

Work Placements: Teacher Guidelines v5/11



Work placements are a popular activity for TY students, and form an important part of both the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Vocational (LCVP) programmes. These placements can be invaluable learning opportunities for students and are often referred to by them as one of the highlights of their school year.

Work placements allow students 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.

Organising a work experience programme for students can be a complex task. Depending on resources available, geographical location and students needs, schools have implemented a variety of approaches to organising placements.

For the LCVP and LCA, work placements are an integral part of the programme, typically last one week (LCVP) and two weeks (LCA), and are organized by the programme teachers. For TY, some schools will prefer to send out students on one or two week blocks while others find that a system of weekly day-release works better.

Sometimes a single teacher or the Guidance Counsellor will be responsible for the programme, while in large schools the tasks may be divided among a core team. There is no one right approach, but it is essential that responsibility for the programme is clearly allocated so as to ensure a structured and beneficial programme for all.

Key elements of a successful work experience programme include:

- Ensuring clear communication about the programme to all parties involved, i.e. students, parents and employers
- Preparing students prior to their work experience so as to ensure that it is a valuable learning experience
- Monitoring – putting in place a system to monitor students when on work placement
- Documenting – ensuring appropriate records and consent forms are kept
- De-briefing and assessing the students on completion of their placement
- Evaluating the programme at the year end

Communication

The communication process around the whole work experience needs to be handled in a planned and coordinated way so as to ensure that everyone involved and affected is kept fully informed.

- ✓ Students need to be informed of the plans early in the school year so that they have adequate time to prepare and find placements.
- ✓ Parents need to be informed of proposed dates, insurance issues, consent requirements and may be invited to assist in providing placements where possible (see the worksheet: Work Placements: Parent Guidelines).
- ✓ Employers need to be communicated with before, during and after placements (see the worksheet: Work Placements: Employers Guidelines).
- ✓ Staff – as the absence of the students on work experience will affect all other teachers lesson planning, all teachers involved with the class groups need to know the dates and duration of the work experience well in advance.

Sourcing Work Placements

The practice of sourcing work experience placements varies from school to school. Some schools encourage students to find their own work experience placement while others have developed partnerships with local employers and it may be the role of the Guidance Counsellor or programme coordinator (TY, LCA, LCVP) to assign students to the various placements available or it may be a combination of both approaches.

Ways for the student or school to source work placements:

- Contact employers who provided placements for your school students in previous years. If it is the students' job to source placements, information could be provided to students on where placements were secured previously.
- Approach businesses in the local area to support the school. If the student is making the approach, explain the process of making a phone call and following up with a letter (see the worksheet: Work Placements: Student Worksheet).
- Encourage students to network with family and friends to find out what opportunities might be available. In terms of finding out what it is like to work in a new different environment, it is usually recommended that students do not opt to work in a family business or where another family member is working but perhaps the placement could be made available to another student in the school. The school can also directly correspond with parents – parents can be a very valuable resource to schools suggesting possibilities, providing contacts and in some cases providing actual placements.
- Many well known organisations and public bodies run transition year work experience programmes every year. They usually have an application process and early closing date and a lot of interested applicants. Research a list of these organisations and display details with closing dates etc on the student notice board.

Preparing the Students

Ideally students should be prepared for work experience through regular timetabled classes where there is an opportunity to :

- introduce them to how the work experience links in to the school curriculum
- explain the objectives of the work experience
- help them develop an understanding of the personal and key skills required in the workplace
- guide them in how to research and source placements
- advise on appropriate behaviour and health and safety issues during placement
- inform them of assignments they will need to undertake before, during, and after the work experience, e.g. logbooks or diaries.



Getting the most out of the Placement

There is much that can be learned during the course of a work experience if students are appropriately prepared, and know what to look out for. The LCA and LCVP programmes have specific learning outcomes associated with work placements, and credits are awarded to students for their final Leaving Cert exam. Outside of these programmes, work placements need some focus to maximize the time being spent. It is an opportune time to encourage students to complete a Career Investigation, get familiar with many Transferable Skills, build up their CV, and determine whether a particular line of work appeals to them or not.

CareersPortal.ie has a number of worksheets available to teachers to download from the Guidance Professionals section of its website which can assist in the preparation of students.

BEFORE THE PLACEMENT...

Work Placement: Student Worksheet

This Worksheet introduces the idea of a work placement and provides details on some of the most important factors a student needs to be aware of. It includes sections on:

1. Finding a placement
2. Setting realistic expectations
3. How to make contact by phone and letter
4. What employers want
5. Identifying key skills and setting targets and objectives
6. Dealing with problems if they arise



DURING THE PLACEMENT:

Career Skills: Career Investigation Workbook

One of the purposes of work experience 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 work experience, Guidance Counsellors and teachers can work with the students to help them understand the different competencies that make someone employable and provide guidance on how students might improve on these competencies during work experience.

