

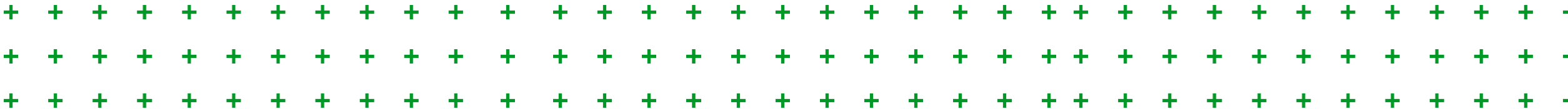
Beyond the lecture theatre

Placement students, PGRs who
teach and PGT supervision

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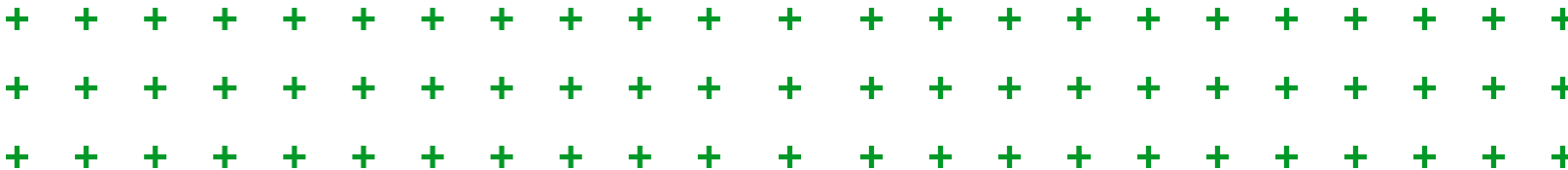


Placements



Placements are different

- Placements are inherently marketed as “differentiators” – year in industry, employer partnership, clinical placements
- The delivery of placements is a mess...a patchwork – fees, support, contract clarity varies across providers
- Students on placement are simultaneously enrolled *and* working often off-campus and cut off from the support networks built during taught years
- OIA sees more complaints from **compulsory** placements tied to professional qualifications (teaching, nursing) — where fitness-to-practise raises the stakes
- Many students never complain formally (fear of reprisal), so problems only surface if SUs actively investigate rather than wait for casework to accumulate



What goes wrong?

- **Reasonable adjustments** - delays putting disability support in place; student felt bullied for asking. Provider paid £2,500 combined after OIA intervened
- **Fee surprise** — PG student invoiced for a placement fee they were never told about pre-enrolment; OIA ordered a full refund + £750 (breach of CMA consumer protection guidance)
- **Placement that didn't exist** — international student sold a 4-year programme with placement; only 3-year route actually validated. £10,000 offered
- **Harassment allegation** — provider investigated without telling the student who'd withdrawn their complaint; OIA said keep students informed even when they step back



What about the fees?

- Regulatory cap: up to 20 per cent of tuition for work placements, 15 per cent for study abroad (≈£1,907 / £1,430 at 2025/26 rates)
- Actual charges range from £0 (Salford) to the full cap
- International students: some pay the same flat fee as home students (huge relative saving); others pay 20–50% of a much higher international fee
- A worrying volume of providers don't publish an international figure at all (marked "TBC" or "n/a")
- What the fee actually buys: continued registration, library/IT access, a named academic contact, assessment infrastructure

/ HOME / CAREERS / JOBS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

PLACEMENTS

Placements can provide valuable opportunities to develop key employability skills and gain vital professional experience.



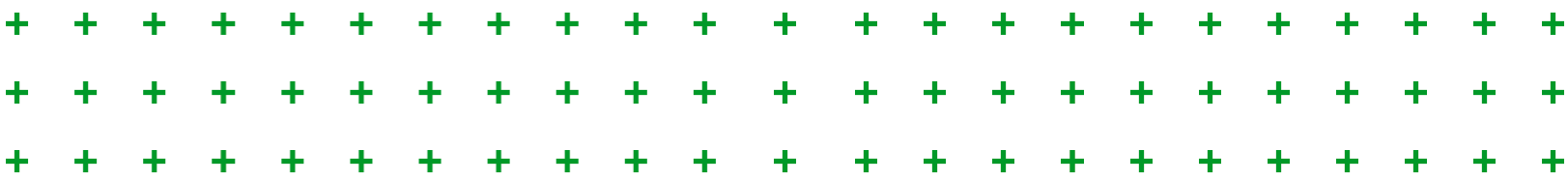
The gaps

- **Guarantee gap** - most providers explicitly say placements are "not guaranteed," yet marketing uses "guaranteed placement" language freely
- **Bursary cliff-edge** - several providers suspend bursaries/scholarships during placement years, precisely when students may be unpaid
- **Maintenance gap** - placement-year maintenance loans are dramatically lower than standard years and most supplementary grants (DSA, childcare, adult dependant) aren't available
- **Assessment paradox** — placement years are usually pass/fail and don't affect degree classification, despite a full year of fees, time
- **When it breaks down** — almost nothing is published on status, fee liability, or visa sponsorship if a placement collapses mid-year; complaints routes for issues with host-organisation staff are largely undocumented

