

Good Practice for Compulsory Study-Based Placements Abroad

This Good Practice aims to assist departments organising compulsory study-based placements abroad (i.e. departments offering “Year Abroad”¹ undergraduate degree programmes). It should be read in conjunction with the [Good Practice for External Curriculum-based Placements](#).

The Assistant Registrar (Placements) is available to advise on any aspect of these processes. Please contact Adrian Hawksworth (a.hawksworth@imperial.ac.uk)².

The role of Departmental Exchange Programme Co-ordinator	
1	<p>Each department offering compulsory study-based placements abroad must have adequate systems in place to manage the placement of students. Key to such management structures are exchange programme co-ordinator(s). The co-ordinator(s) should be responsible for ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Links with partner institutions are well managed, especially the confirmation of places available each year. A knowledge and understanding of curricular and non-curricular opportunities at the partners (including accessibility of projects in the format required by the home department) should be maintained. ▪ Students are kept well informed about a.) the availability of placements, b.) the processes for planning, preparing for and undertaking a placement and c.) the responsibilities of all parties (the College, the placement provider and the student). ▪ Links with the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication [the principal provider of language preparation] are managed effectively, including the management of language testing (please see sections 10-12). ▪ The academic and language progress of relevant students is monitored.
Establishing and maintaining links with Placement Providers (ordinarily institutions of higher education)	
2	<p>All Year Abroad placement providers must be approved by the relevant Faculty Committee. Proposals for new providers must outline details of how the proposed institution will make an effective exchange partner and include information on the pastoral care, supervisory arrangements and learning support facilities available. Where no comparable student exchange links exist with a proposed partner it is expected that the department will undertake a preparatory site-visit. Where a visit is not undertaken on the basis that comparable student exchange links do exist it is expected that the approval process notes the discussions that have taken place with the relevant Exchange Co-ordinator.</p> <p>Exchange links which prosper are those where the local subject co-ordinators have built a strong personal relationship. This usually involves the capacity to make co-ordinating visits, often coupled with visiting students on placement.</p> <p><i>An example of Good Practice is the approach taken by the Department of Physics, where a “visitor” is appointed for each Partner University or clusters (often by country) of partners. The role of the “visitor” includes visiting the students whilst on placement, as well as being a source of knowledge on the partner university.</i></p> <p>If special arrangements exist between the home and host departments for the provision of certain elements of the programme of study (e.g. an extended project or access to courses from one or more study years or levels of study) then it is important that these arrangements are confirmed annually, preferably before students are selected and their admissions at the placement provider are confirmed.</p>

¹ Any reference to “Year Abroad” in this document also includes “Research Abroad”, “Year in Europe”, “International Programme of Study” and “language for science” degrees, except in the case of language preparation (general, tuition and assessment) for “language for science” degrees.

² In the absence of the Assistant Registrar, staff should contact the Academic Registrar.

