

A Good Practice Guide for Placement and Other Work-Based Learning Opportunities in Higher Education



Good Practice for Placements Guides – Volume 2

A Good Practice Guide for Placement and Other Work-Based Learning Opportunities in Higher Education

Good Practice for Placements Guides Volume 2

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ASET
Integrating Work and Learning

Target Readership:

**All those involved in the preparation for and implementation of placements
and other periods of work-based learning in Higher Education**

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Summary

The 2001 predecessor to this document covered sandwich placements, but not periods of work-based learning shorter than about 6 months. Since then, interest has grown in other work-based learning opportunities, and Section 9 of the QAA Code of Practice (QAA, 2007) is titled "Work-based and placement learning". This ASET Code is intended to extend good practice from placements alone to those shorter periods of work-based learning opportunities.

But almost inevitably the word "placement" still features heavily in this Guide, given the extensive history of its development.

Sandwich courses involve a significant integrated period of work-based learning, but where this is infeasible or inappropriate, shorter forms of work-based learning can also be valuable if well-focused and managed. In all cases it is important that all parties involved – Higher Education Institution (HEI), student, and employer - work together before, during and after the period of work-based learning.

The HEI should build the academic and perhaps some basic procedural requirements into the course or module at the design and validation stage, covering learning outcomes, criteria for exemption, preparation for work-based learning, and details of assessment and accreditation. These should then be communicated to the student at the appropriate stages from recruitment through to preparations for, completion of, and debriefing from, the work-based learning.

The HEI needs to provide academic and administrative support for the student to optimise the preparation for and implementation of the experience.

The student should accept responsibility for cooperating as necessary in the process of finding and delivering a suitable period of work-based learning, meeting the HEI requirements including assessment, while also operating as an effective ambassador for the HEI in all dealings with the employer. The student should take every action necessary to get the most out of the learning experience, such as relating learning to the course/module, building transferable skills, and using the opportunity to consolidate career planning.

The employer should think through the reasons for taking a work-based learning student and ensure that the student recruited is appropriate to the post being filled, and will be progressively developed rather than overwhelmed. Students should be seen as good value for money rather than cheap labour, and in all respects other than the shortest periods of engagement should be treated in the same way as other employees, for example being given appraisals, and even disciplinary treatment if that is appropriate.

In all regards the employer should work with the student and HEI to enable the learning experience to take place.

These guidelines are designed as a basis for development of more-specific procedures to be developed by course teams, and appropriate to the period of work-based learning.

Users of this Guide may consult the ASET website www.asetonline.org to check for updates.

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1 Terms of Reference

1.1 Background

ASET has been involved with issues associated with good practice in Sandwich Education since the early 1980s, and they have been debated and developed at many Conferences and Workshops. In 2001 a Code of Good Practice was published, badged jointly with NCWE (at that time National Centre, now the National Council for Work Experience). Subsequently the two organisations amicably but formally separated their joint interests, and responsibility for that Code was vested in ASET, which has continued to offer training seminars.

In 2007, the QAA Code of Practice Section 9, "Work-based and placement learning", was issued to replace its predecessor (coincidentally also 2001) which, like the 2001 ASET Code, covered the placement element of sandwich courses, but not shorter periods of work-based learning.

1.2 Scope

The 2001 Codes (both ASET's and QAA's) covered Placement Learning alone, but it is intended that this current document can be used to cover any work-based learning component of an HE course, regardless of duration, up to and including year-long placements. The phrase "work-based learning" is used in common with the QAA Code of Practice Section 9, where after wide consultation and discussion it was agreed to be the most widely-recognised term across the HE sector, including FE where HE level is delivered.

No single document could cover all work-based learning experiences from 1 day to 1 year long, and from shadowing to full-time employment, so this document follows previous practice in being primarily based on sandwich placements as a "gold standard", from which HEI course teams can adopt and adapt as appropriate for shorter periods of work-based learning. This implies that students and employers will need to refer to specific course/module specifications for periods shorter than a sandwich placement, which is often taken as meaning a minimum of 6 months.

For simplicity the term "HEI" is used throughout this document to cover any HE institution or other institution offering sandwich and other courses at HE level involving work-based learning components.

ASET has never covered courses in the medical or veterinary fields, which are well-defined within their own contexts, and this code is not intended to cover them.

It is hoped that this Code will be of use across Europe and indeed other parts of the world, but it may find less applicability in the USA and Canada where a "Cooperative" model is in use, i.e. more-formal relationships between HEIs and employers, involving students in less choice in where they are placed.

