

# **STUDENT GUIDE**

## **CONTENTS**

**WHY WORRY ABOUT WORK EXPERIENCE**

**WHAT IS WORK EXPERIENCE**

**“WHAT CAN WORK EXPERIENCE MEAN TO ME?”**

**HOW TO START FINDING YOUR OWN WORK EXPERIENCE**

**STEP 1: IDENTIFYING AN OPPORTUNITY**

**STEP 2: IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS**

**STEP 3: CONTACTING EMPLOYERS**

**STEP 4: SUCCEEDING AT THE INTERVIEW**

**THINGS TO CHECK WHEN OFFERED A JOB**

**MAKING A SUCCESS OF THE EXPERIENCE**

**DEVELOPMENT OF KEY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

**AFTER THE WORK EXPERIENCE**

**WHAT IF THINGS GO WRONG**

**APPENDIX:**

**Curriculum Vitae and Application Letters**

**Employment Health & Safety Checklist**

**Income Tax and National Insurance Issues**

**Minimum Wage**

**Overseas Students – Work Permit Situation**

**Equal Opportunities Policy**

## **WHY WORRY ABOUT WORK EXPERIENCE?**

- Most graduate employers expect new recruits to make a contribution to their organisation from day one
- Work experience gives you EVIDENCE of the skills you need for employment and shows employers that you are 'work ready'. The key skills for employability are outlined on page

## **WHAT IS WORK EXPERIENCE?**

A period of temporary student employment, within a framework of learning objectives and assessment, in which the student takes control of the learning.

There are a variety of opportunities, such as:

- Part-time jobs
- Casual vacation work
- Voluntary work
- International exchanges

These are different from the forms of work experience which are part of the higher education institution's programme of education where they may give some supervision and assessment of the experience, such as:

- Sandwich courses
- Course-related projects
- Industrial placements
- Vacation placements

You can begin to develop key employability skills through part-time and voluntary work just as you can through formal work placements.

To decide which kind of work experience is appropriate for you, think about what you want to achieve and how it fits in with your interests and academic commitments. By doing this you will be maximising the learning value of our work experience.

## **“WHAT CAN WORK EXPERIENCE MEAN TO ME?”**

- Helps you to get a better job on graduation
- Earns you some cash
- May help you to stand out from the crowd
- Gives you a chance to put academic knowledge into practice
- Helps you to test out career options
- Improves your knowledge of yourself
- Builds your confidence by working with others
- Develops skills employers are looking for
- Bridges that gap between university and the world of work

**This Guide will help you find your own work experience opportunity and persuade an employer to take you on. It will also help you to:**

- Gain maximum benefit from your work experience
- Devise an action plan to maximise the long-term impact of your experience

During the time you spend on work experience you may have the opportunity to be given real responsibility. It will be an exciting, if sometimes daunting, experience requiring enthusiasm, commitment and trust on both sides.

## HOW TO START FINDING YOUR OWN WORK EXPERIENCE

### STEP 1: IDENTIFYING AN OPPORTUNITY

- Think about likely career interests, any long term goals you may have and skills you need to develop
- Talk to a university careers advisor for help with this, especially if your degree discipline does not itself relate to specific areas
- If you don't know what you want to do, try something that involves your other interests, etc.:
  - ◆ Working with people
  - ◆ Working with numbers or words
- Determine the broad occupational area in which you want to work and some specific objectives you want to fulfil eg:
  - ◆ Need to earn money
  - ◆ Greater understanding about career choices
  - ◆ Development of key skills at work
- Think about such things as:
  - ◆ How much time can I spare for work in addition to study
  - ◆ What is the minimum I need to earn a week?
  - ◆ Where do I want to do it? At home or in my university town?
  - ◆ How far am I prepared to travel?
  - ◆ Do I want to do a mixture of voluntary and paid work?
  - ◆ Do I want to be office based?
  - ◆ How closely does it need to relate to my degree subject or doesn't that matter?

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS**

Most companies, particularly small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs – where most graduate employment lies) have a least one project that needs attention, but lack the resources to tackle it. Managers are usually fully stretched in their day to day business operations and have little time to think far ahead. The organisation may not have the sorts of skills that undergraduates already have, particularly in IT, language, technical areas and marketing.

Work experience students can undertake jobs that might not otherwise be done within the time and resources available. Bright and enthusiastic students can therefore contribute significantly to the organisation's performance at rate the company can afford. Both employer and student have the opportunity to see whether they could like to make the arrangement a permanent one, without committing themselves immediately. Work experience can lead to a full time job on graduation.

