMENTS AND FUTURE MINISTRY

A structure exists within UST to help identify and develop a student's vocation and gifting as follows:

- a. Each student is encouraged to develop a confidential and open relationship with the Pastoral Dean or their designated representative for pastoral care.
- b. Each student is placed in a 'Personal Tutor Group' which meets weekly for prayer and reflection and affords the student a spiritually developmental relationship with the member of staff who leads it as well as with fellow students as a peer group.

² *Quality Code*, B 10, Indicator 6.

³ *Quality Code*, B10, Indicator 13.

⁴ *Quality Code*, B10, Indicator 15.

- c. Each student attends daily worship and participates from time to time in its leadership, including the presentation of short addresses which are reviewed by an experienced member of staff in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in the leadership of worship and public speaking.
- d. There is a formal strategy for ministerial formation which includes modules in preaching, mission and pastoral theology, and a weekly 'Preaching and Pastoral Workshop' in which case studies are presented for discussion and analysis. These include major pastoral challenges.
- e. Every member of staff accepts a duty of spiritual care for students, as well as of academic or more general personal support. In addition, the School has a qualified student counsellor available, and the bursar offers confidential financial advice.
- f. The student body meets weekly without a staff presence, for a period of prayer and reflection, including the discussion of their experience of student life at UST. The Student President is encouraged to raise with an appropriate member of staff any issues identified in those discussions.
- g. The placement modules are designed to enhance ministerial formation and upon that process UST seeks to build strategies of personal development and ministerial formation so that each student is individually enabled to reach their potential sufficient to begin well in their chosen spheres of Christian or secular service. In rare instances, after placement experiences and their studies it may become clear that students are not suited to their intended vocation. Such students will be supported in seeking an outlet for their ministry skills that is more suitable for them. Personal guidance in these matters is generally provided by the member of staff with whom a student feels most comfortable.
- h. In the final year, students are made aware of vacancies in churches and Christian organisations, especially those which contact the School to advertise them. Guidance is offered about how to respond to these effectively and appropriately, and a member of staff will be offered to a student to mediate between student and church in the process of exploring a settlement.
- i. Students are invited to seek continuing support from the School in the first few years after graduation, but this should be initiated by the student. It is considered that the openness of an alumnus to guidance and support is essential to its effectiveness.
- j. The Pastoral Dean is available to churches in which an alumnus has settled to offer guidance and support to them, including if necessary acting as a mediator when difficult issues arise.

9. DOCUMENTS FOR THE PLACEMENT MODULES

- a. The primary documentation for the placement modules are the module specifications available to all students online and in print upon request.

- b. Details of the operation of Placements and roles and responsibilities and documents relating to the process are set out in the UST Placement Handbook.
- c. A formal learning agreement setting out roles, responsibilities and expectations within the placement will be agreed between Union School of Theology, the placement provider, and the student for each to formally sign before a placement is undertaken.
- d. In view of the fact that placements are of limited duration and may even be overseas, there is no schedule for placement visitations unless otherwise specified in this document.

10. THE WRITTEN COMPONENT OF THE PLACEMENT

If the written component of the placement involves human-subject material (such as interviews, case studies, or descriptions of individuals) the proper research-ethics permissions should be obtained and the correct procedure must be followed. See the UST [Research Ethics Policy](#) in the *UST Handbook of Policies and Procedures Programmes*.

Chester University Registered Students

The student is expected to keep a record of their work experience, including personal reflection, and after completion of the three weeks of service, students are required to write a reflective essay of 2,000 words.

The local supervisor will also provide an independent report to the module leader.

The final 2,000 word reflective essay constitutes the debriefing procedure.

This assignment is to be a personal reflection on Christian ministry in the light of the activities in which the student was engaged while on placement. Students may choose to include an assessment of one particularly significant experience or it can be as broad as the whole of the placement experience. Either way, students must clearly demonstrate that their reflection has grown out of this experience.

