

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & BUILDING CONTROL STUDENT PLACEMENTS	4th December 2018
TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE	
FOR DECISION	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Transition and Transformation
Outcome	Environmental Health Student placements in the Causeway Coast and Glens
Lead Officer	Director of Environmental Services
Cost: (If applicable)	£30,000.00

Background

BSc (Hons) Environmental Health students at UK universities are required to undertake a period of professional placement with councils or industry, in order to fulfil requirements of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health registration process and the degree course. During the placement students complete an experiential learning portfolio that forms part of the pathway to qualification as an Environmental Health Practitioner.

The Health & Built Environment Section has continued to offer placements for Environmental Health students since local government reform following those offered by legacy Councils. 4 placements (2 for Environmental Health and 2 for Building Control) have been made available since 1st April 2015. These placements have not always been taken up however, primarily due to other Councils and the private sector offering paid placements (circa £15,000 pa). Council is currently experiencing great difficulty in recruiting qualified Environmental Health Officers by all methods, agency or direct recruitment to fill vacancies. It is considered that placement students are more likely to return to an organisation where they have a professional investment and meaningful experience.

Under employment law, work placements of less than one year duration undertaken by students as part of a UK based further or higher education courses are specifically exempt from the National Minimum Wage Regulations and so the decision to pay or not, and how much is completely at the councils discretion.

However, it is considered that for the benefit of both the student and the organisation a payment be made for the work undertaken. The student would be under supervision and tasks allocated following a period of training and assessment be

related to the competence demonstrated. This will enhance learning and be of benefit to the organisation in the completion of workloads.

Can students studying at the Ulster University be legally given preference by Northern Ireland Councils?

Guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) and advice from a solicitor and the NI Health & Social Care Business Services Organisation suggests that this is feasible and it is acceptable to 'ring-fence' the pool of potential placement students to one or more selected universities. In addition, many universities in England have documented partnership agreements in place.

How should student posts be filled?

Generally there are a greater number of students seeking placements with councils than the number of posts available. The UUU's selection criteria includes a measure of second year academic performance. The Health & Built Environment section continues to have a representation on the Professional Training Liaison Committee (for Environmental Health) to oversee student placement issues and this will continue.

Recommendation

The following is recommended:

1. That the organisational structure for Health & Built Environment Section be amended to accommodate four student places.
2. That a budget of £7,500 per placement (Total: £30,000) be included in the rate estimates for 2019-2020 to remunerate students for the work undertaken and to include any travel associated costs.
3. That Council continues its partnership with the Ulster University and membership of the professional training and liaison committee.
4. That Council accept the selection process operated by UU for the placement of students for this purpose.