

## **Read the University of Melbourne's responses to placement concerns**

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### **GSA recommendation #1:**

For the University to provide clear, central information on changes to placements on their Coronavirus webpage.

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### **GSA recommendation #2:**

For the University to develop different placement options which students can choose from, to mitigate the impact of modifications on the students' home life, career, and finances.

These options should include:

1. Taking in-person placement when the opportunity becomes available – this may involve extending the course, taking a leave of absence, or switching to part-time study;
  2. Completing placement online; and
  3. Completing placement online and engaging in supplementary in-person experiences at a later date.
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### **GSA recommendation #3:**

For the University to engage a service to provide free or subsidised Visa advice to international students who need to take leave or extend their course.

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### **GSA recommendation #4:**

For the University to offer further support (e.g. technology bursaries, provision of office space) to students who are unable to participate in online placements.

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### **GSA recommendation #5:**

For the University to prioritise students close to completion for placement opportunities (as earlier year students will have greater opportunity to catch up), in line with the Government's recommendation for clinical placements.

### **1. Clear and central information**

Melbourne Graduate School of Education (**MGSE**) is using LMS (Learning Management System) sites for communication regarding placement subjects. This also means the information is being shared with those students for whom it is highly relevant.

The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (**MDHS**) launched a dedicated website in late March with information about the status of student placements, with links to school-specific pages for further information. The central COVID website has a link to this site. We have also sought active input from the student body (via GSA & other association reps) in relation to key deliberations and decisions.

### **2. Different placement options**

In recent weeks, MGSE has surveyed students who were scheduled to commence placement to ask whether they will be in a position to do so. This has enabled us to make arrangements accordingly. We will be doing this for other cohorts over the coming weeks also. Because of the complexities of each level of education, we cannot make available all placement options to every cohort. For example, now that school is back in face-to-face mode, we cannot offer online placements. We are endeavouring to cater to students individual circumstances where ever possible.

All schools and departments within MDHS have been working closely with students to progress their studies in a way that best accommodates their personal circumstance while also ensuring no unfair academic advantage or disadvantage to any student.

MDHS has obtained approval from the Academic Board for a range of structural adjustments that schools and departments can apply to their programs as needed to take advantage of available on-site, high quality placement opportunities. Online placement experiences (both real and simulated) are only being offered to students where academic staff are confident the experience will deliver a comparable standard of education and experience to an in-person placement or where it can be supplemented later in the program. In Physiotherapy, students have been offered external placements as they become available, and the Department has worked with clinical partners to ensure high quality clinical experiences are maintained.

### **3. Visa advice for international students**

Student Academic and Study Support (SASS) can provide advice including:

- Visa implications of enrolment changes, course withdrawals; Leave of Absence, Reduced Study Load; Course Academic Progress Committee (CAPC) outcomes
- Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE) extensions and student visa renewal

Students can contact the EC&R team directly via email ([student-visa@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:student-visa@unimelb.edu.au)) or by submitting an enquiry via [ask.unimelb](mailto:ask.unimelb).

*GSA note: International students have expressed a need to access free or low-cost visa advice. While the advice provided by Stop One is a great starting point, personalised advice for a broader range of situations is needed.*

#### **4. Students who are unable to participate in online placements**

MGSE: Online placements are no longer running as schools have returned to on-site learning.

MDHS: The state of restrictions have changed considerably since the GSA survey. The existing support grants and increasing availability of study space on campus will hopefully address student concerns in this area.

SASS: Funding for technology upgrades related to studying virtually are available via [Emergency Support Fund Category 1: IT Upgrade and study support](#). Limited study space for students is becoming available.

*GSA note: Students have expressed concerns to us that their Emergency Support Fund applications have long processing times. We have raised this issue elsewhere.*

#### **5. Prioritising placements for students close to completion**

One of MGSE's guiding principles for managing placements at this time is to prioritise placements for those students who are on track to graduate in 2020. We have put this into practice for students completing the accelerated mode of the Master of Teaching (Secondary) and will continue to follow this principle throughout the coming months for other cohorts. Despite MGSE's best efforts to request placements, if schools and centres are not able to host placements, this may result in a delay in completion of the course, likely for an additional semester.

MDHS: This has always been, and continues to be, a key priority for all disciplines within MDHS. Acutely aware of ensuring timely completion of students, MDHS sought and obtained special approval for the gradual recommencement of placements even while the University continues to operate as a virtual campus. Nonetheless, the placement needs of cohorts are different, and in some cases an available placement cannot provide the experience required for a final-year student. In these circumstances, the placement may be offered to another cohort for which it is more relevant. In some programs, the sequence of teaching and practice has been adjusted to maximise opportunities for appropriate placements.

## About the Graduate Student Association

The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the peak representative body for all graduate students at the University of Melbourne. We are an independent association led by an elected student council, providing representation, events, training and support to over 36,000 graduate students

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