Open University Registered Students – Assessments for Placement Modules

Ministry Placement I

- 1) An evaluation report of skills demonstrated in the placement and their effectiveness, to be completed by the Placement Supervisor who will include a discussion with the student as the report is prepared. (20%). The mark will be assigned by the Placement supervisor in consultation with the module leader based on demonstration of fulfilment of module learning outcomes. Guidance on the preparation of this report is given to the local placement supervisor.
- 2) A 2000 word written reflective report evaluating the learning derived from the placement and demonstrating integration of theological and practical materials. (80%) During their

induction to the module students are given guidance on the preparation of this. The written reflection requires the student to reflect on theology in their practice context.

Ministry Placement II

- 1) An evaluation report the content of which is agreed between the Placement Supervisor and the student, with the mark assigned by the Placement supervisor determined in consultation with the module leader based on demonstration of fulfilment of module learning outcomes. (20%)
Guidance on the preparation of this report is given to the local placement supervisor.
- 2) A placement diary / blog / or learning log compiled by the student demonstrating reflection on practice (10%)
- 3) A 4000 word written project demonstrating the student's ability to integrate Biblical or theological material with Christian ministry practice in the placement context, and evaluation of the outcome (70%)

During their induction to the module students are given guidance on preparation for this assessment. Students will be asked to identify in advance one theological issue, theme, or section of Biblical material, relevant to the placement context, and with which they will engage and reflect on during the placement. They are to assess how the theological issue relates to an issue or series of issues they encounter during the placement. During the placement, and in the written assessments component (blog and project), students need to demonstrate the skills of relating theology to Christian ministry practice.

11. THE DEBRIEF PROCESS

After the placement, students will undergo a debrief session with the module leader, usually the Pastoral Dean. Any issues requiring further attention are then dealt confidentially by the module leader or their representative (if this is someone other than the Pastoral Dean).

During this debrief there will be discussion of options for future placements or future outcomes in Christian vocational ministry, and what has been learned for these as a result of the placement experience.

The student's record is maintained by UST according to its [Data Protection Policy](#).⁵ UST retains a record of the churches and Christian organisations used for ministry placements, and formal correspondence created when setting them up and confirming details.⁶

⁵ See UST Data Protection Policy in *UST Handbook of Policies and Procedures Programmes*.

⁶ *Quality Code*, B10, Indicator 10.

12. RISK ASSESSMENTS AND REVIEWS

The Programme Committee reviews this module as part of its regular monitoring and review process.⁷

UST takes a risk-based approach to developing and managing placement opportunities.⁸ It undertakes an assessment of placements with regard to the safety and appropriateness of the working environment, the equipment required of any agreed task, the effective line management of the facilities and of the staff, and any terms and conditions applied to the placement. It may accept an existing risk assessment properly undertaken by the placement location. In the event that the School approves a placement, but the student is at any time not satisfied, the student may complain to the module leader, who will communicate with the local supervisor to resolve any problems. If the module leader considers it necessary, the placement shall accept a visit by the module leader or their representative to ensure that matters have been resolved to their satisfaction. If resolution by informal means is not possible, students may use the formal [Complaints Procedure](#).⁹

The local supervisor is responsible to ensure that the student has at least one day in each week of the placement completely free of placement duties; and is not required to work more than 35 hours in any one week unless exceptionally the student agrees to do so as contributing to the overall required hours in the placement set out in the module specification. In such an event, the local supervisor will ensure that the student has sufficient time off to recover from such extra working hours in order to the proper fulfilment of the placement. No student shall be required to work more than the agreed number of working hours.

In view of the fact that UST has a small student body, it is usual for each placement module to be unique and therefore not requiring the periodic review of a risk assessment, but where a period of three calendar years has passed between placements at the same location, a review shall be undertaken by completion of a written questionnaire and if the module leader considers it necessary, by a personal visit to the location.

⁷ Quality Code, B10, Indicator 5.

⁸ Quality Code, B 10, Indicator 5. See UST Placement Risk Evaluation in UST Risk Register.

⁹ See UST Complaints and Grievance Procedure, in *UST Handbook of Policies and Procedures Programmes*.