

Policy and Procedures

Higher Education Work-based Learning and Placements

2016 - 19

Higher Education Directorate



| Document approved by: | | | | | |
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Background and Context

Work-Based Learning and Placement Policy for Higher Education at Weston College

Weston College recognises and values the importance of work-based and placement learning within higher education (HE) and its current and potential future benefits for students' learning and graduate employability. This policy is convergent with Weston College's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2014-15 to 2016-17, which aims:

“To focus on graduate employability and the development of those skills needed to ensure that individuals are ready and able to enter the world of work or self-employment.” (Strategic aim 6)

In forming its policy, the College acknowledges that there are many different ways students can acquire work-based learning, depending on the nature and level of their programme of study.

“Learning in the work place can take many forms and serves a variety of purposes.” (*Foundation degree characteristics statement, September 2015*)

This policy provides guidance on the minimum requirements regarding the delivery of work-based learning and placements. Programmes may wish to include additional information or procedures appropriate for their subject, or to meet the accreditation requirements of a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB).

This document closely aligns to the expectations of the QAA Quality Code Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching, B4: Enabling student development and achievement and B10: Managing higher education provision with others.

Definition of work-based learning

Work-based learning refers to learning that can normally be achieved by students in and through paid or unpaid work, and where the learning can be measured through the identification and achievement of defined and related learning outcomes, that contribute to the overall aims of the student's programme of study.

Work-based learning can be achieved through many forms, including full-time or part-time work, integrated work placements, projects and real work environments. Its focus is on learning acquired through activity within workplaces, critical reflection in and on this learning and its relevance to students in terms of enhanced skills, knowledge and understanding and increased critical self-awareness and personal potential.

It takes into account the relevance for employers in terms of enhanced employee and organisational performance, increased innovative capacity, employee contribution and output.

Scope of the Policy

The policy concerns individuals undertaking workplace activities, in the UK or abroad, for the purpose of acquiring learning that will be assessed as part of the learning outcomes of their programme of study. The activity may be paid or unpaid and may take various forms, including traditional employment, part-time or self-employment, work placements, entrepreneurial activity, public performance or exhibition, voluntary engagements or external engagements with professional practitioners at their place of work as part of a College-organised field trip or residential visit.

The policy also addresses instances where students are in long term employment prior to undertaking the programme and are engaging in the programme as a part of their continued professional development.

Work-based learning may take place within a College location as long as the learning opportunities are not contrived for study purposes but occur through the activity of working (for example, 'live briefs' set by a business organisation or professional individual external to the programme of study may be completed within the College and make use of College facilities, making it effectively the student's workplace).

Exclusions

The policy does not apply to employment, paid or unpaid, undertaken by a student outside of the programme of study, even if relevant to the student's programme of study.

1. Principles

Work-based learning activity within HE programmes at Weston College will display some or all of the following characteristics:

- Facilitate the development of a student centred curriculum within the context of award programme requirements and encourage student negotiated elements within programmes of study;
- Be flexible in terms of access, delivery and curriculum, feedback and assessment;
- Promote active partnerships with employers/external organisations;
- Promote innovative teaching, learning, support and assessment strategies applicable to the workplace;
- Contribute to the future employability of the student;
- Promote the professional and personal development of the student;
- Allow the student to develop specialist knowledge, theory and skills by using the workplace as a context for project-based or practice evidenced learning.

1.1. Approval

All work-based learning activity, including placements, within HE programmes at Weston College must be approved in advance to ensure that appropriate standards have been met in relation to the following three areas:

- **Academic quality** - Work-based learning and placement activities must be appropriate and aligned to learning outcomes specified within the programme
- **Health and safety** - students and staff must be assured that the activity will take place in a safe and risk-managed environment.
- **Ethics** - any ethical concerns that may arise from the activity must be properly considered and addressed.

Approval of work placements must follow the agreed Weston College procedures detailed within the Work-based Learning and Placements Policy and Procedures (WBLP).

Weston College will adopt a risk-based approach to the approval and management of work placements and measures taken should be appropriate and proportionate to the activity taking place.

