

Work Placements: Employer Guidelines



Each year, thousands of young students from transition year and the leaving certificate years go on work placements and enjoy the opportunity to not only learn about the world of work and explore possible career options but also to actively develop skills for future enterprise and employability.

These work placements are, for many students, the highlight of their school year where they may have the opportunity to gain a real insight into the challenges and opportunities of work.

Schools and students rely on the willingness of employers to provide work placement opportunities and employers play a pivotal role in the success of these work experience programmes.

Embedding employability in the work placement

One of the purposes of a work placement is to enhance the employability of eventual school leavers by providing them with the opportunity to understand and practice what is needed to be successful in the workplace. In preparing students for a work placement, Guidance Counsellors will have worked with the students to help them understand the different competencies that make someone employable and have provided guidance on how students might improve on these competencies during work experience.

When providing a work placement, employers should try and embed some of these competencies into their students experience by setting employability-based tasks and activities (see page 6). Where possible, employers should also provide feedback to the student at the end of their placement as to their performances in these tasks and competencies.

Schools and students understand that due to the short nature of the placement the tasks assigned may be of a low level and routine in nature. However, it is important to ensure that during their work placement, students have the opportunity alongside the tasks they are assigned to observe as many processes as possible and to interact with staff and customers where feasible. This provides them with the opportunity to develop some of their key personal and employability skills.



Benefits to Employers

Work placements provide many opportunities and benefits to both employers and students. Those most commonly cited by employers are:

- ✓ **influencing the quality of future employees:** employers can help improve the quality and preparedness of young people coming onto the labour market;
- ✓ **development of recruitment channels:** building links with local schools can help to attract school leavers into jobs and can reduce recruitment costs;
- ✓ **brand awareness:** work placements are often formative for students and discussed frequently with peers. A work placement significantly impacts on their awareness of the brand and values of the organisation, which will be shared with others;
- ✓ **influencing career choices:** many employers report that work placements are the ideal way of raising the profile of career opportunities within their organisation and, in some cases, of dispelling unwarranted stereotyped views;
- ✓ **raising the community profile:** many employers attach importance to raising their profile in the community. Work placements provide a valuable means of creating a positive image amongst students, teachers, parents and employees;
- ✓ **creation of staff development opportunities:** the process of policy development, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of work experience programmes gives scope for employees to develop their management and coaching skills, and widen their experience;
- ✓ **increased motivation of employees:** companies participating in education-business link activities have found that such activities increase the motivation of their employees;
- ✓ **understanding changes in the education system:** closer liaison with schools helps employers to improve their understanding of modern learning processes and current educational qualifications, and enhances their relationship with teachers.
- ✓ **monetary:** students may provide fresh perspectives, as well as providing an additional resource.

Placement Supervisor

A supervisor/line manager should be allocated to the placement for the duration of the programme. This person is key to the successful completion of the placement, and enthusiasm and flexibility is essential. It is important also that other members of staff are informed of the placement and facilitate the student where appropriate.

It is important that suitable tasks for the student are identified before the placement begins and that these are worked into a timetable. A tour of the workplace is highly valuable, as it shows the different elements of the business and can provide context for their particular position.

Types of Work Placement:

There are two common types of work placement opportunities sought by students, **Work Experience** and **Work Shadowing**.

✔ **Work Experience**

This is the most common option and involves the student participating in the daily work of their chosen area. This is a hands-on placement, and students are expected to do some work, learn some skills, and contribute in some way.

Work Shadowing

- ✔ Shadowing involves the student closely observing someone in the workplace doing a particular role rather than taking on the working role itself. It offers the student excellent insight into what a particular job involves and the skills it requires. Typically, work shadowing is shorter than a work experience, generally lasting a single day.



School Programmes and Work Placements

Both the Leaving Certificate Applied & Vocational Programme have work placements as an integral part of their programmes.

Leaving Certificate Applied students are required to do two modules of work experience, each of two weeks duration, over the two-year programme. Two further modules of two weeks each may be taken within LCA module choices. Credits are awarded for these modules.

Leaving Cert Vocational students have work experience as an optional module and is of one week duration. Credits are awarded for this module.

Transition Year students normally have two weeks' work experience, usually at different times of the year.

Social Placement is another form of work experience. Students are placed for one or two weeks in a nursing home, hostel or care centre. The purpose of the placement is to increase students' social awareness.

