

## **Description of practical placement in the Slovak Republic**

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Practical placement (PP) in higher education in the Slovak Republic is regulated by the Act no. 131/2002 (Collection of Laws) on Universities (Universities Act). At the same time, the PP activity is included in the set of essential tasks of the Accreditation Commission (hereinafter referred to as "the Commission") established by the government of the Slovak Republic in the year 1990 as its advisory body. The main aims of the Commission are to monitor and independently evaluate the quality of education, research, development, artistic and other creative activity of the universities. Based on independent evaluation, the Commission contributes to improving the efficiency and quality of the education provided at the Universities and develops recommendations to improve the operation of the Universities.

According to the above mentioned Act the higher education institutions (HEI) have extensive academic rights and academic freedoms, the implementation of which is not affected by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic or other State administration bodies. Active use of academic rights and academic freedoms by HEI is an expression of autonomy and ability to take over the responsibility for fulfilling the mission and tasks and thus to contribute to development of education, science, culture and health for benefit of the entire society. Within the framework of the further education HEI carry out PP for students, lasting for several days up to several terms. After completing such an educational activity, the HEI grant to their graduates certificates on their completion.

At Slovak higher education institutions PP has not been compulsory in the majority of cases, they have been only desirable. Whether a PP is compulsory or not, the PP period and its content are decided individually by HEI (by syllabi at each University which decided to apply this "subject") - usually from 4 weeks to 6 months (one term period). PP is a purpose targeted action to achieve the learning outcomes by implementing the knowledge and skills acquired in the training environment under supervision in the form specified by the educational institution. Generic and specific competences are explicitly aimed by university curricula and syllabi, but the practical skills seem to be less present in the graduates' education. For the HEI, the primary concern is to give a solid education which allows graduates to learn easier the skills and competences need in the workplace. PP takes place in a company selected by the student and generally it is tutored by one supervisor in the company and another at the HEI. Students thus have the opportunity to make use of their knowledge in practice and to tune it to the actual needs of the economic environment. Practical placement activities may also cover searching for and gathering material as well as studying relevant problems for the preparation of the diploma thesis.

For example at the Technical University in Zvolen belongs PP to compulsory subjects for students studying the Corporate Management specialization. Students have to find a suitable enterprise for PP and to work there for one term. After that period they must defend a written exam which describe their experiences during the period of their work.) Evaluation methodology differs across university types and study courses. For obtaining a credit, students must hand in the „Special PP Confirmation“ with the employee`s evaluation and a final report about their working experience.

Students have the opportunity of working in a variety of organisations and industries depending on their particular interests. Students are advised to select their placements carefully with a view to gaining experience in an organisation that may facilitate access for the purposes of data collection for the research thesis. Part-time students may complete one placement with their employer, providing the duties are over and above their regular work-related activities and the placement is relevant to the programme as well as being in a different area from that in which they ordinarily work. Placement contracts are drawn up prior to commencement and achievable goals are set with specific placement outcomes that must satisfy host organisations and the university supervisor. Students are required to meet regularly with the PP supervisor to discuss progress towards specified and agreed goals. The report should contain an executive summary of the placement with detailed activity reports attached as appendices. This provides a varied and insightful account of students' experiences in various agencies and helps to guide students and the placement co-ordinator in selection of future placements.

From the difficulties and obstacles regarding the practical placement in Slovakia there can be mentioned e.g. lack of common rules, regulations, instructions, placement offers, quality control of placements (especially those which are not known by the HEI), students of Bachelor study programmes in most cases do not have the PP in their syllabi. Another problem is lack of cooperation with industry (communication, responsibility, commitment) or low interest and motivation of PP coordinators at the HEI.

*“An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching.”*

Gandhi