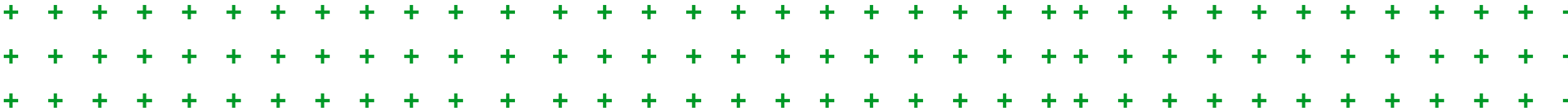


What to look for

- A Placement Student Rights Charter covering
 - Clear information, preparation, support, safe and fair treatment, the right to voice concerns without penalty, remediation if a placement can't be completed, and respect for dual student/employee status
- Fee transparency asks: pound figures (not just %) on both course and central fee pages; published international and PGT placement fees; total programme cost including placement year shown at point of application
- Support asks: named contact + minimum supervision standard (visits/contacts) disclosed upfront; clear adjustment-coordination process with hosts; visa-specific support for international students
- Rights/protection asks: documented complaints route covering host-organisation staff; no NDAs on harassment/misconduct; clarity on status, fees and funding

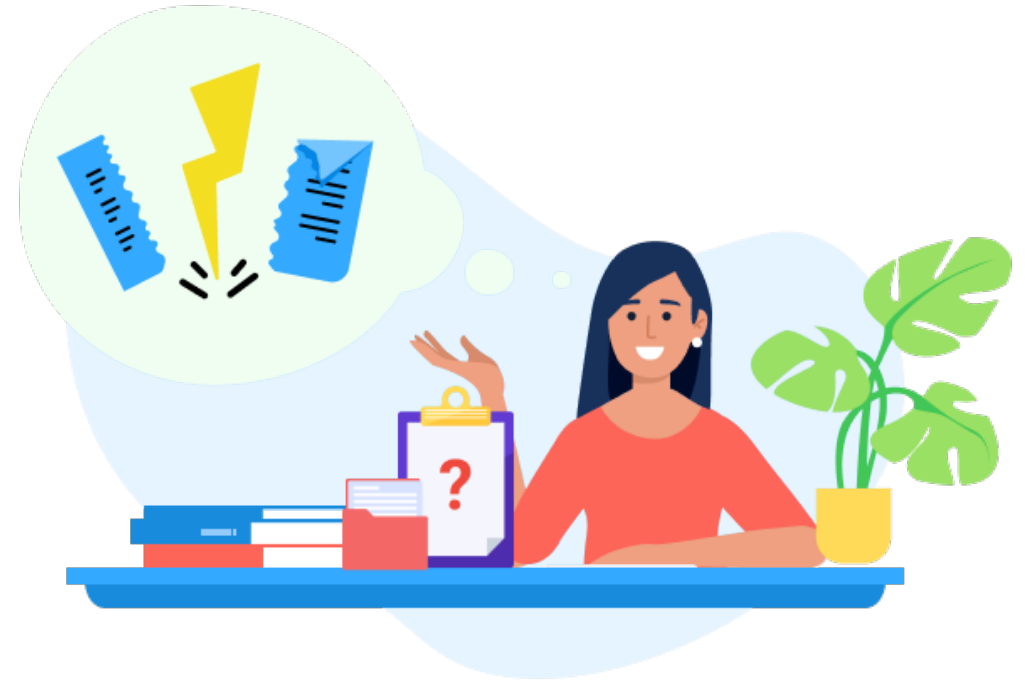


PGRs who teach



Employee versus casual

- PGRs deliver a huge share of UK teaching (seminars, labs, marking)
- UKRI and unis recognise this is good experience but shouldn't take up loads of time – there's two ways to categorise PGRs who teach
- **Employee model** (Sussex, LSE, Bath, UCL, Edinburgh): staff contracts with pensions, sick pay, annual leave
- **Casual worker model**: some contracts state explicitly "no mutuality of obligation," no sick pay if teaching is missed through illness, rolled-up holiday pay (12–17%) that can't actually be booked as leave



The hidden underpayment

- Warwick allocates 3 hrs prep per seminar hour; one institution allocates just 30 minutes - and one sets a marking rate of 4,000 words/hour, which is "fantasy... with financial consequences"
- Some guidance tells PGRs struggling to mark in the allotted time to "adjust their approach"
- **Training:** paid at some institutions (Manchester, Sussex); at others explicitly unpaid as "professional development"
- York's mandatory course is ~25 hours, worth £400+ if it were paid
- **Space and equipment:** PGR teachers often have no guaranteed office, use personal laptops/broadband for online teaching, and in some cases can't access common rooms or get a full staff ID - symbolic exclusions that reinforce a "not a real academic" status

