



Prisoners · Families · Communities
A Fresh Start Together

Student Placement Guide

University Student Edition

A guide for students considering a placement supporting prisoners, people with convictions, and their families

“I think about all the people I’ve helped, and all the cases I’ve worked on, and the family days I’ve done over a year. I just could not have imagined doing all that in my wildest dreams. It’s incredible. It exceeded all my expectations, it really did.”

- Student at HMP Cardiff

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Why choose Pact? | 2 |
| Placement roles | 3 |
| Family engagement service | 3 |
| Additional family services | 3 |
| National Services | 4 |
| Community Services | 4 |
| Personal Specification | 5 |
| Your application and starting your placement | 6 |
| The Process | 6 |
| Training and support | 7 |
| Additional considerations | 9 |
| Does Pact have an existing relationship with your university? | 9 |
| Taking on additional responsibilities | 9 |
| Salary and expenses | 9 |
| Staying in touch after your placement | 9 |
| Get involved | 9 |



Introduction

Pact is a pioneering national charity that supports prisoners, people with convictions, and their children and families. We provide caring and life-changing services at every stage of the criminal justice process: in court, in prison, on release, and in the community.

Pact's vision is of a society that understands justice as a process of restoration and healing, uses prisons sparingly and as places of learning and rehabilitation, and values the innate dignity and worth of every human being. We work for the common good of Society, taking a public health-based approach. We work at the intersection of criminal justice, child and family welfare, mental health, wellbeing provision and health and social care.

Our volunteers and staff work in courts, prisons, probation services, and communities across England and Wales. We are a diverse, inclusive, modern, and collaborative charity. We build effective partnerships and sustainable solutions based on our well-established understanding of the systems in which we work and on our historic values and ethos developed through more than 120 years of service delivery.

Why choose Pact?

Getting involved in the justice system is an experience like no other. A Pact placement offers passionate and dedicated individuals the chance to make a real difference in the lives of those affected by imprisonment.

Having worked with prisoners, people with convictions, and their families for more than 120 years, we have a wealth of experience supporting people to make a fresh start. Our work is proven to build stronger families and safer communities, and minimise the harm caused by imprisonment. Our innovative projects help to shape best practices across the voluntary, public and private sectors. We also play a vital role in influencing policy, commissioning and legislation by empowering those with lived experience to speak truth to power.

Placement roles

As a student on placement, you will be helping us to deliver vital services to support prisoners, people with convictions, and their children and families. We have roles available at each stage of the criminal justice journey.

Family engagement service

Volunteering in our prison-based Family Services team allows you to work across all areas of this service. Your role may include the following:

- Welcoming visitors at one of our Family and Visitors' Centres
- Organising play and activities for prisoners' children
- Serving visitors refreshments

You will be working on the frontline to ensure continuity of care and support for family members and carers and, by extension, people in custody. Your responsibilities will include:

- Ensuring families can access support and early help within their local community and services.
- Supporting prisoners and families to maintain strong, resilient, and effective relationships where there is mutual and lasting benefit in doing so.
- Ensuring that children, families and prisoners are treated with dignity and respect, and their voices are heard.

Additional family services

You may also take on additional responsibilities, subject to you and your supervisor feeling confident in your ability to do so. This includes:

Prison-based case and social work

You will provide one-to-one support to prisoners to maintain links with their children, helping to improve the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. As a student, you will need to go through several stages of training: you will need to shadow an experienced caseworker, take part in observations, and lead on cases with the support of experienced staff. If successful, there may be the opportunity to conduct casework independently and/or facilitate group work. Social work is only available in areas with qualified practitioner supervisors.

Projects, reviews and reports

We often undertake research to help us design, develop and deliver the kind of services people tell us they need. Your supervisors may notice trends in data that they wish to investigate further and may offer you the opportunity to put your academic knowledge and research skills to the test. Such projects help us to better understand our impact and identify additional needs. If you would like to gather data for your own research (i.e. dissertation or thesis) please specify this within your application, or speak to our student placement coordinator who may be able to assist you with your enquiry.

National Services

You can also take on one of our home-based roles supporting our national services:

Prisoners' Families Helpline

Pact runs the national Prisoners' Families Helpline on behalf of HMPPS. This free and confidential service offers practical and emotional support, information and advice to anyone affected by imprisonment. Some people who call and need ongoing support may be referred to other services, including our befriending service.

