



## **Department of Computer Science & Applied Physics**

### ***Higher Diploma in Science (Software Development)***

### ***Higher Diploma in Science (Data Analytics)***

#### **Background**

The “computing” Higher Diplomas @ GMIT include a ‘*Work Placement (or project alternative)*’ module at or toward the end of the programme. Whilst the taught modules on the programmes (comprising 60 credits) are concerned with *skills development*, the work placement (or project alternative) is concerned with *personal development* and the *development of traits / characteristics* (rather than additional hard skills development per se).

The ‘*Work Placement (or project alternative)*’ has traditionally been key in helping unemployed students re-enter the work force as it serves / served as a mini apprenticeship of sorts. This was particularly important during the recessionary period of circa 2012+, when these programmes were first conceived and developed. In more recent years, as the economic climate has improved, the focus of these programmes is increasingly oriented toward *upskilling* working professionals rather than the re-skilling of individuals for a return to employment.

In that context, the notion of “placement” needs be considered in the personal context of each student. For instance, many “students” are already placed / employed and are not seeking to be placed elsewhere.

#### **Work Placement (or Project Placement) – Learning Outcomes**

The intended learning outcomes, upon successful completion of work placement (or project alternative), are as follows:

*The student will be able to:*

1. *Work efficiently and effectively on a project as part of a team.*
2. *Contribute to the strategy of a team in achieving project goals.*
3. *Explain the business strategy of an employer and how a team's work relates to it.*
4. *Work autonomously on specified tasks relating to a project.*

Our experience has been that all the placements we’ve secured for students have been successful in bringing about the above outcomes for the individual(s) involved. Additionally, we recognize that many students may have already achieved the intended learning outcomes; for instance, through current or previous employment(s), and that a (new) placement is not necessary. We have a process in place to provide for that situation also; through GMIT’s ‘*Recognition of Prior Learning*’ Policy (which provides for the recognition of both prior accredited learning and prior experiential learning). Finally, we have had situations where

placement has not been possible for a student (perhaps for logistical, medical or financial reasons), and where previous employment(s) have been minimal or non-existent (e.g. recent graduate), and thus the prior achievement of the four learning outcomes cannot be verified. In such cases we have provided students with a “project” (a body of work / journey of experiential learning to complete) to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

In summary, the pathway to completing the ‘*Work Placement (project alternative)*’ module can be through formal placement (either new or existing), or through the recognition of prior experiential learning, or through a new body of work which we may term “project alternative”.

### **Award Classification / “Scoring” the ‘Work Placement (or Project Alternative)’**

The classification of the Higher Diploma award (*1<sup>st</sup> class honours* | *2<sup>nd</sup> class honours grade 1* | *2<sup>nd</sup> class honours grade 2* | *Pass*) is based on the weighted average score (%) in the ten taught modules which collectively comprise 60 credits of learning. The final 15 credits associated with ‘*Work Placement (project alternative)*’ are not graded with a percentage score; the credits are either deemed to have been earned or not .... (*i.e.* have you gained this “experience” through the journey you have undertaken, or not). We do not (cannot) measure or rate the extent of your “experience” in an employment or on a project, nor do we ask employers / placement partners (past or present) to rate you / your experience / your contribution.

Verification of ‘Work Placement (or project alternative)’ is thus verified as follows:

1. In the case of placement in employment with a new or existing employer....:
  - Through one or more conversations (e.g. phone and / or email) to verify that the candidate has achieved the four intended learning outcomes (in the opinion of the placement partner). We advise that students would typically be involved in circa 150 hours (minimally) of purposeful activity related to the intended learning outcomes.
2. In the case of an application by the student through the *GMIT Recognition of Prior Learning* policy....:
  - Through a detailed CV and supporting narrative document (where necessary) clearly outlining when / how / where each of the four learning outcomes has been addressed / achieved through the professional experiences of the applicant.
3. In the case of (1) and / or (2) above not being applicable or possible.....:
  - Through the identification and completion of a body of work, to be completed independently by the student. Typically, a member of the academic staff of GMIT will liaise with the student at the outset with a view to identifying a body of work or research to be completed by the student over a period. Following completion of this body of work, the student submits a report detailing *objectives, process / methodology employed, results obtained, insights learned*

/ *personal reflection*. GMIT academic staff verify that this is the work / narrative / experience of the student (typically through a meeting or phone conversation).

### **Process and Timeline**

1. Students should consider the *Work Placement (or project alternative)* aspect of their programme when they have circa two-thirds of the taught modules complete *i.e.* when 40 – 45 credits have been earned.
2. Students should note that the credits associated with this module can be formally recognized in early June and early September of each year. (So, if you are pursuing a new placement and wish to have the credits recognized in June, you should be commencing the placement no later than mid-March. etc....)
3. The Higher Diploma is recognized / is earned when a student has completed all 75 credits (and these credits have been ratified at a Progression & Awards Board (PAB) in either June or September).
4. Presently, GMIT holds an annual conferring – in Mid-November – each year. The Higher Diploma is conferred on students at this conferring ceremony. Students do **not** have to be present at the ceremony to graduate.
5. At the time of writing (June 2019), the next PAB is in early September, and the next conferring is in November 2019.

For the time being (pending the appointment of a dedicated academic contact point in respect of *Work Placement (or project alternative)*, please contact Sean Duignan ([sean.duignan@gmit.ie](mailto:sean.duignan@gmit.ie)) when you are ready to proceed with this aspect of the programme *i.e.* when you have accumulated at least 40 taught credits (but you can wait until you have all 60 taught credits completed, if you wish). You should indicate whether you are (a) seeking a new placement, (b) already have a placement / are placed, (c) are seeking to use RPL to earn the credits, or (d) are proposing to undertake an independent project / body of work to earn the credits.

