

Placement Year Guide

A Complete Guide for Students

“I can’t stress enough how beneficial my year in industry has been to my personal development, commercial awareness and career aspirations.” -
Lucy Buckley, Johnson & Johnson

A globally outstanding centre of teaching and research excellence, a collegiate community of extraordinary people, a unique and historic setting – Durham is a university like no other. With employers increasingly looking beyond qualifications and an emphasis on practical experience and transferrable skills within the recruitment process, a Placement Year from Durham University could really help you stand out from the crowd.

Completing a Placement Year as part of your degree at Durham University can provide you with an opportunity to apply your knowledge in a real-world environment whilst also gaining the necessary skills and expertise to secure that ideal job when you graduate.

Over a third of recruiters state that graduates who have had no previous work experience at all are unlikely to be successful during the selection process for their graduate programmes (High Fliers Research 2019).

Why do a Placement Year?

We strongly encourage undergraduate students to do a Placement Year as part of your degree if you feel it is the right option. We have found that not only will it help you decide what you want to do when you graduate and potentially lead to graduate job offers, but research suggests that those who have completed a placement have a higher degree classification overall. Generally, significantly more people who do a placement get a first than non-placement students.

You will develop a number of **transferrable skills** whilst completing the placement, as well as sector specific experience and knowledge which will support you in future job applications upon graduation whether or not you choose to stay in your chosen industry or role.

- **Future-proof your career:** It is very common for employers to use their placement schemes as a pipeline for **securing talent** for their graduate schemes. Many of our students enter final year with a graduate role secured.

- The connections made during your Placement Year, as well as the recruitment process, will **help expand your network** and enable you to secure roles in the future beyond graduation.
- You will have the opportunity to apply the **knowledge from your degree** in a practical setting and for some decide whether you want to enter the job market or pursue a career in research.
- Placements **will most likely be paid**. On average, a placement student earns between £21,000 to £26,000. Within the third sector, NHS and other public sector bodies you are most likely to encounter unpaid or expenses only placements. It should be transparent on the job description whether a job falls into the paid or unpaid category, but we would advise you ask in advance before applying.

Top tip: Placement Years offer you the chance to trial a future career before committing to training or further study.

Requirements of a Placement Year

Once you have decided to undertake a Placement Year, you should let your department and Faculty Placement Manager know as soon as possible within your second year so that they can inform you of the next steps.

Speak to your Faculty Placement Manager about accessing the correct [module handbook](#) for your department. In general, the requirements are that:

- You must pass all Level 2 modules of your programme (achieving the minimum pass mark for your department).
- You must have secured an approved placement of no less than 40 weeks (made up from one long placement, or up to a maximum of three shorter opportunities if your department allows).
- You must have attended a pre-placement briefing and have completed all pre-placement paperwork.

Those students who have entered the university on a four year degree including a Placement Year already, i.e. Business and Management with Placement Year (N203) or Chemistry with Industrial Route (F111), will not need to change the degree title. If you do not enter university on a four year Placement Year programme, your degree title will be changed the summer before your Placement Year if you secure an approved placement.

There may be other requirements specific to your department or programme which you should check in the module handbook before applying.

Placement Year fee

The tuition fee for your Placement Year will be reduced to 20% of the standard fee you would normally pay.

As you will remain a registered student of Durham University while on placement, you maintain continued access to the following:

- Your student loan and financial support from Student Finance England or equivalent.
- Financial advice and support from the Student Funding Office.
- Academic support for any on-going assessment and for dissertation planning for when you return to study.
- Placement support from your placement tutor.
- Mid-placement visit (either in person or online, at the discretion of your tutor).
- Library facilities, including all online resources.
- Online careers resources provided by Careers & Enterprise.
- IT support through the online helpdesk.
- Support services such as Student Wellbeing, Counselling and Disability.
- Immigration and visa support.
- Continued membership to Durham Student Union and your college.

Assessment

The Placement Year is pass or fail (aside from Chemistry), and it does not contribute to your overall degree classification. However, it is officially recognised within your degree title which will change to include 'with Placement Year'.

