

CDET B

An Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
City of Dublin Education and Training Board

Work Based Learning in CDET B: Employer Engagement

Booklet 1

June 2016



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- St Kevins College
- Cabra Community College

Work Based Learning in CDETB -Titles in series:

- Booklet 1: Employer Engagement
- Booklet 2: Roles and Responsibilities
- Booklet 3: Developing Learner Soft Skills
- Booklet 4: Completing the Work Experience Supervisors Report
- Booklet 5: Externships for Teachers and Trainers

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Pilot Work Experience / Work Placement Model - Introduction

As part of the Erasmus+ Skills4Work project CDET is piloting a Work Based Learning (WBL) Model of Continuing Professional Development with CDET teachers, tutors and trainers from January 2016.

The key purpose of the model is to develop the knowledge, skills and experience of CDET teachers, tutors and trainers in the field of work-based learning in order to enhance and support the application of programmes and the relevance of what they do in the classroom with learners in preparation for the workplace. One important element of this model is supporting *employer engagement*.

Colleges and training centres have an important part to play in preparing learners for future careers in the world of work and in helping them to acquire general life skills. At present the market place for graduates is dependent upon the economic environment and the skills, knowledge and competencies of the graduate to adapt to this ever changing climate.

As we have learnt from the recent recession employment for life, (or a job for life) is no longer a reality so colleges and training centres need to help their learners develop transferable skillsets so that they are able to adapt to changing working environments.

Meeting the needs of employers and learners can be achieved by ensuring that learners who graduate have achieved the required standard and understanding of their chosen career area with the relevant skills, knowledge and competencies to gain employment. Therefore engagement and constructive relationships between providers and employers must be encouraged, supported and reviewed regularly to ensure that this is achieved.

European Study Visit: Insights and Examples

During CDETBs Erasmus+ study visits to European partners in 2015 and 2016 to look at work based learning, it was clear from discussions and observations that collaboration between employers and Further Education Colleges and Training Centres has increased and, driven by the demand for relevant skills in each of the employment sectors, relationships have been built on.

Outlined below are a sample of insights and examples of practice captured while on the study visits. These demonstrate how some European education providers interact with and manage their relationship with employers.

The practices are based on reasonable and realistic expectations which encourage all parties involved to build long-lasting relationships.

Contact with Business / Employers

Within the education institutions visited during the study visits there was a contact person or a dedicated staff member responsible for relationships with business and business organisations whose duties included:

- Identifying a contact point / person with the employer and business organisation to facilitate engagement
- Understanding employer activities and their key business objectives
- Informing employers about what is happening in colleges and centres to help them understand and appreciate the aims of programmes and training courses. This was achieved through invitations to employers and employer organisations to attend recruitment interviews, open days / evenings and host business meetings
- Providing contacts between the employer / business and lecturer / instructor to facilitate updating each other on areas such as facilities, equipment and curriculum change etc.
- Developing a strategy for reviewing and expanding databases and allowing for the inclusion of new businesses.

Meeting Employer Needs / Expectation in Relation to Programmes

Insights during the study visits on approaches that help to meet employer's needs and expectations in relation to programmes included:

- Where employers or business organisations have been directly involved in the design of a programme their commitment to supporting that program and learners is usually greater
- Involvement with employers and business organisations facilitates colleges and centres to identify skills gaps which can be integrated into a learners programme
- Consideration is given to including additional training identified / required by employees e.g. a unit of learning that would be additional to the requirement of a programme / curriculum
- Through contact with business, education providers gain a better understanding of the standard that employers require learners to achieve
- In the changing jobs market where new skills and knowledge are required it is important that teaching staff have the necessary understanding of what is required of learners to gain employment in specific vocational areas. Interacting with employers and employer groups provides opportunities for teachers, tutors and trainers to update their own knowledge
- Making programmes more relevant can be supported by including:
 - current market statistics
 - linking training to employability
 - involving employers with the delivery of work related aspects of programmes and course activities
 - demonstrating the positive impact that courses can have upon business.

Supporting Employer Engagement

In summary the following key approaches and factors to consider regarding employer include:

- Establishing links with employers and businesses by identifying a single point of contact to co-ordinate engagement between bodies
- Identifying the areas where business organisations and employers can participate / cooperate

- Linking training standards to employer expectations
- Creating a mechanism for feedback from employers.

Factors to consider

- Funding: it takes more time and more staffing than anyone would like to pay for
- Employer coordinators report that they need more time and staff to do the range of different tasks related to employer engagement
- It can be difficult to engage smaller business to participate
- Convincing prospective partners of the benefits of a partnership can be challenging
- Developing trust between the education and training provider and employers takes time and effort
- There can be challenging practicalities involved in introducing modules / units required by employers into courses due to lack of time, facilities, equipment and staff skills (resource limitations)
- The over involvement of some employer and business organisations (bodies insisting that their requirements are priority) and excluding the needs of other smaller bodies
- Education and training providers need to create meaningful opportunities for partnership bodies so that they can provide inputs into programme development and programme delivery
- Education and training providers need to create opportunities for staff to maintain current industry and business knowledge, skills and experience
- Strategies need to be put in place to meet learner's basic skills shortfalls
- Education and training providers need to demonstrate the advantages and value of their institution to employers
- Engagement with employers and business can only occur through a common interest and benefit to all bodies therefore a contact point must be established between employers and business contacts must be encouraged and maintained.

Notes