Beyond Big Business for Student Work Placement, a Guide for Placement Practitioners.

University College Cork

Roadmap for Employment Academic Partnerships [REAP]

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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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Contributing Partners:
Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS)
Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)
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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. With family businesses inUnderstanding the key opportunities and challenges raised by these stakeholder groups; 

• Ascertain the views and experiences of placement practitioners, family businesses and community and voluntary groups of this type of engagement; 
• Analyzing the key opportunities and challenges raised by these stakeholder groups; 
• Identifying means of overcoming these obstacles and establishing guidelines for this type of engagement.

In order to collect data on the experiences and views of placement practitioners, family businesses, and community and voluntary groups, the project team distributed a number of surveys to both placement practitioners1 and employer organisations2 from the key groups. The following is a brief outline of the key results from those surveys.

Reasons Employers Engage in Work Placement

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

Reasons Employers do not Engage in Work Placement

• Lack of belief in learning experience they could offer students; 
• Inability to commit to placement duration; 
• Lack of financial resources; 
• Lack of personnel for mentoring students. 

95% of employers surveyed who had no past experience of work placement would consider taking a placement student in the future

100% of employers surveyed would hire a placement student upon graduation if the opportunity arose.

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

• Students receive a varied learning experience and a unique opportunity to develop their skills; 
• Students may be required to be more hands-on and take on greater responsibility; 
• Students can see that they have made a difference to the employer; 
• Students bring a new vision and ideas to the employer; 
• Students can help to ease the workload of staff and help bring specific projects to completion; 
• Students 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 institutions. 

Key Challenges for Employers in Engaging in Work Placement

• Lack of understanding of what exactly work placement entails and the core aims it hopes to achieve; 
• Lack of resources required to provide students with training, supervision, mentoring, pay, etc.; 
• Lack of realistic expectations of the placement student’s capabilities; 
• Inappropriate duration and timing of work placements; 
• Matching of students with organisation’s needs and existing staff. 

What Employers Want

• Breakthroughs of placement opportunities; 
• Improved understanding of work placement; 
• A simplified placement structure and process; 
• Further input into the timing and duration of placements; 
• More contact with placement practitioners on a regular basis; 
• Help identifying suitable placement students. 

During Placement

• Maintain regular contact with the employer and student and offer support as required; 
• Respond to all queries from the employer in a timely and professional manner; 
• Manage the on-going assessment of the placement’s learning outcomes; 
• Provide timely feedback on the attainment and evidence of the student’s required learning. 

Post-Placement

• Complete the assessment of the student’s placement including the employer assessment process; 
• Seek and act on feedback from the employer and from the student on the placement process as part of a continuous cycle of improvement; 
• Explore other potential opportunities for engagement with the employer. 

1Employers were recruited from 29 practicals representing 16 HEIs based in 16 counties across the country. Three practitioners from each HEI were recruited reflecting a diversity of disciplines coming from approximately 150 third level courses spanning the disciplines of (Archaeology, Engineering, IT, Science, Business, Health and Education) on an annual basis. 
2Employers were recruited from 23 family businesses and community and voluntary groups from all provinces across Ireland. 
3These guidelines have been adapted from the 2010 study conducted by the BEEP project on Work Placements in Third Level Programmes.