How the programmes operate:

Schools have adopted a variety of different approaches when organising work experience programmes. For example:

Applications - some schools encourage students to find their own work placement while others have developed partnerships with local employers. It may be the Guidance Counsellor or another teacher who assigns students to the various placements available. If, as an employer you feel you can offer a student a placement, contact the Guidance Counsellor of a secondary school in your local area.

Paperwork - whether the school or student organises the work experience, the facilitating employer will normally be required to complete a form confirming the availability, nature and dates of work experience.

Insurance - TY and leaving cert students are insured by their schools' insurers. Each child generally has a personal accident insurance organised by the school. Community and Comprehensive Schools have a State Indemnity for all school activities. Employers will normally be given a document containing the relevant schools insurance details, which should be filed for reference. Check for exclusions for certain types of work.

Format - will depend on the school programme the student is participating in. Transition year (TY) and Leaving Cert Vocational (LCVP) students will require a one week block of work. Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) students normally require a two week period. Occasionally work experience may be organised on a day-release basis once a week.



Payment - the employer is not required to make any payment to the student during work experience.

Monitoring - as part of the monitoring process, the student's teacher may on occasion request to visit the student at the employer's premises during the work experience.

Recording - during the course of the work experience, a student will normally be required by the school to maintain some type of record/diary of his/her experiences so that they can reflect on the learning points when they return to school.

Feedback - on completion of the work experience, the employer would normally be requested to provide feedback to the student on their performance and there would normally be a short feedback form to be completed and returned to the school.

Health & Safety

While a school continues to have responsibility for students on work experience, the employer has the same responsibilities for their health, safety and welfare whilst the student is on an employers premises. As most students undertaking work experience will be under the age of 18 years and in some cases, may be under 16 years, employers facilitating work experience should review the relevant sections of the 'Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996' to ensure compliance.



In general, the Act prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16. However, employers can take on 14 and 15 year olds as part of an approved work experience or education programme where the work is not harmful to their safety, health, or development. There are also some limitations around working hours, rest breaks, night time work etc which apply to those 17 yrs and under. A full guideline documents is available on the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996 on www.employmentrights.ie

In taking steps to ensure the safety of students while on work experiences an employer should:



Assess the Risks - in advance of any work experience student starting, identify any risks associated with the placement and minimise these where possible. Take into account that these young people are likely to be inexperienced, unaware of health and safety risks and physically or mentally immature. They should not be required to operate any hazardous machinery or work in hazardous environments as their short placements would not allow sufficient training.

Appropriate supervision - young people will be facing unfamiliar risks from the job they will be doing and from their surroundings and are therefore likely to need more supervision than adults. Good supervision will also help you to get a clear idea of their progress in the job and to monitor the effectiveness of their training.

Induction - ensure any initial briefing/training that the student receives on commencing their work experience covers the important elements of your health and safety policy including:

- identifying any risks associated with their work experience or their presence on your premises
- ensuring that the students receive appropriate instructions about the tasks they are to perform and company safety regulations including the wearing of protective clothing or equipment.
- advise on systems for dealing with accidents and emergencies.

If the student is absent for any part of the placement or any incident or accident occurs, you should immediately notify the Career Guidance Counsellor or co-ordinating teacher in the school.

Employability skills

At the initial commencement/induction meeting with the work experience student, it is important for an employer to explain what is meant by 'employability' and the importance of certain skills in the workplace. Alongside the daily work and routines that the student will experience, it is useful to encourage students to observe and set personal targets with regard to the many 'soft skills' that provide the backdrop to the work being undertaken.

Students can record their targets and goals on the associated document 'Work Placement - Student Worksheet' that is part of this series. If undertaken, outline how you will assess the student in relation to these competencies on the completion of their work experience. A sample evaluation form is provided at the end of this document to facilitate this.

Employability skills can be broken down under three main areas of competence, namely People Skills, Task Skills and Personal Skills. Some examples of each are provided below along with some examples of tasks which would assist in developing and assessing these competencies:

Personal Skills:

Independence - allow the student to perform tasks with minimum help or approval, or without direct supervision.

Learning - provide some work related training and opportunities to learn. Watch for an interest in personal learning and development. Encourage questioning and assertiveness.

Dependability - offer tasks that require a degree of responsibility.

People Skills

Active Listening - Watch to see if full attention is being given to what other people are saying, if they take the time to understand the points being made, asks questions as needed, and does not interrupt inappropriately.

Team Membership - If possible assign some of the students' time to join in on group work, and encourage participation where appropriate.

Respect - encourage interaction with people from diverse backgrounds and different levels of authority within the organisation. Do they take the feelings, needs, thoughts, wishes and preferences of others (including other cultures and races) into consideration, and give them worth and value.

Task Skills

Time Management - offer opportunities to manage their time efficiently. e.g. punctual clocking in/out, achieve tasks on time, allocate appropriate time to record information and finish what is started.

Computer Skills - encourage the use of a computer to write and print documents, and use email programs. Provide basic training on any in-house computer systems. Encourage them to prepare a report on their placement, or conduct some internet based research, etc.

Customer Focus - If appropriate, allow the student to engage with customers and learn how to develop an understanding and concern for customers needs.

Exit Meeting

At the end of the work experience the student and organisations placement supervisor should have an exit meeting to discuss the experience from both points of view. Questions to ask might include:

- What was liked/ disliked most about the work?
- What improvements would they suggest for next time?
- How well objectives and targets were met and why?
- Whether they have been encouraged by the experience to pursue a career in that particular industry?

Work Placement - Career Skills Evaluation

Participant _____ Dates _____

Supervisor _____ Employer _____

Please provide information on some of the 'transferrable skills' demonstrated by this participant during their work placement with you.

	Not Applicable	Undeveloped	Some experience	Well developed	
PEOPLE SKILLS					
Sensitivity to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows ability to maintain a deep interest in the concerns and feeling of others. Inclined to find ways to help people.
Insight into others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows an understanding of what makes people do what they do, and tolerance of the actions of others. Good at reading the moods of others.
Openness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is open to, and communicates with people at all levels. Inclined to share personal experiences and trust people.
Respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows consideration for the feelings, needs, thoughts, wishes and preferences of others (including other cultures and races).
Speaking / Presenting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Presents information clearly and confidently to other individuals or groups. Maintains good eye contact and keeps the attention of an audience or individual.
Active listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pays full attention to what other people are saying, takes time to understand the points being made, asks questions as needed, and does not interrupt inappropriately.
Conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Speaks clearly and listens attentively. Attends to other people, not to themselves. Seeks clarification where necessary and attends to body language appropriately.
Persuasion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows ability to influence peoples beliefs and actions. Shows ability to win people's co-operation and support for ideas or activities.
Team membership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Works easily with groups of people and shows loyalty and commitment to the teams' objectives. Attends to each member's views equally.
Team participation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Openly expresses views and opinions within a group. Shows willingness to take on tasks and responsibilities as appropriate to one's experience.
Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows the ability to communicate a vision or goal to others and lead them towards achieving it. Pushes for action and results, and wins the support and help of others.
TASK SKILLS					
Planning / Organising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creates clear goals, identifies and finds the resources (e.g. time, people, materials) needed to achieve them, and schedules tasks so that work is completed on time.
Time management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Takes the time to organise events and tasks carefully so as to use time efficiently. Uses a diary/planner to ensure tasks are undertaken.
Practical skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses equipment, tools or technology effectively. Easily follows instructions and shows willingness to use whatever tools or technology is required.
Computer skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Confidently uses a computer to write documents, browse the internet or use email programs. Can save files, locate them efficiently and print them.
Problem solving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows interest in finding the cause of problems, looks for and chooses effective solutions and takes the necessary action to resolve them.
Business awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows understanding of the main business activities of the company/organisation. Has a good sense of the business opportunities available, and the primary competitors.
Customer focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows understanding and concern for customers' needs, is helpful and friendly to them, and deals effectively with any questions or complaints they may have.
PERSONAL SKILLS					
Learning skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Seeks and willingly takes opportunities to learn. Shows interest in personal learning and development. Looks for feedback to improve understanding.
Adaptability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adapts easily to new challenges and shows openness to new ways of doing things. Effective at changing plans or actions to deal with changing situations.
Goal setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows the ability to make a decision about what is wanted, and determine when it is to be achieved. Stays committed to the goal, and deals with setbacks realistically.
Initiative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrates ability to take the initiative in a situation. Shows inclination to find opportunities to make decisions or influence events.
Independence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Able to perform tasks effectively with minimum help or approval, or without direct supervision.
Motivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shows the drive to succeed and excel at tasks. Shows confidence in abilities and expects to succeed at all tasks agreed on.
Dependability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is reliable, responsible and dependable in fulfilling duties. Carefully checks work to ensure all details have been considered.
Professionalism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Remains calm and self-controlled under stressful situations. Works to deliver the best interests of the organisation at all times, and maintains appropriate dress code.

Awareness of the importance and significance of Career Skills is supported by LCVP, LCA, and TY programmes. This evaluation form has been developed by CareersPortal.ie