

Division of Health Sciences

Important information for students in programs with clinical placement requirements

1. Background

The Division of Health Sciences provides programs leading to practice in a variety of health professions, including Clinical Exercise Science, Dietetics, Laboratory Medicine, Medical Radiation Science (Medical Imaging, Nuclear Medicine and Radiotherapy), Midwifery, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Podiatry. All these programs require mandatory clinical placements in healthcare settings and other related industries.

This paper aims to provide students with information on the range of issues that impact on the University's engagement with clinical and other placement environments. It provides context for why the University must manage its placements in the most efficient and effective way possible. The policy and rules for how students must engage with their clinical placements, set out in the Division's [Clinical Placement Policy](#) and in program and course information, apply to all students, without exception.

2. The Complexity of Student Placement in Health Programs

Clinical placement capacity across Australia

Placement opportunities are required for health students from all of the nation's universities, TAFE's and private education providers. Placement capacity is finite and, in particular, placements in states outside of South Australia are held first for universities and other education providers in those states, thus limiting capacity that can be accessed by education providers from other states.

Placements in South Australia are also competitive. For example, as just one of three universities and many other education providers in South Australia, the University of South Australia, through the Clinical Placement Unit (CPU) in the Division of Health Sciences, places 7,000 students annually, arranging over 1,000,000 hours of placement in well over 2,000 placement sites .

Why is this important for students to understand?

- The SATAC Guide, various University publications and enrolment information inform future students that placements are required in specific programs and that the placements are most likely to be in South Australia. Attending and successfully completing those placements is an integral and mandatory aspect of the program in order to enter a health profession. Students are therefore expected to forward plan their lives around the placement commitments of the program they have accepted an offer into and have subsequently enrolled in.
- Rural placement sites are an important part of the health system and are part of the mix of placement sites students are allocated to. Students should plan for the likely possibility that they will be allocated to a rural site in at least one placement. Some programs have a mandatory rural placement.

- Students who live interstate and are studying externally are unlikely to be placed in their own state and must be prepared to come to South Australia for placement.
- The CPU will not repeatedly approach a placement site at the request of a student if that site has already advised a placement is not available.

The funding of teaching

Funding comes from the HECS students pay (about 40% of the teaching costs) plus commonwealth government funds (about 60% of the teaching costs). The provision of clinical teaching is a significant part of the cost of teaching in clinical programs. The University must contribute funds to placement sites for clinical supervision in some programs. That contribution is based on the student numbers allocated to the placement site and the clinical supervision model (eg, 1 supervisor to 8 students) used in the particular program's curriculum. As the placement site then contracts additional staff to supervise the expected number of students, payment for the full placement period must be made irrespective of whether the student actually attends the placement or withdraws part way through the placement. Therefore, please think carefully about your commitment to attend placement, before you enrol in a clinical course.

Why is this important for students to understand?

- Legislation allows students to withdraw from a course by the course census date without incurring a penalty or a fee. However, in placement courses, that student's clinical place must still be paid for by the University, as outlined above.
- If a student repeatedly enrolls in and then withdraws from the same clinical course the University is paying more than once for a placement which the student does not complete and, when withdrawal happens prior to census date, for which no funds are received. This has a negative impact on funding available for other student support and also means a clinical placement that another student would have valued highly is left unfilled. This can also have the effect of placement providers reducing their future placement offerings.
- Please consider the impact, including on your progression in your program and the link between theory and practical courses, before you withdraw from a clinical course. However, we understand that there are times when withdrawal from a course is really necessary due to an urgent, unplanned circumstance.

Placement Agreements with Placement Providers

The University of South Australia is a publicly funded university, and is subject to state and commonwealth government requirements. Rules and regulations within legislation apply to universities as much as they do to the external organisations universities work with. Such legislation includes government Acts which relate directly to, for example, higher education administration, regulation of health professionals and health students, privacy, protection of children and vulnerable adults, ethical and non discriminatory dealings, and intellectual property.

Why is this important for students to understand?

- The University must have a legal agreement with each placement site it sends its student to, and the agreement must be signed only by a person with the Vice Chancellor's authorisation to do so. The agreement ensures all the insurance, supervision, funding, intellectual property and other important issues are agreed by both organisations.
- Students must not therefore negotiate their own placement with a placement provider/placement site unless expressly advised to do so. Arranging a placement outside of the University's normal process can result in serious issues including:
 - The student not being covered by University insurance.
 - The placement not being captured in University systems and student records.
 - The student may be removed from placement by the placement organisation or the University and may be penalised for unprofessional behaviour.
- Due to legislated requirements to protect children and vulnerable adults, all health and other organisations where children and vulnerable adults may be present must have risk management processes in place to protect their clients. Part of that is the police check requirement. The agreement the University signs with placement sites stipulates that all of our students will meet the mandatory pre placement conditions, including a police check. There are absolutely no exceptions. This includes placement in the University's own clinics and gyms. Various other requirements are in place to protect the public and/or the student. These include immunisations, TB screening etc.
- **Pre placement conditions are mandatory in most cases. Students are not permitted to attend placement, and will not be allocated a placement, without evidence provided to the University that the conditions have been met.** The Student Placement System and the CPU's website hold a wealth of information on pre placement conditions.

3. Information provided to Students about placement

Students receive information about placements through the CPU website, School websites, course documentation and emails from the CPU prior to placement.

Why is this important for students to understand?

- The University has an important function to provide the information students require, and takes this responsibility very seriously.
- Students must accept responsibility to read the information provided to them and to comply with instructions.

4. Behaviour on placement

The behaviour of students on placement must always be professional, taking into account the [Code of Conduct for Students](#) and the code of practice for the [profession](#) in which they will eventually practice. Students must always follow the rules and regulations of the organisation in which they are placed. This includes ensuring that the privacy of the organisation, its staff and clients is always respected.

Why is this important for students to understand?

- Students are representatives of the University and their behaviour has a strong impact on the willingness of that organisation to take future students for placement.
- The University's legal agreement with placement organisations requires the University to agree that its students will follow the rules and regulations of the organisation and uphold the privacy of the organisation, its clients and staff.
- Students are subject to the [legislation](#) regulating health practitioners; students are listed on [professional board](#) student registers in most health professions, and are subject to legislated codes of conduct.
- Always consider the impact of your behaviour on public safety. For example, it is not appropriate for a student to be working in addition to being on full time placement, such as attending placement following a night shift. Unsafe or unprofessional behaviour will result in failure of a clinical course and, in cases where the student is also on a health professional student register, may result in a report to the relevant professional Board.

5. How can students be best prepared for their placement commitment?

- **Plan ahead** so that work and life arrangements fit around your placements to the degree they can.
- **Enrol** in clinical placement courses **at least 12 weeks before the course is due to commence** and with commitment to attending the placement you are allocated.
- If you are eligible for Special Consideration in placement allocation notify this through the appropriate form at least 12 weeks before placement is due to commence.
- Look into and apply for available financial support while on placement. This includes placement scholarships and Centre Link support (placement is full time which therefore meets Centre Link full time study criteria). Many of these opportunities are shown on the CPU website.
- **Read** all information provided, including the [Clinical Placement Policy](#) and associated forms
- **Ensure you meet pre-placement conditions by the date notified** to you.

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