Promotion of Relevant Courses	
3	Departmental entries in the Undergraduate Prospectus should make reference to the study abroad options available.
4	<p>All applicants should be informed of the options to study abroad at interview and/or admissions open days. Details of any further options for placement learning (e.g. compulsory or voluntary industrial or project placements) should also be provided.</p> <p><i>It is Good Practice to invite, where possible, students who are planning to study abroad or who have studied abroad, to speak with applicants about their experiences.</i></p> <p>Consideration could also be given to the production of a specific webpage or hard copy handout.</p>
Preparation of the Student for the Placement	
5	Departments are encouraged to review annually, in the summer term, the methods which will be deployed to promote, select and prepare students for placements abroad. The Assistant Registrar (Placements) is available to advise on these matters.
6	<p>A departmental webpage, accessible to current students, should be prepared to aid delivery. Content might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List of partner universities. ▪ Up-to-date contact information, including administrative staff at the partner university and College staff who are knowledgeable about the partner institution. ▪ Timescales and procedures for placement selection. ▪ Feedback from past participants.
7	<p>Where the opportunity exists for current students to transfer onto a Year Abroad course such students should be made aware, either by hand-out/webpage, entry in the relevant departmental handbook or verbally by way of an information session, of a basic timetable of events for the study abroad options available. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General information on how the option fits into the relevant degree and how academic credit is apportioned, assessed and transferred from the host institution, including reference to ECTS. ▪ The name and contact details of the Departmental Exchange Programme Co-ordinator. ▪ Information on how language preparation – where relevant - can be pursued both within and alongside the relevant degree programme (please see sections 10-12). ▪ How progress in the host language is monitored and then finally assessed by the department prior to a study period abroad being confirmed (please see sections 10-12). ▪ Alerting students to the Imperial College Union Erasmus Club, Registry support and key non-academic information (e.g. regarding grants and tuition fee reductions).
8	<p>Briefing Session: A briefing session should take place early in the spring term place for students who are planning to undertake their year abroad in the following session. The Assistant Registrar (Placements) should be invited to participate. The session should include information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Departmental placement selection procedures where selection has yet to take place³. ▪ Application deadlines for each partner and how the department expects application paperwork to be submitted to the partner university (will it co-ordinate or not). ▪ Information on the research strengths of host faculties/departments (this is of particular importance if a project forms part of the study plan). ▪ Examples of study plans and projects undertaken by previous students or a possible study plan if the link is not yet active.

³ Selection for places at non-European partner universities (i.e. non-Erasmus) will normally take place in the autumn term.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The process for confirming academic progression at the end of the year prior to the year abroad (please also see section 15). ▪ The procedure for discussing and confirming a study plan at the host university. ▪ The method for transferring academic credit from the host university to the student's home degree programme⁴. ▪ How the department will maintain contact with the student during placement, including any visits which will take place by academic staff of the home department⁵. ▪ Arrangements for the students' return at the end of the placement (especially any assessments which are to take place at Imperial before the year abroad can be considered complete and any possible impact on graduating as normal). ▪ How feedback will be obtained. The role of the Departmental Exchange Co-ordinator (and others, including those at the host university) throughout the process must be made clear to students. <p>The Assistant Registrar (Placements) will also aim to make contact with all participating students in the spring term to provide advice and assistance which complements their departmental preparation. This will include dissemination of a Year Abroad Hand-out (February) and the Placements Abroad Handbook (May). For those participating in the Erasmus programme advice and assistance with regard to grants will also be provided.</p>
9	<p>Departments are encouraged to organise an appropriate activity (perhaps associated with the Briefing Session referred to in section 8 above) where future outgoing students, returning students (where they are available) and visiting students can meet for information exchange. Efforts should be made to involve the Erasmus Club and relevant College staff, especially language teachers.</p> <p>In those departments where the level of participation is low and such sessions therefore difficult to organise, every effort should be made to ensure that students are made aware of other events, e.g. Erasmus Club activities.</p>
<p>Language Preparation (except for "language for science" degrees where the programme specification should be expressly consulted)</p>	
10	<p>Language Preparation: General Academic requirements for a Year Abroad degree should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Minimum language admission requirements</u>: This would normally be GCSE grade B (or equivalent) in an appropriate language, although departments are free to set higher requirements. ▪ <u>A level of attainment</u> in the relevant language to be achieved before any student may commence a year abroad: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each student should be informed at the beginning of Year 1 as to the required level of attainment. ○ Where students transfer onto a year abroad course after their original course commences any level of attainment to be achieved should be confirmed at the time of transfer. ○ Achieving the level of attainment should be viewed as compulsory where the language of instruction for the study plan is the language of the host country. ○ Where the language of instruction is English (<i>this can include project only placements</i>

⁴ An appropriate statement should be inserted on the relevant webpage or year group material.

⁵ It is encouraged that students at European universities are visited by a member of staff at least once during the placement. Otherwise visits are at the discretion of the department. Departments should utilise such visits for the purposes of maintaining the link, exchanging information and addressing problems. Departments should consider how to make best use of visits made by academic staff to the relevant countries. Alternatively, departments could utilise technology such as Skype to maintain contact.