Befriending for Prisoners' Family Members

Befriending is the formation of a trusting, encouraging and beneficial relationship, developed and maintained consistently over a period of time, whereby the befriender (a trusted Pact supporter) offers appropriate emotional and practical support and guidance to the befriended (the service user). Typically, this involves a telephone call once a week, whereby the befriender can support and provide guidance. The befriender will also have training on how to further signpost and offer referrals to other agencies that may be able to provide additional support.

Community Services

Court support

This role supports the friends and families of defendants going through the criminal justice system by providing advice and support at all stages of the trial or sentencing process. The role also involves promoting the Court Service to both members of the public and professionals working within the court so that they are aware of Pact and the services we provide.

Mentoring

In this role, you will work alongside the prison and probation service to support vulnerable adults during their release from custody. Community mentors meet with service users immediately before their release from prison, on the day of their release, and approximately two weeks after their release. You will support prison leavers' immediate resettlement needs, which include attending their initial probation appointments and assisting with benefits, housing, health and safety.

Please note that prison, national roles, and community-based roles are not mutually exclusive. Depending on availability and requirements within your region of choice, you may have the opportunity to split your time between the services. Every area will have different requirements, and some services are only available in certain regions. We can arrange with you to split your time between multiple regions. Please speak to local staff directly to find out more.

Personal Specification

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| Essential | You believe that every family who has someone in prison is entitled to visit them and that when doing so, they deserve to be treated with respect, empathy, and without judgment. |
| | You can offer a warm welcome to visitors and treat people with dignity and respect. |
| | You have good interpersonal skills and can relate sensitively to the needs of prisoners' families. |
| | You have good written and verbal communication skills, with the ability to communicate effectively with a range of people, including prison staff, other agencies, colleagues and service users. |
| Desirable | A driving license and access to a car. Although some of the prisons we collaborate with have accessible public transport routes, many are in rural areas with minimal, if any, public transport. In addition, some specific project do require access to the car due to the nature of the role. |
| | Students from social science disciplines such as social work, psychology, sociology, criminology, and public services are encouraged to apply for this opportunity. However, we accept students from all disciplines and backgrounds. |

We require a minimum of 6-months to a year commitment to the role, subject to regional practices. This ensures that you can build rapport and trust with service users. It also helps to build your skills if you wish to take on more advanced roles such as casework.

We understand that your course may require you to complete your placement in a shorter time, and this can be discussed with your student placement coordinator at your university. Alternatively, you may wish to complete your placement hours and continue volunteering with us.



Your application and starting your placement

If you are interested in any of the opportunities on offer, you will be pleased to know that our application process is very straightforward. Due to the time needed for DBS checks and prison vetting, we encourage you to apply at least eight weeks in advance, regardless of any unspent convictions. Please note we recruit on an ongoing basis. Therefore, the earlier you submit your application, the more likely we can offer you a placement.

We actively encourage people with criminal convictions to apply. When progressing your application, we will need to consider your personal situation and ensure we can match you to the right opportunity, as some of our volunteering roles may not be suitable.

1 The Process

Complete an online form

Complete the application form, making sure to tick and fill out the student placement section. This will help us to understand your placement needs. Please provide as much detail as possible regarding the number of hours/days of your placement, the length of time you have to complete it, and the level of supervision required.

2 Interview

Successful candidates will be contacted directly by staff members in their region to schedule an online or in-person interview. Typically, there will be two rounds of interviews. This allows for a thorough assessment of your placement needs and how they align with the opportunities available at Pact. These interviews will also give you a chance to learn more about the charity and assess whether it is right for you.

3 DBS & Vetting

Working with individuals who are currently in or have been recently released from prison requires extra security measures. If you successfully pass the interview stages, we will conduct a DBS and vetting application.

4 Training

Pact Academy is our free online training platform that covers any training you might need for your role, including safeguarding and professional boundaries. One of our volunteer coordinators will contact you about how to join and give a time frame for completion. If you choose to take on more than one role, you will not need to do the same training again. However, you may be required to do some additional training that is specifically related to that role.

