



VET & BUSINESS
PARTNERSHIP

CASE STUDY | Ireland

Work Based Learning Externship for Teachers and Trainers in CDETb.

Background

In 2015 the Skills4Work project team made up of members from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Germany and Slovenia identified key principles that contribute towards supporting a quality Work Experience / WBL model.

Five Work Based Learning (WBL) Principles were highlighted as being important to the Skills4Work project and relevant to all the partners.

The WBL Principles included:

1. develop the knowledge, experience and skills of all teachers and trainers working in the field of work-based learning
2. ensure that learning institutions and employers collaborate effectively so that they are regularly sharing information
3. ensure that all learners have the skills and opportunities to reflect critically on their participation in work based learning
4. provide clarity around the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in work based learning
5. develop reliable and valid assessments for work based learning.

In 2016, to support principle 1: *Develop the knowledge, experience and skills of all teachers and trainers working in the field of work-based learning*, CDETb piloted a Work Based Learning (WBL) Model of Continuing Professional Development for teachers and trainers.

The action agreed to help to achieve this was to:

- support teachers and trainers with the implementation of work experience programmes and improve the relevance of what they do in the classroom with learners in preparation for the workplace by setting up and piloting an 'Externship Programme' for CDETb teachers and trainers.

Most people are familiar with the term 'internship' which involves first hand experiential learning and is typically a period of time an individual spends working in another organisation with the objective of learning and developing from the experience. Internships and Externships are similar in that they provide temporary work experience to help individuals gain skills and relevant experience in specific field areas. Internships often involve some form of payment while externships are not usually paid. An externship is generally much shorter in duration than an internship and because of its short duration can sometimes involve more job shadowing than hands-on experience.

Purpose of the CDET B Externship Model

The Externship Model was designed to support the professional development of CDET B Teachers and Trainers to:

- expand their knowledge, skills and confidence (academic, technical , 21st Century etc.) and make connections between the curriculum, programme or subject they teach and the workplace
- learn through direct experience about needs, realities, trends, challenges and practices in different institutions or work environments
- develop an understanding of workplace practices to ensure that what they do in the classroom with learners is more informed, meaningful and up to date so that learners are better prepared for current, emerging and future career opportunities and meeting employer / industry needs
- expand their capacity to implement meaningful and engaging teaching and learning methodologies in the classroom by drawing on case studies and real world work examples
- engage meaningfully with employers and develop mutually beneficial working partnerships and understandings about workplace and education requirements and expectations.

Length of an Externship

While CDET B piloted one and two day externships for a small group of teachers, an externship for a teacher or trainer can in theory be any length from one day to several weeks or months and can take place at different times of the year depending on the arrangements possible at local level e.g. during periods when learners are out on work placements, at the start of the academic year before classes commence, in term time when a visiting guest business / industry representative might cover classes or during holiday periods when a teacher or trainer might wish to make their own personal professional development arrangements. The length and scheduling will in practice be influenced and decided on by several factors or considerations.

Some of these might include:

- the time of the year and the length of time a teacher, tutor or trainer can realistically be released from their college or centre if the externship is being scheduled during term time
- the arrangements that can be put in place for the learners while the teacher or trainer is participating in an externship programme to minimise disruption of their learning
- the type of skills, learning or / experience the externship will provide and how much time is needed to realistically achieve this
- the number of teachers or trainers participating in externships and any overlapping periods
- the level of commitment and time the host placement / employer can dedicate to the externship.

Types of Externships

While the pilot included externships in areas such as financial services, construction and education, externships opportunities are diverse, for example:

- placements in Industry / business linked to specific programmes being delivered by teachers and trainers
- international study trips / exchanges to gain cultural insights and practical experience of different systems
- placements in educational institutions e.g. for the purpose of comparing approaches, standards, benchmarking etc.
- observerships e.g. involving observation and work shadowing.

Sourcing an Externship

Externships were sourced from existing partnerships that CDETБ colleges and centres had. As the model is rolled out to more teachers and trainers in 2016/17 strategies might need to involve:

- approaching a company or organisation that the college / centre already has a relationship with e.g. through student work experience placements, supplier of goods or services to the college / centre etc.
- word of mouth e.g. by talking to friends, family or colleagues to seek recommendations or contacts
- making contact with professional associations or networks
- conducting keyword searches on the internet e.g. targeting specific company types and following up with a personal contact
- attending exhibitions or job fairs and talking to personnel on stands
- making connections through LinkedIn
- getting ideas for companies by reading magazines and newspapers e.g. business sections, advertisements etc. and following up.

The Externship Model in CDETБ

The three key stages of the CDETБ pilot Externship Model:

Stage 1: Planning the Externship

A Teacher or Trainer indicates an interest in participating in an Externship. They identify an area of a programme that they teach (or will be teaching in the future), that they would like to be the focus of their externship e.g. they might identify one or more learning outcomes from a programme.

The Teacher or Trainer completes the *CDETБ Externship Application Form* and uses this as the basis of a preliminary discussion with their Principal, Head of Centre or other appointed person. The form addresses areas such as

- what do you hope to achieve by undertaking this externship?
- what programme module will this externship support? How will it link with the Learning Outcomes?
- how will this externship benefit your Learners?
- what provision might be made for your learners during your externship?

As part of the discussion both address how learners might be supported when the Teacher or Trainer is away on the externship e.g.