	<p>where the official working language of the host research group includes English) but where English is <u>not</u> an official language of the host country the department should consider the level of attainment required. Departments are guided as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For countries where the use of English within the general population is not widespread the normal level of attainment should be achieved. This would include Switzerland, France, Germany, Spain and Italy. ▪ For countries where the use of English in the general population is relatively more widespread the need to achieve the level of attainment may be waived. This could, for example, be applied to the Netherlands and Sweden. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where the level of attainment has yet to be achieved at the time of progression to the year abroad a department may set a condition (upon discussion with the student and, where appropriate, the host university) that progression is dependent on successful participation in further language tuition, for example an intensive language course at the host university immediately prior to the start of the actual planned study period. In such cases it must be made clear to the student that the department reserves the right not to confirm progression to the year abroad if this condition is not met to their satisfaction. Students who do not meet such a condition to the satisfaction of their department would be expected to return and commence the relevant year at College. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Appropriate language tuition as part of the curriculum</u> for students who need support in achieving the level of attainment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Course specifications</u> should indicate how language tuition is integrated (meeting the guidelines for tuition described in section 11 below). <p>The College also encourages departments to look beyond the basic provision of language tuition within the Year Abroad degree by facilitating opportunities for students which sustain and enhance their ability; this could include departmental support for attendance at evening classes, participation in pairing schemes and attendance at language courses in the host country in advance of the study period.</p> <p>Departments should therefore acquaint themselves with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ other language provision available from the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication, including evening language courses; ▪ the language instruction provided by their partners (pre-sessional courses, orientation courses, term-time provision); <p>Other opportunities for language instruction in the host country, e.g. Erasmus Intensive Language Courses within Europe for languages other than French, German and Spanish.</p>
11	<p>Language Preparation: Tuition</p> <p>The amount of language tuition required within the curriculum will depend on what the student will be doing at the partner university and on the student's existing language skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For study plans which will be undertaken entirely or mostly in a language other than English and which include any amount of lectures/tutorials/examinations, tuition should normally amount to 6 hours per week (3 hours of contact plus 3 hours of private study) in each of the two years preceding the year abroad. For a year abroad in Catalonia and Valencia the language tuition should be Spanish. For a year abroad in Flemish-speaking Belgium the language tuition should be French. The College's Guidelines for Compatibility with the European Credit Transfer System should be followed when incorporating language tuition into degree programmes. ▪ For other study plans - where the department has indicated a student must achieve a level of attainment in the language of the host country – tuition normally amounting to 6 hours per week (3 hours of contact plus 3 hours of private study) should be built into the degree programme, preferably in the year prior to the year abroad.