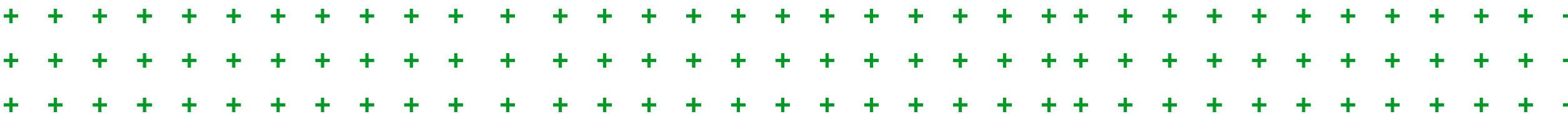


What to think about

- **International PGRs** (~40% of the group): rigidly enforced 20-hour visa work cap for *paid* work, but unpaid mandatory training doesn't count against it — so a student can do 20 hrs unpaid training + 20 hrs paid teaching in one week while barred from more paid hours
- **Disabled PGRs** sit across two disconnected systems - disability services as a student, occupational health as a worker
- **Recruitment** often runs on informal networks and supervisor gatekeeping rather than open advertising — disadvantaging international students, working-class PGRs, and anyone with a broken supervisor relationship



PGT Supervision



Supervision is often a weak spot

- A dissertation can be half a MA in credits and in time – it's high stakes
- Students often never meet their supervisor, drafts aren't read, supervisors are relaxed etc.
- In 2022, PTES found 76 per cent were happy with dissertation planning support, one in five didn't find feedback helpful
- Also something important about likelihood to criticise a one year PGT programme and when they fill in the surveys...
- Weakest level of satisfaction come from international, mature, part-time, commuters, students from ethnic minority backgrounds



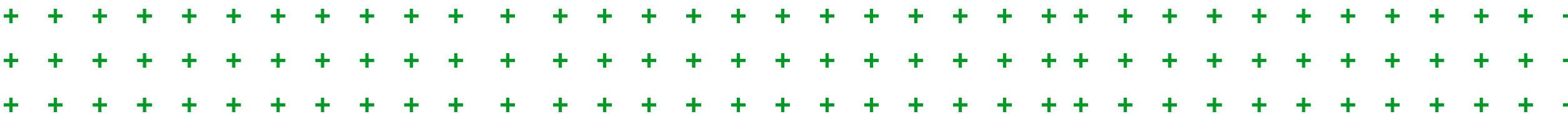
Show me a policy!

- Rare to find a formal, binding policy
- Birmingham – five hours of documented supervision, monthly meetings
- Nottingham – mandates monthly contact for international visa-holders over summer
- St Andrews – feedback guarantee if you submit draft on time
- York – centrally logged meeting counts
- No policy, no standards to point to



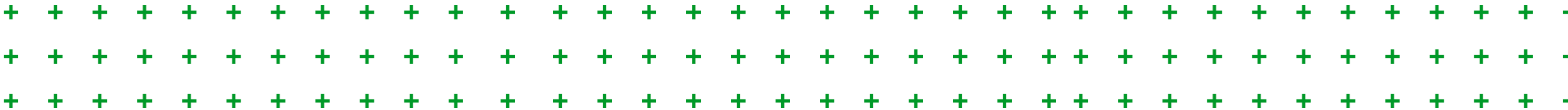
What's the vibe?

- 2023 systematic review (36 studies) confirms structure isn't optional
- Effective supervision needs **adaptive, directive, supportive and feedback-focused** actions, and depends on manageable staff workloads and supervisor training
- Core elements SUs should push for: minimum meeting frequency + documentation; early planning/induction meeting; clear feedback parameters (how much, how fast); guaranteed continuity if a supervisor leaves; named escalation route if things go wrong
- Monthly contact for visa-holding students over summer; remote meeting options; extension/mitigating-circumstance procedures that account for visa risk on deferral
- Also worth building in: supervisor training requirements, maximum supervisee caseloads, supervisor-student matching/change procedures, and a written supervision agreement signed by both sides
- The ask for SUs: lobby for a single, binding, published PGT supervision policy — without one, "rights cannot be enforced"; with one, PTES data and OIA precedent give SUs real leverage to hold the institution to it



Round up:

- Placements are different in make up and delivery
- Huge variation in fees
- Loads of gaps: guaranteed placement, access to bursaries, maintenance, assessment, and what happens if it breaks down
- To Do? Placement rights charter
- PGRs who teach often deliver huge parts of UG programmes – seminars, labs, marking
- Employee versus casual model
- Loads of hidden underpayment – allocated time to mark, prep, training, space and equipment
- Remember about differences for international and disabled PGRs and recruitment
- PGT supervision is a huge weak spot despite comprising more than half of a Masters course
- Huge gaps in supervision: some never meet supervisor, one in five are dissatisfied, amount of feedback received
- There needs to be a policy establishing regulatory minimums, no policy, no standards to point to



Beyond the lecture theatre

(aka the first session after lunch)

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