Details of the specific assignments that you need to undertake will be provided by your faculty or department. In order to pass, you will need to successfully complete the 40 weeks full-time (or equivalent) placement and have passed the summative assignments.

For whatever reason should you not complete the Placement Year, your degree will revert to the original programme title.

If you are a student of Modern Languages and Cultures (MLaC) studying a language either as a single, joint or combined honours degree, you are unable to complete a Placement Year and instead are required to undertake a mandatory Year Abroad. This is a separate opportunity and process for approval of work opportunities abroad with a Target Language Research Project [TLRP] to complete. The TLRP is not credit-bearing, but a mark for each

essay will be shown on your degree transcript. For details and support please contact your Year Abroad Administrator for MLaC or visit the [Year Abroad SharePoint](#) (current students only).

“The Placement Year enabled me to begin a professional qualification whilst still a student which is extremely valuable and also influenced my final year module choices for university.” - Ellie Hardy, EY

Durham is the top 15 universities in the UK for graduate employability ([Times Higher Education 2023-24](#)).

How to find a Placement Year

Securing a Placement Year is a competitive process whereby you need to proactively apply for a job.

The recruitment period is usually from September to June of your penultimate year, and the placement period is usually from July through to September between your penultimate year and your final year.

Advertised vacancies

Thousands of placements will be advertised as vacancies on company websites and job sites where you will apply and be assessed alongside other candidates in a competitive application process.

We have several resources to help **current students** find placement opportunities:

- [CareersConnect](#) vacancy portal.
- [Searching for placements](#) resources.
- Information on [Careers Sectors & Employers](#).
- [Placement Year newsletters](#).
- [LinkedIn groups](#).

Durham University is ranked in the Top 65 globally for employer reputation ([QS World University Rankings 2025](#)), and is in the Top 10 UK institutions targeted by leading graduate recruiters ([High Fliers 2023](#)).

Speculative applications

An alternative source of opportunities can be found by submitting speculative applications. A speculative application means approaching employers that you would be interested in working for directly to enquire whether there are any unadvertised vacancies within their organisations. The process typically involves sending a speculative cover letter and a CV to organisations and following up with a phone call.

Networking

Utilising your existing networks to locate opportunities is a very resourceful way to secure a placement offer. Consider exploring contacts within any past work experience or close family and friends as they may have the leverage you need to create a role suitable for a Placement Year. Use LinkedIn or speak to your department about alumni they are in contact with or colleagues who work in the area you are interested in.

Current students can find out more about networking on our [Networking at Durham](#) help sheet.

Student Employability Fund

The [Student Employability Fund](#) enables students from low income households to participate in employability and recruitment activities by supporting with expenses such as travel, clothing and subsistence.

Application process

The application process can vary from company to company. Generally, the big multinational organisations will have several stages starting with an online application or CV, followed by video or telephone interview, and then face to face interviews and/or assessment centres. As well as many online resources available for students on the Careers & Enterprise website, there are specific opportunities across the University to practise different elements of the recruitment process (see the [pre-placement support](#) section for more information).

Current students can find out more about applications on our [Making Applications](#) help sheets.

Current students can practise online tests and take mock video interviews on [Graduates First](#).

Your faculty or department will have bespoke ways of promoting interesting placement opportunities that are relevant for you such as via social media and newsletters. Make sure you make the most of these resources by signing up.

Top tip: Current students can join our LinkedIn groups for Placement Year support and opportunities:

- [Find a Placement Year](#)
- [Science Placement Year](#)
- [Business Placements](#)

International placements

You have the option to make your Placement Year experience an international one by working outside of the UK.

International placements often take longer to secure as placements of 40+ weeks are less common. However, a global experience enables you to combine both work experience and cultural immersion, making it a unique way to spend a year.

Things you need to consider to secure an international placement:

- It's important to have a professional online presence as much of your searching will be done online. Make sure you create a LinkedIn profile.
- International placements are often secured using speculative applications and through utilising networks, so it may take longer than a 'standard' application.
- You may want to look at larger UK companies which have international offices or focus your search on a specific region or industry to find smaller organisations.
- The role should be of a suitable professional level, your day to day duties will need to reflect this.
- Depending on your nationality, you may need to apply for a visa to work in some countries.
- For some placements you may need to be proficient in another language, please check the job description before you apply. For additional support, [The Centre for Foreign Language Study](#) offers a variety of language courses which may be of benefit.

