

Making the most of work-related learning

Introduction

There are several areas of the curriculum where your learners have the opportunity to design their own learning plans, either by co-creating plans with your support or working independently or with peers. Some examples of opportunities that can provide rich learning experiences, but which may be overlooked in planning teaching and learning are:

- independent or group project work
- Key Skills opportunities outside the classroom or workshop
- part-time work or voluntary and community work
- personal interests or hobbies
- work experience.

This guidance uses work-related learning as an example where, with thoughtful planning, several learning objectives can be met and the value of the experience enriched. At the same time learners are developing their understanding of and expertise in planning, an important skill in itself.

The activity

This activity will help learners to understand how planning can help them to get the most out of work experience and meet multiple learning objectives. The activity can also be used as a resource for continuing professional development, providing stimulus for discussions about involving learners in planning their work experience.

Work experience is an important and motivating element of a learning programme and your organisation will already have formal structures and procedures in place to check that workplaces are safe and supportive for your learners. However, opportunities for learning about work and developing employability skills can often be missed. You can ensure that your learners are able to exploit the workplace as a rich learning environment if you jointly plan learning experiences and learning outcomes with them, and their work placement supervisor or employer and others who may be involved in supporting the work experience.

This activity uses a project planning approach to help learners take a leading role in planning, carrying out and reviewing learning through work experience. Through this activity learners will be able to reflect on the value of effective planning as well as the specific learning they have gained in the workplace.

Getting started

It is useful to approach planning learning by considering three main areas of learning common to most subject and vocational programmes:

- Vocational learning, including specific occupational objectives.
- Personal, social, learning and thinking skills.
- Key skills, Skills for Life or functional skills.

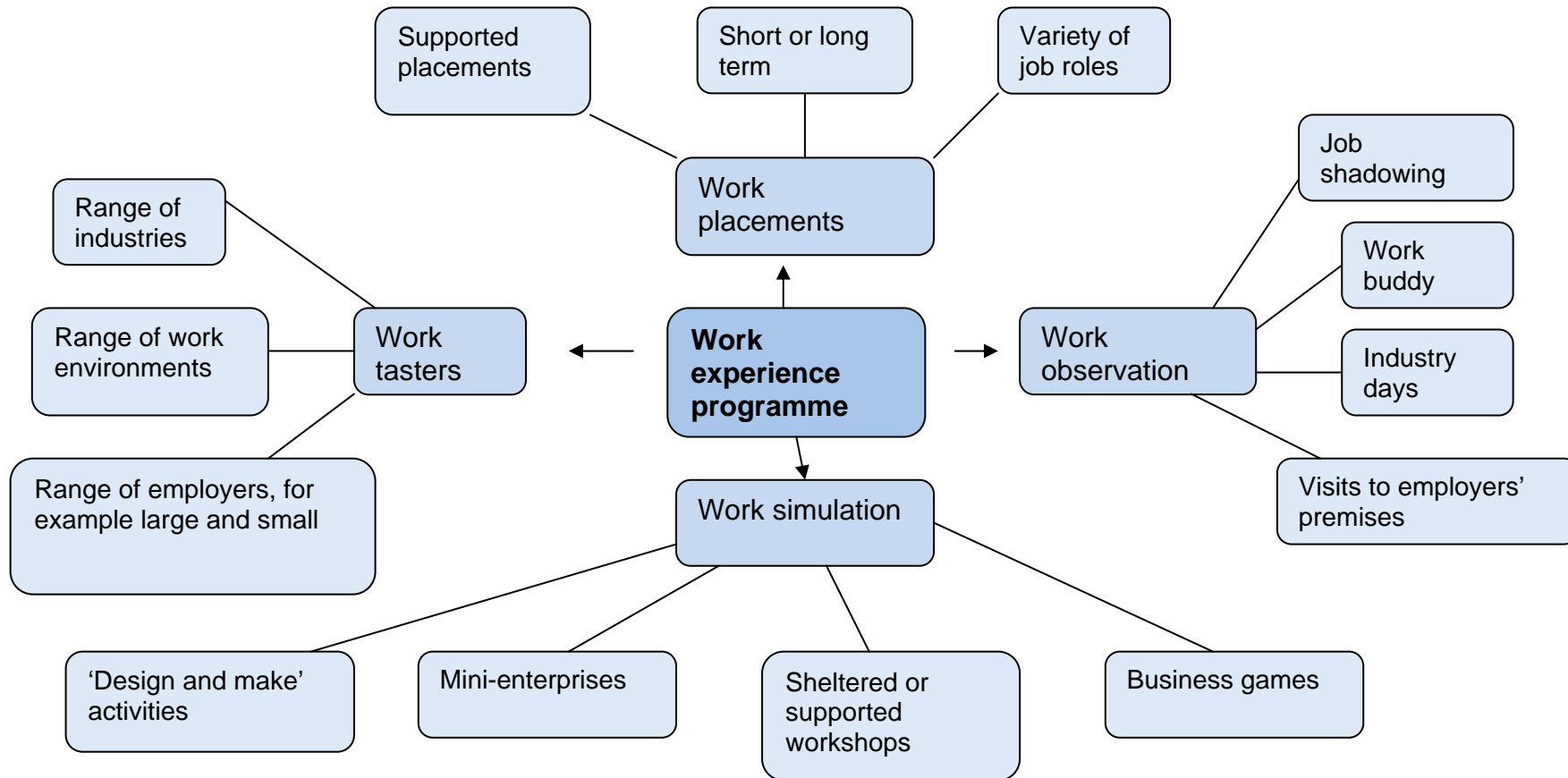
All work-related learning offers opportunities for developing and practising skills or generating evidence for assessment in each of the three areas. You can discuss and help define learning objectives for each of the three main areas in the context of employability. A work experience programme provides an excellent opportunity for learners to appreciate the relationship between the skills they are learning on their programme and to develop, practise and consolidate the skills.