The prime difference in scope between the QAA Code Section 9 and the ASET code is that the QAA is directed solely at HEIs, whereas this ASET code, like its predecessor, is also intended to be a useful reference for employers and students.

1.3 Purpose and Desired Outcomes

The purpose of this document is to provide a guide to good practice for those involved in developing, running, or participating in, work-based learning and other periods of work-based learning in Higher Education. It is not intended to be design-restrictive or to stifle creativity in the development of learning experiences, but to act as a reference foundation document from which detailed course specifications can be developed and implemented.

1.4 Target Readership

This document is intended to be useful to the three main parties involved in work-based learning:

- the HEI delivering the primary educational experience
- the student undergoing the learning experience
- the employer providing the work-based learning environment

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2 Introduction

The 2001 Code was based primarily on 1-year placements and they in some senses remain the reference standard, having been developed over many years. But it is now widely recognised that work-based learning can usefully take place in much shorter time periods, depending on the student, the course, the employer and the desired learning outcomes. In line with ASET's by-line "Integrating Work and Learning" it is intended that this current document, while setting standards primarily designed around those year-long placements, can also be used as a starting point for course teams to develop specifications for work-based learning opportunities of shorter duration. Inevitably not all criteria will apply regardless of duration.

In essence, the objective of any work-based learning experience, regardless of length, is to consolidate and complement the academic learning, knowledge and skills, while integrating some aspects of personal career awareness and development. It generally involves a three-way partnership involving student, employer and HEI, and this Code suggests good practice for each party, in terms of roles, entitlements and responsibilities.

So the aims for course and student are likely to include:

- Develop students' personal and enterprise skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, decision making, initiative, and creativity.
- Implement some academic aspects of the course of study, and lay experiential foundations for further study.
- Enhance students' awareness of the work environment in professional, social and behavioural contexts, thus improving students' employability.
- Assist students in self-awareness and development of their individual career planning.
- Develop and maintain links between the HEI, employers and the community, for many reasons including research and commercial issues as well as taught-course development.

And the employer is likely to have aims such as:

- Derive value for money within the work-based learning period (where students are paid).
- Benefit from students' enthusiasm and creativity as well as up-to-date knowledge/skills.
- Train other staff in new skills, e.g. I.T.
- Implement extended selection procedure.

The relationships are likely to be:

- Between student and employer: For longer periods, this would be a formal legal contract of employment, with all the implied entitlements and responsibilities. For periods as short as a few hours, the student would probably be regarded as a visitor rather than employee.
- Between student and HEI: a formal contract implicit in acceptance of a student on a course, and evidenced by the student's contributions towards tuition fees.
- Between HEI and employer: a less formal contract, but one implied by the acceptance by the employer of a student in connection with an HEI course.

Each of the parties has entitlements and responsibilities before, during and after the work-based learning period itself, and in the following sections this document is arranged so that each party can see what is expected of them, while also being able to check what they can expect from others involved.

In every case these guidelines are to be interpreted with appropriate attention to the length of work-based learning; the emphasis should be on development of procedures having regard to fitness for purpose.

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3 Good Practice – the HEI

3.1 HEIs - Before Work-Based Learning

The HEI's role in work-based learning commences at the course or module planning stage, when the reasons for including a placement or other period of work-based learning need to be made clear, and result in well-defined objectives and procedures, from enrolment through to award. This will cover issues such as:

- How the learning outcomes of work-based learning integrate with those for the whole course.
- The minimum duration of the work-based learning experience.
- Whether the work-based learning is to be a compulsory or optional element.
- If the experience is optional, at what stage and on what basis can students elect not to do it? [If the choice is made too easy or available too soon in the course, there is a danger that the students who most need the experience will opt out]
- What provision is made for students exempt from work-based learning, or unable to find a suitable opportunity, or choosing not to follow that route – do they simply proceed, [with potential attendant difficulties of mixing with students who have not experienced the same academic diet,] or is there some other academic provision leading to a different award?
- What provision is to be made for Equal Opportunities compliance e.g. gender and disability?
- Whether the work-based learning or some aspect relating to it is to be assessed, and how.
- Whether the learning is to be supported by technologies such as electronic portfolios.
- How the work-based learning is to be accredited, for example by grades that feed into a main degree award, or by an adjunct such as “and Placement with Distinction”, or by separate internal award, or by external accreditation.
- Whether any exceptions to the general conditions are to be made for students undertaking a work-based learning period overseas - e.g. alternatives to visits.
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures, both for the student as student and recognising that an employer will normally also have similar procedures for the student as employee.
- Procedures for termination of the contract, by any party and for whatever reason, while so far as possible not compromising the best interests of each party.