1.2. Roles and responsibilities

The College will provide clear and accurate information regarding the roles and responsibilities of each party (i.e. the student, the placement provider and the College) associated with a placement, which must be acknowledged prior to the placement commencing. The communication will take the form of a Letter of Expectation (for placements with a low risk profile) or a Placement Agreement (for placements with a medium or high risk profile).

A Letter of Expectation will require acknowledgement of receipt, whereas a Placement Agreement must be signed by the College and the placement provider (and, where appropriate, the student) with a copy being returned to the College.

1.3. Academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

Weston College's awarding partners take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities irrespective of where they are delivered. The College recognises its responsibilities for the arrangement and oversight of the delivery of learning opportunities with others in the form of work-based learning and work placements.

Where learning outcomes are delivered and/or assessed within the workplace by the placement provider the College retains oversight of the academic standards and assessment of students. In such instances, staff at provider must be approved by the awarding partner. The College will also provide regular and ongoing continuing professional development to placement supervisors, to ensure a complete and current understanding of academic standards and assessment requirements.

1.4. Sustained management and oversight

Weston College will ensure sustained management and oversight of all work-based learning and placements with external providers through specific responsibilities ascribed to a designated post within the Higher Education Directorate.

The HE Partnership and Compliance Manager has oversight of the management of work-based learning and placement activity on behalf of the HE Directorate.

1.5. Annual monitoring and evaluation

Programmes, in fulfilling their obligations to their validating partners and with reference to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, are required to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of work-based learning and placements as part of the annual programme reporting process. This should include evaluation of any CPD that is delivered to placement providers as part of the programmes ongoing work placement arrangements.

Faculty HE annual monitoring reports are required to reflect and evaluate, at a faculty level, the effectiveness of work-based learning and placements across their HE provision.

The HE Directorate provides an annual overview report to Higher Education Board of Study (HEBS) of the effectiveness of the centralised sustained management of work-based learning and placements, taking into account feedback from students, programmes and employers.

2. Procedure for the management of work placements

A work placement is a specific form of work-based learning. It is defined within the HE sector as any period of work experience, paid or unpaid

- Which is undertaken taken as an integral part of the student's course
- Where the student is enrolled at the institution during this period
- Where there is a transfer of direct supervision of the student to a third party¹

2.1. Management of placements

The process draws substantially from the HE sector-recognised Association of Work-based and Placement Learning (ASET) and Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) guidance for managing work-based learning and placements. In particular it recognises that within higher education:

- i. The prime purpose of any placement is to provide a learning and developmental experience for the student. Health and safety needs to be an integral part of the whole process and experience.
- ii. Higher education should be encouraging students to learn how to assess and manage risk.²

The roles and responsibilities of each party should be made clear and communicated to each party at the appropriate stage of the placement. The process identifies certain actions and responsibilities of each party **pre-placement, on placement and post-placement.**

In instances where the employer or work placement provider will assess students on behalf of the College, appropriate staff development must be provided by the programme team. Development opportunities must ensure that assessors are competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities and the assessment is robust.

2.2. Pre-placement

Preparing the student for placement

Students must be properly prepared for placements, both in terms of how to apply and secure a position, and their responsibilities as an employee (whether paid or unpaid) whilst on placement.

¹ Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) Health and Safety Guidance (2009) & ASET Good Practice Guide for Health and Safety for Student Placements (2014)

² UCEA Health and Safety Guidance (2009)

Students will be issued with a **Student Placement Guide** containing information to help support the student in finding a placement opportunity (e.g. preparing a CV, approaching employers, behaviour in the workplace, expectations about tasks they may complete etc.) The template for the guide will be managed by the HE Directorate.

Health and safety and risk assessment training will be embedded in the curriculum (e.g. through in-class training and workshops, handbooks, online materials), with relevant subject specific input as appropriate. The information will be provided in a way that the College can be satisfied that the student has received the information.

Securing a placement and notifying the College

Students will be encouraged to wherever possible find their own placements; Weston College considers this an important learning exercise in terms of their future employability. Once a student has secured a placement they should seek approval from their tutor for the placement to proceed. They will be able to do this remotely, through an online “**placement information form**” (PIF), which will ask them to complete specific details about their placement, the provider, activities they will undertake and relevant health and safety questions dependent on the risk rating.