Planning a work experience programme to meet individual needs

You and you learner can tailor the work experience programme to take account of their:

- prior experience
- work readiness
- level of skills development
- level of confidence in language, literacy, numeracy and ICT
- targets for skills development in the individual learning plan
- motivation
- ability to face challenges
- confidence.

There are several routes into the workplace and you can use the diagram that follows as a handout to prompt discussion with individuals or groups of learners so that they can think about starting their work experience project plan taking into account their own starting points and learning objectives.



What knowledge and skills can be developed?

You and your learners can review the specific skills and areas of knowledge that they can develop through their individual work experience programme. It is helpful to be as precise as possible and avoid general skills descriptions such as 'communication', 'numeracy' or 'team work'. This will help to focus the plan so that opportunities are created to develop, practise and consolidate skills that will really help move the learner forward. In designing a work experience programme you can think about skills and knowledge as employability skills and talk about how they relate to the three main areas of learning:

- vocational learning, including specific occupational objectives
- personal, social, learning and thinking skills
- Key Skills, Skills for Life or functional skills.

The following handout can be used to generate ideas through discussion so that you can refine learning objectives in each of the three main areas. It gives a few ideas as starting points.

Talking about employability skills

Stage 1

About the world of work

Learners acquire broad awareness and knowledge of the world of work and begin to find a focus.

Developing these skills will enable learners to:

- know about a range of occupational areas
- understand the different types of jobs in these occupational areas
- understand the different types of job available locally
- find out more about occupational areas that interest them
- find out what skills, including LLN, they already have
- find out what skills, including LLN, they need to develop.

Skills for Life, Key Skills or functional skills

Reading job adverts and information to find out what jobs are available.

Reading and understanding information about jobs in different sectors.

Personal and social skills; learning and thinking skills

Finding out which personal and social skills are needed for different jobs.

Practising interview skills:

- preparing for interview
- looking tidy and well presented
- speaking confidently about myself
- being ready to ask questions about the job
- smiling and being polite.

Vocational skills and knowledge

Finding how a work placement can help me learn about the world of work and what I'd like to do.

Finding out about jobs open to me in my occupational area with different levels of training and experience.

Stage 2

Getting ready for work

Learners make links between the skills needed for particular jobs and the skills that they have and need to acquire. They will work to develop these skills.

Developing these skills will enable learners to:

- recognise the personal and social skills that are relevant for work
- recognise the personal and social skills that employers expect from employees
- recognise the Skills for Life required for work and expected by employers
- know the activities involved in applying for a job.