Current students can find out more about finding international opportunities on our [Overseas Work](#) help sheet.

Top tip: GoinGlobal is an online resource which provides vacancies and country specific labour market guides. Log in to [CareersConnect](#) and open 'Resources' in the top right corner to access GoinGlobal.

Pre-placement support

In addition to the support offered by Careers & Enterprise, each faculty has a designated Placement Manager who is available for consultation appointments. These sessions will enable you to explore options for Placement Year and provide bespoke support and guidance.

Top Tip: Did you know that you can [book an appointment](#) with your Faculty Placement Manager to discuss anything to do with Placement Years via [CareersConnect](#)?

Careers & Enterprise run a range of events and fairs to support you applying to placements. Our fairs are attended by a number of employers who are there to recruit. We also have an extensive programme of support aimed at placement students, including mock interviews, mock assessment centres and opportunities to get your CV checked by a member of staff.

The Part Time Jobs, Placements & Volunteering Fair takes place each October and we invite many placement providers to attend the event to promote and discuss opportunities within their organisations.

Top tip: Your department may offer a range of bespoke workshops and events. Look out for them being advertised and sign up early to secure a spot.

Placement Year approval

If you have been offered a Placement Year role, you can start the approval process on [PebblePad](#).

This allows your Faculty Placement Manager and department to review your offer and begin the approval process to ensure you have a fantastic and safe placement experience.

The process will involve confirming that the placement:

- Meets the minimum requirements and learning objectives set out in your Placement Year module handbook.

- Offers work of a professional level similar to that of a graduate job.
- Provides a named supervisor who will support your workplace development and liaise with the University.
- Provides you with a safe working environment that complies with the University's requirements.
- Provides reasonable adjustments if you have a disability or health conditions (where necessary).
- Complies with the requirements of your visa as set out by the Home Office, if you are an international student with a student visa.

Once your Faculty Placement Manager and department have approved your placement, you will need to finalise the approval process by:

- Completing a risk assessment.
- Completing a health declaration.
- Attending a pre-placement briefing.
- Submitting a request for insurance (if applicable).
- Signing the student declaration.

Once you have accepted a Placement Year opportunity, we would strongly encourage you to withdraw your applications from other roles to ensure you maintain a professional relationship with other organisations – you never know who you may be seeking employment with in the future!

“Completing a year placement has been invaluable, allowing me to gain skills, improve employability prospects and give me knowledge of the real working world. This allowed me to come back to Durham for my final year, prepared and more knowledgeable, able to relate learning to personal experience.” - Ellen Gibson, Aldi

Before going on placement, please:

- Complete all relevant sections on PebblePad.
- Inform your department and college.
- Share key contact details with the University and family.
- Take out health insurance (international placements).
- Register for University and pay tuition fees.

While on placement, please:

- Check your University emails regularly.
- Get in touch with your academic placement tutor after two weeks.
- Contact your Faculty Placement Manager or academic placement tutor if you need support.

Location and accommodation

When applying for a Placement Year, one of the things you may want to consider before you begin your search is location and accommodation. Many students may choose to relocate for their Placement Year and will find accommodation in the same city where they will be working. If you have already secured accommodation in Durham, it may be that you will be searching for a placement at an organisation which is commutable from Durham.

Durham Students' Union Advice and Help Centre has some great [Housing Support resources](#) available online, including a contract checking tool and resources on private renting. Some of these resources specifically refer to private accommodation in Durham (either as an individual or a group), but the advice also applies to renting more broadly.

Council tax

As a student, you are exempt from paying council tax in the UK if you are living with other students. This is the same when you are on Placement Year. You will need to provide evidence of this with a council tax exemption certificate which you can [apply for online](#).

You may choose to live with other working professionals on placement and although you are exempt, they are not and may still expect you to contribute to the cost of paying for the council tax.