- are the learners on work experience themselves at this time?
- what type of substitution arrangements can be put in place if needed?
- can the externship be done before / after courses start / finish?

During the meeting if there is agreement in principle to the externship taking place, an action plan is drawn up using the *CDETБ Externship Action Plan Template*. This sets out and agrees how the externship will be further progressed and implemented. A potential host company / organisation is contacted and a plan for the externship is agreed. A named person is identified who will be the point of contact and mentor in the company / organisation. Goals and expectations are clarified and agreed for all parties.

Stage 2: During the Externship

To maximise the externship opportunity teachers and trainers are advised to engage as appropriate in a range of activities e.g.

- visit different departments within the company / organisation to get a good overview of the roles, range of work, facilities etc. available
- arrange for HR to provide an insight into recruitment, roles / positions, skills needs, pay and conditions, training, performance review processes, policies and procedures etc.
- request resources that might give an insight into the company / organisation e.g. annual reports, brochures, articles, online links, PowerPoint presentations etc.
- job Shadow in different sections / departments or with employees with different roles
- keep a log / prepare a presentation that can be used on return to the college / centre to share learning with other teachers / tutors / trainers
- build a portfolio of resources that can be used with learners in the classroom.
- provide the company / organisation with knowledge of the FET sector and the opportunities for employing FET graduates and further networking opportunities.

Teachers and trainers are also provided with a toolkit of *Sample Questions to ask during an Externship*. These are useful either before and / or during an Externship to help to gain insight into the host placement and maximise opportunities for learning.

Teachers and Trainers are also advised to:

- be aware of and sensitive to employer needs and wishes and workplace requirements
- be realistic about what can be achieved in the time available, balanced with making the most of the opportunity
- keep a log and record experiences
- reflect on how things are going and how the externship is potentially supporting the delivery of a programme to learners and what new ideas, case studies, approaches etc. might be implemented in the classroom
- think about what peer sharing could take place with colleagues or return to the college / centre
- complete an evaluation using the template CDET *Evaluation of the Externship*.

Stage 3: After the Externship

Teachers and Trainers are advised to

- contact the host company / employer to thank them for the opportunity
- invite the host company organisation to complete an evaluation form using *Evaluation of Externship by Host Company / Organisation*
- reflect on learning and skills achieved during the externship
- complete the evaluation of the externship experience and learning
- disseminate and share the learning experience from the externship at college / centre / organisation level
- make recommendations to management on any aspect of the process that needs adjustment for future externships
- implement the learning from the externship in the classroom with learners.

I have already discussed my externship experience with a number of colleagues and can only highly recommend it, not only from the point of view of teachers CPD but also for the beneficial impact it can have for learners when the output from this experience is discussed, shared and incorporated into teaching methodology.

CDET B Teacher

Time permitting I would suggest considering more of an 'immersion' experience, of longer duration and possibly undertaking some of the tasks that one might expect a learner to be assigned.

CDET B Teacher

Dissemination of learning and national roll out of the Externship Model

Drawing on the Skills4 Work project experiences and in particular CDETBs experiences of externships for teachers and trainers, the Further Education Support Service (FESS) in partnership with the National Network of IT Teachers and with the support of ETBI and SOLAS eCollege, is planning an externship model of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for FET IT teachers and trainers in Autumn 2016. This innovative approach to CPD was presented by FESS at an ETBI QQI Forum where the proposal was met with great enthusiasm and support by all ETB representatives.

The principle aim of the Externship Visiting Programme (EVP), as it will be called, is to provide teachers and trainers with an opportunity to experience and share practices with industry counterparts in the field of learning in which they teach, for collaborating organisations to inform and gain valuable insights into the skills, knowledge and competency that the FET system can provide to future employees and finally to develop a community of practice with other colleagues based on the experiences and relationships developed while on the EVP.

It is envisaged that externship attendees will:

- visit a company / organisation to get an overview of the roles, range of work, facilities etc. available
- become familiar with a range of contemporary and current practices / processes / technologies / methodologies used in organisations today
- develop an insight into recruitment, roles /positions, skills needs, pay and conditions, training, performance review processes, policies and procedures (e.g. Q&A with HR manager)
- engage with and share practices with employees working in relevant fields within the company / organisation (e.g. speed-shadowing) and other colleagues on EVP.
- acquire a portfolio of information that can be used to inform their own teaching and learning when returning to the classroom
- provide the company / organisation with knowledge of the FET sector and the opportunities for employing our graduates and further networking opportunities
- develop a community of practice among the FET sector, which will ultimately lead to higher standards of quality assurance and graduates that are better equipped for direct employment in modern industry.

The primary target audience for this pilot programme will be IT teachers / trainers working in the FET sector. Following learning from this pilot it is hoped to extend it to other field areas e.g. Healthcare, Childcare, and Hospitality.

Process

The Externship Visiting Programme will take place as a pilot with FET IT teachers and trainers over several dates during the academic year 2016/2017 with two to three IT companies involved. Collaborating companies will be requested to facilitate a visiting group of teachers / trainers (circa 10 to 15), and to provide access to suitable staff and facilities.

FET teachers / trainers will be asked to apply for the Externship Visiting Programme. Selection will be based on teaching subject, company suitability, and teacher / trainer purpose statement. Where there are more applicants than places available, a lottery will be held. This initiative will form part of the FESS CPD calendar for 2016/17 and full details will be available on the FESS website www.fess.ie in Autumn 2016.