

## Time well spent

Embedding employability in  
work experience

Report sponsored by

department for  
**education and skills**  
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence



Report sponsored by

department for  
**education and skills**  
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

**For a copy of this report in large text format,  
please contact:**

Amali Gunaratne  
Human Resources Directorate  
T: 020 7395 8138  
E: [amali.gunaratne@cbi.org.uk](mailto:amali.gunaratne@cbi.org.uk)

March 2007

ISBN 978-0-85201-654-1

Price £50.00

© Copyright CBI 2007

The content may not be copied, distributed, reported or dealt with in whole or in part without prior consent of the CBI.

# Time well spent

## Embedding employability in work experience

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to all those who assisted with this research and particularly to those managers, teachers and students who made time to take part, without whose support the project would have been impossible.

We are also grateful to the Department for Education and Skills for sponsoring the project. The CBI project team included Nick Chandler, Laura Ringsell and Esmond Lindop. Special thanks to KPMG who seconded Nick Chandler to lead the project.

# Contents

Foreword	5
Summary of key points	6
Introduction	8
What do we mean by employability?	11
Embedding employability in work experience	13
Views from employers	21
Views from students and schools	27
Case studies	35
Employability: the story so far	72
Annexe: Employability and work experience – a quick guide for employers and students	77

# Foreword

BY RICHARD LAMBERT | GENERAL DIRECTOR | CBI



Each year thousands of young people go on work experience. It is a great chance for them to learn about the world of work. And the great majority thoroughly enjoy their time.

But we need to ensure that it is time well spent. In an era when basic skills and competencies play an ever more vital part in the battle to remain competitive in the global economy, work experience offers an outstanding opportunity to help young people understand why these matter and to gain a taste of using them in the real world. This report sets out the CBI's vision for how employers, students and schools can work together to achieve this.

The report explains our thinking on the attributes, skills and knowledge that together make up 'employability'. Our central theme is the need to put these centre stage when shaping work experience programmes. The precise balance in importance of the competencies will vary from organisation to organisation, but generic skills such as application of numeracy, communication and literacy, and teamworking are exactly that – generic. They are relevant to virtually every job and sector.

As the research for this report shows, there is plenty going right in the field of work experience. But our research also shows that there is scope for improvement. So we want all those involved in work experience to become more demanding. We need schools and employers to be more demanding of students, so they gain a better grasp of the challenges and opportunities of work. We need to be more demanding of employers to provide well-structured placements. And we need to be more demanding of schools to prepare students beforehand and to help students absorb the lessons after their placements.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Richard Lambert'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

# Summary

**1** Work experience has a key role to play in preparing young people for the adult world. It is an opportunity to bring home to them the attributes, skills and knowledge they need to succeed throughout their working lives. The aim of this report is to help employers, students and their teachers in realising that potential.

**2** The need to boost awareness of the key elements that make up employability has been highlighted by successive surveys showing that UK businesses are often frustrated with the work-related competencies of many of the young people emerging from full-time education.

**3** Employability is best defined as a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy.

**4** A positive attitude is the key foundation of employability, which underpins the following seven-point framework of competencies:

- Self-management
- Teamworking
- Business and customer awareness
- Problem solving
- Communication and literacy
- Application of numeracy
- Application of information technology.

**5** Enhancing employability through work experience involves a three-way partnership among school, student and employer. The school should set the tone, creating positive expectations and briefing students about the objectives of work experience. The student should engage with the process and make the most of the opportunity. The role of the employer is to create

the right balance of briefing, tasks, activities and assessment. At the end of the placement, the employer should provide feedback, but assisting students to develop through reflection on their work experience falls primarily to schools.

**6** As an aid in shaping a work experience programme, an employer should have a vision of what a successful placement would look like. The objectives for the placement should incorporate explicitly the development of employability competencies, and tasks and activities should be set with this in mind. Section 3 provides illustrations of how this can be done in practice.

**7** Work experience programmes should, if possible, provide students with an opportunity to review the activities they have completed and draw out what they have learnt. After the placement it is important for schools to reinforce the lessons from work experience and support students in addressing personal development needs.

**8** A survey among employers finds almost half saying that work experience in their organisation plays a role in developing employability skills, but not as much as they would like. The scope for schemes to be improved and refined is widely recognised.

**9** The key benefits for employers of providing work experience are seen as promoting interest among students in their particular type of work or sector and, secondly, raising the organisation's profile. For manufacturing firms, enhancing local profile is particularly important to counter the often negative impressions of manufacturing.

**10** Over three quarters of respondents identified learning about the importance of generic employability skills as a key benefit to students. Manufacturing respondents also pointed to the insight into careers in that sector.

**11** A survey among students who had recently undertaken work experience showed the great majority enjoyed their placement and felt it had given them a good insight into the world of work.

**12** But the survey also showed up common shortfalls. Many students reported they did not receive a briefing about the company, did not have explicit goals or learning objectives and did not receive feedback.

**13** Almost 90% of respondents thought that work experience helped to improve their skills needed for work at least to some extent. Over 70% of respondents said they had discussions about the skills needed for a particular task at least to some extent, but many had little or no discussion of the more general competencies needed for work.

**14** Work experience co-ordinators in schools see placements as an opportunity to encourage students to think on their feet, use their initiative and act responsibly in a completely new environment. The aspiration is that they come back motivated to achieve their best in school.

**15** The 12 case studies in section 6 demonstrate how work experience is currently handled in a range of organisations spanning many sectors and all parts of the country. They provide a wealth of ideas and illustrate different approaches for those setting up or reviewing schemes.

# 1 Introduction

**Work experience has a key role to play in preparing young people for the adult world. For most, it is their first taste of the workplace. With some 95% of students undertaking work experience placements in the run-up to GCSEs (key stage 4), this is a critical time in life. Patterns and attitudes are being formed that young people will carry forward into their working lives. Some are disenchanted with formal education: work experience provides a prime opportunity to forge understanding of the links between the skills they can acquire at school and the competencies needed at work. A couple of weeks of work experience account for a tiny proportion of young people's time in education, but it is hard to overstate the potential importance of that brief period for their future employability.**

What matters is that the time should be well spent. The vast majority of young people enjoy their work experience, as

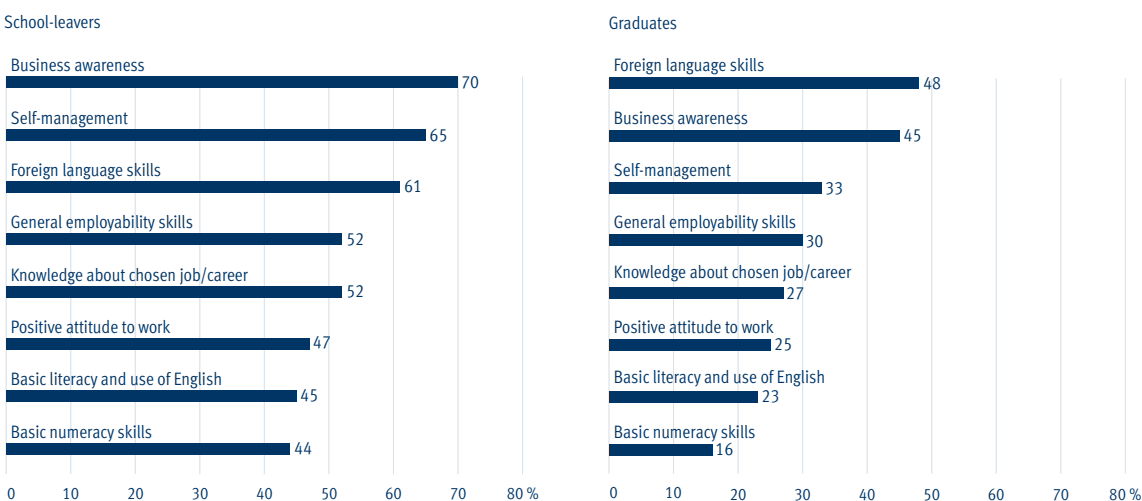
our research in section 5 shows. Certainly, a positive first taste of working life is a useful foundation for the future. But placements give scope for much more than that. Above all, work experience can be a time to embed core competencies. It is an opportunity to bring home to young people the attributes, skills and knowledge they need to succeed throughout their working lives. The aim of this report is to help employers, students and their teachers in realising that potential.

## The need for action

There is a pressing need to boost awareness of the key elements that make up employability. Time and again, UK businesses have expressed frustration with the competencies of many of the young people emerging from full-time education. Most recently, in the 2006 CBI *Employment Trends Survey*<sup>1</sup>, over 50% of employers reported that they were not

### EXHIBIT 1 Employers dissatisfied with the key skills of young recruits (%)

Source: CBI Employment Trends Survey 2006





satisfied with the generic employability skills of school leavers, and almost a third had the same issue with graduates. Exhibit 1 shows the scale of the challenge. Competencies such as self-management, basic literacy and numeracy, and generic employability skills are critical to equip workers for the changing roles that are such a feature of today's employment market.

### Work experience in the new Specialised Diplomas

Work experience is currently a valued part of the curriculum – and is set to grow in significance with the introduction of Specialised Diplomas from September 2008.

The new diplomas, with their greater focus on the world of work, are intended to prepare young people with the skills and flexibility they will need in order to adapt to an ever-changing job market. Specialising in a range of areas – from engineering to creative and media, from retail to business administration and finance – young people will have the opportunity to learn in different ways, combining practical skill development with theoretical knowledge. A core curriculum will enable students to master the basics in English and maths required by all employers, and specialisation in particular academic areas will allow them to develop knowledge and skills relevant to their sector of interest. A project will enable them to deepen this sectoral understanding, perhaps drawing on the experience of an extended work placement which will provide a clear purpose for the schoolroom learning. At the heart of the diplomas lies a commitment to ensuring that young people have the essential employability skills to be successful in the world of work.

The diplomas are not considered to be direct preparation for work. Nevertheless they represent a real opportunity to embed employability skills. For the extended work experience it is even more important that young people are clear about the competencies they should be developing for employment in order to get the most out of the diploma as a whole.

The urgency of the issue is further highlighted by the substantial pool of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The number of 16-18 year-olds in this category – the so-called NEETs – has climbed

from 177,000 (9% of the age group) in England at the end of 2003 to an estimated 220,000 (11% of the age group) at the end of 2005<sup>2</sup>. Taking a broader age group of young people, among those in the 16-24 year-old age range the number of NEETs was reckoned to stand at some 1.24 million<sup>3</sup>. The increase in the number of young men not in education, employment or training has been particularly pronounced, up by 27% to 575,000 since early 1997. Many of these youngsters have weak employability competencies. Non-participation in formal activity is likely to erode these still further.

Of course, work experience is not a panacea. It cannot guarantee that young people now at school will avoid joining the ranks of the NEETs in the future. But it does have an essential role to play at a formative stage in the lives of young people. Work experience placements are an opportunity for young people to gain practical understanding of why employability skills matter and to put those they should have acquired in a school context into action. As this report emphasises, there are roles for both schools and employers to play in helping young people to understand this. Our key message is the need for this fundamental aspect of work experience placements to be made explicit and regularly reinforced.

### Overview of the report

Recent years have seen a blossoming of literature on the subject of employability. The CBI itself has played an active part in explaining the concept. In section 2 we set out our current thinking on what the term 'employability' means and the attributes, skills and knowledge that make it up. This is an important matter, since only when there is consensus on the elements that constitute employability can all concerned focus on delivery.

In section 3 we look at ways in which these generic employability competencies can be embedded in work experience programmes. But this is not solely about what happens during those few days when students are on an employer's premises. Work experience should involve a partnership among employers, schools and students. While employers can point out why certain attributes, skills and knowledge are important and give young people a taste of using them in practice, there is much that needs to be done in school to prepare students for the placement and to help them learn from the experience through reflection and discussion after

<sup>2</sup> *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England: 2002-03 and 2004-05*. Office for National Statistics

<sup>3</sup> *Labour's Lost Generation*. (24 December 2006). *The Sunday Times*.

the event. This section draws on the case studies to illustrate structuring of work experience arrangements, and in particular the variety of tasks and activities that can be used to reinforce different employability competencies.

The 2006 CBI *Employment Trends Survey* found a widespread view among employers that work experience could help young people develop their employability skills. Section 4 sets out results of further research among employers. This was designed to find out more about the competencies sought and employers' views on the effectiveness of their current programmes. The results point both to the value of work experience schemes but also to the scope for their further development in many instances.

As the 'consumers' of work experience, it is clearly important to know how young people themselves feel about placements. So in section 5 we present the results from research among more than a thousand young people who had recently been on work experience placements. For the vast majority, their taste of the workplace was an enjoyable one. But the results also point to areas for improvement, ranging from greater consistency in practice on briefing for students to more feedback on the competencies used. In too many instances, young people seem to go away from their placements without a clear idea of what they need to achieve success at work.

Case studies of work experience in 12 organisations are set out in section 6. Spanning a varied mix of service sector and manufacturing employers in all parts of the UK, the case studies provide a wealth of ideas and approaches for those reviewing their own arrangements or considering introducing a work experience scheme for the first time.

As mentioned, much has been written about employability in recent years. There is also a lot of material available to help those concerned with the practical operation of work experience. Section 7 provides a short overview of the major studies and guides available, with the intention of offering signposting to other sources of help, but it makes no claims

to being a definitive review of the literature.

Finally, we conclude with an annexe in the form of a quick guide for employers and students. The guide is available as a PDF download from the CBI website ([www.cbi.org.uk](http://www.cbi.org.uk)). It is intended to outline to employers, in an easily accessible form, the competencies that make someone employable and ideas on how to improve the development of employability during work experience. For students, it sets out an employability competencies checklist that can be used throughout the work experience assignment to establish how the competencies might be important at work, to keep a record of the activities undertaken, and ultimately to rate their own abilities.

### **Using the opportunity of work experience**

Research for this report has revealed lots of positive views about work experience from the viewpoints of employers, teachers and students. There are plenty of things going right, but there is also room for improvement. In particular, the CBI believes thought needs to be given by all concerned to doing more to embed employability in work experience. The build-up to a placement, the placement itself and activities after it offer an outstanding opportunity to instil in young people an awareness of those generic attributes, skills and knowledge they need for a successful and fulfilling working life.

## 2 What do we mean by employability?

**In a flexible and fast changing economy, it is essential that all employees possess the generic employability skills demanded by employers if they are to contribute effectively. But what do we mean by ‘employability skills’? In this section we set out the CBI’s thinking on this issue.**

There has long been debate about skills – and more particularly shortages of skills – in the UK economy. But much of that debate has been concentrated on what may be termed ‘technical skills’, in other words the specific skills needed to carry out certain specialist tasks. Specific technical skills may well be critical to an employee’s current role, but the focus of this report is the suite of generic employability skills that equip workers to adapt to the changing roles that are such a feature of today’s economy.

In recent years, employability skills have come to feature much more prominently in the discussion of skills as a whole. They are now generally recognised as a necessary precondition for the effective development and use of other, more specialist or technical skills. As our review of other work in this field in section 7 shows, the terms ‘employability’ or ‘employability skills’ are used in different contexts and have no single agreed meaning, although there is much common ground among those exploring these issues. To improve the employability of labour market participants as a whole, and school leavers in particular, we need a shared understanding of the concept of employability skills. What follows is the CBI’s contribution to this ongoing debate.

### **Employability means more than skills**

The term ‘employability’ or ‘employability skills’ is used to refer to a set of generic softer skills such as self-management, teamworking and communication. Much work has been done in defining what employability means as well as

in establishing a list of the competencies that are central to being employable. Although the term employability skills is commonly used, it is evident from our research that employability is not solely concerned with the possession of a certain set of skills.

In particular, personal attributes that can be summed up as a positive attitude are critical to being employable. A positive attitude encapsulates such enterprising characteristics as a willingness to take part and openness to new activities and ideas. The need for more to be done in this area is well illustrated by the results from CBI research (see section 1) that show almost half of employers are not satisfied with the attitude to work of many young people.

Equally, knowledge is a vital component of what makes someone employable. This is not knowledge in the sense of specific information. Knowledge in this context means for example understanding of the basics of numeracy and literacy – how to apply mathematical concepts for practical purposes, a knowledge of essential elements such as multiplication tables, ability to structure a piece of written work logically, with correct use of basic grammar and spelling of everyday words<sup>4</sup>. IT awareness must also in these days be regarded as essential. Knowledge also includes potentially more tacit awareness of matters such as the importance of customer care.

On the basis of our review of existing literature and consultation with CBI members and others, we believe employability is best defined as:

A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy.

## The attributes, skills and knowledge that constitute employability

Having defined in broad terms what employability represents, we set out to establish a more detailed list of the attributes, skills and knowledge that make up employability. This process started with the compilation of a suggested list of competencies by an internal CBI working party. CBI members were consulted on the appropriateness of items on the list through a survey (see section 4) and discussion at CBI member committees. We also discussed the competencies with a number of school teachers and students. We were mindful of the development work in schools on enterprise capability, defined by the DfES as "...*creativity, innovation, risk-management and risk-taking, and a can-do attitude and the drive to make ideas happen*". Following these consultations, we set out below and in Exhibit 2 the core attributes, skills and knowledge that we conclude make up employability.

A positive attitude is the key foundation of employability. This can be summed up as a 'can-do' approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make those ideas happen. An attitude of this kind underpins the following seven-point framework:

- **Self-management** – readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning
- **Teamworking** – respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, awareness of interdependence with others
- **Business and customer awareness** – basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty
- **Problem solving** – analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions
- **Communication and literacy** – application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning

- **Application of numeracy** – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (eg measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae)

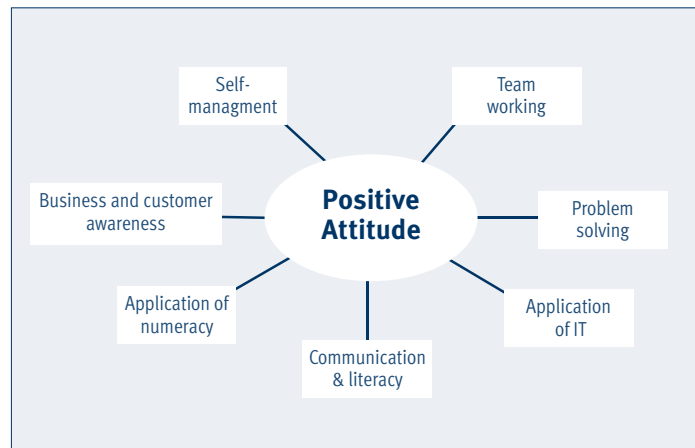
- **Application of information technology** – basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.

The next section of this report sets out ideas, drawn primarily from the employer case studies in section 6, about how work experience placements can be used to best effect in aiding development of employability skills. Our objectives in doing this are:

- To raise the focus on employability skills
- To help stimulate employers' own thinking on how best to improve the effectiveness their work experience schemes
- To encourage students and their teachers to have clearer ideas of what they should be looking to get out of work experience.

Employability is set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy

EXHIBIT 2



### 3 Embedding employability in work experience

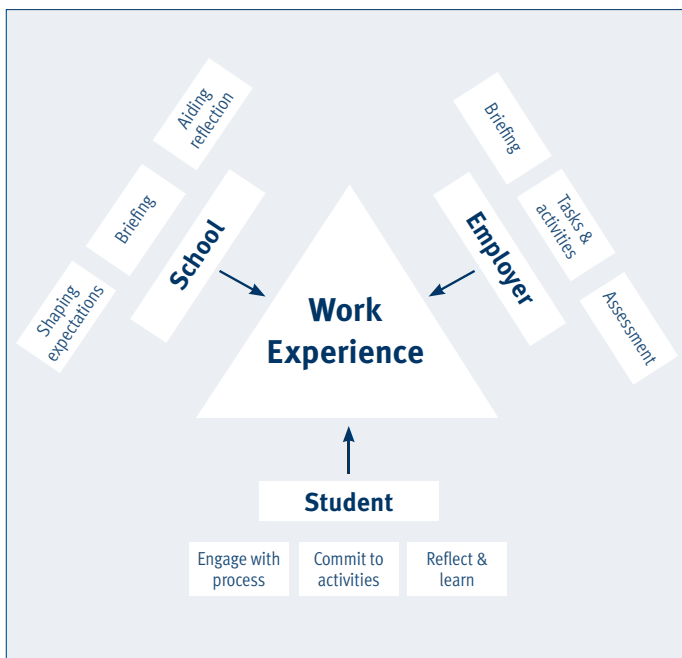
**This report is primarily concerned with the role of the employer in embedding employability in work experience. The aim of this section is to help employers identify ways of enabling young people to appreciate the importance of the generic competencies outlined in section 2 and to put them into practice during their work experience placements.**

While our main focus is on the role of employers, this is only one facet. Enhancing the employability of school leavers through work experience is a three-way partnership between school, student and employer, as Exhibit 3 illustrates.