Skills for Life, Key Skills or functional skills

Personal and social skills; learning and thinking skills

Vocational skills and knowledge

Reading and understanding instructions at work.

Being clean and smart in appearance.

Working under pressure and meeting deadlines.

Understanding and sharing information using a variety of media.

Having respect for other people's views.

Understanding the needs of customers and clients.

Making a phone call to ask for details of a job and how to apply.

Knowing how to manage feelings and emotions.

Taking responsibility for doing the job properly.

**Stage 3
Going to work**

The learner needs essential ‘coping skills’ for the work place, together with higher level employability skills that will help improve performance.

Developing these skills will enable learners to:

- understand the need for health and safety at work
- understand the need for equal opportunities policies at work
 - understand the responsibilities and rights of the employer and the employee at work.

Skills for Life, Key Skills or functional skills

Speaking to colleagues and customers. Asking for help when needed.

Timekeeping.

Making sense of the pay slip.

Carrying out a range of calculations and measurements.

Personal and social skills; learning and thinking skills

Asking for help when needed. Understanding and using appropriate body language.

Showing interest, initiative and effort.

Being aware of own responsibilities.

Trying out different creative thinking techniques

Vocational skills and knowledge

Understanding that some jobs might be difficult to cope with, for example working long hours, working outdoors, dealing with stressful situations.

Finding out why Skills for Life and personal and social skills are needed for work.

Working in a way that is safe for the learner and others.

Weighing up solutions to problems and deciding which is the best option.

Stage 4

Moving forward

Skills for Life, key skills or functional skills

Personal and social skills; learning and thinking skills

Vocational skills and knowledge

Learners reflect on their achievements on the programme, the opportunities that have opened up to them and the sort of job training they intend to move on to next.

Developing these skills will enable learners to:

- identify the additional skills needed to develop a career
- know about the training available to develop a career
- make plans for continuing to learn throughout their working life.

Communicating well with new employers and colleagues.

Using IT to work more efficiently.

Presenting a positive image of self.

Identifying other skills that need to be worked on and plan to improve them.

Using a range of problem-solving techniques.

Understanding why lifelong learning is important and knowing how to find further training.

Being open to new ideas and techniques.

Creating the work experience plan

When you and your learners have agreed the most appropriate work experience route you can begin to create the work placement plan as a project. You and your learners can incorporate the employability skills you have discussed into the plan so that they can be developed and practised. You can indicate:

- who is responsible for creating the opportunity to develop and practise the skills identified: this might be a workplace supervisor, a tutor or a mentor or the learner
- what the learner will do
- who will provide assessment and feedback
- how evidence could be generated for accreditation if appropriate.

If you use the **SuccessPlanner** tool in this Planning toolkit to create the work experience as a project you can:

- determine learning objectives and outcomes
- define roles and responsibilities
- set goals
- set specific tasks that all individuals involved will undertake: the learner, workplace supervisor, assessor, tutor, mentor, for example
- formulate success criteria in relation to the tasks
- keep track of progress
- use the tool to help review progress at key points and at the end of the project.

To create a **SuccessPlan**, work through the following stages:

- Ensure that the purpose is clear – all project team members should understand the project brief and be able to break it down into measurable criteria for success.
- Set a realistic timeframe – the project should have an identified start and end date with a contingency to allow for fixes, re-working and unexpected obstacles.
- Identify meaningful stages – clear stages not only make the project seem more manageable, they also provide opportunities to build informative assessment against agreed success criteria for each stage, keeping the project on track.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities – in the context of planning learning opportunities through work experience the roles and responsibilities might be assigned to the work placement supervisor or employers, assessors, work placement officers and tutors as well as the learner. All those involved in the plan together comprise the project team.
- Define tasks and resource requirements – spending time planning the specific activities and resources required to meet each success criteria will increase the likelihood of meeting targets on time.
- Track progress and communicate at every step – keeping all team members informed of progress will increase or maintain motivation and ensure that problems don't go unchecked.
- Build in opportunities for regular review and reflection, both in terms of the project and personal development – the ability to identify skills gaps and to set targets for filling

those gaps is an important skill for life and for employment. It is also an essential step towards becoming an expert learner. Reflection is also a key part of your own professional development cycle.