If you choose to get students to complete a career investigation while on a placement, then this workbook can be used to collect and store the information. The career investigation teaches students to be more aware of the work they are doing/observing and to discuss the work in more detail. It includes sections on:

1. Describing the career
2. Knowledge requirements – what areas of study are important for the job
3. Courses that lead to the career
4. Key transferrable skills observed
5. Skills developed
6. Specialist knowledge requirements



AFTER THE PLACEMENT:

Career Skills: Self Assessment Exercise

This exercise can be used after the work experience to allow students to reflect on any transferrable skills developed so far, and to identify areas of weakness that may be addressed in a further work experience or training.

Work Placement Summary

This is a short summary worksheet that facilitates a simple de-briefing and reflection on a work placement.



Monitoring

The extent to which schools can monitor students while on work experience will vary depending on school resources and the number of students on work experience. A short visit by a member of staff to a student on work experience can be important in reassuring students, employers and parents of the value the school places on the work experience programme. It provides an opportunity for the teacher/coordinator to observe the work-places at first hand which can help when reviewing any subsequent employer feedback reports. It also helps to strengthen the links between the school and local employers.

When making initial contact with employers, whether it is through direct phone contact or an information sheet that the student makes available to the employer, make sure to advise that you may wish to visit the premises while the student is on placement.

Where it is not feasible to visit every student while on work placement, it is advisable to make phone contact with the employer and separately with the student to ensure that the placement is going smoothly. Students and employers should also be clearly advised as to what process should be followed if a student is absent from the placement for any reason or if an incident or accident occurs.

Debriefing & Assessment

To complete the learning process, it is important for students on completion of their placement to have the opportunity to reflect on their experience and what they gained from it. This might take the form of written assignments (in the case of LCA & LCVP), completing evaluation worksheets (as mentioned above) or simply engaging in a classroom discussion.

Some of the debriefing questions which students should discuss are:

- how the experience has influenced them or changed their perspective
- the skills they used, observed, needed
- competencies they may need to improve on
- insights they gained into the world of work
- how relevant the experience is to their subject choices and future career decisions

Getting each student to present a summary of their experience to the whole class is recommended as it develops many core skills as well as provides insight into the working life of a variety of career areas to all students.

Most employers will also be happy to complete a student evaluation form that provides some useful feedback for the student, and for the school. A Sample form is available at the back of this document. Students should also be encouraged as part of the completion process to write 'Thank You' letters to the employers.

Participation on work experience programmes would normally form part of a student's overall assessment at the end of a school year. Student's dairies and reports, employers' reports and perhaps notes made by a visiting teacher could all form part of the assessment. In addition the assessment should reflect the effort a student has put into the whole process from preparation to de-briefing.

Documentation

There can be a lot of documentation required to support an effective Work Placement programme. The range of documentation which may be required include:

- Briefing sheets for employers and parents (see CareersPortal.ie 'Work Placement' series)
- Material for classroom work with students (see CareersPortal.ie Worksheets)
- Parent Consent Forms
- Insurance Indemnity documents for students to give to employers. Note: school insurance company should also be notified of student work placement programme and the document should contain insurance policy number (Sample below - print on school headed paper)
- Student CV's and application letters
- Contact details for all proposed placements, including students and employers contact details
- A database of past work placements
- Employer Report/Assessment forms (Sample below - print on school headed paper)

Evaluation

To ensure that the work experience programme is meeting the needs of students and employers, the programme should be reviewed on an annual basis with input from employers, parents, students, management and staff. The evaluation could be carried out by issuing questionnaires to the different groups, i.e. students, employers parents and/or meeting with representatives from each group to hear their perspectives on the success of the programme and suggestions for improvement.



Employers Report on Work Experience

Participant _____ Dates _____

Supervisor _____ Employer _____

Description of Work Experience / Duties

Please indicate your assessment of this participant during their work placement with you.						
	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Not Accessed</i>	<i>Acceptable</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	Comments...
Attendance & Punctionality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Personal appearance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Attitude towards job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ability to follow instructions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Initiative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ability to complete jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Practical skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Social Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ability to handle technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Relationship with supervisors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Relationship with staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Please add any other comments you wish to make about this participant...

Would you be willing to take our students for work experience next year?

YES NO If yes, contact details: _____

Work Experience Insurance Cover

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This school actively participates in a Work Placement programme for our students. As part of this programme, each student is encouraged to gain Work Experience during the school term, and during normal working hours.

The Pupil will be available for a period of: _____ days during the following dates: ___/___/___ to ___/___/___

The schools insurance policy has been extended to cover each pupil during this period of Work Experience. The policy details are as follows:

The Pupils understand that they must comply with any conditions you lay down regarding activities, safety, and confidentiality. They are also given instructions beforehand about attendance, punctuality and codes of behaviour in the workplace.

The school appreciates your assistance in accommodating one of our Pupils. If you require any further details, please contact me at the school,

Many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

Ph:

Mobile: