



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Work-based learning, placements and work experience

Careers & Enterprise,
The Library, Peel Park Campus,
University of Salford, M5 4WT



 0161 295 0023
 careers&enterprise@salford.ac.uk
 salford.ac.uk/careers

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Introduction

What is work-based learning?

Work-based learning can be included in any programme of study and is conducted by students in a work-related environment. This approach to learning contrasts with traditional methods of learning, which tend to take place in a classroom, laboratory setting or even in the home via remote learning methods. By immersing yourself in a workplace, work-based learning allows you to learn a job and gain professional experience that can help you to take your first career steps.

Work-based learning helps you to prepare people for the realities of a job and allows you to understand whether your chosen career is right for you. Work-based learning offers practical training and can place candidates in an advantageous position compared to other applicants because they can demonstrate relevant work experience, even when applying for entry-level roles. Unlike classroom education, which focuses heavily on theory, learning in the workplace involves a combination of theory and practical work.

So why do work-based learning? The clue is in the question

- Work Based Learning can provide you with a valuable opportunity to develop your employability skills and gain vital professional experience, which will give you an advantage when you apply for jobs.
- Graduate recruiters warn that graduates who have had no previous work experience at all are unlikely to be successful during the selection process and have little or no chance of receiving a job offer for their organisations' graduate programmes.
- Graduate recruitment at the country's leading employers is expected to rise, with employers in eleven out of fifteen key industries and business sectors planning to recruit more new graduates this year.
- Three-quarters of employers provide paid vacation internships for penultimate-year students and at least half offer industrial placements for undergraduates.
- Substantial numbers of employers now also have work experience places for first-year undergraduates over a quarter of organisations offer paid internships and two-fifths of employers run introductory courses, open days, and other taster experiences for first-year students.

This guide is split into five sections:

1. Different types of work-based learning
2. Where to look for work-based learning opportunities
3. Useful websites
4. Information for international students
5. Applying for placements and other forms of work-based learning

Different types of work-based learning

The clusters of Work Based Learning outlined below are designed to offer work-based and professional learner experiences in real-world situations. Models are for guidance and examples not exhaustive.

Insight visits

Examples: Work shadowing, site visits, company visits, and field trips.

Students gain access to the workplace over a brief period, gaining knowledge and insight into the working environment and associated practices. Students will be visitors to the company, engaging with the employer in groups with all students enabled to engage equally. The experience focuses on observation and recognition of aspects of the workplace.

Work-related projects

Example: Live brief, Extended employer project.

Students work to address challenges faced by organisations in negotiated pieces of work, (either group-based or individual) that may be sourced by the University or the student and can be located at the employers' premises, or remotely on and off campus, outside of the workplace environment.

Short placement (recommended duration 1– 12 weeks)

Examples: Practice placements, trimester placements, study and work abroad, internships /vacation placements

During activities in the short placement cluster, students gain access to the workplace to develop their understanding and experience of the working environment.

A short-term placement opportunity is usually offered and advertised by employers although may also be secured through a speculative application. Taken by students at any level of study during vacation time or an academic year.

Elsewhere, the term “internships” is used in another context to describe opportunities for new graduates.

Semester or year abroad

When a student opts to study at an overseas Higher Education provider which has a collaborative/reciprocal agreement with their home Higher Education provider, this could include a period of work or study only. This may be part of, or additional to, their degree e.g., Turing.

Practice placements

Governed by a formal agreement between the Higher Education provider and employers, these placements are undertaken on programmes where qualification leads to a license 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.

Long placement

(Recommended duration 3 – 12 months)

Examples: Placement module, Sandwich year, Internship

During a long placement, you will gain access to the workplace over an extended period to develop your technical (what you have learnt in your course) employability skills, knowledge and experience in a working environment and associated practices. School-based Work Based Learning teams and placement tutors can help you gain experience(s) with industry partners or help you search for Work Based Learning opportunities that suit you and your learning needs and current situation.

There may be a formal application process. During the work-based learning, you will collaborate with employers and organisations to address real challenges to the enterprise through day-to-day projects and extended tasks.

Long Placement experiences are typically taken by undergraduate students in your penultimate or after the second year of your Programme.

Virtual internships

Examples: Placement module, Sandwich year, Internship, trimester placements.

Virtual internships refer to any kind of work experience that you can do from home, including placements, insights, and vacation schemes. You may also hear them referred to as remote internships, online internships, or virtual experiences.

Virtual internships are inclusive, open to anyone and everyone, and often self-paced so you can choose your hours.

How do they work?

Most virtual internships will take one of TWO formats:

1. Structured programmes offering insight into the business and its culture. Some larger companies, like Microsoft and Google, have the technology and infrastructure to deliver their virtual work experience programmes. These are designed to mirror real life wherever possible and include opportunities to network and socialise with other employees.
2. Short, module-based programmes designed to develop a specific set of skills. Companies: including Accenture, KPMG, Linklaters and CitiBank, have created module-based virtual internships. These require students to conduct and submit a series of tasks via an online platform.

Which industries offer virtual internships?

You will not just find virtual work experience in the tech world. Or a digital marketing agency. You will also find it in sectors like banking, consulting, software engineering, fashion, and even medicine. In global corporations, SMEs, and start-ups alike.

Where to look for work-based learning

Your placement tutor

Your programme may have a member of staff who has responsibility for work placements. They are usually known as the 'Placements Tutor'. Their role is to provide support and information about placements. If you do not know who they are, you're your module tutor or contact careers&enterprise@salford.ac.uk we can direct you to the correct member of staff or school team to support your question.

