

Work-based learning – Making the most of your opportunity

So....how could work-based learning help me?

Spending time within a work setting is a valuable experience – how else can you find out what working life is really like ?

Work-based learning offers you an opportunity to

- gain insight into working life
- build your confidence in a work environment
- meet people and expand your networks
- identify how skills are applied in the workplace
- find out how to get into the industry
- understand what a job or role really entails
- enhance your CV and support career choices

Regardless of where, or for how long, you spend time in work-based learning there is always something useful to learn, which can ultimately help you to work out

- what do I really want to do for work ?
- how can I take advantage of opportunities available ?
- what skills do I already have and what do I need ?
- how can I improve my employability ?
- which is the next step for me ?



How to arrange work-based learning

Speak to DYW –
they have links
with businesses
all over the
Borders

Write directly to
companies –
explain why you
are interested in
spending time in
their organisation

Ask family &
friends for
contacts in areas
you'd like to work

Discuss with
pastoral staff –
local companies
may offer
opportunities

What to expect from work-based learning ?

A work-based learning opportunity or placement can take on almost any shape !

In order for a company to support a young person in experiencing work within their organisation, the schedule needs to fit around their working day. This means that the experience is realistic, but it may also mean that there will be some limitations on what you are able to experience :

- ❖ a single afternoon, a few days, a week or an ongoing weekly arrangement
- ❖ focus on a specific job or general exposure to the range of roles within the organisation
- ❖ hands on or shadowing
- ❖ highly organised or ad-hoc, going with the flow

Whatever experience you are offered, use the opportunity well and always be grateful !

It's all in the preparation.....

Once you have arranged work-based learning, spend some time getting ready to make the most out of the opportunity

Prior to the placement

- research the organisation – find out what they do and what their business is all about
- be prepared by ensuring you know
 - where to go (particularly if the organisation has a few different locations) and how to get there
 - what time you are expected
 - who you report to when you arrive
 - what you need to wear – if you are going to be in a practical hands-on environment, you may need to wear suitable clothing (such as safety shoes and trousers)
- think about what you want to get out of the experience
 - what else do you want to know
 - make a list of questions you want answered

When you first arrive

- be professional but friendly – first impressions count !
- familiarize yourself and ask if you are not told
 - where can you leave your personal belongings?
 - where are the toilets ?
 - who do you speak to if you have questions ?
 - what hours are you expected to be there and when is lunch
- be willing to learn and remain engaged with everything you are exposed to

“Although I was placed in an office where I knew I didn't want to work, the experience showed me what aspects of working life I needed to think about and what types of tasks I actually enjoy !”

Making the most of the opportunity

Be professional – remember to be polite to everyone you encounter. This also means being attentive to what they are trying to show you and any responsibilities they give you, particularly if this involves health and safety concerns.

Keep an open mind – no matter how well you prepared for the experience, you are likely to learn a lot more. In particular, you might do something you never thought you would be able to do, but you will never know unless you try.

Be confident – it may not be long before you are an employee somewhere so have faith in your ability. If you have questions to ask, make sure you ask them and if you're not sure about something, seek advice or guidance.

Think about how the work relates to you – if you are interested in someones role, ask them how they got to do what they are doing – did they train somewhere or learn on the job ? what qualifications did they need ?

Capture the experience – take a notepad and pen or your work experience booklet Write down what you learn and any contact details of people who you might want to contact at a later date (perhaps for a job !).

“I was introduced to so many people and the jobs they were doing – I never knew that there were so many opportunities at this company”

Reflection and capturing the benefits

After a work-based learning experience, it's a good idea to reflect and think about what you have learnt.

- What skills did I put into practice
 - job specific training
 - generic skills relevant to most working environments (such as customer service, interactions, attending meetings, answering the phone)
- How can I use my work-based learning to enhance my personal statement or CV ?
- What do I need to do next to
 - apply for a job
 - apply for training at college or university
 - gain further insight or experience

Consider writing to thank the company for offering this valuable opportunity – you never know when you might need to ask them for a reference or job

“The staff made me feel very welcome and it didn't take long for them to get me involved in the work. I felt a bit out of my depth at first but soon got used to the responsibility”