Health and safety vetting and risk assessment

Students will be expected to complete initial information on the PIF prior to submitting the form electronically for staff approval. The information requested will cover some health and safety questions in order for staff to make a judgement regarding the level of risk associated with the placement, using a risk profiling approach that considers the following factors:

- Type of work
- Travel and transportation
- Location or regional conditions
- General/environmental health factors
- Individual student factors (e.g. health, disability, linguistic or cultural)
- Insurance limitations.

The risk profiling will establish whether the proposed placement is high, medium or low risk and any possible actions that may need to occur to reduce risk. Where further actions are identified this must be addressed by the tutor with the student and/or placement provider as appropriate before the placement is approved. Where a visit to the provider is identified as necessary, this should be carried out by the tutor, with or without the student, prior to approval.

Academic suitability of the placement

Before approving the placement, staff must be satisfied that the activities the student will be undertaking enable them to have an appropriate learning and developmental experience that align with the learning outcomes the placement is intended to fulfil.

The member of staff should also be satisfied that where there is potential for ethical issues to arise, these have been taken into consideration and appropriate safeguards put in place to enable the placement to proceed.

Approval of placement

At the point of approval the member of staff will send a communication to the provider thanking them for taking the student and include information regarding the roles and responsibilities expected of the provider (as well as the student and Weston College).

The communication should include either a Letter of Expectation (for low risk placements) or a Placement Agreement (for medium or high risk placements). Acknowledgement of receipt should be received for a Letter of Expectation, whereas a signed copy of the Placement Agreement must be received before the placement can be approved.

The content of the Letter of Expectation and the Placement Agreement will be managed by the HE Directorate.

A generic **Placement Provider Guide** will be produced by the Directorate to be sent to providers either in hard copy or electronically. Programmes will be able to add content to suit their particular subjects, but as a minimum it will include information on induction and health and safety expectations, how to report accidents, incidents or near misses to the College, procedures should the placement have to cease or be withdrawn, 24 hour emergency contact, how to deal with complaints or other concerns arising from the placement.

Staff will confirm their approval of the placement, normally via email, to the student.

2.3. On placement

Communication plan

Approval of a placement must be accompanied by a communication plan, initiated by the academic tutor and agreed with the student and, if appropriate, the provider.

The communication plan should be proportionate and appropriate for the type of placement being undertaken. It should take into account any risk management measures identified.

As a minimum, the communication plan will include College emergency contact details for the student/provider to use in the event of an emergency occurring during the activity (even where activity maybe a one-off occasion for only a few hours). Where placements take place abroad or outside of normal working hours, or where

activities are being supervised remotely, appropriate arrangements must be in place to ensure “immediate emergency communications” are available to the student so that immediate measures can be undertaken to normalise the situation, in accordance with the Weston College Business Continuity Plan.

The communication between the college, student and provider should be maintained in accordance with the agreed communication plan

2.4. Post placement

Sustained management

The Directorate will monitor all externally supervised work-based learning and placement activity and records of placement providers through a central database (CRM). Data gathered will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and may be used internally to enhance the College’s management of work-based learning and placements and links with employers.

Evaluation and annual monitoring

In accordance with the College policy, the evaluation of WBLP will be included in HE annual programme/faculty monitoring and evaluation processes, including annual reports. The key committee that will consider the effectiveness of WBLP is HE Board of Study (HEBS). An annual institutional level overview report will be considered by the Board.

3. Procedure for the management of other forms of work-based learning

Management of work-based learning may vary depending on the type of activity taking place. Some activities, such as insight days or visits to industry settings, will be covered by existing College policies and procedures (i.e. field trips and residential visits).

3.1. Work based learning supervised by a third party

Where work-based learning takes place off College premises, under the direct supervision of non-Weston College staff and in the absence of Weston College academic staff, the activity will need to follow the same approval process as a placement.

3.2. Student enterprise projects, exhibitions, performances

Student enterprise projects, that are devised, managed and delivered by students in a non-College, public setting, but not directly supervised, will also require prior approval by academic staff. It is recommended that staff follow a similar risk-profiling exercise to that of placements, to ensure that students have properly considered their own health and safety and risk management responsibilities in relation to the enterprise. Students and staff should follow the pre-placement procedures, excluding those pertaining to the provider as the student(s) effectively take that role. A communication plan should also be in place for the duration of the project.

