



Catholic Education Office, Sydney

# AN EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO WORKPLACE LEARNING

*Guidelines for employers providing workplace  
learning opportunities for school students*

## **WHAT IS WORKPLACE LEARNING?**

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Workplace learning refers to programs that provide students with valuable opportunities to develop vocational skills, knowledge and attitudes in the context of real work environments. Workplace learning extends the school curriculum by enabling students to gain practical experience that may assist them in their transition from school to work and further study.

The two main types of workplace learning programs are work experience and work placement.

## **WORK EXPERIENCE**

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Work experience programs give students aged 14 years or over the opportunity to develop a more informed opinion about their possible career options by enabling them to spend some time in a workplace they have chosen.

Work experience allows students to:

- observe a variety of work being done
- undertake supervised work appropriate to the student's skill level
- ask questions about the workplace
- gain skills related to being at work
- find out about training and employment opportunities

## **WORK PLACEMENT**

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Work placement is different from work experience as it is an integral part of Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses that can be completed by students for their Higher School Certificate (HSC). These courses lead to nationally recognised VET qualifications and it is important for students to have opportunities to apply their classroom learning in real work contexts. For this reason, work placement is a mandatory component of these courses.

Work placement should be relevant to the vocational course being undertaken by the student. It should have a clear purpose and achievable outcomes in the particular employer's workplace and should complement off-the-job learning programs.

Work placement also provides opportunities for work-based assessment of specific course competencies, which are negotiated between the student's school or training provider and individual employers. Local Community Partnerships assist schools and employers to broker these placements.

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WORKPLACE LEARNING?**

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**Host employers** have the opportunity to:

- be involved in the education and training of young people
- meet and train potential employees and contribute to the development of a committed and skilled workforce
- enhance the professional development of staff as they gain experience as workplace supervisors
- meet students from diverse backgrounds who may have skills which can be useful to your organisation
- promote good will in the community through closer links with schools

**Students** have the opportunity to:

- experience real work situations,
- access industry standard facilities, equipment and experienced staff
- develop self-confidence, skills and understandings that will assist them in their transition to meaningful work
- evaluate their abilities and interests in relation to career choices

## **ABOUT WORKPLACE LEARNING.....**

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### **1. Are students paid?**

Students are volunteers and should not be paid. Any payment to students may invalidate insurance and indemnity arrangements.

### **2. Who do I contact if there is a problem?**

If you have any concerns or difficulties during the placement regarding the student or other matters, please contact the nominated school coordinator as soon as possible so that solutions can be found quickly. Contact details are provided in the student's workplace learning record.

### **3. What do I do if an accident occurs involving the student?**

If a student is injured during a workplace learning program, including travel to and from the place of work, the following steps should be taken:

- seek medical help immediately
- contact the school as soon as possible and, depending on the seriousness of the injury, contact parents or carers.
- ask the doctor attending for a medical certificate
- use the student's Medicare number. As students are not employees, Workers' Compensation does not apply

- complete a written report of the accident and forward it to the school. Include a full statement from the student and employer or employees involved.

A copy of the Catholic Schools Insurance Covers for workplace learning is attached for your information. All claims for injury, loss of property or damage to property should in the first instance be referred to the student's school.

#### 4. When can workplace learning occur?

All students aged 14 years and over are eligible to participate. However, students under the age of 15 cannot participate in workplace learning outside the hours of 7.00 am and 6.00 pm.

Placements usually occur during school term time. However, Principals may approve placements during school holidays on the condition that the same level of duty of care and supervision is provided.

#### 5. Are there any industrial concerns?

- The hours worked by the student during the placement should be in accordance with the award for your industry.
- Students should not replace paid employees (including employees who are on paid leave).
- Students should not be used to replace employees engaged in industrial disputes. In the event of industrial action, students must return to school.

### **WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING STUDENT SUPERVISION?**

Employers are expected to act in accordance with workplace responsibilities as set out for all employees and members of the public. This includes responsibilities that flow from legislation such as Occupational Health & Safety, Child Protection, Privacy, Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination Legislation.

#### **Occupational Health & Safety**

In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 No 40 and Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001, all employers are required to have:

- an Occupational Health & Safety policy,
- documented safe work practices and
- a risk management system to identify hazards.

It is expected that employers would have these requirements in place prior to accepting a student for workplace learning, and would make any relevant documentation available if requested. It is also expected that all employers will give students a site-specific Occupational

Health & Safety briefing at the commencement of, or prior to, the workplace learning program.