Accommodation in Durham

One of the main concerns which students have when deciding whether to do a placement is whether to sign for a house with their friends during second year. The choice is an individual one but there are a couple of things to consider:

- You may want to avoid signing for a house as housing contracts can be difficult to get out of. In most cases you will need to find someone to take your place.
- Speak to your college. If you don't manage to secure a placement, then you may be able to sign up for a room in college for your final year.
- If you have already signed for a house in Durham, you can still search for placements as there are many local employers who could offer opportunities.

Accommodation in London

When searching for accommodation in London, remember that for some parts of the city, it can be just as competitive finding somewhere to live as securing your placement in the first place!

It can often be quite a fast-paced process with rooms only being advertised 1-2 months before they are available. This can sometimes feel a bit challenging if you manage to secure a placement early on in the academic year and want to organise your accommodation in advance or if you have plans to travel before your placement starts. For this reason, it would be a good idea to put aside some time before your placement to look around potential homes.

International accommodation

Securing accommodation in another country can seem like a challenge. However, a lot of research can be done online which can help your search when you relocate.

- Use GoinGlobal and read the 'Country Career Guides' to understand more about the accommodation market in that country. Log in to [CareersConnect](#) and open 'Resources' in the top right corner to access GoinGlobal.
- Read the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office '[Foreign Travel Advice](#)' for the country you will be relocating to. It provides specific safety advice which relates to your chosen country and individual regions/area of cities which you may be considering moving to.
- Check with your host organisation about suitable locations to live and reputable companies which advertise suitable accommodation. They may also have a Relocation Manager/HR representative who can offer this assistance to you.
- You may want to book and stay in a hostel for a couple of weeks before your placement starts so you can physically go look at possible flats and houses rather than committing online (this can also be a great way to meet new people).

Tips on finding accommodation

Buddy up

It may be worth asking other placement students if you would like to 'buddy up' and rent a house or flat together.

HR department

You can ask the Human Resources department of your host organisation if they can connect you with other placement students.

Friends, family and social media

Asking friends and family to share posts on Facebook or LinkedIn may also help you in your search, especially if you are relocating.

Searching the web

Here are just a couple of websites which you can use to start your search:

- [SpareRoom](#)
- [Gumtree](#)
- [Rightmove](#)
- [Unite Students](#)

Travel and transportation

Make sure to check your insurance, explore travel benefits, and apply for necessary insurance.

You may have access to a car whilst on placement and choose to use your car for work. In this instance be mindful that this may affect your insurance and you may need to take additional cover for business use.

Your host organisation may be able to offer employee travel benefits, so make sure you get in touch with them before signing up for any season tickets for the bus, train or tube/metro.

Student Oyster card

If your placement is in London, you can apply for a [Student Oyster card](#). You will need to apply on the Transport for London website and the University will then be asked to confirm that your placement is eligible.

To be eligible for a Student Oyster card, your placement must be in London for a minimum of 14 weeks and must be a mandatory part of your course (which approved Placement Years are). When you set up your account to apply for the photocard, you will need to select the 'Coming to London on a work placement?' option.

Insurance

If your placement is located more than 60 miles or 60 minutes travel from your home time or term time residence, you will need to apply for approval to travel and travel insurance using the VIATOR system. If you plan on taking additional trips or extending your stay in a foreign country for travelling purposes, then we would advise you to take out additional insurance as you will not be covered by the University travel insurance.

Top Tip: Download the [Crisis24 Horizon mobile app](#) to your phone and keep up to date with the latest travel advice and alerts for the country you are in.

Finance and funding

The tax year runs from April to April, which means it is likely that your Placement Year will span two tax years.

If you're on a paid placement, you will have to pay income tax and national insurance on any earnings which are above the personal allowance amount. You should keep all of your financial documents during and after your placement, as in some instances you may need to make a claim if you have overpaid. This is something you can do yourself. For current information, visit the GOV.UK website for [paying tax on student jobs](#).