Online placement opportunities

Careers and Enterprise advertise undergraduate and graduate placements, vacation placements, internships and voluntary placements online through [Handshake](#)

Occupational information

There are lots of useful websites relating to [different industries](#), which may help you search for a placement.

Meet employers on campus

Careers and Enterprise work with Schools to organise several school-specific placement fairs throughout the academic year. We also organise presentations by employers throughout the year. Details of upcoming fairs and presentations can be found on Advantage [Employer Events](#). Your placement tutor should also know about any upcoming placement-related events.

You can also find out information about placement opportunities and events on your school web pages and on Blackboard

You might find it useful to book an appointment with Our Advisers to discuss work-based learning opportunities. Book an appointment on [Advantage](#) or by calling 0161 295 0023 (option 5 than 3).

There are also Careers and Enterprise [Workshops](#) which look at key areas of where to look and apply for work-based learning opportunities.

Useful websites

The following is a selection of useful websites which will help you start your search for work-based learning:

[Prospects](#)

You can use the Prospects website to research types of jobs and find employer information, and search for details of Careers Fairs.

[Target jobs](#)

You can find sector-specific advice on work-based learning, research employers and find work-based learning opportunities on this site.

[The National Association of Student Employment Services \(NASES\)](#)

Employment advice for students.

[Rate My Placement](#)

The UK's leading website for undergraduate work experience. Receiving two million student visitors each year and working with over 350 clients across a wide range of industries to promote their opportunities.

[Shell STEP](#)

Shell STEP organise 8-week placements in small and medium-sized businesses. You must be a second or penultimate-year student to take part

[Student Job](#) The job site cuts out all the challenging work for you and once registered you receive weekly email alerts and newsletters of placements which fit your profile description.

[LinkedIn](#) is the world's largest professional network on the internet. You can use LinkedIn to find the right work-based learning opportunity and learn the skills you need to succeed in your career. You can access LinkedIn from a desktop, LinkedIn mobile app, or mobile web experience.

Overseas placements

[AIESEC](#)

AIESEC arrange work abroad programmes for students lasting between 2 and 18 months in a wide range of countries.

[Council in International Educational Exchange \(CIEE\)](#) Internships and Work & Travel programmes around the world for students.

The [International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience \(IAESTE\)](#) provides paid course-related summer placements abroad for science, engineering and applied arts.

Other placements

[Windsor Fellowship](#)

Two-year leadership programme for Black and Asian undergraduates which includes a six-week work placement.

[Employability](#)

Opportunities for disabled and dyslexic students & graduates.

Information for international students

There are specific regulations relating to international students taking up sandwich placements and internships. Detailed guidance is available on the [UKCISA website](#).

If you have a 'prohibition' passport stamp or visa sticker, it is important that you check your status with an authorised University Adviser.

Applying for work-based learning

If the Work-Based Learning is part of your programme of study some programmes may organise opportunities on your behalf, while others will assist you in identifying and applying for Work-Based Learning yourself. If you are interested, remember to speak to your module tutor about work-based learning opportunities.

Alternatively, if you are arranging your own Work-Based Learning companies may require you to complete a formal online application, detailing what you could bring to the role. Applying for Work-Based Learning can be as competitive as applying for a permanent job, with many companies holding formal interviews and assessment centres. It is therefore essential that before you apply, you thoroughly research the company and the role.

By using Careers & Enterprise in the ways detailed below, you can make sure that you are prepared and make the best application you can. These include:

- *Creating your CV,*
- *Writing a Covering Letter*

- *Successful Application*
- *Forms, Preparing for Interviews.*

Book a Work Based Learning Appointment with a Careers Adviser

If you would like to discuss your options in more detail you can book a confidential [Careers Advice](#) appointment with a Careers Adviser. Appointments can be booked online.

Making the most of your work-based learning

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

Before the work-based learning:

- Set yourself goals. What do you need to gain from the opportunity for it to be a success? Is it developing certain skills, or gaining experience working on specific projects? These goals could change during the work-based learning but ensure that you gain the right experience and skills that will build towards gaining the right career for you.
- What else do you want to know
- Make a list of questions you want answered.
- 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 various locations) and how to get there what time you are expected
- To Whom 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)

When you first arrive

- Be professional but friendly – first impressions count!
 - Familiarize yourself and ask if you are not told.
 - Be willing to learn and remain engaged with everything you are exposed to.
1. **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.
 2. **Keep an open mind** –no matter how well you are prepared for the experience, you are likely to learn a lot more. You might do something you never thought you would be able to do, but you will never know unless you try.
 3. **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 are not sure about something, seek advice or guidance.
 4. **Think about how the work relates to you** –if you are interested in someone's 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?
 5. **Capture the experience** – Use the reflective forms (below) to reflect on your learning and development and record any contact details of people whom you might want to contact later (perhaps for a job!).

Reflection and capturing the benefits

During and after a work-based learning experience, it is a good idea to reflect and think about what you are learning, how are you developing, what you need to do to ensure the opportunity is a success and finally, what have learnt.

**There are [reflective forms and guides](#) that will support this reflective learning.*

- What skills have I learnt and put into practice, have you had any job-specific training
- Generic skills relevant to most working environments (such as customer service, interactions, attending meetings, and 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.
- 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.