*Where the workplace is a construction site, employers should apply the legislative requirements for OHS training that were introduced in April 1999. Employers should be satisfied that the student holds the required WorkCover card for general OHS induction for Construction training, and ensure that work activity and site specific training is conducted on the site.*

#### **Child Protection**

Employers should ensure that all employees are aware of the special responsibilities associated with working with young people and of the consequences of any abuse. Child Protection legislation also applies to students undertaking workplace learning programs. Employers should take all possible steps to ensure that students do not:

- undertake an unsupervised task that involves contact with children under the age of 18 years (applicable to Child –related employers only)
- undertake a task that involves unsupervised contact with just one employee or client. Supervision can be provided by visual contact or the physical presence of another employee at all times.

Unacceptable conduct by an employer or their employees includes sexual intercourse with a student; inappropriate sexual conversations of a sexual nature; obscene language of a sexual nature; suggestive remarks; actions including showing of publications, electronic media or illustrations which are sexually suggestive; jokes of a sexual nature; obscene gestures; unwarranted and/or inappropriate touching; sexual exhibitionism; personal correspondence with a student in respect of the employer's or employee's sexual feelings for the student; and deliberate exposure of students to sexual behaviour of others.

Additionally students must not be treated in a manner that may be psychologically harmful or that would constitute physical assault. This would include pushing, grabbing, pulling or hitting a student as well as berating, humiliating or belittling the student.

It is expected that these requirements would be consistent with the employer's existing workplace policies and practices.

**Employers must be aware** that complaints of harassment or abuse of a student in the workplace will require investigation and possible notification according to *Part 3a NSW Ombudsman's Act 1974* and *Section 39 Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*.

## Privacy

The Commonwealth Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 regulates the collection and storage of personal and sensitive information that may be held by organisations. In order to meet duty of care responsibilities and to facilitate the design of suitable workplace learning experiences, employers are provided with relevant information regarding students who are on work placement or work experience. This may include name, address, age, emergency contact details and possibly sensitive health information. In accordance with privacy requirements, it is expected that employers will:

- keep all personal student information secure and confidential, particularly any health information
- ensure that information regarding the student is used only for the purpose of the workplace learning program
- dispose of all student details once the workplace learning program is completed
- provide student access to any student records held by the employer, including the supervisor's report.

This legislation applies to the information collected about students by the school and passed on to employers, regardless of whether or not it directly applies to your organisation. Similarly, all information provided by the host employer to the school will be used only for the purpose of the workplace learning program.

## **CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL WORKPLACE LEARNING**

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### **Before the placement:**

- Ensure that employees, including union representatives, understand the purpose and the benefits of the workplace learning program. For the success of the program it is essential that all staff who will have contact with students, support the organisation's approach to workplace learning and understand the special responsibilities of working with young people.
- Appoint experienced staff to coordinate the program and mentor the student. In consultation with the school coordinator, plan a schedule of activities which will provide students with an understanding of the nature of the industry and a variety of opportunities to learn and practice specific agreed skills.
- Ensure that you have provided the school with clear information about the type of activities you can provide and any special requirements such as first day arrangements or behaviour, clothing and safety regulations, etc.

- Where students with special needs have been identified, including students with learning disabilities, liaise with the nominated school coordinator to ensure that needs are understood and appropriate adjustments are made.

### **When the student arrives:**

- Provide each student with a workplace induction, including safety instruction, emergency procedures, dress requirements, work expectations, location of facilities, working hours, break times, etc.
- Introduce the student to the supervisor and coworkers. Advise who to notify in the event of non-attendance due to illness or misadventure and who to speak to in regard to any problems or questions.

### **During the placement:**

- Regard students as voluntary workers, not visitors. Provide an interesting range and variety of tasks so that students can develop skills related to the agreed outcomes of the program.
- Establish a supportive environment where students are able to ask questions and accept helpful advice.
- Ensure that students work normal working hours and have sufficient time to complete workplace learning journals and assignments.
- Always provide appropriate instruction and supervision – especially in relation to safety issues. Don't assume previous experience.
- Ensure that students are not assigned tasks that are identified as prohibited activities in the attached insurance document.

### **Before the student leaves:**

- Complete the student evaluation report and take time to discuss your feedback with the student.

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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Thank you for your interest in providing workplace learning opportunities for students. Your contribution to the social and vocational development of young people is valued and appreciated.

If you have further questions, contact the VET Coordinator or Careers Adviser at the school, or the Vocational Learning Manager at the Catholic Education Office.

*The CEO Sydney acknowledges the NSW Department of Education and Training (2005) An Employer's Guide to Workplace Learning as an invaluable reference in the development of this employer guide.*