5 Induction

You will have your first official meeting with your supervisor during induction. This meeting is a chance for you to further discuss your placement needs and roles, and the frequency of your meetings. If you are based in more than one location, this is also the time to discuss your schedule. You will receive a guided tour of your place of volunteering, whether this is the office, Visitors' Centre or prison wings.

Training and support

During your placement, we will provide extensive training on:

- Safeguarding and professional boundaries
- Equality and diversity
- Data protection
- Navigating the criminal justice system
- Health and safety

Subject to requirements, prison-based roles also provide training on:

- Jail craft: This training has been designed to help staff and volunteers comprehend what it is like working in a prison. It ensures that individuals can work effectively and prepares them for some of the terms used within a prison. It aims to provide practical support in dealing with some of the issues you may face, ensuring you can safely and appropriately respond to any incident and manage service users' behaviour. The safety of Pact personnel, and the health and wellbeing of prisoners and their families, is of utmost importance to us.
- Key and radio use: In some instances, key training and radio training may be available to you. This training occurs once your supervisor is confident in your abilities to work independently inside the prison.
- Trauma-informed practice
- Casework
- Restorative practice



Supervision

Every student on placement has a Pact supervisor*. How often you meet will depend on what you and your supervisor decide, and is usually based on your placement requirements. These meetings are an excellent opportunity for you to talk about how the placement is going, any additional roles you want to take on, any time off you want to discuss (especially around term holidays or exam periods) and any concerns or issues you are having.

We understand the challenges involved with juggling university, placements and other responsibilities. This is why your supervision meetings are essential, as we can ensure you are fully supported during your time with us. If there are any issues that you do not feel comfortable sharing with your supervisor but still want to discuss with a member of staff, please email our student placement coordinator at studentplacement@prisonadvice.org.uk, who can arrange a confidential meeting.

*For social Work students: Please note that not all Pact supervisors are qualified to be Practice Educators. If your course requires that you have a Practice Educator, then you must clarify this point when applying. It is your responsibility to ensure that the supervision required by your course can be met by the staff within your chosen location.



Additional considerations

Does Pact have an existing relationship with your university?

Depending on your course requirements, Pact may already have a relationship with your university. Speak to your placement advisor or course leader about whether you would need additional approval from the university to take part in a Pact placement. Make sure you allow enough time to apply if your university needs to assess the role. While we have not yet had any university deny a student placement, we do ask that you follow protocol.

Taking on additional responsibilities

It is important to be realistic about the roles you will be undertaking. While there may be opportunities for you to advance, many roles, such as casework, require you to build up your confidence and skills over time. You may, therefore, wish to start volunteering with us before starting your placement. This will help you to make sure you can take on the additional responsibility and may allow you to develop your skills in time for a placement taking on more sensitive work.

Salary and expenses

While our student placements are unpaid, we reimburse all reasonable expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the course of Pact business. This includes travel costs via public transport or private car (mileage), including travel to attend training, subsistence (i.e., lunch) may also be reimbursed in accordance with our expenses policy. More information on our expenses policy will be made available to you on or before your first day.

Staying in touch after your placement

Your student placement may have a timeline, but you can still stay involved with Pact. Many students choose to stay with us after their placement and some even take on paid work when the opportunity arises. Choosing to stay with us is entirely at your discretion and will not affect your placement.

Get involved today

If this sounds like an opportunity for you, then why not start the process today? Go to our website at www.prisonadvice.org.uk/volunteer and complete an application form for your chosen role. A member of our team will be in touch to discuss next steps. If you cannot see anything suitable, please contact studentplacement@prisonadvice.org.uk as we may have upcoming roles not yet advertised.

Are you a member of university staff? Find out more about our placements and the potential for a partnership by contacting our student placement coordinator by email at studentplacement@prisonadvice.org.uk, who will put you in touch with a regional coordinator.

Get in touch

Visit our website:

www.prisonadvice.org.uk/volunteer

Email us:

studentplacement@prisonadvice.org.uk

Prisoners' Families Helpline: 0808 808 2003 (Mon-Fri 9am – 8pm, Sat & Sun 10am -3pm)

www.prisonersfamilies.org

info@prisonersfamilies.org



Pact is a registered charity - number: 219278. Company registration number: 356443.
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