It is important that the school sets the tone for the placement, creating positive expectations and adequately briefing the student about the objectives of doing work experience. Equally, it is incumbent on the student to make the most of the opportunity to develop the competencies needed for work during the placement. The role of the employer is to create the right balance of briefing, tasks and assessment to ensure the student has the opportunity to practise what is needed to be successful in the workplace. At the end of the placement, the employer has a role in providing feedback, but assisting students to develop through reflection on their work experience falls primarily to schools.

#### EXHIBIT 3

#### Partnership approach



Having defined what we mean by employability and the generic competencies that make someone employable, we now consider ways in which employability can be embedded in work experience schemes. This can be achieved through appropriate structuring of work experience arrangements, including the setting of employability-based tasks and activities during the placement.

Not all the ideas presented here will be appropriate for all employers. Similarly, the extent to which various aspects of the work placement are formalised will, necessarily, depend upon the size and nature of the organisation. For example, an induction is an important part of any work experience assignment. But the way in which this is best delivered – whether in a two-hour presentation or a 20-minute chat – should vary to reflect the complexity and size of the organisation and the nature of the placement. The ideas we present here are scaleable – they demonstrate themes about how to embed employability which can be adopted in a form appropriate to the organisation.

## 1 Structuring of work experience arrangements

It is important to have an appropriate structure for work experience – investing sufficient time and resources in planning the programme is critical if the benefits are to be achieved for both student and employer. According to the DfES guide (see section 7), all good work experience programmes should include the following components:

- Aims and objectives – of the work experience programme for employers
- Planning – to ensure smooth and efficient operation
- Preparation and briefing – of students by schools and employers
- Induction – of students at start of the programme
- Debriefing and evaluation – of students at end of the programme.

The rest of this section on structuring work experience arrangements sets out ideas about how to increase the focus on employability during the various stages of the placement.

### Aims and objectives

Employers covered in the case studies get involved in the provision of work experience for many different reasons. For example, Alliance-Boots sees the provision of work experience placements as part of the company's wider corporate social responsibility initiatives, making a positive contribution to society: *"Boots has traditionally had close ties with the community and this involvement has helped the brand to become so successful and respected"*. In a similar spirit, NG Bailey takes the view that *"Work experience is part of making a positive contribution to society and the right thing to do from a corporate social responsibility perspective"*.

For others, opening up avenues for recruitment is a business imperative. Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery, for example, sees the main benefit of its involvement in conducting work experience as widening the local pool from which it can recruit. This is of strategic importance for the business and is viewed by senior managers as *"...competency management for the future"*. For Bombardier, the use of work experience is an important mechanism for fostering a more diverse workforce.

Yet another reason for businesses to provide placements is illustrated by Land Rover. Among other benefits, the company views dealing with work experience students as presenting personal development opportunities for its staff in the areas of coaching, communication and leadership. According to Bombardier too, *"Staff working with the students on a day-to-day basis find it extremely rewarding. They have the opportunity to do something different and are able to teach future employees about their trade and the skills involved"*.

Whatever the reasons for getting involved, it is essential, as highlighted in the DfES guidance, that any organisation has a clear understanding of its aims and objectives in providing work experience. What does it expect to achieve and what does it expect the students to take away from the experience? An employer should have a vision of what a successful placement would look like. Setting clear objectives and having that vision will enable an effective programme to be put in place.

The CBI believes that there needs to be acknowledgement by both employer and student that development and application of relevant attributes, skills and knowledge are key objectives. This is fundamental to embedding employability in work experience. Indeed, the statutory requirement for work-related learning makes it clear that an essential part should be development of knowledge, skills and understanding that will be useful to working life. Satisfying this development need, together with any other employer-specific objectives, should drive the design and content of the work experience programme.

It is also important that the work experience programme addresses any school-set objectives. In our experience, however, where such objectives are set at all, they are likely to be quite general in their terms. Nonetheless, we encourage employers to liaise with schools where possible to understand the school's objectives for students during the placement and how best these might be satisfied.

### Induction

The objectives set for the placement should incorporate explicitly the development of employability. The induction session is the perfect opportunity to explain to the student what makes someone employable – including the specific attributes, skills and knowledge needed for working

life. This exercise does not have to be a passive briefing of students. It can take the form of a more interactive session – as for example at Boots' Oxford Street store where, as part of induction, the students are required to brainstorm why customer service is important to the company and suggest examples of good customer service.

The induction session should also cover details of how and when the students' performance will be assessed. A clear understanding of the basis of any assessment is important in securing the students' buy-in and helping them focus on the objectives of the placement. During the induction session at Land Rover, for example, the student receives a 'work experience agreement'. This includes a section dealing with appraisal, which sets out the criteria against which the students' performance will be assessed.

A suggested employability competencies checklist is shown as Exhibit 4, page 16 (it is also included in the quick guide available for download from the CBI website and reproduced in the annexe). This could be used by students during induction to develop their understanding of why the relevant competencies are important and to rate their own abilities at the end of the work placement.

During the induction it can also be agreed how the student will provide feedback at the end of the placement on what they have learnt. At Bentley Motors, for instance, students are set a project to complete during their placement. As part of the project they must give an overview of the responsibilities of the function in which they have been working and create a flowchart showing the different teams in the function and how they are interrelated. They also have to report on two key activities, such as communication and teamwork, why they are important, and provide an overview of what they have done and learnt on the placement.

### Setting employability-based activities

Before the start of the placement, the employer should have a clear idea of the department in which the student will work and the specific work-related tasks and activities to be undertaken. This schedule of activity can usefully be documented and discussed with the student during the induction session. Feedback from students shows that they feel better engaged and motivated when presented with a structured programme. As one put it, *"I enjoyed following a plan – it meant I knew what I was doing on any one day"*.

The employability competencies of self-management, teamworking, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication, application of numeracy and application of IT will not each hold the same level of importance for all employers nor for all the roles in which the students are engaged. The emphasis on the various competencies will differ between employers. What is fundamental is that employers recognise the importance of setting work-related activities to help develop the attributes, skills and knowledge most relevant to them.

When setting tasks it is important not to lose sight of the overall aim of work-related learning, which is learning through work, about work and the skills required for work. Therefore, it is essential that students be given as many 'real work' tasks as possible and not merely artificial exercises to keep them busy. Indeed, as observed by the regional manager for The Royal Bank of Scotland's school engagement activities, *"In our experience students want to contribute. It's our responsibility to give them the opportunity to do so by treating them like responsible adults and giving them tasks to complete independently"*. Our focus group discussions provide further backing for this view, with students commenting that they are most engaged and motivated when they feel they are making a genuine contribution to an organisation. It is unfortunate, therefore, that health and safety concerns sometimes appear to put excessive restrictions on the tasks those on work experience can undertake (see for example the Linde case study, page 57).

It should be recognised, however, that there is a role for exercises that give students the chance to practise skills in what amounts to a training context – for example drafting replies to different types of communications or complaints from customers. The value of observing how employees handle processes and situations – for example on an IT helpdesk – should also not be underestimated, provided it leads to real learning.

All staff involved in supervising the students during the placement should be aware of the objectives of the work experience programme. This ensures they are able to reinforce key competency messages when discussing tasks with a student, and also identify other development opportunities that might arise during the placement.

**EXHIBIT 4**

**Checklist of employability competencies for students**

Competency	When might you use these skills at work?	What activities needed this competency during work experience?	How do you rate your skills? (1 = poor, 5 = excellent)
<p><b>Self-management</b> Accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.</p>			
<p><b>Team working</b> Respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, awareness of interdependence with others.</p>			
<p><b>Business &amp; customer awareness</b> Basic understanding of key drivers for business success – including importance of innovation, taking calculated risks and profit – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.</p>			
<p><b>Problem solving</b> Analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.</p>			
<p><b>Communication &amp; literacy</b> Application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning.</p>			
<p><b>Application of numeracy</b> Manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (eg measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).</p>			
<p><b>Application of IT</b> Basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.</p>			



## Feedback and reflection

Carrying out employability-related activities is no guarantee that a student will develop or understand the importance of employability competencies. Without reflecting on this experience, it may quickly be forgotten and its learning potential lost. Therefore work experience programmes should if possible provide students with an opportunity to review the tasks they have completed and draw out what they have learnt. In practical terms, how might this be best achieved?

At the end of each day the student could discuss with their supervisor the tasks performed and the competencies they feel were necessary to complete them successfully. An interim appraisal can also be a useful opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved in the first part of the placement. At the end of the first week at Boots, for example, the students are assessed by the store manager. This involves each student completing a self-assessment form. The student receives individual feedback on their performance and a plan is agreed to address development issues in the following week.

Work experience placements should if possible include an end-of-placement or leaving interview. At this meeting students can be asked to explain what they have learnt, with a particular focus on which skills they believe are important for working life and why. This could take the form of a simple face-to-face discussion, a more formal presentation (for example, using a flip chart or PowerPoint) or a session where all students on work experience at the same time discuss their experiences and what they have learnt. The leaving interview could also involve the student's employability skills being assessed against a pre-determined framework, as in the case of Land Rover.

It is also good practice for the employer to seek the students' views on the overall effectiveness of the work experience programme. Did it achieve its objectives? Which specific aspects could have been improved? This can be achieved through the debrief session at the end of the placement or the completion by the student of a post-placement questionnaire.

The end of the placement should not signal the end of the students' learning from work experience. After the placement it is important that the school reinforces the lessons arising from work experience and supports students in addressing personal development needs.

Schools should encourage students to share their experiences. For example, they can hold debrief sessions where the students are split into groups in order to discuss their placements – in particular, identifying the competencies they believe are required for working life and how they could go about further developing their own abilities. Another good way for students to share their experiences is to give presentations to their peer group, at parents' evenings or other appropriate events, again with the competencies needed for working life playing a prominent role.

## 2 Embedding the competencies

We now look in more detail at ways to reinforce the competencies that constitute employability. Drawing on the case studies, we consider tasks that can be set to improve the focus on development of these competencies during work experience.

**Self-management:** *readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, assertiveness, time management, improving own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.*

It is essential that the expectations of both employer and student are clearly understood at the start of the placement. The initial induction session gives an opportunity for the employer to make clear the behaviours expected of the student. For example, at Accord the HR manager runs through the key responsibilities of staff, and in particular the daily accountabilities expected of normal employees: *“This helps to demonstrate to students the skills needed to perform well in their career and the need to be motivated if they are to succeed in the workplace”.*

If an organisation's employees are required to clock in and out each day or keep time sheets, the same should be required of work experience students. This is a good mechanism through which to reinforce the importance of time keeping and personal accountability. For example, at Ridgeons the students are required, like all employees, to clock in and out each day. The branch manager explains the importance of the system for keeping track of staff during emergencies and how it works: *“I make it absolutely clear to the students that we expect good attendance and punctuality and that they should phone in if there is a problem”.*

Our discussions with students indicate they enjoy the responsibility that comes from being treated on an equal footing with employees: *“It felt good to be treated like an adult and in the same way that normal employees were treated”*.

**Teamworking:** *respecting others, negotiating/persuading, co-operating, contributing to discussions, awareness of interdependence with others.*

Most organisations have scope for giving those on work experience a taste of teamworking. At Accord, for example, the importance of teamwork is reinforced by including the students in project meetings or team briefings so they can observe the dynamics between different people in achieving business objectives. Similarly, at Boots the students are treated in every way possible as part of the team, including attendance at daily team briefings.

Ensuring that students feel part of the team can also aid the development of self-management skills. Contributing to shared goals and supporting other team members can promote engagement and desire to take ownership of tasks. Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery noted *“One of the things that students seem to enjoy most is being part of the team and treated like one of the gang. I think this gives the students a sense of belonging and encourages them to take ownership because they want to help out their colleagues”*.

Students undertaking work experience at the Royal Bank of Scotland carry out a ‘mystery shopper’ exercise. The student prepares a five minute presentation on the results to deliver during a daily branch team meeting. This gives the students a great opportunity not only to practice their communication skills but also to play an important role as part of the branch team.

Working with a member of staff, as opposed to shadowing them, is another way to reinforce the importance of teamworking. At Bentley Motors, the students get hands-on experience of building an engine. As part of this work the student is made aware of the interrelationships between the departments: *“It is essential for the students to learn that each department views the other as its customer because serving those customers’ requirements correctly is crucial to the success of the company”*.

Even the most basic of tasks, such as getting teas and coffees, can serve an important purpose in integrating the student into a team. This creates interaction with the other team members and the opportunity to build relationships. It is, of course, equally important that this is not the only task given to the student during their placement...

**Business and customer awareness:** *basic understanding of the key drivers for business success – including the importance of innovation and taking calculated risks – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.*

The student’s induction session at the start of the placement should include a briefing on the company and its structure. This should cover, in simple terms, the company’s products or services, its main customers and competitors and its overall business model and strategy. This can help engage the student better and also provide a basis for setting tasks during the placement.

One of the challenges is to bring this type of information to life. At Bombardier, for example, supervisors take students through the shop-floor performance charts and explain the rigorous quality monitoring standards that components must satisfy at each stage. The need to follow instructions and pay attention to detail is emphasised in the context of ensuring the product is delivered on time and without fault to the ‘customer’ in the next production area.

A programme that involves rotation between departments can provide better experience, in terms of understanding how a business operates, as well as a valuable insight into the skills required for different roles. For example, during the two-week placement at Ridgeons the students are rotated across the three main areas of the shop-floor (stacking shelves, merchandising, carrying out stock-counts and completing stock sheets and dealing with customers), goods-in (checking deliveries against order notes and unpacking and storing deliveries) and the goods yard (shadowing employees dealing with customers).

Attendance at internal ‘business briefings’ may also help bring abstract concepts to life and provide useful background for work experience students. They could be given the opportunity, with appropriate guidance, to deal with customers or be involved in other ways. At the Royal Bank of

Scotland, for example, staff are observed as part of training and development to ensure they apply company guidelines when dealing with customers. Work experience students are permitted to conduct this observation and assessment. At Boots, the importance of customer care forms a significant part of the induction programme. The students also receive coaching from store team members on appropriate ways to deal with customers – this includes mini role plays to reinforce the key messages and help students to consider how they would help a customer. This exercise “...reinforces the importance of customer care in the workplace generally but also focuses the students’ minds on how they might conduct themselves with store customers during the placement itself”.

Students placed in the customer services function of Bristol International Airport receive detailed training on customer care. The training emphasises the importance of customers to the business and the need to be polite, helpful, sympathetic and to remain calm and controlled in all situations. It also includes a role play on problem situations to encourage students to think logically how they might go about rectifying the problem.

**Problem solving:** *analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.*

At its simplest, problem solving can involve following a set of instructions to achieve a particular outcome. At Boots, for example, students stacking shelves must first understand and analyse a numbered plan of the store to determine the correct location for incoming stock.

During work experience at engineering firm NG Bailey, the students analyse diagrams of structures with details of the dimensions. They then calculate the sizes of specific components required to make the structure by deduction from the information given. This is aimed at reinforcing both the importance of problem solving and numeracy skills in a user-friendly, practical way. Students also work regularly with different units of measurement – for example, when taking readings to ensure the voltages of circuit boards are set within prescribed safety standards. At Bristol International Airport, students working in the baggage area have responsibility for checking-in luggage, monitoring baggage numbers, rectifying faults on the baggage system and allocating or changing baggage lanes.

**Communication and literacy:** *application of literacy, ability to produce clear written work, oral literacy including listening and questioning.*

Communication skills are well known as an area of weakness among many young people. Work experience placements, from the earliest stages, offer scope for highlighting the importance of communication in all its forms.

Some employers require students to complete an application form and interview prior to their acceptance onto a work experience programme. While this can be useful in matching the student to the placement it can also, with constructive feedback, be valuable in helping students learn how to present themselves, both on paper and face-to-face.

At Land Rover, for example, all students are required to complete an application form and are interviewed to ensure their suitability. The company sees the interview as essential in achieving the right match between student and placement. It also gives students useful experience of what a job interview entails, focusing on the importance of presenting a positive attitude and emphasising personal strengths. At Ridgeons, students taking up work experience placements are encouraged to write a formal letter of acceptance.

The placement itself can provide opportunities to improve literacy through tasks such as filing, proof-reading documents, and drafting letters, faxes and emails. Accord, for example, puts a particular emphasis on written and oral communication skills. Students are often expected to produce short written reports, write letters and speak to internal customers on the phone. The student is briefed on telephone manner and observes other employees making such calls before doing so themselves. At the Royal Bank of Scotland work experience students may be asked to ‘interview’ each staff member after the weekly training session to ensure the key messages have been understood.

Giving or attending a presentation is another way to reinforce the importance of oral communication skills. They could be asked to prepare a presentation during their work experience about what they have learnt from the placement. This could be delivered by the student at the leaving interview.

During work experience at the Crown Prosecution Service, the prosecutor will review case files prepared by the student and ask them to identify the key issues in the case. This process involves student and prosecutor role playing the arguments and possible counter-arguments that might arise in court: *“The students enjoy this exercise as it encourages them to use their analytical skills and builds confidence in their ability to communicate effectively”*.

**Application of numeracy:** *manipulation of numbers and general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (eg measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).*

A variety of tasks can be set to bring home to students the practical value of numeracy skills. These can range from analysing receipts and working with spreadsheets to measuring and taking readings.

During work experience at Ridgeons, rotation across the builder’s merchant’s three main areas presents varied opportunities for students to practice their numeracy skills, including conducting stock-counts and completing stock sheets and checking orders received against delivery notes. During work experience at NG Bailey, students work regularly with different units of measurement – for example, when taking readings to ensure the voltages of circuit boards are set within prescribed safety standards.

In a very different context, at the Crown Prosecution Service the student will be asked to calculate any numerical values relevant to a particular court case, such as *“How many times over the legal limit was the driver of a vehicle if he had a blood-alcohol level of 200 milligrams per 100 millilitres and the legal limit is 80 milligrams per 100 millilitres?”* .

**Application of information technology:** *basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.*

Even for young people who consider themselves highly IT literate, use of common IT applications in the workplace – probably on a network – is a different experience from working on a home PC or school computer. At Accord, students are encouraged to use IT applications throughout the work placement. In the business development department, for example, work experience students can find themselves involved in analysing and synthesising information and presenting written summary reports in a clear and concise manner, including:

- Managing/maintaining up-to-date client databases
- Conducting and writing up internet research on new market opportunities
- Assisting in design and formatting of publications.

Internet research represents an opportunity not only for a student to build their IT awareness but also their business knowledge. For example, a student could be set the task of finding the answers to various questions about the organisation, its markets and competitors on the internet.

During work experience at Bentley Motors, students are set a project to demonstrate their understanding of the department within which they have been working. The student is given access to a computer to complete the project. This represents a good opportunity for students to develop their IT skills, including document formatting and design, as well as using their literacy skills.

## 4 Views from employers

**CBI surveys have repeatedly shown that many employers are dissatisfied with the level of employability skills among school leavers. In the 2006 CBI Employment Trends Survey, for example, over 50% of employers reported that they were not satisfied with the generic employability skills of school leavers, and almost a third had the same issue with graduates. The 2006 survey also found a widespread view among employers that work experience could help young people develop their general employability skills.**

Against this background, the CBI has carried out further research to identify in more detail the types of employability skills employers look for and to explore the structure and effectiveness of current work experience programmes. During October and November 2006 we sent a questionnaire to HR representatives in a cross-section of CBI member firms. The survey focused on work experience programmes for 14 to 16 year-olds. This section of the report analyses the responses. Among the key findings are that:

- Employers look for a variety of skills in school leavers. In descending order of importance the competencies wanted are:
  - Oral communication skills
  - Self-management
  - Numerical skills
  - Application of information technology
  - Written communication skills
  - Teamworking
  - Problem solving
  - Customer care
- Almost half the respondents said work experience in their organisation plays a role in developing employability skills,

but not as much as they would like. There is therefore recognition of the scope for improvement

- The most important means of identifying students for work experience placements is employee contacts, followed by direct applications from young people and links with schools
- The key benefits for employers of providing work experience are seen as promoting interest among students in their particular type of work or sector and, secondly, raising the organisation's profile. For manufacturing firms, enhancing local profile is particularly important to counter the often negative impressions of manufacturing
- Over three quarters of respondents identified learning about the importance of generic employability skills as a key benefit to students of work experience. Manufacturing respondents pointed to the insight into careers in the manufacturing sector as an equally important benefit
- Over 60% of respondents did not include goal/objective setting as part of their work experience programme
- Almost 60% did not hold a debriefing session or exit interview with work experience students and less than two thirds provided regular feedback on student performance during the placement.

### The sample

Usable responses were received from 101 member companies by the closing date of the survey. Reflecting CBI membership, the organisations surveyed are all in the trading sector of the economy, so this survey does not provide data on employability and work experience in the public sector. In the vast majority of cases, the survey was completed by

**EXHIBIT 5** Responses by sector

	%
Energy & water	4
Manufacturing	35
Construction	4
Professional services (law, consultancy etc)	13
Retailing, catering etc	5
Banking, finance & insurance	7
Distribution, transport & communication	13
Other services	20

an HR manager or those with job titles related to HR, personnel and/or training.

Exhibit 5 provides a breakdown of respondents by sector. Overall, service sector organisations accounted for 57% of the sample and manufacturing and related industries for 43%. All subsequent references to manufacturers in this section are to manufacturing and related industries such as construction.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 250 employees accounted for 35% of responses, with the balance of responses from larger organisations.

All survey respondents answered the question on the employability skills that should be possessed by school leavers. Of the 101 respondents, more than four-in-five provide work experience and were therefore also able to answer the other questions in the survey.

### Employability skills that should be possessed by school leavers

A key objective of the survey was to put some flesh on the bones of 'employability skills'. As noted earlier, CBI surveys have found widespread dissatisfaction among employers with the shortfall in general employability skills among school leavers. In order to improve these, it is obviously essential to have a better understanding of the competencies that employers believe make up employability. Accordingly, respondents were asked to pinpoint the skills they look for in school-leavers.

The results show that employers are seeking a range of skills. Every employer responding to the survey thought

oral communication was an employability skill that should be possessed by school leavers. Virtually all employers are also looking for self-management, written communication, numerical and information technology skills. Customer care and problem solving were the only skills to receive backing from less than 90% of respondents. Exhibit 6 gives full details of the responses.

The results for priority of employability skills do not differ significantly when analysed by company size and sector.

### Effectiveness of work experience in developing employability skills

The survey asked employers whether they believed work experience in their organisation plays a role in helping young people to develop the employability skills set out in Exhibit 6. Virtually half of respondents said that work experience does play a role in developing such skills, but not as much as they would like. This gives a clear signal that more needs to be done in focusing on employability skills as part of work experience placements. A full breakdown of responses is shown in Exhibit 7.

**EXHIBIT 6**

## Employability skills that should be possessed by school leavers

	%
Self-management	98
Teamworking	91
Customer care	72
Problem solving	81
Oral communication skills	100
Written communication skills (literacy)	97
Numerical skills	98
Application of information technology	98

**EXHIBIT 7**

## Do you believe your work experience programme plays a role in developing employability skills?

	Number	%
Yes – definitely	44	50
Yes, but not as much as we would like	41	47
No	3	3

**EXHIBIT 8****Do you believe your work experience programme plays a role in developing employability skills? Results by size and sector**

	SME	Large	Services	Manuf'g
Yes – definitely	62%	44%	61%	38%
Yes, but not as much as we would like	31%	54%	35%	60%
No	7%	2%	4%	2%

**EXHIBIT 9****Duration of work experience placements**

	Number	%
Five days	49	60
Ten days	29	35
Other	4	5

**EXHIBIT 10****How students are identified**

	Number	%
Employee contacts	69	78
Direct applications from students	55	63
Direct links with schools	54	61
Broker (eg EBPs, Trident, Connexions, or other similar organisation)	30	34

**EXHIBIT 11****How students are identified – by size and sector**

	SME	Large	Services	Manuf'g
Employee contacts	66%	85%	70%	88%
Direct applications from students	45%	71%	57%	69%
Direct links with schools	55%	64%	54%	69%
Broker (eg EBPs, Trident, Connexions, or other similar organisation)	21%	41%	24%	45%

The responses varied when analysed by size and sector. Of SME respondents, just over three fifths believed their work experience placements definitely play a role in developing employability skills, compared to about two fifths of larger organisations. Among service sector respondents, three fifths similarly believed that their work experience definitely plays a role in developing employability skills, compared to about two fifths of manufacturing organisations. Exhibit 8 compares the full results by size and sector.

**Duration of work experience**

Of the 88 respondents that offer work experience, 82 provided information on the duration of the placements. Nearly 60% provide work experience of five days in length, while the vast majority of the rest offer ten-day placements. The results do not differ significantly by company size and sector. Exhibit 9 summarises the responses.

**How are students identified?**

Employers identify students for work experience placements from a variety of sources. As Exhibit 10 shows, the single most common means is via their own workforces, with 78% of respondents citing employee contacts as a source of young people for placements. Links with schools and applications directly from students are also important avenues. About a third of the employers surveyed used a broker, such as Trident, to identify students.

It should be noted that, as many employers identify students for work experience through more than one source, the percentages in Exhibit 10 add to more than 100%.

The responses varied when analysed by size and sector. Employee contacts are more significant for larger companies (employing over 250), with four in five identifying students by that means, compared to two thirds for SMEs. Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of larger companies (71%) said direct applications from students were a means of identifying students than their SME counterparts (45%). About two in five larger companies use a broker – twice as many as compared to SMEs.

Employee contacts proved more significant for manufacturing organisations, with almost 90% of employers identifying students through this route, compared to about 70% for service sector organisations. Almost half of manufacturing and related respondents used a broker – virtually double the figure for service employers. Exhibit 11 compares results by size and sector.

**Key benefits of work experience to employers**

Survey respondents were asked to identify the key benefits to their organisation of taking on work experience students. The two benefits that received the strongest support were



promoting interest among students in relevant careers/sectors (89%) and increasing the organisation's local reputation/profile (83%). Work experience programmes also offer development opportunities for employees, giving them the chance for example to develop and use coaching skills to assist young people during their placements. Just over a third of respondents identified this as a key benefit of work experience schemes, as Exhibit 12 shows.

The responses showed differences when analysed by size and sector. Exhibit 13 gives full details, showing:

- Increasing the organisation's local reputation/profile is particularly significant for large employers and manufacturers, with 86% and 91% respectively identifying this as a key benefit
- Only about a quarter of SMEs and manufacturing firms identified the development and motivation of existing staff as a key benefit of work experience, compared to approximately two fifths of large companies and service sector organisations.

### Key benefits of work experience to students

The survey asked what employers saw as the key benefits of work experience to young people. The results are shown in Exhibits 14 and 15. The benefit identified most frequently was learning about the importance of generic employability skills, with three quarters of employers pointing to this as a key benefit of work experience. General business awareness and insight into a particular career or sector also received strong backing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, less than a third of respondents thought that a key benefit was developing job-specific skills.

The results analysed by size and sector are fairly consistent with the overall findings. However, of particular note is that over three quarters of manufacturing companies identified insight into a particular career or sector as a key benefit, compared to just short of two thirds of service organisations. This is perhaps predictable, given that manufacturing has for many years suffered from a poor public image. Work experience offers a great opportunity for such companies to dispel the myths and promote the benefits of a career in the sector.

#### EXHIBIT 12 Key benefits to employers of running work experience

	Number	%
Developing recruitment	43	49
Promoting interest among students in relevant careers/sectors	78	89
Increasing organisation's local reputation/profile	73	83
Developing and motivating existing staff (eg coaching skills)	31	35
Improving the quality of future employees	41	47

#### EXHIBIT 13 Key benefits to employers of work experience – by size and sector

	SME	Large	Services	Manufg
Developing recruitment	41%	53%	52%	45%
Promoting interest among students in relevant careers/sectors	86%	90%	87%	91%
Increasing organisation's local reputation/profile	76%	86%	76%	91%
Developing and motivating existing staff (eg coaching skills)	28%	39%	44%	26%
Improving the quality of future employees	55%	42%	50%	43%

#### EXHIBIT 14 Key benefits to students of work experience

	Number	%
Learning about the importance of generic employability skills	67	76
Insight into a particular career or sector	63	72
General business awareness	62	71
Developing a positive attitude	42	48
Increasing awareness of need for learning and education	41	47
Developing job-specific skills	28	32

Also, while half of manufacturers considered a key benefit to be increasing awareness of need for learning and education, only about a third of service sector employers thought this was the case.



**EXHIBIT 15** Key benefits to students of work experience – by size and sector

	SME	Large	Services	Manuf'g
General business awareness	76%	68%	74%	67%
Insight into a particular career or sector	62%	76%	65%	79%
Learning about the importance of generic employability skills	79%	75%	74%	79%
Developing a positive attitude	41%	51%	52%	43%
Increasing awareness of need for learning and education	41%	49%	39%	55%
Developing job-specific skills	38%	29%	35%	29%

**EXHIBIT 16** Activities included in work experience programmes

	Number	%
<b>Processes</b>		
Completion of application form	31	35
Interview	38	43
Goal/objective setting	35	40
Briefing on company	75	85
Assignment of mentor	66	75
Regular feedback on student performance	56	64
Leaving/exit interview	37	42
<b>Tasks</b>		
Working with computers	79	90
Attending meetings	53	60
Working with numbers eg counting money, using spreadsheets	50	57
Attending presentations	40	46
Dealing with customers	33	38
Letter writing	33	38
Delivering presentations	5	6

**Activities included in work experience programmes**

Respondents were asked to identify whether their work experience programmes included certain activities. Looking first at the ways in which placements are handled, the results set out in Exhibit 16 show that:

- The great majority of respondents provide a briefing on the organisation
- Only two in five set goals/objectives for those on work experience
- Three quarters assign a mentor to each student

- About two thirds of respondents provide regular feedback on student performance
- Under half hold a leaving/exit interview at the end of the placement.

Given the importance employers attached to the communication skills of school leavers, the results suggest that employers might be doing more themselves in some instances to demonstrate the significance and value of communication.

Turning to the types of activities undertaken by young people during their placements, the survey shows:

- The vast majority of placements include dealing with computers
- Other common activities are attending meetings, working with numbers in some way, and attending presentations.

A look at the results by size and sector (Exhibit 17, page 26) shows a number of significant differences. These differences are predominantly between SMEs and large employers:

- Over half of SMEs conduct an interview with the student, compared to less than two in five large employers
- A briefing on the company is conducted by virtually all SME respondents, compared to about four fifths of large employers
- Goal/objective setting forms part of the work experience programme for about half of SMEs but only one third of large employers
- Students have greater opportunity to deal with customers at large employers, with 42% of large respondents identifying this as part of their work experience programme, compared to 28% of SMEs
- Larger organisations present greater opportunity for working with numbers. Over 60% of large employers identified this as a feature of their work experience, compared to 45% of SMEs.

The results for service and manufacturing companies are broadly similar. The prime exception is dealing with customers, where half of service sector respondents identified this as an activity undertaken during work experience, compared to less than a quarter for manufacturing organisations. This result is to be expected, given the generally greater opportunities to deal with customers in a service than manufacturing environment.

## Areas of work experience for improvement

The survey included an open-ended question about which one area of work experience arrangements respondents would most like to see improved. Given the nature of the question, it inevitably brought a wide variety of responses, but some patterns emerged:

- A number of employers thought more needed to be done in matching students to placements relevant to their interests
- A number of respondents felt that students should be more effectively briefed by their school about work experience and what to expect before starting the placement
- Several employers noted that they received no feedback from schools – something that they would appreciate in order to improve their work experience programmes.

### EXHIBIT 17

#### Activities included in work experience programmes – by size and sector

	SME	Large	Services	Manuf'g
<b>Processes</b>				
Completion of application form	38%	34%	35%	36%
Interview	55%	37%	44%	43%
Goal/objective setting	48%	36%	44%	36%
Briefing on company	97%	80%	87%	83%
Assignment of mentor	76%	75%	78%	71%
Regular feedback on student performance	69%	61%	63%	64%
Leaving/exit interview	41%	42%	44%	41%
<b>Tasks</b>				
Working with computers	97%	86%	89%	91%
Attending meetings	59%	61%	54%	67%
Working with numbers eg counting money, using spreadsheets	45%	63%	61%	53%
Attending presentations	41%	48%	48%	43%
Dealing with customers	28%	42%	50%	24%
Letter writing	41%	36%	39%	36%
Delivering presentations	0.0%	9%	4%	7%

## 5 Views from students and schools

**Learning about the importance of generic employability skills was identified as a key benefit of work experience for students by over three quarters of respondents to our employer survey (see section 4). A significant majority also saw insight into a particular career or sector as an important benefit. But do students experience these benefits in practice?**

To find out about placements from the ‘consumer’ perspective, we carried out research among students who had recently undertaken work experience. We wanted to understand how students perceive their placements and whether they had benefited in the ways employers anticipated. The research had three elements:

- A survey among students aged 14-16 who had recently been on work experience
- Discussions with focus groups drawn from among those students
- Interviews with work experience co-ordinators in schools.

In the period September to November 2006, we arranged with nine schools for students aged 14-16 who had recently been on work experience to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire focused primarily on the activities undertaken during work experience and what the student felt they had gained from the placement. The schools were selected to provide a good mix by type. They included single-sex, mixed-sex, selective, non-selective, state and private schools in locations ranging from Northumberland to Poole.

### 1 Results from the survey

Piloting the questionnaire revealed that some students had difficulty in relating the survey to their activities. Accordingly, the survey was amended and the results presented in this section of the report reflect the responses received to the revised questionnaire. In all, useable questionnaire responses were received from 1,034 students.

Looking at the overall experience, among the key findings from the survey are that:

- Over two thirds agreed or strongly agreed that work experience had helped them understand how learning at school is important in getting a job
- Almost 80% of respondents agreed that work experience had given them a good insight into the world of work
- Almost 90% of respondents agreed that they enjoyed their work experience placement
- Over 60% did not agree that work experience had assisted in helping them to decide on a particular job or career
- Two thirds of respondents said that their placement was matched to their interests.

Turning to preparation for the placement:

- About half of respondents said they received a briefing (or information pack) in advance about the organisation and its activities
- Almost two thirds of students did not receive a schedule (or other listing) of what they were going to do on work experience
- About 60% did not set objectives to be achieved during the placement.

**EXHIBIT 18** Duration of work experience

	One week		Two weeks	
	Number	%	Number	%
How long did your work experience placement last?	131	12.7	903	87.3

**EXHIBIT 19** Who arranged the placement?

	School		Parents		Yourself	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Who arranged your work experience?	533	51.5	131	12.7	370	35.8

**EXHIBIT 20** Was the work experience matched to your interests?

	Number	%
Yes	703	68.0
No	331	32.0

During the course of the placement:

- About three fifths of students received a briefing about the company
- Over 60% did not have explicit goals or learning objectives
- Almost 70% did not gain experience of attending a meeting and about 40% did not deal with customers, work with computers or carry out number-based tasks
- About two in five students did not receive regular feedback on progress
- The vast majority of respondents – over 80% – did not attend a leaving/exit interview.

Turning to the skills and competencies needed for work:

- Over 70% of respondents said they did have discussions about the skills needed for a particular task at least to some extent
- A quarter of respondents said that no one discussed with them the competencies needed for work
- A quarter of respondents received no feedback on how good their skills were
- Over half of respondents were not required to explain the skills and competencies they had developed or learnt during work experience

- On a positive note, almost 90% of respondents thought that work experience helped to improve their skills needed for work at least to some extent.

On a cautionary note, it should be emphasised that a survey of this kind is inevitably about students’ perceptions and recollections. It may be, for example, that in practice higher proportions were given feedback or had objectives set for them, but if so this message failed to be heard. In the end, in an area like this, perception is king.

**Preparing for the placement**

The questionnaire started by asking students how long their work experience lasted. The vast majority undertook a two-week placement. The responses are shown in Exhibit 18.

The first part of the questionnaire was concerned with activities undertaken in the lead up to the placement. Exhibit 19 summarises the answers to the question “Who arranged your work experience placement?” For almost 50% of respondents, the placement was organised by either the students themselves or their parents.

When asked whether the placement was matched to their interests, almost one third of respondents said it was not. Assuming that placements organised by parents or students (which represent about half of the total) are likely to be matched to the students’ interests, this implies that about two thirds of the placements arranged by schools or brokers were not matched to the students’ main areas of interest. Exhibit 20 shows the split of responses.

The students were asked how prepared they were before starting their work experience. Results are shown in Exhibit

**EXHIBIT 21****How prepared were you for work experience?**

	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Before you started work experience did you receive a briefing (or information pack) about the organisation and its activities?	553	53.5	481	46.5
Before you started work experience did you receive a schedule (or other listing) of what you were going to do during the placement?	376	36.4	658	63.6
Before you started work experience did you set objectives to be achieved during the placement?	408	39.5	626	60.5

21. Only about half the respondents said they received a briefing or information pack about the organisation and its activities before starting the placement. Almost two thirds of students did not receive a schedule or other listing of what they were going to do during their work experience. Ahead of starting the placement, only about two in five had any specific objectives to be achieved.

### Activities included in work experience programmes

The students were asked whether their work experience included various activities, ranging from having to complete an application form or attend an interview ahead of the placement to attending an exit interview at its conclusion. Looking at the ways in which work experience is handled, the results set out in Exhibit 22 (page 30) reveal that:

- About three fifths of respondents received a briefing about the organisation during the placement
- Over 60% did not have any goals or learning objectives set as part of the placement
- About two in five students did not receive regular feedback on progress
- The vast majority of respondents – over 80% – did not attend a leaving/exit interview.

The questionnaire also gathered information from students on the types of work activities they were involved in. While the opportunity to undertake certain activities will of course vary depending on the nature of the placement, almost 70% did not attend a meeting and about 40% did not deal with customers, work with computers or carry out any number-based tasks. At the very least, these results raise questions over the extent to which students are being given the opportunity to practice and develop important work-related skills.

### Skills needed for work

The survey asked for students' views on a number of questions related to the skills needed for work. In this context, the survey defined the skills as including the following: self-management, teamworking, customer care, problem solving, oral communication skills, written communication skills, numerical skills and application of information technology. The results are set out in Exhibit 23 (page 30).

Only about a quarter of respondents answered 'yes' when asked whether anyone discussed with them the skills needed for work, although many more said that this had happened to some extent. The results were slightly more encouraging in the context of a specific activity: some 38% of respondents said they had discussions about the skills needed for particular tasks and a larger proportion did so to some extent.

Importantly, about three quarters of respondents said they received feedback at least to some extent on how good their skills were, though this means that 25% received no such input. Just over half of respondents were not required to explain the skills they had developed or learnt during work experience.

On a positive note, almost 90% of respondents thought that work experience helped to improve their skills needed for work at least to some extent. And a similar proportion felt it helped them to understand the skills needed to be successful at work. Work experience is therefore having a positive impact on students and their understanding of the skills that are critical for success in the workplace – albeit more could be done to reinforce this message.

**EXHIBIT 22** Activities included in work experience programmes

	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
<i>Processes</i>				
Complete an application form	390	37.7	644	62.3
Attend an interview	505	48.8	529	51.2
Set goals or learning objectives	403	39.0	631	61.0
Receive an introduction about the company	639	61.8	395	38.2
Receive regular feedback on your progress	618	59.8	416	40.2
Attend a leaving/exit interview	178	17.2	856	82.8
<i>Tasks</i>				
Write a report (eg a summary of information or research)	309	29.9	725	70.1
Attend a presentation	193	18.7	841	81.3
Deliver a presentation	72	7.0	962	93.0
Attend a meeting	315	30.5	719	69.5
Deal with customers	632	61.1	402	38.9
Work with computers	628	60.7	406	39.3
Carry out number-based tasks (eg adding up money or using spreadsheets)	577	55.8	457	44.2

**EXHIBIT 23** The skills needed for work

	Yes		To some extent		No	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
During your work experience did anyone discuss with you the skills needed for work	265	25.6	504	48.8	265	25.6
During your work experience did anyone discuss with you the skills needed for a particular task?	396	38.3	355	34.3	283	27.4
During your work experience did you receive feedback (written or face-to-face) on how good your skills needed for work are?	458	44.3	316	30.6	260	25.1
Did your work experience help you to improve your skills needed for work?	636	61.5	283	27.4	115	11.1
Were you required to explain (written or face-to-face) what skills you had developed or learnt during your work experience?	215	20.8	292	28.2	527	51.0
Did your work experience help you to understand the skills you need to be successful at work?	630	60.9	314	30.4	90	8.7

**Benefits of work experience**

The survey also sought to understand how effective work experience is in achieving broader benefits such as putting the importance of school into context and helping students decide on a particular job or career. Exhibit 24 (page 31) sets out the full breakdown of responses.

About one third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that work experience had helped them with their school work. More encouragingly, over two thirds agreed or strongly

agreed that work experience had helped them understand how learning at school is important in getting a job. The results suggest that the extent to which work experience helps inform decisions about specific future careers is limited. Over 60% did not agree that work experience had assisted in this regard, although almost 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that work experience had given them a good insight into the world of work.

The survey looked to gauge the students' overall reaction

**EXHIBIT 24****Other benefits of your work experience**

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
There are things that I learnt on work experience that have helped me in my schoolwork	100	9.7	243	23.5	328	31.7	309	29.9	54	5.2
Work experience has helped me understand how learning at school is important in getting a job	51	4.9	112	10.8	174	16.8	473	45.7	224	21.8
Work experience has helped me to decide on a particular job or career	94	9.1	214	20.7	341	33.0	242	23.4	143	13.8
Work experience gave me a good insight into the world of work	23	2.2	54	5.2	140	13.6	490	47.4	327	31.6

**EXHIBIT 25****Other benefits of your work experience**

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I enjoyed my work experience placement	34	3.3	30	2.9	75	7.3	308	29.8	587	56.7

to work experience, and in this context, asked respondents whether they enjoyed their placement. The results, set out in Exhibit 25, are very positive, with almost 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they enjoyed the experience.

### What aspects of your work placement did you particularly enjoy?

The survey included an open-ended question about what aspects of the placement the students particularly enjoyed. Given the nature of the question, it inevitably brought a wide variety of responses, but patterns emerged:

- A common theme was how much the students enjoyed being given responsibility to complete tasks on their own. Many noted that they enjoyed being treated like an adult and the sense of independence they felt during the placement
- Students also enjoyed the increased confidence work experience gave them
- Many respondents noted that they enjoyed the interaction with other people – particularly with customers while,

for example, resolving their queries – and generally when being treated as part of a team

- Students enjoyed keeping busy – dealing with a variety of tasks – and following a formal structure for the placement
- It was clear that the respondents felt a sense of achievement when adding value in what they were doing
- Many students noted that they enjoyed the insight into the particular organisation that they gained from work experience.

## 2 Results from student focus groups

In addition to the survey, we conducted a number of focus groups drawn from the survey participants. Each was made up of about ten students aged 14-16, without a teacher present. The aim of the group discussions was to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences.

The group members' experiences gave rise to a wide variety of comments, but certain themes emerged. Aspects of their placements the students particularly enjoyed were similar to those noted above in response to the open-ended survey

question. Again as in the wider student survey, with some exceptions, most placements were generic and not linked to specific career interests. Other points to emerge were:

- Few of the students had interviews before the placement
- No students in the groups were set formal learning objectives
- Many said they had insufficient work to do and were given tasks just to fill the time, such as photocopying and making tea/coffee
- Students said generally that they did not mind doing these mundane tasks – they accepted that this was a fact of working life – as long as they were mixed with more interesting work as well
- Employers did not always explain why certain tasks needed to be done – this was seen as important as the students wanted to feel they were contributing to the business
- Carrying out artificial tasks that are not genuinely work-related was seen as pointless and demotivating
- The students who had a more fulfilling experience were generally those where the employer had a formal structure or timetable organised for the placement
- Few students had discussions with their employer or the manager responsible for them about the importance of employability skills in the workplace
- In the main, students had little awareness of employers reinforcing the importance of specific skills for particular tasks
- Often very few permanent staff seemed aware that there was a work experience student on site
- Students felt they were not always introduced to all relevant staff.

### 3 Interviews with school co-ordinators

During our visits to some of the schools we also interviewed the member of staff responsible for administering the school's work experience programme. This was an open discussion to understand a range of issues, including how the school arranges work placements, whether they brief the students and how they evaluate whether the placements met student expectations.

The schools visited rely on third-party brokers, such as Trident and Connexions, to varying degrees. In some schools virtually all placements are arranged through this means. For example, one school we visited relies on the local Education Business Partnership for approximately 80% of the placements, with the vast majority of the rest arranged by the school (which has developed strong contacts with local business). In others, students and/or their parents are active in arranging work experience.

Students are generally required to complete a 'selection form' where they identify their preferred field of work experience. The work experience co-ordinator matches students to appropriate placements where possible. There was a strong view that two-week placements were preferable to shorter ones.

Schools prepare the students for work experience to differing degrees, but in general it is seen as very important that the students approach the placement in the right frame of mind. Pre-placement activities include lessons and general assemblies covering matters such as:

- General behaviour – including taking ownership of their placement by asking questions, using their initiative and talking to customers
- Setting expectations – for example emphasising that all jobs involve boring tasks and that to be successful you must be willing to get stuck in
- Interview practice – how to make an impression
- Health and safety awareness.

Other key themes to emerge from these discussions are:

- It is common that the students are encouraged to get in touch with the employer to demonstrate their interest and ensure they know what to expect on the first day



- The co-ordinators see work experience as providing a 'taste of the world of work' that can help the students understand the value of hard work and what it takes to be successful
- Work experience is also seen as an opportunity to encourage students to think on their feet, use their initiative and act responsibly in a completely new environment. The aspiration is that they come back motivated to achieve their best in school
- A number of schools conduct a formal debrief in class after the placements, often with the year group split into smaller groups to discuss their experiences with a teacher.
- Over 70% of employers cited insight into a particular career or sector as another key benefit, whereas only just over one third of students agreed that work experience helped them decide on a particular job or career
- Some 85% of employer respondents said they provide a briefing on the organisation, whereas almost two fifths of students said they did not receive a briefing about the company
- Less than two in five employers set goals/objectives for work experience – the same result revealed in students' experience
- About 40% of both employers and students said that regular feedback on performance was not a feature of their work experience programme
- Almost 60% of employers surveyed did not hold a leaving/exit interview. An even larger majority of student respondents – over 80% – said they did not attend an end of placement interview.

#### 4 Comparing the views of employers and students

Having survey results from employers and students enables us to see how the views of both parties compare. It should be emphasised that the students surveyed did not have work experience with the employers surveyed, though there may have been some tiny overlap. Also, the student survey reflects the perceptions of students: these may or may not be consistent with an employer's view of the same work experience programme.

While the opportunity to undertake certain activities (eg attend meetings, deal with customers and work with computers) will vary depending on the nature of the placement, a comparison of the results reveals some interesting trends in terms of the focus on skills and the structuring of work experience arrangements:

- Just over three quarters of employers identified learning about the importance of generic employability skills as a key benefit to students of work experience. Over 90% of students responded that work experience helped them, at least to some extent, to understand the skills needed to be successful at work

## 6 Case studies

The 12 participants in the case study research were selected to provide a spread of organisations across major sectors of the economy and all parts of the country.

Accord plc	36
Alliance-Boots	39
Bentley Motors	42
Bombardier Aerospace	45
Bristol International Airport	47
Crown Prosecution Service	51
Land Rover	54
Linde Material Handling	57
NG Bailey	60
Ridgeons Limited	63
Royal Bank of Scotland	66
Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery	69

CASE STUDY 1

# Accord plc

Accord is one of the UK's leading providers of management and support services to both public and private sector clients. The company's operations include dealing with waste management, maintaining highways and social housing, and providing business services such as security. Among its key clients are local authorities, the Highways Agency and housing associations. With an annual turnover in excess of £260m, the company employs a workforce of about 3,600 in 50 offices throughout the UK. This case study focuses on Accord's group office. Based in Welwyn Garden and employing about 70 people, the office provides a range of services including central HR policy and IT, financial and legal support.

Accord has good links with a number of schools and liaises regularly with the local education business partnership (EBP) broker. For example, when the nearby Priory School in Hitchin applied for Business and Education status, the company helped to develop a business plan detailing how the school would use the grant received in fostering enterprise education. Accord staff now sit on a steering group which looks at ways in which the school can enhance its business-education links.

The Welwyn Garden office takes on four or five students each year for a one-week placement. The work experience programme is aimed at providing young people with appreciation of what being in the workplace involves. Accord's Chairman, Stelio Stefanou, is keen for the company to take an active involvement in the community and raise its profile as a socially responsible employer. Work experience is seen as a way of giving something back to the community by raising young people's aspirations.

## Reviewing skills in the application process

Students are put forward for placements by the local EBP. Students are required by their school to complete a form that includes a paragraph in which they set out their career aspirations and other interests. This is sent to Accord, after which an interview with the student is arranged, either directly over the phone or through the school.

The HR manager of Accord's group office carries out the interview, looking to ascertain where the student's interests lie and the subjects they are studying at school. The interview helps to ensure that, as far as possible, the student is offered a placement tailored to their career interests and preferences. Even at this early stage the process has a focus on developing skills. In the view of the HR manager,

*“The interview is an informal way to ease the student into the placement. But it also gets them thinking about what they want to do and talking about themselves – for example their achievements and interests”.* The logistics of the placement and the departments in which they will be working are also discussed.

### Setting the scene

On the first day of the placement, the HR manager gives the students a half-day induction. This includes a health and safety briefing, a presentation on the company profile and a summary of the departments in which they will be working and their principal functions. The expectations of students in terms of their working hours, how they should dress and when they should take their lunch are clearly set out at this stage. Each student is also introduced to the staff they will be working with.

The placements vary according to whether the student has expressed an interest in a particular aspect of the business. For example, if a student wants to work in IT, then they are likely to be assigned to the IT department for the whole week. Students have previously expressed specific interest in working in areas as diverse as marketing, legal support and graphic design: in all of these cases they were given a tailored work experience placement in the relevant department. Where no particular interest has been demonstrated, Accord designs placements to ensure students get a taste of all the core business support functions – for example, by rotation around the IT, finance and marketing departments.

### Reinforcing skills during the placement

Accord’s employees are informed in advance of the student’s schedule and encouraged to give them real tasks (as well as shadowing opportunities) that contribute to fulfilling the department’s workload. The relevant departmental managers are also expected to set clear guidelines as to what activities the student might undertake and any specific expectations. As part of this process, the HR manager runs through the key responsibilities of Accord staff, and in particular the daily accountabilities expected of employees. The HR manager emphasises that *“This helps demonstrate to students the skills needed to perform well in their career and the need to be motivated if they are to succeed in the workplace”.*

Accord puts a particular emphasis on written and oral communication skills. Students are often expected to produce short written reports, write letters and speak to internal customers on the phone. The student is briefed on telephone manner and observes other employees making such calls before handling one themselves.

Making the students aware of appropriate conduct in the office and the interdependencies between different departments develops understanding of the importance of customer care for internal clients. Teamwork is reinforced by including the students in project meetings or team briefings so they can observe the dynamics between different people in achieving business objectives.

The tasks students undertake vary according to the department they are attached to. In the finance department, students will do work that encourages them to use IT applications such as Excel as well as general numerical and analytical skills. This can for example include:

- Analysing receipts and calculating expenses
- Observing the payroll process
- Asset management such as ordering cars.

In business development too, the tasks encourage students to use IT applications. The work also involves analysing and synthesising information and presenting written summary reports in a clear and concise manner:

- Managing/maintaining up-to-date client databases
- Conducting and writing up internet research on new market opportunities
- Assisting in design and formatting of publications.

In IT, work experience students are encouraged to communicate effectively and politely by email and telephone. The work also requires them to analyse the situation/fault to find appropriate solutions and to practise good time management. It may include:

- Observing/operating software applications
- Undertaking IT installations for clients
- Shadowing/operating the IT helpdesk with a maximum two-hour response time.

In the marketing and communications department, students undertake activities such as researching/identifying target clients, designing/formulating marketing brochures and conducting supporting research for tendering bids.

Managers give regular feedback to the students on their performance and encourage them to reflect on the things they have really enjoyed or found particularly difficult. This culminates in the production of a progress report evaluating the student's overall performance during the placement. The HR manager also holds an informal meeting with the student to discuss the placement and how it has gone. As part of this meeting, the student is taken through their logbook and encouraged to talk about what they have learnt and what they have enjoyed or disliked. Accord thanks the student for their contribution. The students in turn are encouraged by their school to write a thank you letter.

### **Benefits to the company**

For Accord, helping employees to develop coaching and managerial skills forms the key benefit of their involvement in work experience. *“Our staff enjoy working with students on placements and see this as part of their personal development. Coaching and mentoring experience is becoming an increasingly important part of our performance appraisal system.”* Accord also sees benefits in terms of its corporate social responsibility activities, helping to raise the company's profile in the community.

## CASE STUDY 2

# Alliance-Boots

Alliance-Boots is an international pharmacy-led health and beauty group operating in more than 15 countries worldwide. It was formed in July 2006 by the merger of the Boots Group and Alliance UniChem plc. Boots is one of the most widely recognised brands on the high street, with some 2,600 healthcare outlets in the UK and a further 3,000 outlets overseas. This case study focuses on the work experience programme at the Boots flagship store on Oxford Street in London. Opened 18 months ago and a showcase store for Alliance-Boots, the store employs some 360 people.

Alliance-Boots sees the provision of work experience placements as part of the company's wider corporate social responsibility initiatives, making a positive contribution to society. The store manager observes that *"Boots has traditionally had close ties with the community and this involvement has helped the brand to become so successful and respected"*. The work experience programme forms a core element of the Oxford Street store's education-business link activities. On occasion staff also help to raise awareness by giving presentations in schools about various health issues, such as the effects of drugs and smoking.

## Selection for placements

The Boots flagship store takes on between six and ten work experience students each academic year. The students range from 13 to 15 years old, though most tend to be towards the older end of the range. The placements normally last two weeks. The store uses Trident to identify students of all abilities from across London for placements. Trident is the UK's largest national broker for work experience placements and forms part of Edexcel, the examining and awards body. Trident takes care of all the paperwork – including risk assessments and health and safety checks – and liaises with the schools on Boots' behalf to ensure that the placement is suited to the student in terms of whether they have an interest in retail or the pharmaceuticals industry.

In the store manager's experience, students put forward by Trident are generally well suited to the placement. They normally possess a keen interest in pursuing a career in retail or working in specific areas such as health and beauty. Work experience placements are therefore offered in a range of departments within the store – such as in the pharmacy or healthcare and beauty sections – depending on the students' prime area of interest.

### Focusing on customer care skills

On the first day of the placement, students report to the senior manager in charge. They are taken as a group to a meeting room where they receive a general welcome from staff, an introduction to the store, a health and safety presentation and a security briefing. At the induction session the students are also given details of their expected working hours and their personal timetable for the two weeks.

Each student is subsequently assigned a 'buddy' in the team in which they will be working for the duration of the placement. The store manager emphasises that *"The buddy is seen as an important role model for the students and is there to encourage them to open up and get stuck into the placement"*.

At the outset, the store manager highlights to students the importance of high quality customer care, underpinned by a strong team ethic, as the key driver for the success of the store and for the business at large. The message put over to students is that they will be acting as ambassadors, representing the company's 150-year heritage during their placement. It is therefore essential that they present and conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the company's core values. Students are expected to demonstrate a positive attitude and to act responsibly at all times. For example, employees must keep their personal possessions such as bags, wallets or mobile phones in designated lockers for security purposes. Any failure to do so would result in the student being sent home.

As part of their induction, the students carry out a brainstorming exercise on why customer service is important to the company and what makes good customer service. The students write these ideas up on flip charts and are encouraged to think about what they can do during their placement to deliver good customer service. The students also receive coaching from store team members on appropriate ways to deal with customers – this includes mini role plays to reinforce the key messages and help students to think logically about how they would help a customer. This is an important exercise which, according to the store manager, *"...reinforces the importance of customer care in the workplace generally but also focuses the students' minds on how they might conduct themselves with store customers during the placement itself"*. The session has the added benefit of encouraging students to feel at home more quickly and to engage with each other as well as other members of staff.

### Practising a range of skills

The students are normally rotated around different store departments in the second week of the placement to ensure they have a broad understanding of the services offered by the business. They are treated in every way possible as part of the team, including attendance at daily team briefings to discuss store matters arising from the previous day. The students may also attend team training sessions, depending on the schedule for that week. These can for example include shadowing an employee learning how to manage the telephone helpdesk.

The tasks undertaken during the placement include a variety of activities, including:

- Helping customers, such as directing them to the right department or another member of staff with the relevant expertise to answer their query
- Engaging with customers by greeting them as they enter the store and handing out baskets
- Printing product labels and price tickets by entering the correct data into a hand-held computer
- Checking stock numbers against delivery schedules, also using a hand-held computer
- Stacking and tidying shelves – this requires understanding and analysing a numbered plan of the store to determine the correct location for incoming stock
- Answering customer queries to the telephone helpdesk. Students receive a briefing in advance on appropriate communication techniques, such as introducing themselves, being polite and adopting an appropriate tone of voice
- Reading and responding to faxes or emails, and also some photocopying duties, giving students experience of a variety of systems and equipment.

### Reviewing progress

After the first week the student is formally assessed. This involves the student completing a self-assessment form, a copy of which is also sent to their teacher. The students do this in groups and are required to establish what they did well ('good'), what they found 'tricky' and what they would, on reflection, do differently ('different'). This exercise forms the basis for individual feedback from the store manager on the student's performance. A plan is agreed to ensure that any development issues are addressed during the following week. For example, a student who is not engaging sufficiently with customers may be asked to hand out baskets to help build their confidence by increasing their interaction with customers. In the store manager's experience, this exercise in review and reflection leads to an improved performance in the second week. She states that *"By reflecting on their first week the students become more clear on what their strengths and weaknesses are and know what they need to improve in the second week"*.

At the end of the two weeks, the student attends a leaving interview with the store manager and their teacher. The store manager runs through how the student has performed over the course of the placement, assessing the student

against a 'skills matrix'. This is an internal tool outlining the competencies that the work experience placement aims to develop in school students. Areas covered include for example 'interpersonal understanding', 'acting for the customer' and 'concern for quality and order'. The importance of these competencies to the store and group at large is reinforced, as well as the broader value of competencies such as communication skills and teamworking. If students have performed particularly well during the placement, they are encouraged to apply for a Saturday job with the company. A team celebration is also held at the end of the placement and all students receive a thank-you goody bag.

### Value of the scheme

The store's management believes its work in supporting local schools makes an important contribution to the broader corporate social responsibility activities undertaken by Alliance-Boots. The work experience programme in particular is seen to make a valuable contribution to young people's learning and development. It also helps to ensure that the Boots brand continues to have a positive image in the community.



CASE STUDY 3

# Bentley Motors

Bentley Motors was founded in 1919 and is one of the iconic marques of the motor industry. In 1998, Bentley was acquired by Volkswagen. Production takes place at Crewe in north-west England. The Crewe site employs approximately 4,000 staff, housing the head office and sole manufacturing facility. The work experience programme forms one key element in a wider programme of educational involvement, which is run by the company's training Academy.

Three years ago Bentley decided to engage with head teachers from schools in south Cheshire, with the aim of seeing how it could support the educational needs of local students. The head teachers were invited to attend a briefing day at Bentley's head office, where they received information about the company, its activities and the key skills required by its workforce. A Bentley Academy representative observes *"The drive to get involved with young people has been a real success story for Bentley and led to many other education initiatives being developed with local schools to the benefit of both sides"*.

## Supporting employability and basic skills workshops

St. Thomas More School was looking to achieve maths and ICT status. Part of the bid required them to link with a local business. St Thomas More and Bentley worked together to develop the Bentley Foundation Programme which equips successful candidates with skills to assist them in working life, such as presentation skills and team building.

For Bentley, work experience forms one of the biggest elements of its education links with local schools and students. An Academy representative noted that involvement in work experience *"...helps support the learning and development of students that could potentially become Bentley apprentices"*. The company offers one or two-week work experience placements to students from ten local schools with which it has direct links. In all, Bentley provided around 150 placements in the 2006 calendar year.

### Matching school students to placements

The company provides details of the roles, dates available and minimum academic requirements to the work experience co-ordinators in each school. The company specifies that the students must have an interest in engineering or business and be expected to achieve grade C or above in English, maths, and one science or business studies.

The local schools are responsible for putting forward appropriate students for the placements. To assist them in matching students to the roles available, the company holds an on-site day for the teachers to explain the nature of the placements in more detail and the essential qualities required of the students.

### Using projects to structure placements

At the start of the placement, the student is given a formal induction by an Academy representative. This includes a brief history of the company and detailed guidelines for the work experience students. The guidelines cover appropriate conduct, health and safety matters and the requirement to wear a name badge at all times for security purposes. After the induction the student is introduced to the relevant placement manager; this will be a manager from one of the 'zones' in which the company offers placements – for example the wood shop, electrical engineering, paint rectification or the engine assembly line.

Students are set a project to complete during their placement. The aim of this is for the student to demonstrate their understanding of the department in which they have been working. In particular, the project requires the students to give an overview of the function's responsibilities and to create a flowchart showing the different teams in the function and how they are interrelated. The project also involves students in identifying two key activities – for example communication and team work – and providing an overview of why they are important, as well as what the students have undertaken and learnt during the placement. The project can be hand written or produced on a computer – the student is given access to a computer to complete the project. According to an Academy representative, the project *"...encourages the students to analyse what they are learning throughout the placement and helps them to be more inquisitive as they try to extract information from other members of staff"*.

### Work placements in practice

The way placements are handled in the V8 engine line assembly zone provides a good illustration of the way the work experience scheme works in practice.

The assembly line zone manager conducts a specific departmental induction, dealing with administrative matters such as the layout of the department, confidentiality and security, working hours and health and safety. The manager and student formally agree and document the student's objectives for the week – these are normally expressed in terms such as 'Learn more about the construction of engines'.

During the week the student shadows a number of engineers on the assembly line – the objective being for the student to witness, and assist with, the production of an engine from start to finish.

The student gets hands-on experience of building an engine, but always under the careful supervision of one of the full-time engineers. At the end of each day, the zone manager discusses with the student what they have learnt or problems they have encountered so these can be addressed during the following day.

The manager explains that Bentley uses standardised processes for production and that following the instructions, which are documented on wall charts around the factory, is critical in ensuring production, quality, cost and safety targets are met. He also explains the inter-relationships between the departments – for example, engines not produced on time or to the correct standard would hold up production in other departments. *"It is essential for the students to learn that each department views the other as its customer because serving those customers' requirements correctly is crucial to the success of the company."*

Towards the end of the week, the zone manager discusses the student's performance with the assembly line workers. The manager then sits down with the student to reflect on what has been achieved. At this session the zone manager reinforces the importance of the skills required for the job – following instructions (with attention to detail), working in teams including being able to communicate effectively, and good customer service – with 'internal' customers being as important as 'external' customers. According to the man-

ager, *"This is an ideal opportunity to stress the importance to the students of working hard at school because failing to achieve now could hold them back in later life"*. To give this greater reality, the manager discusses his own circumstances, explaining that he did not achieve the right academic qualifications for promotion to his current position and had to go to night school to get the required grades. At the end of the week, the students' teacher carries out an on-site review of the students' achievements during the placement – this is a group session for all the students from the same school. An Academy representative attends the meeting and presents each student with a certificate as evidence of successfully completing a placement at Bentley Motors. The company feels it is important for the students' self-esteem to be given some form of recognition which they can also produce in future job interviews. The project reports are collected from the students at the meeting. At the end of the year, the projects are reviewed and the best ones are awarded a prize.

### **Benefits of the scheme**

An Academy representative explains that the company sees its involvement in work experience as playing *"...an integral role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the workforce which is largely drawn from the local community and requires large numbers of skilled apprentices"*. The zone manager also observes that staff involved with managing the students on a day-to-day basis find it a rewarding process and a productive way of developing their mentoring and leadership skills.

## CASE STUDY 4

# Bombardier Aerospace

Bombardier Aerospace is the largest manufacturer in Northern Ireland, with an annual turnover in excess of £500m. The company specialises in the production of fuselages and engine nacelles for a range of regional aircraft and business jets. The production facilities include assembly operations, two advanced composites plants and a sheetmetal production unit. In addition, the company has a skills training centre near Belfast city centre for training apprentices and retraining existing employees. The company employs a total of 5,300 people in Northern Ireland, 4,000 of them based at Bombardier Aerospace's main site in Belfast. This case study looks at the work experience programme at the Belfast site.

Bombardier's partnerships with local schools are diverse. The firm actively engages in education initiatives such as interview workshops, business insight days and careers talks. These initiatives need to be seen against the background of the special circumstances of Northern Ireland. There are two clear drivers to the firm's involvement in work experience – encouraging students to see engineering (and manufacturing more generally) as a dynamic career option and the promotion of equal opportunities.

### Opening up opportunities

The company has been involved in providing work experience for over 20 years. It established more formal links with local schools in the 1980s as part of its equal opportunities programme. Encouraging greater involvement from under-represented sections of society is a high priority. Bombardier therefore views its work experience and education outreach activities as part of a responsibility to promote diversity in the workplace. As the equal opportunities manager puts it, *"There is a clear business case for engaging with local schools. It's about looking to the future and ensuring we can tap into the best young people"*.

### Employability in the curriculum

'Employability' is one of the key underpinning objectives of the revised Northern Ireland school curriculum. As part of the employability module embedded in the curriculum, students in Northern Ireland are encouraged to contact the employer directly to demonstrate their motivation for working in that organisation.

For placements in the engineering function, Bombardier expects work experience students to have a keen interest in engineering. They should be studying appropriate subjects, ie maths plus at least one science GCSE. According to the company, this is a benefit to all concerned as the company does not have to engage students who have been *"...herded into the placement despite no interest or the right skills for a career in engineering"*.

Indeed, many of Bombardier's apprentices have previously undertaken work experience with the company.

### Building understanding of work competencies

Bombardier took 146 students on work placements in the 2005/2006 academic year. The placements are tailored as far as possible to students' interests, and often involve rotation around several departments to gain experience of office, factory floor, and engineering work and to provide an overview of the business.

Before the placement starts the student is sent a comprehensive information pack, including details of the logistics for their first day and the qualifications needed to take advantage of career opportunities in engineering or business support within the company.

On their first day the students are given an induction setting out the company background and expectations in terms of behaviour, punctuality and dress. The induction also covers health and safety. They are assigned a 'buddy' who initially talks them through a personalised schedule and provides support and guidance where necessary over the next two weeks. However, the students are expected to take ownership of the placement and be in the right place at the right time.

The operations team manager gives students a tour of the factory floor and introduces them to the teams working in each area. The students are rotated around the manufacturing areas and shadow team members to understand the stages involved in building a fuselage. Having observed the processes and how to use tools safely, the student is given hands-on work such as cutting or drilling component pieces, setting robot specifications and developing test pieces. Supervisors also take students through the shop floor performance charts and explain the rigorous quality monitoring standards that components must satisfy at each stage. The need to follow instructions and pay attention to detail is emphasised in the context of ensuring that the product is delivered on time and without fault to the 'customer' in the next production area.

Students therefore begin to appreciate the importance of teamwork and understand that if procedures are not followed carefully, the whole production line suffers delays and additional work to rectify faults. Bombardier expects the students to show good self-management skills in terms of their behaviour, presen-

tation and timekeeping. If this is not up to scratch then the student is reprimanded, as a normal employee would be. This is not a regular occurrence. Above all, the operations team manager considers that a positive attitude to work is the most important attribute that a potential apprentice should have. The manager observes that *"Most students start off quiet but they come out of their shell, especially when working with other people, because they are just treated as one of the gang"*.

The students are given regular feedback and the importance of communicating with people is reinforced throughout the placement. If a student is bored or not sure what to do, the manager expects them to use their initiative and ask questions: *"They have to make the placement their own and tell their co-workers if they would rather be doing something else. If they talk to people it shows they are interested and employees will respond favourably to that"*. At the end of the placement the students are assessed on their skills and performance. The manager also discusses with the student the comments they have recorded on Bombardier's feedback questionnaire about the quality of the placement. This is viewed as an important tool to help maximise the success and benefits of work experience all round.

### Value the scheme

Work experience plays an important role in providing large numbers of students with an insight into Bombardier and the career opportunities available. The company has 1.8% turnover of staff per annum and a steady intake of graduates, but there has been a decline in school leavers applying for apprenticeships – from around 1,000 applicants fifteen years ago to just under 200 in recent years. This is a growing concern in terms of future skills gaps as apprentices form the bulk of employees working in assembly.

The company's drive to promote diversity through work experience has strengthened Bombardier's standing in the Belfast community and helped foster a positive image among traditionally under-represented groups in the labour market. The strategy has also proved popular among shareholders who expect the company to function ethically within the community.

Departmental managers also find that work experience is a good motivational tool that helps add variety to the work done on the shop floor. *"Staff working with the students on a day-to-day basis find it extremely rewarding. They have the opportunity to do something different and are able to teach future employees about their trade and the skills involved"*.

## CASE STUDY 5

# Bristol International Airport

**Bristol International Airport (BIA) Limited** is responsible for running and maintaining all the airport's facilities and providing customer services and advice. The company has approximately 220 direct employees, while the airport as a whole has approximately 3,000 staff on site. The vast majority of these are employees of partner companies such as retailers and food outlets. The airport has grown rapidly to serve 5.7 million passengers per year.

The company is very active in engaging with local schools and other educational establishments. The rationale for these activities *"...is to attract future employees but also to assist with the general employability of students by providing them with the skills essential for the workplace"*. Two other education-linked initiatives that Bristol International is involved in are 'teacher and lecturer resource days' and 'in the workplace' visits. These are outlined in highlighted boxes.

## Casting the net wide

The work experience programme, which has been running for more than a decade, forms a central part of the company's education-business links. The programme has grown in importance in the last six years, having been restructured and reinvigorated since the appointment of a new HR manager. In all, the company takes around 52 students each year for one-week placements, with the majority of students being 15-16 years old. Placements are offered in two departments – customer services and fire services. One position is made available in each department every week in the period November to March each year.

The work experience programme is geared towards creating as large and diverse a recruitment pool as possible, raising awareness among school leavers of the employment opportunities offered at the airport. In particular, the placements are aimed at helping to fill recruitment gaps among BIA's business partners operating at the terminal. Being dominated by hospitality and catering services, these typically experience the high levels of staff turnover characteristic of this kind of work. There is also a wider sense of social responsibility underlying the company's activities – BIA sees it as part of its *"...duty and social responsibility to help students gain access to employment opportunities and, above all, to reinforce the importance of education and*

*skills in the world of work*". This is reflected in a focus on working with schools in deprived areas with relatively high unemployment.

### Teacher and lecturer resource days

The resource days are a free programme available to groups of teachers and college lecturers from across the south west. They take the form of a day's training at BIA for groups of up to 40 about the company's business, including its strategies for marketing, customer experience, health and safety, human resources (including recruitment) and the company's approach to the environment and conservation. The training includes real-life case studies – for example, the marketing 'module' covers a case study on how BIA targeted Continental Airlines to run a daily service from Bristol to New York.

The material in each module is directly relevant to the curriculum in BTEC, GMVQ, applied GCSEs in Business Studies and Leisure and Tourism. Teachers and lecturers are able to use the material covered, which is provided to them on a CD, to augment their teaching.

The company has contracted SCool to handle identification and vetting of work experience students. SCool, a government-funded business-education broker, operates a website which advertises work experience placements and allows students to apply online. Once an application is submitted, a detailed job specification is provided and the student must agree with their career adviser or work experience co-ordinator that they are suited to the placement before proceeding further. The placement is temporarily reserved for the student while SCool discusses the application with the career adviser to ensure the role is suitable for the student. BIA expects students to possess certain key skills and attributes – for example, self-confidence and motivation – and part of SCool's role is to ensure that the students put forward for placements at BIA meet these criteria and will be able to perform effectively.

When the student has been accepted for the placement, SCool sends a letter to the student and school detailing the start date, placement details and logistics, together with a pack of information. This includes a code of conduct, company background and a security clearance disclaimer to be

returned to BIA prior to commencement of the placement. According to BIA, *"SCool has a success rate of about 95% and this ensures that the students taken are interested and can get real value out of the placement"*.

### Student ownership of the placement

On the first day of their placement, students are given a formal induction by an HR representative. The students are asked to introduce themselves (there are normally two students in the induction), talk about the studies they are undertaking at school and explain what they would like to get out of the placement. The induction features running through a health and safety briefing and discussing the key elements of the placement. These include a formal schedule of events and break times for the week. The students are given a key task list outlining expectations for the activities they should be undertaking during their placement – for example dealing with a customer query or making a tannoy announcement. The HR representative also runs through a company briefing. This includes a summary of the organisation chart detailing key staff roles and responsibilities and where the student fits into the overall structure.

Throughout the induction process it is made clear that students must also take ownership and responsibility for ensuring that their placement is successful. For example, the student is expected to approach and question relevant staff where necessary to ensure they are comfortable with the tasks they have been given and can perform them effectively. As the HR manager emphasises, *"It is their placement – if the students want to know something it is up to them to take the initiative and ask questions. It is also their responsibility to ensure they take their breaks at the correct times"*. Similarly, the student is expected to remind the manager in the relevant department to provide them with a logistics/health and safety briefing and to review their logbook, if they have one, before leaving the department. The student will have also been given an evaluation sheet to complete and keep a record of their daily activities.

### Embedding skills during the placement

The tasks completed during a typical work experience placement in the customer services department include:

- Making a tannoy announcement – in advance the student

is given a condensed version of the company's standard training on announcements. The student would receive the training, observe and shadow others making announcements and then conduct one themselves. Key points emphasised during the training are being courteous, showing enthusiasm and a good tone of voice

- Checking-in luggage, monitoring baggage numbers, rectifying faults on the baggage system and allocating/changing baggage lanes – this is all done using designated computer software. The student is asked to review how busy the baggage lanes are using on-screen CCTV footage and then allocate an appropriate lane to newly landed aircraft. If there is a fault, the student is expected to identify the problem and call the engineering team
- Staff training and briefing – whenever the opportunity arises, the work experience students are permitted to sit in on other employees' training sessions to gain an appreciation of the key skills needed in the workplace. The student will also attend daily team briefings or 'situation updates' so that they feel like part of the team and can observe the interaction between team members
- Providing customer service – assisting customers, either in the call centre, via email or on the service desk. The students receive a condensed version of the company's customer care training (see box) and listen in on other employees' calls before answering the telephone themselves.

In the course of a typical work experience placement in the fire services department, a mock fire rescue exercise is simulated and the student has to analyse the situation and provide a clear and concise briefing of the known facts to air traffic control via radio.

### The feedback process

The students receive constant feedback from the team and assigned manager on their performance. This includes providing constructive pointers to the student as to what they can improve on and how they can do this. The manager will also regularly look at the student's evaluation sheet and logbook, if they have one. Importantly, the students are seen to add value to the company: *"Our customer service teams are small and deal with a high volume of enquiries. The students*

*are treated as normal employees and as another pair of hands in the team."*

At the end of the placement, students have an informal leaving interview with an HR representative. This includes running through their evaluation sheet covering items such as the tasks they could or could not do successfully, the aspects they did or did not like, and their strengths and weaknesses. According to the HR manager, *"It is important to sit down with the students and help them reflect on what they have learnt so they can take these lessons away with them and apply them in any work context"*. The students receive a certificate documenting their completion of a work experience placement at BIA and are encouraged to put this in their record of achievement and use it in future interviews. Throughout the placement, students are encouraged to fill out their logbook and this is reviewed and discussed at the final meeting. Not all students are given a logbook to complete by their school and, the HR manager notes, these vary in sophistication.

### In the workplace workshops

'In the workplace' visits involve BIA staff providing training to students in the 14 to 16 year age range at schools. The training takes the form of hour-long workshops, each attended by a group of 30-35 students. Generally, sufficient workshops are run to give all students in a year group the opportunity to attend during the day. The company offers separate workshops covering maths and science, interviewing skills, and verbal and written communication. The aim of the sessions is to reinforce the importance of specific skills for the workplace. For example, the maths session includes a case study requiring the students to calculate the cost of resurfacing a runway. This puts maths into a real-life context – the case study includes pictures of the airport infrastructure – to reinforce the importance of what otherwise might have been viewed as an abstract subject. In the communication skills workshop, the students are required to construct and read out a tannoy customer announcement to address a set of fictitious circumstances at the airport. The facts are then changed and the students must revise their announcement accordingly. The aim of the session is to put across the importance of clear and accurate communication as a workplace skill.



### **In focus – customer care**

The training emphasises the importance of customers to the business and the need to be polite, helpful, sympathetic and to remain calm and controlled in all situations. The training includes a role play on problem situations to encourage students to think calmly and logically how they might go about rectifying a problem. The student will often need to pull off information from the internet in order to answer customer queries and at some point will have to encourage customers to fill out the company's customer satisfaction survey. They also use mental arithmetic when counting money and selling tickets for the 'flier' shuttle bus.

### **Benefits of the scheme**

The key benefit of BIA's involvement in work experience placements is seen as identifying potential employees from the local community and giving them the opportunity to develop their life skills through an insight into the work done in the company. The focus on working with schools in deprived areas with high unemployment has also helped the company establish a good working relationship with the local councils. This has had other significant benefits in terms of the good reputation BIA has developed within the local community and the business opportunities this may encourage.

The company offers separate workshops covering maths and science, interviewing skills, and verbal and written communication. The aim of the sessions is to reinforce the importance of specific skills for the workplace. For example, the maths session includes a case study requiring the students to calculate the cost of resurfacing a runway. This puts maths into a real-life context – the case study includes pictures of the airport infrastructure – to reinforce the importance of what otherwise might have been viewed as an abstract subject. In the communication skills workshop, the students are required to construct and read out a tannoy customer announcement to address a set of fictitious circumstances at the airport. The facts are then changed and the students must revise their announcement accordingly. The aim of the session is to put across the importance of clear and accurate communication as a workplace skill.

## CASE STUDY 6

# Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is the principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales. It is responsible for advising on cases for prosecution, reviewing cases submitted by the police, determining the charge, preparing cases for court and presenting cases at court. Every year it deals with more than 1.3 million cases in the magistrates' court and about 115,000 in the Crown Court. With headquarters in London, York and Birmingham, the CPS operates a structure of 42 geographical areas in England and Wales. It employs around 7,700 staff, including some 2,500 lawyers. This case study focuses on the North London Prosecution Service, based in Edmonton, north London, which employs about 60 staff.

As a public sector employer, the CPS is expected to promote core ethical values by playing an active role through its 'community engagements'. The work experience placements form part of discharging this responsibility. They are also viewed as an accessible way of promoting careers in the organisation and supporting the development of local school students in general. In addition to the placements, the Edmonton office holds open days in magistrates' courts. At these, students from local schools and colleges take part in mock court cases and role plays to understand how the court system operates.

The CPS's Edmonton office has direct links with work experience co-ordinators at all schools in the boroughs of Enfield and Haringey. The office notifies the schools of work experience opportunities for students and fills the vacancies on a first-come, first-served basis. CPS Edmonton takes on between five and ten students each academic year for placements lasting one week. The work experience programme is aimed at 14-16 year-olds, although the CPS Edmonton also provides placements for mature students – generally those studying to become solicitors – on an ad hoc basis.

## Setting the scene

Before the placement begins, the student is sent a form detailing their role at the CPS and what is expected of them in terms of personal conduct, behaviour and punctuality. They must also record certain personal details on a separate form, which is returned to the CPS for security checking.

At the start of the placement the student is welcomed, given a tour of the office and introduced to all members of the CPS team. This is followed by an induction session covering details such as working hours, health and safety, and the respective roles and responsibilities of the main groups of

staff at the office. Each placement follows a structured programme. As the prosecutor puts it, *“We feel it is important to give the students an overview of the various steps involved in preparing and bringing a case to court. They need to understand that the job is not all about being in court, but requires considerable patience”*.

### Building understanding of tasks and skills

On the first day the student shadows and assists a clerical caseworker carrying out the activities necessary to prepare cases for court. The work involves cross-checking the list of court cases provided by the magistrates’ court with the CPS’s own list and, if necessary, telephoning the court to iron out any inconsistencies and to establish the particular courtroom in which the case will be heard. The student is also given a case file to read and then, based on that example file, set the task of preparing the files for other cases going to court that week. This involves gathering documentation and details of witness statements, interviews, CCTV footage and any related material. At all times CPS staff ensure the student understands why the tasks need to be done and how they contribute to the office’s work as a whole.

On the second day, the student shadows the prosecutor whose main responsibility will be preparing to present cases in the magistrates’ court next day. The student begins by reading the ‘prosecutor’s code’. This sets out guidelines as to when cases should be pursued by the CPS, namely if it is in the public interest and there is sufficient evidence to prosecute. The prosecutor will review the files prepared by the student on the previous day and ask him or her to identify the key issues in the case. In particular, the focus is on the defining pieces of evidence and the approach, based on the prosecutor’s code, the student would take if prosecuting or defending the case. This process involves the student and prosecutor role playing the arguments and possible counter-arguments that might arise in court. According to the prosecutor, *“The students enjoy this exercise as it encourages them to use their analytical skills and builds confidence in their ability to communicate effectively”*.

The student will also be asked to calculate any numerical values relevant to the case. These might, for example, include working out how many times over the legal limit was the driver of a vehicle if he had a blood-alcohol level of

200 milligrams per 100 millilitres and the legal limit is 80 milligrams per 100 millilitres? Throughout this process, the prosecutor continually reinforces to the student both the importance of attention to detail and the need for accuracy and completeness of the case file – a poor quality file will undermine the case.

The students spend their third day observing and learning about proceedings at the magistrates’ court. They are treated as part of the CPS team and sit at the front of the court with the CPS prosecutor. The student is empowered to pass copies of the case papers to the defence team, to ask for the team’s contact details and to enquire of the defence whether the defendant intends to plead guilty or not guilty. The student is asked to make a record of what evidence has been passed to the defence, so this information can be noted as an important part of the prosecutions case file. The student is expected to take detailed and accurate minutes of the proceedings. These will form an important source of reference in the future.

After the trial, the students are introduced to, and have the opportunity to question, the magistrates about their job. The prosecutor will then run through what happened in court with the student – focusing on why the cases played out in a particular way.

On the final day of the placement, the student attends the crown court. This largely involves the student observing proceedings within the court. The student has the opportunity to discuss with the CPS team their respective roles and responsibilities, for example with the solicitor or barrister presenting the case for the prosecution. The student is also required to take notes of proceedings in the courtroom and is quizzed at the end of the day on the differences between crown and magistrate court cases.

CPS staff believe it is important for the student to see the prosecution process from the opening stages of data gathering and file preparation to the finish in court proceedings. In the prosecutor’s view, *“I think this gives the students a sense of ownership and they appreciate that administrative tasks are equally important in supporting the more glamorous court work”*. For example, other important administrative tasks undertaken by the student might include:

- Scanning files returned from court

- Updating CPS lists for the next court date
- Putting witness statements on file
- Sending memos to the police so witnesses can be notified of their court date
- Photocopying documents and sending statements of agreed evidence to defence teams.

The students receive regular feedback on their performance and this is structured around the student's school logbook. CPS staff check that the logbook is being completed properly and will assess students in the light of the learning objectives specified in the logbook.

### **Benefits of the scheme**

The local placements are viewed as a good way of promoting careers in the organisation and supporting the general development of local school children. The key driver for the CPS, as a public sector employer, *"...is to demonstrate our active involvement in the community and provide opportunities for local people from a range of backgrounds to get involved with the service"*.

CASE STUDY 7

# Land Rover

Land Rover is well known for the design and manufacture of a range of four-wheel drive vehicles. Today, the marque forms part of the Premier Automotive Group, a division of the Ford Motor Company. The company employs approximately 9,500 people in Britain. Land Rovers are manufactured at the company's plants at Solihull in the West Midlands and Halewood on Merseyside. This case study looks at work experience arrangements at the company's other major site, Gaydon in Warwickshire, which is home to the Land Rover research and design headquarters.

Land Rover operates an active community support programme. Its activities with local schools include running skills workshops on themes such as team building, writing CVs and preparing for interviews. Warwickshire Education Business Partnership (WEBP) has a permanently staffed facility based at the company's Gaydon site. This body is responsible for administering visits by educational establishments to the Gaydon site as well as work experience. Birmingham and Solihull Connexions has a similar presence on Land Rover's Solihull site, organising the education services provided at that location.

The work experience programme forms a major part of the company's education-business initiatives and contributes to its broader CSR activities. Important as these are, the company views the key driver for providing work experience in terms of the benefits for staff development. According to the corporate citizenship manager, *"The feedback from staff that have mentored work experience students is phenomenal. The programme has made a real difference in terms of widening their personal development and helping staff to develop their coaching, communication and leadership skills. They also feel that they are helping to make a real difference to the students"*.

## Using application forms and interviews

WEBP is responsible for working with local schools to identify appropriate candidates for the company's work experience programme. In order to assist schools in this process, Land Rover holds regular professional development days at its Solihull site for careers teachers and those involved with teaching engineering and design and technology. At these it briefs them on the company's activities and the opportunities available for work experience. Placements at the Gaydon site are offered in a number of departments including:

- The model shop
- Marketing, service and sales
- Finance
- Planning (for example scheduling the vehicles for building or producing timing plans)
- Rapid prototype (designing vehicle parts)
- Trim and final (building prototype vehicles)
- Workshop (preparing prototype vehicles for testing).

The company seeks to offer work experience to all suitable applicants, although the number of placements is limited to 20 on the site at any one time. In total, approximately 80 students undertake a one or two-week placement at the Gaydon site each year.

All students put forward by the schools are required to complete an application form. They are also interviewed by WEBP staff to assess their suitability. In this context suitability means that they have a genuine interest in engineering and that the company is able to provide work experience to match their area of interest in, for example, vehicle design. In all, about 90% of the students who apply for placements are considered suitable. The company sees the application form and interview as essential in achieving the right match between student and placement. It also gives students useful experience of what a job interview entails, focusing on the importance of presenting a positive attitude and emphasising personal strengths.

Students who are not offered a placement receive feedback from WEBP explaining the reasons why. Those students who are successful in securing a placement receive a pack of information, including a letter of acceptance, company briefing, risk assessment and details of where and who to report to on their first day. They also receive a form setting out the various departments and explaining the type of work undertaken by each. The student is required to tick a preference for the placement and return the form to the company.

### Setting objectives

At the start of the placement, the student attends an induction conducted by the WEBP staff. This covers administrative matters such as a general introduction to the site, health and safety and signing of a confidentiality agreement. As part of the induction, each student receives a 'work experience agreement' (see box). This sets out the students'

objectives and criteria against which they will be assessed and their achievements recorded. According to the corporate citizenship manager, *"Setting objectives helps to ensure that students are learning skills and knowledge that are relevant to their studies and personal learning. It also means that we can assess their performance fairly at the end of the placement and tease out any particular development points they could work on in the future"*.

### The work experience agreement

The agreement includes a section in which the students are required to document their objectives for the one or two-week placement. Typical objectives include 'work in a team' and 'understand more about building cars'.

The agreement also includes a section dealing with performance appraisal. This sets out the criteria against which the student's performance will be assessed. The key headings are 'appearance', 'attendance', 'self-management', 'communication', 'personal/social', 'confidence', 'interest/attitude', 'comprehension' and 'technical ability'.

The students are made aware that at the end of the placement they will be assessed by the placement supervisor – graded 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) – for each performance measure.

After the general induction, the student is introduced to their placement supervisor who conducts a health and safety briefing and induction specific to the area in which the student will be working. The supervisor also reviews the student's objectives. This is to ensure that the nature of the work the student will be undertaking will enable them to achieve the goals set. For example, in one area the student is given an additional list of objectives set out on a pre-printed sheet in order to provide structure to the placement. These include items such as 'List three pieces of personal protective equipment used (explain why they are needed)', 'Describe the type of work carried out' and 'Identify the department's main customers'.

### Placements in practice

The nature of the tasks carried out varies according to the department in which students are placed. To illustrate a typi-

cal placement, below we look at the activities undertaken by those attached to workshop building – preparing prototype vehicles for testing, carrying out modifications, updates and repairs.

As a training exercise the student is given several parts – including a differential, gears, starter motor and alternator – and is required to strip the parts and reassemble them, following a detailed instruction manual. This is seen as a useful tool in improving manual dexterity and introducing the student to the nature of the work carried out in the workshop. The student is partnered with an experienced fitter, who acts as coach and mentor during the placement. The activities undertaken during the two weeks include:

- Using an airgun to tighten the nuts on a wheel
- Stripping a vehicle of all interior panels in advance of re-wiring
- Being part of team that services the car – including changing an air filter and topping up screen wash
- Making the bracket for the exhaust
- Measuring stress of loads and checking instruments to measure fan speed.

The student undertakes all tasks under careful supervision, but has responsibility for the work carried out. The company does not create artificial tasks for the student. The supervisor encourages students to participate as much as possible – they are treated as part of the workshop team and undertake real work tasks. In her experience, *“I tend to find that the students enjoy being given some responsibility. This pushes them to work hard as they want to impress and most students are capable enough to complete the tasks they are given”*. In addition, to provide an understanding of 4x4 technology, some students get the opportunity during the placement to go on a track tour, riding in a 4x4 around the off-road proving ground.

### Providing feedback

At the end of the one or two-week placement, the supervisor discusses the student’s performance with the employee who has been acting as coach and then completes the student’s performance assessment. Students receive face-to-face feedback on their performance and an explanation of why they were graded as they are under each assessment heading. The assessment form requires

that, in addition to the numerical rating, the supervisor details evidence to support the grading and documents the student’s strengths and weaknesses.

On the last afternoon the student attends the WEBP for a debrief meeting. This includes running through, on a one-to-one basis, the student’s objectives for the placement, whether they have been achieved, and the assessment report. The student is also asked for oral feedback on how the placement could be improved and receives a certificate as evidence of completing a work experience placement at Land Rover. The corporate citizenship manager stresses the importance of two-way communication and encouraging honest feedback from the students: *“We are always trying to improve the experience for the students and so the feedback they give us is helpful. By ironing out the wrinkles we are making an investment that ensures both parties benefit”*.

### Benefits to the organisation

The work experience programme is a key part of Land Rover’s community support initiative. The company views these activities as important in supporting the general educational development of local school children. The scheme also offers essential personal development opportunities for its staff in the areas of coaching, communication, giving feedback and leadership.

The supervisor interviewed views a successful placement as one where *“...the student has enjoyed the experience but also understood that work requires a disciplined attitude, including being on time and working to deadlines”*. The scheme also plays a role in helping to attract potential recruits. Some 40% to 50% of current apprentices either visited the company’s site as part of the company’s community support work or took part in Land Rover’s work experience programme.

## CASE STUDY 8

# Linde Material Handling

Linde Material Handling (UK) Ltd is a leading manufacturer of material handling equipment such as fork lift trucks and tow tractors. With a head office in Germany and worldwide turnover of more than 3.6bn euros a year, the company employs 19,000 people in total. This case study looks at Linde's Basingstoke site. This employs some 800 people and has produced material handling equipment for over 50 years. One of the most modern facilities of its type in Europe, it pioneered the development of mechanised logistics in the UK. The site also features a range of support services including product development, HR, IT, financial and legal functions.

Linde's involvement in work experience is primarily aimed at raising awareness of the career opportunities available within the company to young people in the Basingstoke area. Over the years, the company has found that engineering careers often have a poor image among young people, who tend to move into what they consider more exciting fields elsewhere. Recruiting new staff has therefore proved increasingly difficult. The company is also looking at other labour sources to fill its skills gaps. As the training co-ordinator puts it, *"We need to get the right people working for us to plug our increasing skills gaps and be successful in the long-term. By raising Linde's profile within the community, local students will hopefully consider Linde as one of their career options"*.

The work experience programme for 14-16 year-olds has been running for at least five years. It forms part of the company's local education-business initiatives, offering two-week placements. Linde also runs a programme of four-week, project-based placements for gifted 15-17 year-olds sent by a German school.

## Matching students to placements

The company has sometimes found schools reluctant to engage directly with local businesses. Linde therefore now works closely with the Basingstoke Consortium, a body which helps match students to suitable work experience placements. The company also receives requests for placements directly from individual students. These are sifted according to the interests expressed by the students and feedback is provided to students where they cannot be accommodated on a placement.

The Basingstoke Consortium shortlists a number of students most suited to the placements being offered by Linde. Once the list has been reviewed and agreed with the com-



pany, the Consortium sends relevant documentation – risk assessment, health and safety details, and insurance notification – to the parents and school for approval prior to start of the placement.

The students come in beforehand for an informal discussion about the placement with the training and development adviser. The aim is to get to know the students better and to establish their main interests, both at school and more generally. It is also an opportunity for students to overcome their nerves about the working environment. The logistics of the placement and the departments in which they may be working are discussed. The interview helps to ensure that as far as possible, students are offered a placement tailored to their career interests and preferences.

### Tasks and skills

Work experience students used to spend at least part of their placements in manufacturing departments on the factory floor. This was abandoned, however, following a health and safety advisor's recommendation that students should not be allowed to use power tools. The training and development adviser comments that *"There was little point keeping students on the factory floor – they would have been bored stiff and would not have had an enjoyable experience"*. The work experience placements are now concentrated in office-based departments such as financial support and marketing services.

The students have a half-day induction with the training and development adviser on the first day. This covers the code of conduct, key contacts, company background and legal documentation. The student is introduced to their supervisor who will review the learning objectives detailed in the student's logbook. The supervisor sets out the envisaged job role in order to manage the student's expectations of the placement. General housekeeping rules such as start and finish times and lunch break arrangements are also covered. The students are then introduced to the team and the functions of the department in which they will be working.

The supervisors make the placement as much like the real world as possible by ensuring that students are treated like other employees and as part of the team. Students are therefore expected to arrive on time, have good attendance and behave and dress appropriately. *"It's important that*

*the student understands that simple things like turning up to work on time and finding out if staff need any help can make a good impression and show a positive attitude."* Students are also expected to listen to and follow instructions carefully, and are encouraged to communicate with their colleagues if they run into difficulties.

Other staff in the team are encouraged to identify suitable tasks for the students. Activities undertaken in the marketing department for example include:

- Internet research
- Analysing market trends
- Administrative work such as filing and answering letters/emails
- Presenting results of research in Word/PowerPoint documents
- Formatting internal reports.

For those on placements in the finance department, tasks can include verifying invoices against expenses and inputting or processing this data using Excel.

Supervisors have regular discussions with the students to ensure they are enjoying the placement and being given enough to do. At the end of the placement, the student has an informal debrief session with the training and development adviser who provides feedback from the supervisor on the student's overall performance on the placement. The students are encouraged to talk freely about their experience, reflecting for example on those things they really enjoyed or found particularly difficult. The training and development adviser also checks that the student has completed the logbook. A follow-up letter thanking the students for their contribution is sent afterwards.

### Assessing the scheme

The company views a successful placement as one where the student has realised the need to be responsible and committed to succeed in the workplace. Most important is the attitude demonstrated by the students and whether they tried to take ownership of their placements and the tasks undertaken. The training and development adviser notes that *"The students definitely come out with more confidence and are less shy or embarrassed to talk to people. They also feel like they have made a real contribution to the business*

*and this seems to improve their motivation all round*". The key challenge for Linde in delivering successful work experience placements is balancing the resources needed and convincing staff that it is worth giving up their time to oversee and coach students.

The company believes that Linde's involvement in work experience encourages more local students to consider working for the company and helps to counter the poor image of the engineering sector. Work experience forms an important means through which the company can promote its image and the apprenticeship opportunities available to local young people.

CASE STUDY 9

## NG Bailey

**NG Bailey is one of Europe's leading independent mechanical, electrical and building services engineering contractors. The company has 4,500 employees at 21 branches nationwide. With an annual turnover of around £500m, NG Bailey has been engaged in high profile projects including the Bluewater Shopping Centre, the Heathrow Express high-speed rail link and a variety of PFI projects. This case study focuses on the NG Bailey engineering training academy based in Leeds.**

The company has built strong links with local schools and is actively involved in helping young people gain an insight into career opportunities in engineering. The work experience scheme, which has been running for at least 20 years, plays an important part in achieving this objective. The company takes on about ten students each year for two-week placements, most of whom are 16 years old. In addition to its work experience activity, NG Bailey runs an engineering apprenticeship programme, with some 120 apprentices recruited in 2005 to its four-year training scheme.

According to the HR manager, the work experience programme is *"...geared towards creating as large and diverse a recruitment pool as possible by raising awareness of the employment opportunities offered at NG Bailey among school leavers in the community"*. The company aims to counter the negative image of engineering by providing students with a practical idea of what a career in engineering entails.

### **Starting the work experience process**

Most of the students who take up work experience placements are identified by the local school. The school also provides the company with an idea of the direction of the student's career interests, such as electrical engineering or construction. NG Bailey sends an information pack to the student and school outlining what the two-week placement will involve and other important requirements, such as risk assessment and insurance documents.

A few weeks before the placement begins, the student is invited for an informal meeting with the training manager and given a tour of the training facility in which they will be working. The student is introduced to staff and briefed on what they will be doing during the placement. The training manager sets out what is expected of the student in terms

of time keeping, conduct and dress code. This is also an opportunity for the training manager to discuss the subjects the student is studying and to establish their interests in more detail. Where students express interest in a specific career or skills, they will be assigned to the relevant department. Otherwise, the student is rotated around departments on a structured programme.

### Developing skills during the placement

On the first day, the student meets their assigned trainer and is taken through a work experience portfolio. This includes health and safety, emergency contact numbers and a company briefing. The trainers act as mentors to the students. They emphasise the importance of two-way communication to solve any problems. *“Our trainers encourage the students to ask questions wherever necessary to help their understanding of what is being asked of them”*. Communication skills are highly valued and emphasised in terms of listening to and following instructions carefully in order for tasks to be completed successfully.

A variety of activities are carried out during work experience programme, such as testing circuit boards, installing heating and ventilation piping, and building an electronic demonstration panel. These tasks generally involve following instructions or carefully observing and repeating an exercise. The students also analyse diagrams of structures with details of the dimensions. They then calculate the sizes of specific components required to make the structure by deduction from the information given. This is aimed at reinforcing the importance of problem solving and numeracy skills in a user-friendly, practical way. Students work regularly with different units of measurement – for example, when taking readings to ensure the voltages of circuit boards are set within prescribed safety standards.

In addition, the students attend apprentice training sessions, listening to the trainer and learning about the skills being taught to the apprentices in that particular session. For example, the apprentices are sometimes required to deliver presentations on their latest work projects and these are observed by the work experience students.

Teamwork is another important skill emphasised during the placement. It is reinforced to students by working closely with their mentor and co-operating with apprentices on

specific tasks. According to one of the trainers, *“The projects and tasks undertaken by the students add value to the company and are not simply training tasks. For example, the output of the electronic demonstration panel is used in the business”*. The student is also given the opportunity to complete the school logbook using a computer to help reinforce the importance of IT skills.

### Taking account of individual needs: reinforcing numeracy awareness

The training manager had established (through discussions with the school) that a particular student had little interest in arithmetic and was under-performing in maths GCSE as a result. In the light of this, during the two-week period of work experience with the company the student was given a series of number-based tasks, such as measuring the voltage levels of circuit boards and specifying the lengths of construction components. Once his placement had ended, the student commented, *“I realise now why maths is important in the world of work and for a career in engineering”*. The practical experience at the company motivated the student to improve his performance and he achieved a grade C in his maths GCSE.

The students are given regular feedback from their assigned trainer during the placement and are scored on all the exercises they undertake. The trainer prepares a communication skills report which is sent to both the school and the student at the end of the placement. The training manager also conducts an exit interview with the student to discuss how the placement has gone. During this discussion, the training manager encourages the student to feed back their impressions of the two weeks. The manager also emphasises the importance for their futures of the students ‘selling themselves’ in the world of work by displaying a positive attitude. At the same time, the student is given information about career opportunities at NG Bailey, and the importance of maths, English and science for a career in engineering is reinforced.

With the placement completed, the company sends each student a letter thanking them for their contribution over the two weeks. The company sees this as important for the student’s confidence and something they can use at future interviews to demonstrate their ability to contribute.

## Evaluating the scheme

The company views a successful placement as one where the student has improved their practical skills and shown an interest in the sector. For the training manager, *“If students have shown a positive attitude and been engaged, for example by asking questions to improve their understanding, then we consider that to be a real, important achievement”*.

The organisation views work experience as beneficial both in terms of identifying potential employees from the local community and giving them the opportunity to develop an insight into work done in the company. The satisfaction for staff lies in helping develop young and talented students, so those young people have the opportunity in the future to succeed in an engineering career. Looking at the broader perspective, the HR manager considers that *“Work experience is part of making a positive contribution to society and the right thing to do from a corporate social responsibility perspective”*.

## CASE STUDY 10

# Ridgeons Limited

Ridgeons is a family-owned builders' merchants and timber processing operation in the East of England. With an annual turnover of £114m, the company has 950 employees spread across 19 branches and three timber-processing operations. The company has a strong emphasis on staff welfare and training – the group was one of the first of its kind in the region to gain the Investors in People standard in 1998. The case study concentrates on the Newmarket branch, which has 35 employees and is also the location of the group's HR function.

The Ridgeons' work experience programme is aimed at creating a local recruitment pool by raising the awareness of the company and the employment opportunities it offers to school leavers. The group has always been actively involved in the community. Work experience is seen by the company *"...as a way of giving something back to the community by raising young peoples' aspirations and giving less academic students the chance to learn a trade"*.

Ridgeons has established good links with a number of local schools and is involved in other programmes designed to help school leavers with few qualifications to gain an insight into the world of work. The work experience programme for 14-16 year-olds forms a growing part of the company's initiatives to foster local education links. In the period January to July 2006, the company took on 28 students in total, each for a two-week placement.

## Experience of an interview

Students put forward by local schools for placements are sent a letter by the company inviting them for interview. The interview is carried out by the manager of the branch where the student will be undertaking the placement. While there is no formal structure to the interview, the manager uses it to ascertain those areas of most interest to the student. This enables the branch manager, as much as possible, to offer a placement tailored to the student's preferences. The interview is also viewed as an opportunity for students to consider their attitude and self-presentation: *"Most work experience students don't have a clue about the appropriate manners and language to use in interviews with prospective employers, so we think that having an informal chat with them beforehand is beneficial"*.

The company subsequently writes to the student to offer a placement and confirm its start date, location, who to report to etc. The students are encouraged to confirm in writing their acceptance of the offer, thereby having the opportunity to apply their formal written communication skills. The student is also sent a joining pack containing a risk assessment to be signed by parents together with various information sheets. The pack also includes a copy of the Ridgeons Recorder bulletin reporting on the company's charity work and other events occurring at various sites.

### Building understanding of employability skills

On the first day of the placement the students meet their branch manager, who runs through a health and safety briefing and introduces the students to the rest of the team and their assigned supervisor. The students are required, like all employees, to clock in and out each day. The branch manager explains the importance of the system for keeping track of staff during emergencies and how it works:

*"I make it absolutely clear to the students that we expect good attendance and punctuality and that they should phone in if there is a problem".*

During the two-week placement, the students are rotated between each of the three main areas:

- The shop-floor, where they are involved in stacking shelves, merchandising, carrying out stock counts and completing stock sheets, and shadowing employees dealing with customers on the shop-floor and over-the-counter – ie taking payment for goods
- Goods-in, where they help with checking deliveries against order notes, unpacking and storing deliveries, going out to deliver orders
- The yard, where they shadow employees dealing with customers.

The placement focuses to a large extent on dealing with customers. The students are given a briefing on why customers are essential to the business and how to respond to and deal with them appropriately. The students are encouraged not to shy away from customers. Instead, they are urged to explain who they are, that they are on work experience and that they will get an experienced member of staff to help the customer. The importance of a positive attitude is emphasised,

with all employees taking responsibility for even the most basic of tasks. According to the branch manager, *"If the area supervisor sets a task like sweeping-up an area, this is put into context in terms of why it is important. Perhaps the tidiness is of vital importance for health and safety reasons or in terms of presenting a more professional image for the company".*

The branch manager holds frequent meetings with students to ask them how things are going and what they have enjoyed and not enjoyed. At these meetings, the manager reinforces the importance of dealing with customers appropriately. The branch manager is very much focused on ensuring that the students' experience is as much like real work as possible: *"Most students don't have much of an idea of what is expected in the workplace. But we see them coming out of their shells and taking some responsibility after a week".* He ensures that the students take ownership of their conduct – for example, lateness and not tidying up after themselves are not tolerated – and these matters are discussed with the students as they arise.

### A placement student's story

David completed a work experience placement with Ridgeons at the Cambridge branch three years ago. As a result of the placement, he decided to pursue a career with the company and joined its apprenticeship scheme. David is now a permanent employee and has a bright future, having been identified by HR as having the potential to become a branch manager.

David spent time rotating between the shop-floor, goods-in and yard departments. He learnt about being motivated for work and says, *"I really enjoyed being treated as a real employee. I felt like part of the team and knew I would like to work there in the future".* He learnt about the importance of customers to the business and became more confident when communicating with them. He also learnt how to follow instructions carefully to ensure that health and safety procedures were followed correctly.

### Providing feedback to students

Throughout the work placement, the student is required to complete a student record supplied by the school or local Education Business Partnership. The branch manager com-

pletes the evaluation section of the logbook during the placement. At the end of the two weeks, he holds a meeting with the student to discuss the placement and how the student thinks it has gone. As part of that meeting the manager gives the students feedback on their original pre-placement interview, their letter of acceptance and their overall performance during the placement. The aim is to be positive and provide constructive suggestions for areas of improvement. The manager may also outline the company's apprenticeship scheme if the placement has gone particularly well.

After the placement, the branch manager sends the students a letter thanking them for their contribution during the placement. The company sees this as important for the students' confidence.

### **Assessing the scheme**

A major benefit of Ridgeons' involvement in conducting work experience is identifying and introducing potential employees from the local community to the opportunities available with the company. This is important given that the long-term career options and progression within the company are somewhat limited and many students now have higher aspirations. Ridgeons therefore seeks to get as many local students, particularly those with low levels of qualifications, into the work experience scheme as possible.



CASE STUDY 11

# Royal Bank of Scotland

Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) is the world's fifth largest bank, with over 140,000 employees in 30 countries serving more than 35 million customers worldwide. It offers a diverse portfolio of financial services for personal, business and corporate customers. It also sells insurance and investment products through its subsidiary, Direct Line. Its network of UK branches includes NatWest, which it acquired in 2000 in the biggest takeover in British banking history.

The RBS group has for many years engaged with schools and colleges to improve young peoples' financial capability, helping them to understand the financial opportunities and challenges they are likely to face when leaving full-time education and, indeed, during the rest of their lives. The drivers for engaging with schools and providing work experience are *"...to build relationships with local schools and increase the pipeline of school leavers coming into the company, but also to enhance our position in the local community and promote RBS as an employer of choice"*.

## Work experience as part of financial education

In 1994 the group launched its *Face 2 Face with Finance* programme as the umbrella under which the group delivers financial education to young people. The programme includes personal and business finance interactive classroom modules and incorporates running a 'School Bank', which brings together the practical application of both modules. Since the programme was launched, over 2,600 schools and colleges have benefited.

Work experience is linked to the *Face 2 Face with Finance* programme. All branch managers receive a work experience guide, which provides guidance on the effective structuring of work placements (including a sample placement schedule) as well as information surrounding the administrative aspects of dealing with the placements. RBS gives priority to placement requests from schools with which they have an existing *Face 2 Face* relationship. Applications are, however, also considered from other schools and from broker organisations such as Trident and the local EBP. The placements are planned about six to nine months in advance, with for example the London north and east region of the group providing work experience for about 200 students each year. Placements in the branch network are generally for one week.

## Starting on the right foot

Prior to the start of work experience, the student is invited into the branch for a meeting with the branch manager. The meeting is taken as an opportunity for the manager to introduce the student to the branch staff – including the ‘buddy’ who has been allocated to provide support during the placement – and to run through the outline of the activities planned for the week. Other matters, such as working hours, dress code, lunch and travel arrangements are also covered.

On the first day of the placement the allocated buddy gives the student a detailed tour of the branch. The student has a one-to-one meeting with the branch manager or the buddy to discuss in detail the planned schedule of activity for the week. Other matters covered include the code of conduct, a declaration of secrecy and health and safety briefing. *The Face 2 Face* programme manager believes that assigning a buddy to each student is good practice and can help to improve the student’s performance throughout the placement. She says *“Students often feel quite overwhelmed and lost the first time they experience the workplace. That’s why it is important for them to have a mentor who can help them feel comfortable and provide coaching that allows the student to fulfil their potential”*.

The students are made aware that their performance will be assessed at the end of the week on basis of:

- Timekeeping
- Learning ability
- Appearance
- Motivation
- Relationship with other employees
- Relationship with branch manager
- Ability to follow/seek guidance and
- Ability to work in group/team.

The student receives a group organisation chart and where branch banking fits into the group is explained. After the induction, the student is required to complete basic health and safety training. The student will generally shadow the buddy thereafter for rest of the first day, with the staff member explaining their own role and how this fits into the activities at the branch. At the end of the first day, the branch manager conducts an informal review of the day with the student to ensure they feel comfortable with the plan for the week and to address any concerns.

## Range of activities undertaken

During the week, students are involved in tasks that require use of a range of skills:

**Mystery shopper** – This involves the student researching and comparing some generic banks products such as Student Accounts. The student is asked to read all the literature collected and prepare a five-minute informal presentation addressing which product they would choose and why. This presentation is delivered during a daily branch team meeting.

**Observation** (dealing with staff) – The student watches how staff deal with customers to ensure they apply RBS guidelines, for example, greeting the customer by name, using their name throughout and asking if there is anything else they can help with. Before the task the student is briefed on the importance of dealing with customers in an appropriate manner. The student completes an assessment checklist, detailing which behaviours were exhibited by the member of staff. This is discussed with the staff member when they have finished dealing with the customer.

**Observation** (branch presentation) – This activity centres on the layout and tidiness of the branch. Before the task the student is briefed on the importance of presentation of the branch in conveying the right image of the organisation to customers. It involves completing a checklist and detailing observations about the general presentation of the branch, both inside and outside. For example, are the leaflets neat and tidy? Are all walkways clear? The results of the review are discussed with the branch manager.

**Stationery review** – The student conducts a review of the stationery store. This includes ensuring the all the forms are up to date (ie the current versions), there is sufficient stock and returning excess stock to head office. Beforehand, the student is briefed on the importance for both customer service and cost control of keeping the right amount of current stationery. It is made clear that where excess stock is returned, the branch receives a ‘credit’ to its results – so this can have a real commercial benefit for the branch.

**Customer care** – The student shadows the customer services officer greeting and dealing with customers. The student may also spend time shadowing a cashier or customer

advisor and, with the customer's permission, may sit in on bank interviews. In the latter case, the advisor will talk the student through why certain system entries and paperwork are required.

Usually, one day a week the branches have a delayed opening to allow time for staff training. The student attends the training session and may later be asked to speak to a selection of staff members, using a checklist to ensure that each has understood the key messages.

All the tasks that the student undertakes would otherwise be done by permanent members of staff. According to the *Face 2 Face* manager, *"In our experience students want to contribute. It's our responsibility to give them the opportunity to do so, by treating them like responsible adults and giving them tasks to complete independently"*.

### Providing feedback

At the end of the week the student completes a feedback form aimed at establishing in particular whether the placement met their expectations, was relevant to their studies and helped them develop new skills. The feedback form provides the basis for discussion at a debrief meeting with the branch manager. The aim of this meeting is to *"...help the students learn from the experience by asking probing questions to draw out how they felt the placement helped them and what new skills they have acquired"*.

The student is also asked for their views on how the branch might improve its customer service. During the meeting the manager completes the performance evaluation and presents the student with a *Face 2 Face with Finance* record of achievement certificate.

### Benefits to the organisation

Work experience is viewed as an opportunity to promote the RBS (and group) brands to the student population but also, very importantly, to make a worthwhile contribution to education and the community. In addition, it is considered important in promoting branch banking as a career. The scheme opens up opportunities for the personal development of staff, helping them to develop their skills in dealing with new people and sales staff in developing the clarity of their communication.

## CASE STUDY 12

# Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery

**Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery Ltd has operated – under various identities – at its present site in Lincoln for over 50 years. It is the base for the design and manufacture of world-class gas turbines for the oil and gas industry and industrial power generation. The Lincoln business has an annual turnover of more than £300m and employs over 2,300 people. A major exporter operating in 88 countries, the company provides its customers with expertise covering all aspects of industrial power plant technology.**

In recent years the company has invested significantly in fostering links with local schools and education providers. It has established a good relationship with Lincolnshire and Rutland Education and Business Partnership, which provides guidance on work experience requirements and procedures. The Lincolnshire and Rutland EBP informs the company about local schools seeking placements and the times when these are required. Students are then put forward to the company by local schools.

### **Enhancing the image of engineering**

The company's work experience programme for 14 to 16 year-olds has been running for over 20 years. It is aimed principally at combating negative stereotypes of manufacturing and promoting engineering as an attractive career option, providing students with a positive insight into the world of work. Most placements are therefore based in the design department or manufacturing departments of the production line. In the 2005/06 school year, the company took on 70 students, the vast majority of whom undertook a five-day placement.

Work experience forms a major part of the company's initiatives to foster local education links, but it is by no means the only programme. For example, the company also runs teacher placements to provide teachers with a practical context to use as part of the science curriculum and to help them promote a positive image of science and technology careers.

### **Value of application forms**

Students are required to complete a one-side application form designed by the company specifically for work experience placements. The form requires, among other things, that students identify the subjects they are studying at

school, the type of work experience they would prefer and helps them assess their own strengths and weaknesses. The company views the application form as an important step in encouraging students to think about how to present themselves to a prospective employer and how best to convey this, using their written communication skills. Indeed, for many students this will be the first time they have had to think about their skills and attributes in the context of employment and how to express this when filling in an application form.

The application form is also used by the company to ensure that the work experience placement is tailored as far as possible to the individual, reflecting the student's requirements. For example, if a student is studying a GCSE in engineering, the placement will be targeted to complement the syllabus. If the student expresses a desire, say, 'to work with their hands', they would be offered a placement in assembly as opposed, for example, to design. The work experience co-ordinator sees the application form as a beneficial tool for both parties: *"The students gain valuable experience in communicating their strengths and it allows the company to ensure that the right students with an interest in engineering benefit from what we have to offer"*.

The company phones students who are selected to discuss and agree the details of their placement. The specifics of the placement, such as dress code, working hours and activities, are confirmed in a letter to the student in advance of the start date. Students are encouraged to contact the company should they have any queries, providing an opportunity to practise their oral communication skills and telephone manner.

### Treating those on placements like employees

In advance of students beginning work experience, all staff in the relevant departments are made aware of their names, how long they will be with the company and what their main duties will be. The philosophy at Siemens is that the student should be viewed as *"...someone who has come to do a job and is therefore treated as any normal employee would be in the real world in terms of discipline, punctuality and their attitude to work"*.

On their first day, students are introduced to the appropriate departmental manager assigned as their supervisor. The supervisor runs through a health and safety briefing and introduces the students to the rest of the team and the area where they will be working. Students undertake real work tasks during the placement that add value – such as tightening bolts within turbine assembly or setting specifications for automated machines – not artificial exercises designed to fill their time. The importance of completing the task correctly is emphasised in terms of the product being in the required state for the worker carrying out the next process on the production line.

During the placement, the students work closely with colleagues within their assigned team and are supervised by their assigned manager. In all other aspects they are treated like full-time employees. The importance of teamworking and self-management skills, such as being punctual, are continually reinforced. Students are therefore included in team building exercises and events such as inter-departmental football games or team briefings as they occur. The work experience co-ordinator observes that *"One of the things that students seem to enjoy most is being part of the team and treated like one of the gang. I think this gives the students a sense of belonging and encourages them to take ownership because they want to help out their colleagues"*.

### Reviewing progress

Throughout the work experience placement, the student is required to complete a logbook or student record about the activities undertaken and the skills learnt or applied. The student record is supplied by the local EBP and forms the basis of a leaving/debrief interview conducted on the last day of the placement. At the end of the week, the assigned manager completes and signs-off the evaluation section of the logbook. This is reviewed for completeness and appropriate detail by a member of the HR team in advance of the leaving/debrief interview. The key driver here for the company is that feedback on the pupil's performance could prove critical for recruitment if the student later decides to apply for an apprenticeship.

The leaving interview is attended by the student, their teacher and a member of the HR team. The students are asked for feedback on whether they would consider pursuing a career in engineering and what the company can do to

improve its work experience programme. The HR representative will also run through the various skill sections of the student log book (eg communication, IT, working with others) and ask the students to reflect on what they did and learnt, what they enjoyed/disliked most and how they think they performed. The company's emphasis here is to establish a two-way dialogue and build on positive feedback from the manager in order to foster the student's confidence.

The company views a successful placement as one giving the student sufficient insight into the world of engineering and industry to help them determine whether or not a career in engineering could be suitable for them. The senior management believes this is only possible if the students are fully integrated into their assigned work teams and departments, and are treated as far as possible like normal employees. By giving the students practical insight into the world of work, Siemens also aims to raise the aspirations of young people and instil in them a positive attitude to work.

### Benefits for the company

The company sees the main benefit of its work experience programme as establishing recruitment links and widening the local pool of potential employees. For example, in 2005, 19% of newly recruited apprentices had been on work experience at the company. Between 2004 and 2006, applications for apprenticeships increased by 38%, attributed by management largely to the company's investment in education links. This recruitment channel is of strategic importance for the business in Lincoln and is viewed by senior management as *"...competency management for the future"*.

Also significant are the personal development opportunities for staff involved in the supervision of work placement students. Staff who might otherwise have never been given such an opportunity are able to develop and apply, among others, supervisory, leadership and communication skills. This form of employee involvement has *"...inspired a real culture change where employees are encouraged to take ownership of their career and motivated to apply for team-leading job opportunities"*.

## 7 Employability: the story so far

**The research conducted for this report provides evidence on the employability competencies that employers look for in school leavers. The CBI's current thinking on employability is set out in section 2. But the subject has a much longer history. The purpose of this section is to look briefly at previous work on defining what is meant by employability and the attributes, skills and knowledge that constitute employability. We also look at some key studies on work experience and its practical operation.**

Employability and, to a lesser extent, work experience are areas on which a growing number of studies have been conducted. This literature review is not intended to cover all previous research. Instead it aims to deal with the main issues by reference to the more enduring studies identified. Below we look at work on:

- Definitions of employability
- Attributes, skills and knowledge that constitute employability
- Characteristics and effectiveness of work experience.

We conclude with a brief assessment of the main existing guides on work experience. In developing the ideas set out in section 2, we have of course had regard to this extensive bank of earlier work.

### What does employability mean?

In 1998, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE – now Department for Education and Skills) noted that employability was central to the strategic direction of the department. But the department also recognised that the term ‘employability’ lacked clarity and precision as an operational concept because of its use in a variety of different contexts with a range of meanings. As a consequence,

the DfEE commissioned a review of the relevant literature, supplemented by discussions with departmental officials, in order to come up with a definition and framework for employability to help inform future policy. Hillage and Pollard<sup>5</sup> of the Institute for Employment Studies conducted this work.

Hillage and Pollard noted that while there is no single definition of employability, their review of the literature suggested that employability is about work and the ability to be employed – gaining initial employment, maintaining employment and obtaining new employment – and also the quality of such work or employment. The study concluded that: *“In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work”*.

The emphasis on the sustainability of employment is clear. Employability is not just about having a job, it is about the having the ability to move between, and be effective in, different jobs. Indeed, in 2002 Lees<sup>6</sup> noted that:

“When seeking a definition, it is important to establish the difference between employability and employment. Employment refers to having a job, whilst employability, or being employable, refers to the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace.”

Indeed, the importance of the sustainability of employment was summed up well by Peter Hawkins in his 1999 work, *The Art of Building Windmills*:<sup>7</sup>

*“To be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure”*.

The CBI contributed to the employability debate in the late 1990s, recognising the increasing importance of the term and the need for a clearer definition to provide a focus for

<sup>5</sup> Hillage, J. & Pollard, E. (1998) *Employability: Developing a Framework for Policy Analysis*. Research Brief 85. London: Department for Education and Employment.