Unpaid placements

We encourage all students to undertake a paid placement but acknowledge that in some sectors there will be limited opportunities, and you may have to undertake an unpaid Placement Year. We would encourage all students to think carefully before accepting an unpaid placement and to consider the following:

- As a minimum, request expenses that will cover travel and subsistence.
- If you will be working part-time, negotiate a shorter working week over a longer duration to ensure a better work/life balance.
- Download a budgeting app and plan what your spending will be each month to work out how much money you will need to live off (don't forget budget for fun things too!).
- Your college may have bursaries or scholarships or other financial support available to support you through the application process and whilst out on placement. Current students can contact your [college support team](#) for further information.

- For some unpaid placements, you may be eligible for ‘special cases’ funding if you are in receipt of support from the Student Loans Company. Current students can find more information on the ‘[Financing Your Placement](#)’ page of the Placement Year Hub.

If you are in receipt of a loan from Student Finance England or equivalent, it is likely that the amount you received on your Placement Year will be different.

Professional etiquette

Your placement is a professional experience that requires a professional attitude, an eagerness to learn and appropriate behaviour.

For the duration of your placement, you are an employee and therefore will be expected to behave like all other employees. Whilst no one will expect you to know everything, it is important that you meet certain expectations. During your placement, you should try to:

- Clarify expectations regarding assigned responsibilities and activities.
- Demonstrate a positive, enthusiastic attitude.
- Meet deadlines.
- Avoid office politics and gossip.
- Interact professionally with colleagues, customers and supervisors.
- Follow office policies regarding use of phones, computers, email, etc.
- Dress appropriately as clarified by supervisors.
- Exercise wise time management skills. Do not be late and if you are for any reason, then apologise. Make sure you allow yourself ample travel time to avoid delays.
- Consult regularly with your supervisor and/or placement tutor about your placement experience. When you check in, it’s good practice to do as much as you can beforehand and have a list of questions ready. Communicate your progress and follow instructions.
- Ask for assistance and advice as needed.

You are still a student of Durham University and as such, you must conduct yourself in accordance with the [policies of Durham University](#).

Before your first day on placement, consider:

- Do you know your route to work?
- Who do you meet on your first day and at what time?

- Organise clothes for the first few days.
- Have a pen and paper so you can take notes at meetings.
- Apply for a Student Oyster card (if in London).
- Plan lunch arrangements (bring snacks if necessary).
- Make sure you get to work on time for your first day (and every day after that).

Statistics

The average Placement Year salary across the UK is £19,158. ([Rate my Placement](#))

52% of placement students who graduated in 2019 achieved a first class honours degree compared with 13% for students who did not complete a Placement Year. (Durham University Business School)

56% of voluntary sector workers in 2023 were employed in workplaces with less than 50 employees. ([NCVO](#))

Three professionals join LinkedIn every second. ([LinkedIn](#))

In 2018 54% of graduate hires for the Top Undergraduate Employers comprised of previous placement students and interns.

58.4m companies have LinkedIn profiles. ([LinkedIn](#))

SMEs account for around 99% of Britain's 5.6m businesses. (Business Population Estimates [2023](#))

Five years from now, almost half (44%) of the skills that are considered important in today's workforce will have changed. ([World Economic Forum](#))

The North East of England is home to **over 71,000 companies**, and experienced one of the highest growth rates in company numbers in recent years, second only to London. ([Invest North East](#))

Students who go abroad are 20% less likely to be out of work when they graduate than those who did not. (UUKi's Go International report)

Durham University is ranked 89th in the QS World University Rankings ([2025](#)).

Over 2/5 of employers offer placements for undergraduates. (High Fliers)

46% of graduate hires from companies in RateMyPlacement's Best Student Employers were students that had completed an internship or Placement Year at that company during their degree. ([RateMyPlacement](#))

Durham placement students have worked all over the world, including Europe, Asia and in the USA.

Durham is in the top 10 universities most targeted by the largest number of graduate employers. ([High Fliers](#))

Students who go abroad are 19% more likely to get a 1st in their degree compared with those who don't. (UUKi's Go International report)

49% of placement students were recruited into a graduate role (ISE Student Recruitment Survey 2024)

Useful University contacts

Whilst you are on placement, you are a registered student and are entitled to make use of the full range of professional support services that the university has to offer. This includes:

Student Experience and Welfare Support

As a Durham student you'll find a wide support network available at the University. For more information, please visit the [Student Support & Wellbeing website](#). Current students can also visit the [Student Support Hub](#).