In terms of course operations, the procedures and preparations fall naturally into the following areas, described here for longer placements but applicable to some extent to all work-based learning periods:

- Securing the opportunity. Students need support in several areas, from self-awareness (potentially impinging on the whole area of career choice) and knowledge of what employers expect/how they recruit, to help with conventional mechanisms such as letters, application forms, CVs, psychometric tests, interview techniques, and telephone interviews/on-line applications. As a part of this preparation, students need help to recognise and identify in themselves more general employability skills, both personal and interpersonal, and often referred to as personal transferable skills. This support can be provided through an academic module, or through a dedicated non-academic unit, in collaboration with a Careers service, or through any combination of these or other arrangements.
- Underpinning Health and Safety issues. In general this will be covered if the institution complies with procedures in the 1997 UCEA/CVCP Health and Safety guidance document.
- Optimising the work-based learning. It is widely accepted that a key role of Higher Education is to prepare students for life-long learning, that is, for a continuance of learning in the absence of a formal learning environment. From this perspective, a placement or other period of work-based learning can form a crucial “half-way house”, in which the student is becoming that independent learner, but under the arms-length support of the HEI, which therefore needs to prepare the student for that experience, while also taking into account the need of the student to be prepared for whatever assessment and accreditation regime has been defined.

The HEI should have a procedure for approving employers for these purposes, and for supporting students in their own search for appropriate opportunities if undertaken separately from any institutional provision. This approval should include ensuring that the employers comply with the requirements in the UCEA/CVCP 1997 Health and Safety guidance document. (Currently under revision)

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3.2 HEIs - During Work-Based Learning

During work-based learning, the student remains a student, (and this is accentuated in most cases by the payment of tuition fees). Even where the employer has full responsibility for the student as employee, or at the very least as visitor, the HEI retains a continuing share in the responsibility for the student's well-being and ongoing learning, though the student will ideally develop as an autonomous learner during the work-based learning experience.

The HEI should make provision for ongoing student support in order that the student can optimise the learning experience. For longer periods such as a sandwich placement, typically this involves giving a the student a contact who may be designated Visiting Tutor or Placements Tutor, and in the case of longer periods visiting the student in the workplace to support autonomous learning and ensure satisfactory progress. Where appropriate, and certainly for placements or longer periods of work-based learning, the HEI should develop and implement procedures defining what will take place and how such visits will be arranged and conducted.

Although visiting procedures are not to be seen primarily as problem-solving exercises, the HEI should nevertheless ensure that in all cases procedures are in hand to enable any such situations to be dealt with appropriately.

The HEI may also make some arrangement for the students to return to the HEI during the placement or extended work-based learning period, for students to share experience with each other and the course team, and to enable briefing such as details of module choices on return to the HEI.

The HEI will undertake such action as necessary to implement the assessment regime defined for the course, including possibilities such as E-portfolios.

3.3 HEIs - After Work-Based Learning

When the student returns following the work-based learning, the HEI should make provision for reflection, consolidation and dissemination of the students' learning experiences, both individual and collective.

In a broader sense, the HEI should also take the opportunity to capture student experience and learning, in order to refresh curricula and to develop partnerships with employers for research and commercial activity, as well as for ongoing work-based learning opportunities.

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4 Good Practice – the Student

4.1 Students - Before Work-Based Learning

The student's role in preparing for the experience starts with enrolment on a sandwich course, or course involving some other kind of work-based learning, in the clear knowledge and acceptance of its implications in terms of preparation and commitment.

Since the implications of a work-based learning experience will vary according to the particular course and length of that experience, the student should ensure familiarity with course requirements, which are likely to be found in a course handbook or similar.

Whatever support mechanisms the HEI offers, and within the context that the seeking of work-based learning opportunities is a co-operative activity, the student will recognise that ultimately it is normally his/her individual responsibility to secure and deliver a satisfactory placement or other work-based learning experience. The HEI can train, help, brief, prepare students and introduce employers, but in general cannot "give" work-based learning opportunities directly; only the student and employer can agree to enter into that contract directly. (Practice in North America and Canada is different; HEIs and employers often cooperate directly – hence "cooperative" education)

The student should therefore make full use of all the support offered by the HEI in connection with both seeking and preparing for the work-based learning experience. This is likely to involve both academic and practical activities including opportunities to meet post-work-based-learning students and to share their learning experiences, and to hear visiting employers who attend the HEI to promote opportunities in their own companies.