Companies can be identified by:

- Going to your University Careers Service and the Student Employment Service or Job Shop.
- Looking at advertisements in the local paper for casual and part-time work
- Accessing websites that are being established and which put you in touch with work experience opportunities. Check out: [www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org) for links
- Using the internet to access job vacancy sites of the major newspapers
- Using departmental contacts, especially if yours is a vocational course. Academic departments usually have a variety of links with companies through research and consultancy activities
- Checking with your local Chamber of Commerce, researching Trade Directories and the business section of your local library, the Yellow Pages and Recruitment Agencies
- Reading local and trade press for companies which have just been awarded a new contract or developed a new product

**DON'T FORGET THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING – YOU MAY BE ABLE TO FIND SOMETHING THROUGH FAMILY, FRIENDS AND OTHER CONNECTIONS.**

### **STEP 3: CONTACTING EMPLOYERS**

Research the company you are contacting to find out:

- What they do
- The name of their Chief Executive or Managing Director

Prepare a targeted CV with covering letter, addressed to the Chief Executive or Managing Director to ensure they understand:

- Why you are interested in them
- Why you are interested in getting work experience
- What you have to offer them in terms of technical skills such as IT, and personal qualities
- The benefits to their company if they take you on, e.g. a completed task or project
- The relevance of your course of study and any other experience
- Don't forget that your choice of hobbies, voluntary work and interests can assist in determining your suitability for the job

Advice on how to prepare a CV can be had from your University Careers Service or from specialist publications (see appendix for some headings that need to be considered).

- Follow up all letters with a telephone call one week later if there is no response
- Always be positive – it is important to sound enthusiastic and to show you have something to offer
- Be pro-active – suggest a meeting/interview to discuss the job further

## **STEP 4: SUCCEEDING AT THE INTERVIEW**

Prepare for the interview by viewing it from the manager's perspective:

- Why should the company take you on?
- What are the benefits?
- Can they spare the time to supervise a student (think of an example where you had to work on your own)
- Why did you choose this particular course of study?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses? (e.g. what are you good at?)
- How much do you know about this sector of work?
- Have you successfully completed a project before?
- Working in this company isn't easy, can you cope with difficult situations? Give an example.
- Why do you want to work here during the vacation period?

Present yourself on time and dressed appropriately for the job to make a good impression. Show a positive attitude. Show that you are genuinely interested in the company by thinking through ideas for your work for them.

## **AFTER THE WORK EXPERIENCE**

Once you have completed your work experience, you should think through what you have achieved and the experience gained as follows:

- List your good points
- Did you receive any training?
- Did you have contact with people outside of the organisation?
- How did you communicate with people, both inside and outside the organisation?
- What resources did you use to find information to carry out your work? Were they realistic?

- Did you initiate and respond to correspondence?
- Did you come across any conflict? How did you resolve it?
- Did you manage a budget?
- Think about the bad things that occurred – did you learn anything from them?

Finally, summarise your achievements and skills development in a 100 word paragraph to use in your CV update.

### **WHAT IF THINGS GO WRONG?**

In the event of difficulties arising while you are undertaking work experience in a company or organisations, you should first of all try and sort out the problem with your manager. If you are in a large organisation, there will be procedures to deal with such matters. In smaller organisations, there should also be some procedures, so you will need to ask what they are. Discuss the matter with your mentor, if you have one.

If matters cannot be resolved, e.g. you cannot get on with your supervisor and it is not possible to move you to another department, then the best thing is to recognise that it would be in everyone's interest that you leave. If you are on a project placement or are a sandwich student or on an HEI organised or assessed placement, you must check with your tutor what to do.

Should such a situation arise, and you leave the company, think through why things went wrong and what might have been done to overcome the problem at an earlier stage so that you are better prepared to deal with a similar situation should it occur again. Record the positive achievements and the lessons learnt.

## THINGS TO CHECK WHEN OFFERED A JOB

1. Check terms and conditions, eg. Start date, end date (if applicable), period of notice, salary or rate of pay (unless it is an unpaid placement). If you become an employee of the organisation there is additional information you should be given; check this with your tutor, Job Shop or Careers Service. Also check:
  - Start/finish times for the working day and lunch break arrangements
  - Dress code
  - Who you report to
  - Method of payment, i.e. weekly/monthly, by cheque, bank transfer, etc.)
  - Whether you have to pay tax and national insurance contributions (see appendix for details).
2. Clarify company objectives for the work and what you are expected to do, e.g. set up a database system, undertake a research project.

Clarify expectations with your manager, e.g. are you expected to make presentations or write reports.

Clarify your own expectations of what you want out of it. e.g.:

- Your learning objectives
- Personal skills development
- Knowledge of the business sector
- Working in a team or with customers
- Whether you will be given feedback or an appraisal

Identify a mentor (preferably inside the company or an experienced person) with whom you can confide and seek advice.

## **MAKING A SUCCESS OF THE EXPERIENCE**

For the work experience to be successful you need to contribute to the organisation and to learn from it. This means performing like a regular, successful employee by turning up for work on time, behaving appropriately, fulfilling the company's requirements and achieving objectives and targets to the best of your ability. In all of this your attitude towards the work and towards others is important. You should show initiative where appropriate and be flexible and cooperative as well as contributing ideas and the skills you already have.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF KEY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

Work experience will also help you develop a range of skills that employers are looking for when they recruit graduates. The 6 key skills identified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) are:

- Improving own learning and performance
- Communication
- Working with others
- Information technology
- Application of number
- Problem solving

Some of these skills are more important in some jobs than others, so you will not necessarily need to develop all of these to the same level.