Colleges

Remember to stay in contact with your college. Each college has a Student Support Officer and can be a great source of support whilst searching for placements and out on placement itself should you need it.

As an intern, I expected relatively low responsibility, however, when there was work to be done I was the first they relied on. For the most part, I was a fully-fledged member of the team. I firmly believe they took my opinions to heart and listened to what I had to say. -Takaki Lievre, Healthy Tokyo

Disability Support

If you have a disability, health condition or learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you may require some reasonable adjustments when applying for a Placement Year or whilst you are out on placement. We would encourage you to tell your prospective employer so that these adjustments can be made. It is understandable that you may not wish to talk about

the nature of your disability to your employers and you are under no obligation to do so. However, if you do choose to tell them you will be protected by the Equality Act 2010.

Disability Support can provide you with advice and support in a range of areas, including:

- Guidance on obtaining diagnostic evidence.
- Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) and other disability funding, such as charitable trusts.
- Advice on how to access support.
- Liaising with other staff about setting up support, including Departmental Disability Representatives (DDR).
- Signposting to other services, including those at the University and externally, such as the NHS and Social Services departments.
- Advice about what the University can do to support you.

The Careers & Enterprise website has a wide range of resources and diversity guides available to support students. Current students can access information on the [Equality, Diversity and Your Career](#) page of the Careers & Enterprise Hub.

For more information, please visit the [Disability Support website](#). Current students can also visit the [Disability Support SharePoint site](#).

Tel: **0191 334 8115**

Email: disability.support@durham.ac.uk

Counselling and Mental Health Service

Some employers may offer a workplace counselling service which you could access whilst on placement. You may wish to use this to help manage any difficulties that are impacting your successful engagement within your Placement Year.

You can also contact the University's Counselling Service, who are a team of trained and experienced practitioners available all year round to registered students via self-referral.

For more information, please visit the [Counselling and Mental Health Service website](#). Current students can also visit the [Counselling and Mental Health Service SharePoint site](#).

Email: cmh.service@durham.ac.uk

Careers & Enterprise

You can access the Careers & Enterprise service throughout your Placement Year via phone, email, in person or online. Opening times are 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday all

year round including vacation times. Current students can access the [Careers & Enterprise Hub](#), which is also a great comprehensive resource, covering a broad range of career related topics including career planning, employability skills and CV writing, which you may find useful during your time away.

You can book in with one of the experienced Careers Advisors for tailored support and guidance during any point of your Placement Year, or upon your return ahead of preparing for future applications in your final year.

For more information, please visit the [Careers & Enterprise website](#).

Tel: **0191 334 1437**

Email: **careers@durham.ac.uk**

Student Funding Office

The Finance department are here to help you to keep your financial affairs with the University in an order whilst you are out on a Placement Year. This could include information on tuition fees, maintenance loans, travel grants and bursaries. There are a range of resources online for you to access.

For more information, please visit the [Fees and Funding website](#). Current students can also visit the [Student Funding SharePoint](#).

Tel: **0191 334 6292**

Email: **financialsupport.undergraduate@durham.ac.uk**

Student Immigration Service

The Student Immigration Service provides advice for international students looking to enter or extend their leave to remain in the UK to study. They work with departments across the University to ensure compliance with UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI) regulations.

The Student Immigration Service has dedicated Immigration Advisors who are the only official provider of visa and immigration advice in the University and advice should not be taken from any other source.

If you are an international student, you may be required to extend your visa if undertaking a Placement Year, and we would advise you to contact the Student Immigration Service in this case.

For more information and to contact the Immigration office, please visit the [Student Immigration Service website](#). Current students can also visit the [Student Immigration SharePoint site](#).

Contact details

For further information on Placement Years for prospective students, please contact our Placements Team at placement.years@durham.ac.uk

For further information on Placement Years for current students, please contact your Faculty Placement Manager at:

artsandhumanities.placements@durham.ac.uk

business.placements@durham.ac.uk

sciences.placements@durham.ac.uk

socialsciences.placements@durham.ac.uk

Careers & Enterprise information

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