The student should make an appropriate number of applications either through the HEI or direct, or both. "Appropriate" can vary widely according to the student's ability and focus – a strong candidate with a clear idea of a desired work-based learning opportunity may be expected to make fewer applications than a weaker student with as-yet undeveloped career plans. It will also depend on the student's decision-making style – some will prefer a carefully selective strategy while others will opt for the "blunderbuss" approach, firing vaguely at every opportunity, however unlikely.

At all stages when dealing with an employer the student should recognise his/her role as a representative of the course and HEI, and act appropriately.

Where the student is active in seeking work-based learning opportunities beyond the HEI system, the HEI should be advised, both to reduce the danger of parallel applications and so that the true extent of that student's application activity is known. **Even when the student has found a possible opportunity by this means, it is not formally recognised until the HEI has approved both the activity content and the employer's compliance with Health and Safety criteria.**

It is the student's responsibility to use every possible means to research the company to which they are applying, e.g. personal contacts, placements officers, careers departments, company literature, Internet, current/past placement students, and current/past visiting tutors.

The student should acknowledge interview appointments that have been made by the HEI, and ensure that both the HEI and employer are advised in advance if appointments cannot be kept.

Where the student makes an interview appointment direct with an employer, the HEI should be told the details in order to avoid clashing appointments.

The student should seek prior agreement from an employer for the reimbursement of normal out-of-pocket travel expenses.

Where a student has had an interview and realises in the light of this that the opportunity is no longer appropriate, s/he should withdraw his/her application within 48 hours, and ideally before an offer is made, so that the employer can make offers to other candidates. Offers and acceptances are binding even if only spoken, but it is reasonable for the student to require an offer to be confirmed in writing before cancelling other applications. However once an offer has been accepted it should be considered binding.

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Because of the potentially serious implications for an employer of a student's withdrawing from a committed offer situation, the student should withdraw all other ongoing applications as soon as a firm offer of work-based learning has been accepted.

The student should provide the HEI with details of any position accepted, to enable ongoing contact and to enable visits to be undertaken.

Even after a period of work-based learning has been arranged, the student should continue with any required pre-requisite academic modules.

Students about to commence work-based learning should attend appropriate briefing sessions from the HEI, including those on Health and Safety; otherwise the HEI may not recognise it.

4.2 Students - During Work-Based Learning

Most importantly, the student should take every opportunity on work-based learning to optimise the learning experience, relating to academic course content, developing personal and interpersonal skills, and learning professional expectations and behaviour. Ideally, and certainly where required by assessment, these should be not only developed but evidenced, for example in some kind of portfolio or journal.

At the same time, the student will probably also be undergoing a cultural change, perhaps experiencing the workplace for the first time or in a new context, discovering that employers have their own priorities, and adjusting to this new perspective may take time.

Nevertheless, students on work-based learning should realise that at all times they remain students as well as employees, and should behave so as to enhance the reputation of their course, school/faculty, and HEI, and maximise the potential for repeat opportunities for future cohorts.

At the earliest opportunity students should provide the HEI with any requested information such as details of employer, start date, work and residential addresses, telephones, FAX, email contact details, and name of workplace supervisor, to facilitate written and telephone contact with the HEI and where applicable to enable visiting arrangements to be set in place.

Students should ensure that they are fully aware of all HEI requirements while on work-based learning, including assessment, and comply as necessary.

Depending on the time period, students are typically entitled to be visited while on work-based learning but should recognise that both HEI staff and employers have many other calls on their time. A student who desires to be visited should contact the appropriate person, perhaps Visiting Tutor or Placement Tutor. Visits should not be viewed as something that takes place only in response to problem situations, but as an opportunity to discuss and optimise the learning process offered by the work-based learning.

Students should co-operate with the Visiting Tutor and make appropriate visit arrangements, such as meeting room/refreshments, availability of manager, parking spaces, travel instructions and hotel recommendations.

