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Beyond Big Business for Student Work Placement, a Guide for Family Businesses and Community and Voluntary Groups.

University College Cork

Roadmap for Employment Academic Partnerships

Higher Education Authority

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As work placement is now a compulsory element of many third level programmes, placement opportunities must be provided for relevant students. Family businesses and community and voluntary groups can offer students a varied and unique learning opportunity.

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Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)
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Beyond Big Business for Student Work Placement

A Guide for Family Businesses and Community & Voluntary Groups

Project Description

In recent years, the enormous value of work placement for third level students in Ireland has been accepted and promoted by students, education providers and employers. However, due to the current economic crisis, it has become somewhat more difficult for work placement practitioners in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) to secure placements for the tens of thousands of students who undertake work placements as part of their third-level programmes on an annual basis. Some employers who would have been the 'traditional' placement partners of HEIs (multinational companies, public sector bodies, etc.) have now had to scale down the number of positions that they can provide to students. Nonetheless, as work placement is now a compulsory element of many third level programmes, placement opportunities must be provided for relevant students.

The purpose of this project was to examine the potential for overcoming this shortfall by developing new partnerships with both family businesses and community and voluntary groups, as although these organisations may not traditionally have been seen as within the reach of HEIs, they are bountiful within almost every community, and are most certainly within the orbit of every HEI in Ireland.

The project team developed this guide for family businesses and community and voluntary groups as a means of introducing these organisations to the concept of student work placement. It should help to promote the value of work placement among these groups, and both facilitate and enhance their experience as host employers for work placement students.

What is Work Placement?

The academic definition of work placement is 'a work context for intentional learning that is relevant to the aims and intended learning outcomes of a higher education programme or module'. In essence, work placement is a three-way partnership between an employer, a student, and a higher education institution, whereby a student is given the opportunity to work and learn in a real-life professional environment which is relevant to their academic studies in order to achieve a number of set goals. Placement students are typically assessed through the completion of a work placement journal and/or report, as well as through feedback from the employer.

Reasons Employers Engage in Work Placement

- Desire to help up-skill students;
- Desire to engage with local HEI;
- Organisational need;
- Opportunity to give something back;
- Opportunity to recruit students upon graduation;

Key Benefits of Work Placement for Family Businesses and Community & Voluntary Groups

- Students bring new vision and new ideas to the employer;
- Students provide a flexible solution to recruitment needs as they can help to ease the workload of staff and bring specific projects to completion;
- Students offer a source of skilled labour and provide insight into new methods currently being taught in third level institutions;

- Employers can identify potential new recruits;
- Employers can contribute to the up-skilling of the next generation;
- Employers gain greater links to higher education institutions.

What is Expected of Placement Employer

- As much as possible, treat the placement student like any other employee in the organisation;
- Appoint a mentor for the student within your organisation who will both supervise the student's work and act as a point of contact for the student;
- Give the student as much opportunity as possible to engage in learning in the workplace;
- Offer regular feedback to the student and partake in the required assessment of the placement student.

Guidelines for Family Businesses and Community & Voluntary Groups

Guidelines for Family Businesses and Community & Voluntary Groups¹

Pre-Placement

- Once you have identified a need for a placement student, make contact with your local higher education institution;
- Ensure you have full understanding of the placement process and what is expected of you by the partner college;
- Prepare an appropriate job specification outlining the type of work the student will be doing;
- Actively engage in the student selection process by meeting and interviewing students;
- Consider how the student's required learning goals could be met in your organisation;
- Appoint and prepare a mentor in your organisation to support the student in the workplace.

During Placement

- Provide suitable induction and supervision arrangements for the student;
- Give the student every opportunity to both work and learn;
- Attempt, where possible, to focus the student's experience towards the placement goals and learning outcomes set out before the commencement of the placement;
- Communicate any difficulties or issues

to the placement practitioner in a timely fashion so that they can be addressed before the completion of the placement;

- Treat the student like any other employee in the organisation;
- Provide regular and appropriate feedback to the student and the HEI.

Post-Placement

- Provide appropriate feedback on the student's performance as part of the assessment process;
- Provide feedback and suggestions for the improvement of the placement process;
- Consider further engagement opportunities with the HEI.

¹ These guidelines have been adapted from the 2010 study conducted by the REAP project on 'Work Placement in Third Level Programmes'.