## **APPENDIX**

### **CURRICULUM VITEA AND APPLICATION LETTERS**

There are some essential pieces of information you must include in your CV, but remember to keep the document short (no more than two pages), in bullet point style, clear and easy to read and well presented.

You need to state your name and contact details: address, telephone and other contact numbers such as e-mail and fax if you have them. You should summarise the skills you have that are relevant to an employer, including your IT skills. You should give your education and state the qualifications you have acquired so far, noting any special achievements or distinctions in your school, college or social life. It is important to show any previous work you have done and the extent of responsibility and skills employed. You should also list two referees, preferably from work and your HEI.

The covering letter you send must be targeted to the position you are applying for and show that you understand the nature of the business and the post. You need to show what and how you can contribute. You need to make yourself stand out from the crowd so be brief, relevant and persuasive.

Further advice and examples of different CV formats and applications letters can be obtained from your college careers library or bookshop.

## **EMPLOYMENT HEALTH AND SAFETY CHECKLIST**

This checklist is designed to be used at the beginning of your period of work experience, as an aid to ensuring that key items of information are given to you. Some items, such as safety matters, are essential for all types of work experience, whilst others will vary depending upon what you are doing and the size of company or organisation you are in.

### **1. Welcome to organisation**

Try and ensure your manager or supervisor tells staff why you are there and what you will be doing.

### **2. Confirm the name of the owner/manager/supervisor responsible for the work you will be doing.**

### **3. Working Hours**

Check start and finish times  
Lunch break times  
Whether you will be expected to work outside of these hours

### **4. Absence Procedure**

Check the name of the person you need to notify if you are absent for any reason, e.g. illness

### **5. Location of Services**

Check where the toilets/washroom area, as well as eating and refreshment facilities and places to store your belongings.

### **6. Health & Safety Matters – Fire and Emergency Procedures**

Ask for general instructions in the event of fire/emergency evacuation. Check for:

- Location of any alarm call points/fire marshals
- Location and use of fire extinguishers
- Location of emergency exits and assembly point
- First Aid provisions
- Name/Location of person responsible for providing First Aid

## **Health & Safety Policy and Procedures**

You should be given a general explanation by your manager/supervisor about the company/organisation's policy

Ask them to outline duties you will be allowed to undertake and any restrictions/precautions, e.g. supervision, protective equipment needed.

Ask to be made aware of any specific hazards and associated procedures.

Ask if there are any activities which you must not undertake and/or areas/locations which must not be entered.

### **7. Rules and Standards**

Check as to what is appropriate, e.g. dress, etiquette, confidentiality, quality assurance system, etc.

### **8. Confirm arrangements for day to day supervision**

### **9. Employer's Liability Insurance**

Make sure that the company/organisation has this.

### **10. General Third Party/Public Liability Insurance**

Make sure that the company/organisation has this

## INCOME TAX AND NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS

Depending on the sort of work experience you get, you will need to check the situation as to whether you will have to pay Income Tax and National Insurance Contributions.

The amount you have to earn before paying tax is approximately £4,000 p.a. You have to start paying National Insurance contributions once you start earning more than £66.00 per week.

For **part-time employment** you will need to check with your employer whether you will be earning enough to pay tax and National Insurance contributions.

For **vacation work** you will need to check the circumstances with the company or organisation.

If you work **voluntarily** for a company organisation and do not get any form of payment, then the issue of paying income tax or national insurance contributions does not arise.

For **Sandwich courses, Industrial placements and course-related projects** there will be standard procedures agreed with the company or organisation. In most instances you will be treated as an employee of the organisation.

Students on some **placement programmes**, such as **STEP** are exempt from paying tax or national insurance contributions as they receive a training allowance.

When you finish our employment you should **collect your P45 form**. This states how much national insurance has been paid and is therefore evidence of your contributions and that your employer has paid.

## **MINIMUM WAGE**

There is now a minimum wage for all employees. The main details are as follows:

- Workers aged 22 or over must be paid at least £4.85 per hour (from October 2002)
- Workers aged 18-21 must be paid at least £4.10 per hour (from October 2002)

Students on sandwich course placements are exempt from the minimum wage.

In all other instances, you should be aware of the minimum wage level when negotiating your work experience.

## **OVERSEAS STUDENTS – WORK PERMITS**

Overseas students from non-EU countries no longer require a work permit to take part-time and vacation work. A number of restrictions will still apply:

- The student must not work more than 20 hours a week during term time, except where a work placement is to be undertaken as a necessary part of the course of study as agreed by the education institution.
- The student should not pursue a career by filling a permanent or part-time vacancy.

Further clarification can be obtained from the Home Office.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY**

Remember to ask about whether the company has an Equal Opportunities Policy as you should be treated like everyone else.

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