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4.3 Students - After Work-Based Learning

Students should realise that they can learn from work-based learning even after the experience itself has ended, and be pro-active in optimising this experience. This learning can take the forms of:

- Further reflection on the work-based learning for example as recorded in a journal, reflective learning logs or similar.
- Conscious integration of the work-based learning with academic modules, where experience can intensify and deepen the understanding to be gained.
- Sharing of experience with other students in the same cohort, since there is likely to have been a wide variety and spread of experience
- Sharing of experience with following students cohorts, to enable them in preparation and experience optimisation.
- Sharing experience with staff such as placement tutors, placement officers, who are involved with the preparation and overseeing of work-based learning, so as to optimise this provision.
- Using the experience as a basis for directing and focusing career plans, which may be with the same employer in the same line of work or not. Even a career decision along the lines of “not that employer, not that type of work” can be constructive if genuinely informed.

5 Good Practice – the Employer

5.1 Employers - Before Work-Based Learning

Employers can best contribute significantly to the smooth running of the recruitment process if they:

- Are clear about their motives for recruiting work-based learning students, and have realistic expectations of what induction/training will be needed and what students can then deliver.
- Are aware of the requirements and expectations of student and HEI.
- Recognise that recruitment will follow a natural cycle, annual or otherwise, related to the academic year, and where feasible adjust recruitment cycles to fit in with this.
- Treat the recruitment of placement or similar students in the same way and using the same procedures as for any other graduate level staff, e.g. in drawing up job- and person specifications, thinking through appropriate remuneration packages, and complying with all relevant legislation including working-time directive, holiday time entitlement, payment of national insurance, tax, and compliance with legislation against discrimination on the grounds of disability, ethnic origin, gender, and good practice in respect of non-discrimination on the grounds of age.
- Advise the HEI of whom they are interviewing, and where, to minimise clashes.
- Promptly pay students out-of-pocket expenses when they attend interview/testing, regardless of the outcome.
- Make employment offers as soon as reasonably possible after interview/testing, in view of the fact that students frequently need to juggle with several offers or potential offers, and it is in the interests of all parties that arrangements be confirmed as soon as possible.
- Note that the work-based learning employment may in some cases be the first time that the student has lived away from home, and giving support where appropriate in the finding or provision of accommodation.
- Co-operate with the HEI in all procedural matters including confirmation of appropriate legal Health and Safety provision.

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5.2 Employers - During Work-Based Learning

Employers should:

- Note that in the UK they have full legal liability for students as employees (or visitors, for very short periods).
- Provide induction and training including Health and Safety issues
- Wherever possible involve them in staff appraisal schemes, since this is a valuable way of learning about employment norms.
- Consider appointing a mentor for each student, distinct from the line manager and possibly from another department, to oversee the training, development and general learning processes of the student.
- Ensure that the immediate supervisor or manager has access to the HEI contact, placement tutor or officer.
- Make appropriate provision for the student to be visited at a mutually convenient time and place, providing a meeting room and ensuring availability of the student's manager.
- Co-operate with the HEI in all course requirements such as the need for the student to undertake assessed work while on work-based learning, possibly involving some procedure for dealing with sensitive/confidential data, and to attend any appropriate event at the HEI during the work-based learning e.g. a residential or briefing day.
- If anything goes seriously amiss with the work-based-learning experience or the student, involve the HEI immediately and jointly seek ways to resolve the situation, and if necessary involve the HEI in any disciplinary action.
- Provide, on request, an appropriate statement on the student's conduct and performance.
- Provide the student with a debrief session and receive suggestions as to how to make the work-based learning experience even more rewarding for all parties.
- Where a student is required for the following year, involve the existing student in the recruitment process (e.g. drawing up the job- and person specifications) and ideally in the handover and induction of the new recruit.
- Recognise that after a period of work-based learning the student's priority is to complete an academic course, and to encourage that process by means such as keeping in contact throughout the student's subsequent studies; where appropriate a bursary or opportunity of subsequent employment may be offered.

5.3 Employers - After Work-Based Learning

After work-based learning, most activity is carried on by the student and HEI. However the employer can usefully:

- Provide the student with an appropriate testimonial, or agreement to provide a reference on request from a future potential employer.
- If not already implemented, consider a further student from a later cohort.
- Research and where appropriate implement the suggestions identified in discussions between company and student during the debrief session.

6 Acknowledgements

This Code of Practice draws heavily on previous work, produced both by individual institutions and at course level, and by co-ordinating bodies such as ASET, NCWE, and PlaceNet, as well as government bodies and their agents, particularly QAA for the 2007 update of Section 9 of its Code of Practice.

All these contributions are gratefully acknowledged, and specific sources are listed in Section 7.

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