12	<p>Language Preparation: Testing</p> <p>Departments are responsible for confirming whether a student has met the level of attainment. This should be confirmed with the student. Departments are at liberty, and are encouraged, to seek the guidance of the relevant language co-ordinator in the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication.</p> <p>Some students may have achieved the level of attainment prior to admission to or at time of transfer onto a Year Abroad course (i.e. those already fluent in the relevant language or who provide acceptable evidence that they are of the required standard). Such attainment should be confirmed by the Department.</p>
<p>Academic Management of the Study Period</p>	
13	<p>Study Plan:</p> <p>The preferred format for a study plan is a Learning Agreement. Template Learning Agreements are available alongside Guidance on academic recognition of study abroad at: http://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/academic-governance/academic-policy/placement-learning/ .</p> <p>The relevant section of the learning agreement should ordinarily be signed by the student, host co-ordinator and home co-ordinator - and where necessary at institutional level - before the study period commences, although in some circumstances it can be completed within 30 days of the start of the student's study period.</p> <p>The College's Guidelines for Allocating Academic Credit must be followed for study plans at partner universities regardless of whether they use ECTS or not.</p>
14	<p>Academic standing prior to placement: In order to progress to the placement the student must normally be of upper second class honours degree standing.</p>
15	<p>Confirming progression to the placement abroad: This decision should be based primarily on the student's academic progress and, where relevant, their proficiency in the requisite language. However, other factors may be taken into account. The formal decision to allow progression should be made by the Director of Undergraduate Studies or equivalent (with advice from the Departmental Student Exchange Co-ordinator).</p> <p>For those requiring Entry Clearance (Visa) to the Host Country: Where a student requires a visa to enter the host country, the department should receive confirmation that the visa has been granted (copy of passport) in advance of the student's departure for their placement. Progression to the year abroad may need to be withdrawn should a visa not be obtained.</p>
16	<p>Approving Study Aboard Placements: Departments should follow the Good Practice for External Curriculum-based Placements when approving individual placements.</p>
<p>During the Placement</p>	
17	<p>Study Plan: The Learning Agreement is maintained and modifications approved by all three parties as soon as possible.</p>
18	<p>Registration for exams at the host; other assessments at the host and at Imperial; access to projects: Special attention should be given to ensuring that students on placement are provided with appropriate and timely support regarding assessments, access to projects etc. from both the home and host departments. Partner universities do not always provide guidance to their own students in the same way as Imperial; in these cases departments will need to ensure that Imperial students are aware of what is required and are adequately supported.</p> <p>It remains the responsibility of the College to ensure that its students studying abroad receive appropriate support and guidance.</p>

	<p>Departments should record, for each partner university, who is responsible for assessing elements of a study plan. Where assessment of projects is to be undertaken by the home department the contribution of the host university, if any, to that process should be recorded.</p> <p>Receipt of Results from the Partner University: Departments should ensure that they receive from the host universities the results of all assessments, preferably by mid-July but certainly no later than 1 September, to allow for the student's overall result for the year to be determined by the examiners before the start of the ensuing session.</p> <p>Where students undertake a Year Abroad in the final year results should still be received by 1 September at the very latest. It is acknowledged that meeting this deadline is not always possible for some engineering students undertaking their final year at certain partner universities (e.g. RWTH Aachen); in such cases contingency arrangements need to be made so that students can continue to graduate alongside their peers. Departments should ensure that their students are fully informed about such matters.</p> <p>Results from the host university would normally be presented in the form of a transcript or similar document released either to the student or directly to Imperial.</p> <p>Credit Transfer: Departments should establish for each partner university a protocol for the translation into marking schemes of grades awarded to students. Special attention should be given to allowances, if any, made to students which take into account the special nature of a placement abroad. Please see the Guidelines for Compatibility with the European Credit Transfer System for further information.</p>
Upon the Student's Return⁶	
19	<p>Feedback: Departments should ideally organise a debriefing session with each student on their return from placement. It is acknowledged that it may be difficult to arrange such sessions with students undertaking a Year Abroad in their final year. However, it is important that departments still ensure that feedback is obtained from such groups.</p> <p>Departments may also wish to arrange group feedback sessions so that students can share their experiences.</p> <p>Students should receive information on action taken in response to feedback. Recipients of Erasmus Grants for Studies will also be required to submit an on-line report on their placements to European Commission.</p> <p>Students could be encouraged to help maintain a departmental year abroad guide (for specific partner universities and/or a general webpage/booklet). Innovative means of encouraging feedback should also be considered (e.g. blogs, video clips).</p>
Resource Implications	
20	<p>Departments should consider the resource implications of running a Year Abroad degree. Factors to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The maximum number of students that could be supported on such a programme. ▪ The ability to achieve strong relationships with placement providers. ▪ Placements abroad when they are managed within the framework of an exchange, either at departmental, Faculty or College level. ▪ The provision of language tuition. ▪ Staff development: the provision of appropriate support and training for staff involved in the management of this type of placement learning.

⁶ With reference to previous sections: Points 5-9 (Preparation of the Student for the Placement) and Points 17-18 (During the Placement)