Where students are performing or exhibiting work in a recognised public venue it is not necessary for staff to vet the venue (as they might a workplace of a placement provider) as part of the approval process, although students must provide evidence obtained from the venue owner that the venue complies with health and safety at work legislation and appropriate insurances and relevant licences are in place. Where students are unable to obtain such evidence, the member of staff should approach the venue owner directly to request this information prior to approval.

Examples of work-based learning

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| Company visits | Usually undertaken as a supervised, group activity either as part of the curriculum or outside, as an enrichment activity for students. |
| Enterprise Projects | Student devised entrepreneurial initiatives that lead to a commercial output. Exhibitions and public performance would come under this category, as would the public launch of a student business or product developed within a programme of study. |
| Insight days | May be offered by employers, or arranged by academic staff. Where accompanied by staff, field trip procedures would apply. |
| Internships/ Vacation placements | A short term placement opportunity usually offered and advertised by employers although may also be secured through a speculative application. Taken by students at any level of study in a vacation time or part time during an academic year. Elsewhere, the term “internships” is used in another context to describe opportunities for new graduates. |
| Practice placements | Governed by a formal agreement between the Higher Education provider and employers, these placements are usually undertaken on programmes where qualification leads to a licence to practice such as in health or education. Students will often do multiple practice placements as part of their programme of study and employers may be involved in the assessment of students. |
| Live Projects | Negotiated pieces of work, either group based or individual that may be sourced by the Higher Education provider or the student. Alternatively, businesses or organisations may approach the College with a proposal or brief that may be appropriate for an individual student or group. The project may be located at the employer’s premises or may be completed within the College setting. |
| Semester placements | If a full time placement, it would be equivalent of a semester’s academic study (12-15 weeks depending on the Higher Education provider’s regulations). May also be used to describe a part time placement where a student integrates spending 1 or 2 days a week throughout the semester on placement with their academic study. |

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| Work shadowing | Short term, informal activities where a student will spend time on company premises but will have no contract or expectation of making a working contribution; it is an observation opportunity. |
| Work based award | A full programme where the employment setting is used as a contextual focus for the learning regularly throughout the degree; either retrospectively through reflection or prospectively through the setting of specific projects. |

References

- ASET Good Practice Guide for Work based and Placement Learning in Higher Education, ASET, 2014
- ASET Health and Safety for Student Placements, ASET, 2010
- Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark Characteristics Statement, Quality Assurance Agency, September 2015
- Guidance for the assessment of Work-based learning (Higher Education Academy, 2010)
- Intellectual Property Rights Policy and Regulations 2008 (RBI, UWE)
- QAA Quality Code Higher Education B10 Managing higher education provision with others.
- QAA Quality Code Higher Education B3: Learning and Teaching, Section 2 Work-based and placement learning
- QAA Quality Code Higher Education B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement
- Student General Regulations, Bath Spa University 2014
- Universities and Colleges Employers Association Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork, UCEA, 2011
- Universities and Colleges Employers Association Health and Safety Guidance for the Placement of Higher Education Students, UCEA 2009
- Weston College Higher Education Strategic Plan 2014-15 to 2016-17
- Work Placement Toolkit for Students, Universities and Arts and Cultural Organisations, Arts Council England and London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise (LCACE)
- Work-based Learning Policy, Bath Spa University, 2012-15
- Work-based Learning Policy, UWE, 2010

Glossary of terms

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| ASET | Association of Work based and Placement Learning |
| BSU | Bath Spa University |
| CMT | Corporate Management Team |
| CRM | Customer Relationship Management |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HE CPD | Higher Education Continuing Professional Development |
| HEBS | Higher Education Board of Study |
| HEDMT | Higher Education Directorate Management Team |
| HEMT | Higher Education Management Team |
| PIF | Placement Information Form |
| PSRB | Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body |
| QAA | Quality Assurance Agency |
| RBI | Centre for Research, Business and Innovation |
| UCEA | Universities and Colleges Employers Association |
| UWE | University of the West of England, Bristol |
| WBL | Work-based Learning |