<sup>6</sup> Lees, D. (2002). *Graduate Employability – Literature Review*. Learning and Teaching Support Network Resources Database.

<sup>7</sup> Hawkins, P. (1999) *The Art of Building Windmills*. Liverpool: Graduate into Employability Unit, University of Liverpool

policy. The CBI<sup>8</sup> proposed the following definition as a basis for consultation and discussion:

*“Employability is the possession by an individual of the qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby help to realise his or her aspirations and potential in work”.*

The definition was developed against the backdrop of increasing globalisation and technological change and reflects the importance of having the skills necessary to survive in a rapidly changing employment market. The CBI discussion document set out a list of the qualities and competencies (see below) envisaged in the definition, which included up-to-date, job-specific skills and experience. This reflects the fact that the employability definition was set in the context of the characteristics required of the existing workforce, rather than new entrants to the job market such as graduates and school leavers.

Of immediate relevance to new entrants to the job market is the definition used by the authors involved in the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT), a group funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Focused on those entering work from higher education, it defines employability as:

*“A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”.*<sup>9</sup>

### What are the attributes, skills and knowledge that constitute employability?

In 1999, Peter Hawkins looked at the results of five years of employer surveys and, based on that review, suggested the following bundles of employability skills:

- Self-reliance skills – self-management, self-awareness, pro-activity, willingness to learn, self-promotion, networking and planning action
- People skills – teamworking, interpersonal skills, oral communication, leadership, customer orientation and foreign language
- Generalist skills – problem-solving, flexibility, business acumen, IT/computer literacy, numeracy and commitment

- Specialist skills – occupational skills, technical skills, understanding commercial goals, company-related expertise and strategic planning skills.

The study focused on the skills required by graduates but, nonetheless, there are clearly themes emerging that are relevant to all employees – for example, self-management, teamworking and communication. It is difficult, however, to accept specialist skills as an element of generic employability competencies. By their nature, they are related to specific roles. Equally, a foreign language may be increasingly desirable, but is by no means a core skill required by all new entrants to the job market.

In 2002, in a submission to a Scottish Executive review, CBI Scotland<sup>10</sup> summarised the core qualities and competencies that make up employability as follows:

- Positive attitudes compatible with work opportunities such as a desire to learn, to apply that learning, to improve and take advantage of change and to make a difference
- Values such as honesty and personal integrity
- The basic skills of literacy and numeracy
- The defined core skills of communication, numeracy, ICT, working with others and problem solving
- Customer service skills
- Relevant job specific skills and knowledge
- The ability to manage one’s own learning and career.

Members of the Scottish business community were asked to comment on the relevance of this ‘employability template’, which was based on the CBI’s work in the late 1990s. The overwhelming view was that the template was still broadly valid, although some respondents suggested the possible addition of ‘flexibility’ to the list. Increasing emphasis was also expected in future on aspects such as customer service skills (where the customer may be either external and internal to the business) and IT skills.

In Wales, the 2003 Skills Survey<sup>11</sup> conducted by the Future Skills Wales Partnership sought the views of 6,000 companies and individuals on the use of generic skills such as communication, teamworking and leadership in the workplace. The participating companies were selected at random to represent the country as a whole. The survey was conducted by telephone and included questions about the employers’ opinions regarding the skills needed for their

<sup>8</sup> *In Search of Employability* (1998). London: CBI.

<sup>9</sup> *Are Your Students Employable?*. Briefings on Employability 2. ESECT.

<sup>10</sup> *Determined to Succeed – A Review of Enterprise in Education: Evidence Report* (2002). Annexe 8: CBI Employability Template. Scottish Executive.

<sup>11</sup> *Generic Skills Survey* (2003). Prepared by Experian Business Strategies and MORI on behalf of the Future Skills Wales Partnership.



organisation both from within their workforce and the wider labour market. Employers were asked about the skill level they expected for a variety of skills in relation to a specific, randomly selected occupation at their business establishment. The levels were defined as ‘not required’, ‘basic’, ‘intermediate’, ‘high’ and ‘advanced’.

The survey found that across all occupations employers said they most wanted people who can understand customer needs, follow instructions, communicate well, work in teams, show initiative, be adaptable and flexible, and have the ability to learn. The percentages of employers demanding these skills at high and advanced levels are set out in Exhibit 26.

While literacy and numeracy did not top employers’ priorities, the study noted that few employers do not require literacy and numeracy skills from their employees. The research also found that the fastest growing needs expected for the future were IT skills and the ability to organise personal learning and development.

### Work experience – aims and effectiveness

Our own survey results have shown that there can be wide ranging benefits for employers engaged in providing work experience programmes. Involvement in work experience can help raise the profile of the employer in the community and demonstrate that it takes its corporate social responsibilities seriously. An IDS study<sup>12</sup> in 2004 also observes that students can add value during their placements by bringing a fresh perspective and undertaking projects that would not otherwise get done.

Survey research conducted by the IRS<sup>13</sup> asked employers what their organisation hoped to achieve by offering work placements. The results, detailed in Exhibit 27, suggest that employers see establishing links with potential future employees and making a contribution to society as the top two benefits of providing work experience. Employers are also committed to broader business-education links, and over a third of the employers surveyed regard work experience programmes as providing an opportunity to develop the mentoring skills of employees.

A survey of businesses in Wales in 2004<sup>14</sup> found the vast majority maintained links of some kind with secondary

schools, targeting the 14-16 age group. Work experience placements were by far the most popular form of engagement, with 80% of respondents offering these. But despite this commitment to work experience, employers in the survey believed they had been only marginally successful in achieving their aims, pointing to room for improving the effectiveness of work experience programmes. More positively, however, employers surveyed in Wales cited significant benefits deriving from their involvement with work experience and education providers more broadly – including improved employability and staff morale (see Exhibit 28).

Work experience should have a number of important benefits for students. For many, the placement will represent their first real contact with the world of work. Placements also present an opportunity for students with specific career interests to gain first-hand knowledge of what working in that sector could entail and the roles they might be able to undertake. According to QCA research, 79% of key stage 4 teachers saw work experience as the most important aspect of work-related learning activities for students.<sup>15</sup>

A KPMG/CIPD survey<sup>16</sup> in 2006 found that 73% of employers believe that providing work experience can improve the quality of school-leavers and help to close the employability gap. Work experience can also be effective in developing pupils understanding of soft skills – for example the ability to communicate with others and work effectively in a team – and their application in the workplace. According to a survey by Edge,<sup>17</sup> the top three skills gained by students from work experience were teamworking (75%), communication skills (69%) and punctuality (63%).

#### EXHIBIT 26

#### Skills needed for work

Source: Future Skills Wales Partnership

Skill	%*
Understanding customer needs	80
Ability to follow instructions	75
Communication	73
Teamworking	72
Adaptability/flexibility	71
Showing initiative	70
Ability to learn	66

\* Establishments expecting high and advanced competency

<sup>12</sup> *Work Placements* (2004). IDS HR Study 774. Incomes Data Services.

<sup>13</sup> *An Experience Worth Repeating*. *IRS Employment Review* Issue 853, August 2006.

<sup>14</sup> *Companies and Classrooms* (2004). CBI Wales.

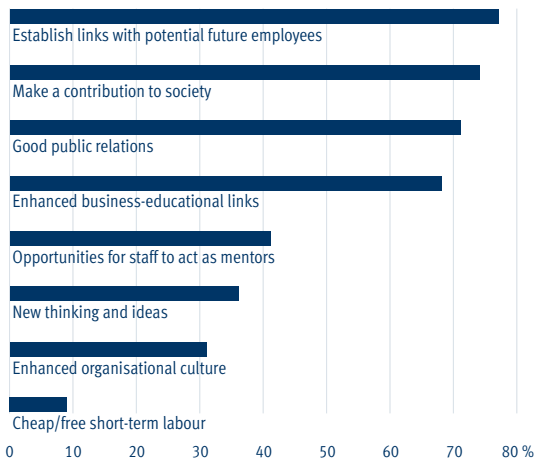
<sup>15</sup> *Work-related Learning Baseline Study* (2004). Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

<sup>16</sup> *Labour Market Outlook: Quarterly Survey Report* (Summer 2006). KPMG/CIPD.

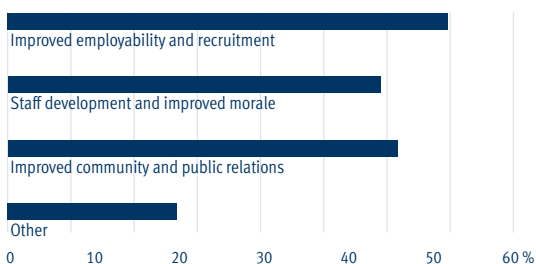
<sup>17</sup> *Practical Learning: Challenging the Education System* (2005). London: Edge.

**EXHIBIT 27 Organisations' aims in offering work experience placements**

Source: IRS

**EXHIBIT 28 Benefits gained from links with education providers**

Source: CBI Wales



The evidence illustrates that most students are broadly positive about their work experience placement. According to the Edge survey, 82% of students enjoyed their work experience placement – very much in line with results from the CBI student survey detailed in section 5. Moreover Ofsted's findings<sup>18</sup> illustrated that the majority of pupils who had undertaken work experience felt that it had helped them to understand the world of work and how business works. This encompassed knowing what it was like to commute and turn up on time to work, to do a full week's work and how to present themselves appropriately and form part of a team.

Students tended to benefit more from placements where they were linked to the subjects they enjoyed at school or specific career interests that they had, according to the Ofsted survey. They were more likely to have gained a valuable insight into that career and, in particular, the skills and qualifications needed for success in that career path. However, the 2004 Ofsted survey found that in three in five placements, the link between work experience and vocational or other school courses was non-existent. Only 50% of students collected evidence of what they did throughout their placement for later use in class. And according to the survey conducted by Edge, 70% of students said work experience did not help them to understand better the work they were doing at school.

Most students undertake some form of general preparation in class before commencing their work experience placement. However, the evidence suggests that more preparation should go into making sure the students understand what they should be getting out of the experience – particularly in terms of their individual skills and learning requirements. Schools do not consistently set individual learning objectives. Consequently, there is often little link between their learning curriculum and the activities undertaken on work experience.

**Current guidance on work experience**

Employability competencies should be at the heart of work experience. Crucial to achieving this is providing good practical guidance for students, teachers and employers demonstrating how employability skills can be reinforced as part of work experience programmes. This CBI report aims to do just that.

There exist many types of guidance for employers, schools and students on work experience. In particular, there is useful guidance available on the processes and logistics of work experience. Existing guidance, however, pays only limited attention to employability competencies and how best to reinforce these through work experience programmes.

Below we provide a flavour of three of the best-known guides to work experience.

<sup>18</sup> *Increased Flexibility Programme: Improving Work Experience* (2004). HMI 2220. Ofsted.

## Work Experience: A Guide for Employers by the DfES

This guide<sup>19</sup> outlines the legislative and policy context. Its function and value therefore are to summarise for employers the broad strategic context rather than provide guidance on the detail of providing placements.

It illustrates the benefits for employers of conducting work experience placements. In general, however, the guide is defined by its attention to issues surrounding compliance – for example, what students are allowed to do on work experience and employers' obligations under health and safety and insurance legislation. The guide features a useful chapter on how to manage the logistics of a placement appropriately. This includes providing advice to employers on setting objectives for their programme, planning the placement in advance, briefing students on what they will be doing, and providing a debriefing and review at the end of the placement. The guide also signposts employers to other information sources and the issues that should be taken into account in the provision of work experience.

## Company Guide by the National Council for Work Experience

The document<sup>20</sup> focuses principally on providing good practice guidance for employers on how they should go about organising and structuring work experience to maximise its contribution to the business and effectiveness for the student. The guide also sets out the business case for providing work experience. It indicates some of the key skills that students on work experience might want to acquire – for example application of number, IT skills, team working, social skills, communication, problem solving and business awareness.

## Work Experience and Work-Related Learning Document by The National EBP Network

This pamphlet<sup>21</sup> is not intended to be a comprehensive, in-depth guide on how to plan and undertake work experience placements. Instead, the document provides an accessible guide to further information and resources that can help support stakeholders wanting to get involved in work experience. It also takes school teachers and work experience co-ordinators through the basic components that should be undertaken in preparation, during and after a work experience placement. A key strength of the guide is its emphasis on students using a logbook throughout their placement and having the opportunity to reflect on what has been learnt in

a formal debriefing session. The accompanying box summarises the key suggestions outlined in the guide for reinforcing the learning experience through an effective debriefing.

### Suggested ways to reinforce learning through debriefing and reflection

Debriefing – this can provide students with the opportunity to:

- Write a letter of thanks to the employer reflecting on the value of the placement
- Review how well their learning objectives have been met
- Share experiences with peers
- Review employer comments
- Give presentations, for example to peer groups and at parents and information evenings
- Write a report, which could be linked to GCSE course work.

Longer term review of impact – this enables students to:

- Update CVs with new skills and experiences
- Review progress made against their individual learning plan and revise where necessary
- Measure impact on achievement
- Complete assignments where appropriate
- Progress any curriculum links.

Source: NEBPN

### Other online resources

There is a growing array of guidance and advice available online. As well as the sources and guides already mentioned, it is worth for example exploring the website of Trident, the leading provider of placements ([www.trident-edexcel.co.uk](http://www.trident-edexcel.co.uk)).

<sup>19</sup> *Work Experience: A Guide for Employers* (2004). The DfES's publication is very useful, offering employers guidance and practical advice on a variety of issues relating to work experience, including how to structure arrangements to ensure quality placements. The guide is available at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications)

<sup>20</sup> National Council for Work Experience, Prospects House, Booth Street East, Manchester. M13 9EP. Tel 0845 6015510. [www.work-experience.org.uk](http://www.work-experience.org.uk)

<sup>21</sup> The National EBP Network, 188 Main Street, New Greenham Park, Thatcham, Berkshire, RG19 6HW. Tel 01635 279914. [www.nebpn.org](http://www.nebpn.org)

# Annexe:

## Employability and work experience – a quick guide for employers and students

We conclude with a quick and easy-to-use guide for employers and students. The guide is available as a PDF download from the CBI website ([www.cbi.org.uk](http://www.cbi.org.uk)).

The guide is intended to outline, in an easily accessible form, the competencies that make someone employable and ideas for employers on how to improve the development of employability during work experience.

For students, it sets out an employability competencies checklist that can be used throughout the work experience assignment to establish how the various competencies might be important at work, to keep a record of the tasks and activities undertaken and, ultimately, to rate their own abilities. This will help them identify priority areas for development.

# Employability and work experience: a quick guide

Each year thousands of young people go on work experience. It is a great chance to learn about the world of work. And the vast majority thoroughly enjoy their time.

The objectives are that students should learn:

- **Through work**, by having the chance to learn from direct experience of work
- **About work**, acquiring knowledge and understanding of work and enterprise
- **For work**, developing skills for future enterprise and employability.

It is important to make good use of the time. Central to work experience should be the opportunity it presents for students to learn about – and use – the general competencies needed for work. More about the knowledge, skills and attributes that are needed to make someone employable is shown on pages 2 and 3.

Enhancing the employability of school leavers through work experience is a three-way partnership among school, student and employer. It is important that the school sets the tone for the placement and briefs the student about the objectives of doing work experience. It is up to the student to make the most of opportunities to develop during the placement. The role of the employer is to create the right balance of briefing, activities and feedback to ensure the student has the opportunity to practise what is needed to be successful in the workplace. After the placement, the school should help the student to absorb the lessons of the experience.

## For employers

Page two of this guide sets out the competencies the CBI believes make someone employable. It also gives some ideas for employers on how to build development of employability into work experience programmes.

## For students

Page three of this guide sets out a checklist for use by students. It can be used to help them think about how competencies might be important at work, to keep a record of tasks undertaken during work experience, and ultimately to rate their own abilities.

We urge all those involved in work experience to use this guide to become more demanding –

- More demanding of students so they gain a better grasp of the challenges and opportunities of work
- More demanding of employers to give students an interesting and worthwhile experience.

# For employers: embedding employability in work experience

The competencies the CBI believes make up employability are set out on page four. A positive attitude is the key foundation underpinning these seven competencies:

Self-management – Teamworking – Business and customer awareness – Problem solving – Communication and literacy – Application of numeracy – Application of IT

It is important to embed these competencies in work experience schemes. This can be achieved through appropriate structuring of schemes, including setting employability-based tasks and activities during the placement. Here are some tips.

## Be clear on your objectives

Developing employability should be central to work experience. It should drive the design and content of the scheme. Placements can also be a chance for students to learn about a particular sector or potential career.

## Use the induction session to set the focus

Explain what is meant by ‘employability’ and the importance of those competencies. Cover details of how and when the students’ performance will be assessed and agree how they will provide feedback on what they have learnt. Do they understand what competencies are important for the world of work and why?

## Feedback is key to embedding the learning

An interim appraisal can be a useful opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved in the first part of the placement. A leaving interview is a chance for the student to receive feedback and to explain what they have learnt – with a particular focus on which competencies they believe are important for working life and why.

Examples of tasks to help develop competencies:

- **Self-management:** clocking in/out, keeping timesheets, understanding accountabilities and expectations, keeping a log of activities
- **Teamworking:** attending internal meetings, team briefings, working closely with a ‘buddy’, sharing basic tasks such as getting teas/coffees
- **Business and customer awareness:** learning about the organisation’s business strategy and performance, observing or assisting with answering customer queries face-to-face, over the telephone or by email, drafting letters of response
- **Problem solving:** investigating and responding to customer queries, assisting an IT helpdesk, setting up spreadsheets, interpreting diagrams
- **Communication and literacy:** completing an application form before the placement, drafting and proofing documents, drafting letters, faxes and emails, observing and making phone calls, attending presentations and briefings, writing a report on the placement
- **Application of numeracy:** analysing receipts and calculating expenses, working with spreadsheets, measuring and taking readings, conducting stock-counts and completing stock sheets, checking orders received against delivery notes, weighing goods
- **Application of IT:** updating databases, preparing a presentation using PowerPoint, conducting internet-based research.

# Checklist for students

At induction, in discussion with the employer, the student can identify and document when the various employability competencies might be important at work (second column). The student can keep a record of tasks and activities undertaken during the placement that contribute to the development of competencies (third column).

At the end of the placement the student should be encouraged to reflect on what they have learnt – as part of this they can rate their own abilities (end column). The completed checklist can be a useful record of achievement to take back to school and can help in identifying areas of personal development.

Competency	When might you use these skills at work?	What activities needed this competency during work experience?	How do you rate your skills? (1 = poor, 5 = excellent)
<b>Self-management</b> Accept responsibility, flexibility, resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.			
<b>Team working</b> Respecting others, co-operating, negotiating/persuading, contributing to discussions, awareness of interdependence with others.			
<b>Business &amp; customer awareness</b> Basic understanding of key drivers for business success – including importance of innovation, taking calculated risks and profit – and the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty.			
<b>Problem solving</b> Analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.			
<b>Communication &amp; literacy</b> Application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning.			
<b>Application of numeracy</b> Manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (eg measuring, weighing, estimating and applying formulae).			
<b>Application of IT</b> Basic IT skills, including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines.			

# What employability means

The CBI defines employability as “A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy”. The competencies that make up employability are illustrated below:



## Employability through partnership – school, student and employer

“Work experience is about getting a taste of the reality of the world of work. It’s about getting them to think on their feet, use their initiative and act responsibly in a completely new environment. The aspiration is that they come back motivated to do the best they can in school.”

**School work experience co-ordinator**

“It felt good to be treated like an adult and in the same way that employees were treated. I enjoyed being given some responsibility because it helped me to build my confidence and I felt like I was contributing to the business by helping to get things done.” **Student**

“One of the things that students seem to enjoy most is being part of the team and treated like one of the gang.”

I think this gives the students a sense of belonging and encourages them to take ownership because they want to help out their colleagues.”

**Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery**

“I learnt a huge amount about working life and the skills required in the workplace and I feel that I have greatly improved my interpersonal skills. I think that having a good induction is really important to make the most of the opportunity. I knew what was expected of me and it helped me focus my mind on the tasks I was doing and the skills I was using.” **Student**

“In our experience students want to contribute. It’s our responsibility to give them the opportunity to do so by treating them like responsible adults and giving them tasks to complete independently.” **The Royal Bank of Scotland**