



# **Professional Work Experience Manual**

March 2018

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# 1. Professional Work Experience

Professional work experience is one of the many activities that can occur as part of Work Integrated Learning (WIL). WIL is the process whereby students learn through experience in practical settings. WIL may be embedded into a course, completed as an extra or co-curricular activity. WIL is an umbrella term and can include activities such as professional work experience, practicums, internships, fieldwork, project-based activities, field education and service learning. Professional work experience allows students to engage in a range of professional activities and experiences built into courses as part of a program of study at USQ.

A quality Work Integrated Learning experience has:

- Meaningful engagement and professional activity that adds value for the student in terms of clear learning outcomes and for the host organisation in terms of project outcomes;
- Induction/orientation and ongoing support for students and supervisors;
- Reflection and debriefing;
- Engagement in special projects or activities with clear learning goals and targeted 'product' outcomes for the host; and
- Relevant and applied assessment underpinning the experience which includes:
  - A commitment by the host organisation to provide meaningful work or activities that link to student learning outcomes and assessment; and
  - Clear expectations for both student and host organisation as to what is to be delivered during the placement.

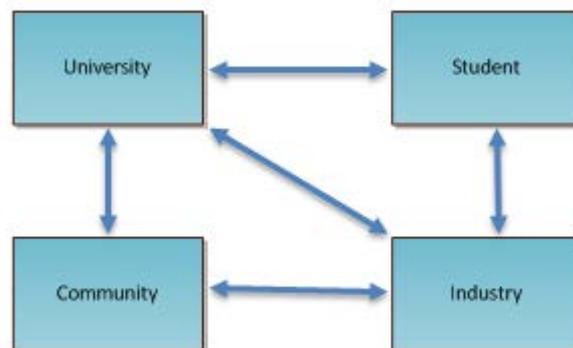
There are many types of professional work experience that a student may undertake depending on their discipline, year of study, course requirements and career goals. Examples include:

- Observing and engaging with professionals in workplace settings through site and field visits in order to produce a report on learning as a result of this observation and engagement;
- Engaging in special projects or activities that enhance learning and skills and value add for the host organisation;
- Shadowing a professional in the workplace in order to examine practice and report on learning and outcomes as a result;
- Undertaking meaningful workplace activities under the guidance of a supervisor and reporting on the experience;
- Conducting research as part of a professional research team; and
- Collaborating and working with a team of professionals to deliver on existing projects.

## 2. Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to articulate the roles and responsibilities for the Host Organisation, Student and Course Examiner as part of the professional work experience activity. This shared understanding is part of our mutual obligation under the [QLD Work Health and Safety Act \(2011\)](#) to consult, cooperate and coordinate.

A professional work experience activity requires a partnership between the student, the University (Course Examiner), industry (Host Organisation) and the community. By looking at the needs and wants of each of the stakeholders, a collaborative program can be initiated that will be sustainable and provide appropriate results. This relationship is represented below.



## 3. The Stages of an Industry Placement

Every industry placement is different depending on the discipline, industry needs, resources, course requirements and experience level of the student. Professional work experience generally follows the three stages shown below.



## 4. Host Organisation – Roles and Responsibilities

Host Supervisors should ensure that placement students receive a proper induction to enable them to integrate into the organisation. Commencing a placement can be an intimidating experience for students and it is important to assist them to make a smooth transition to the workplace. The induction process should include making clear plans for the placement, establishing communication channels, workplace health and safety, values, ethics and an introduction to staff.

It is important that the Host Organisation:

- Provides a suitably qualified and responsible Supervisor who will supervise, provide educational experiences for and, if necessary, participate in the appraisal of the Student;
- Provides information on and access to relevant policies (including workplace health and safety), regulations, rules, procedure manuals, and directions for the use of equipment to the Student and as relevant, to USQ;
- Provides information regarding any licences, approvals, registrations, dress codes, including any uniform and other reasonable requirements relevant to the placement to the student prior to commencement of the placement,
- Ensures that the tasks undertaken by the Student on the placement and the level of supervision of the Student is appropriate, taking into account the Student's skills and level of experience;
- Provides induction, training and orientation (including on workplace health and safety) for the Student on commencement of the placement;
- Ensures students are made aware of legislative requirements, occupational health and safety requirements, security requirements, workplace confidentiality, intellectual property, privacy requirements, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws and any other workplace policies and procedures related to their placements;
- Provides where requested, information, reports or records concerning a safety incident or breach related to the placement and advice on outcomes;
- Provides feedback about the student's performance during the work placement and formally at the end of the placement. Where applicable, this forms part of the student's assessment and should be discussed with the student before any documentation is forwarded to the Course Examiner;
- Contacts the Course Examiner if there are any concerns about the placement; and
- Provides feedback to the University about placements that could improve the University's professional work experience program in the long term.

### 4.1 Pre-placement requirements

Does your facility have any specific needs for student placements, e.g., Blue Cards, pre-requisite course completions?

### 4.2 Managing Performance

A number of factors may impact on a student's performance during placements. These generally relate to:

- Student attitude, communication, professional practice or self-management in the workplace;
- Cultural or linguistic diversity; and
- Health and / or personal issues.

When the Host Organisation identifies a problem with the student's performance and considers them to be at risk of failing, the following steps should be followed:

- Talk to the student;
- Contact the Course Examiner;
- Develop an improvement plan;
- Monitor progress; and
- Maintain confidentiality.

### 4.3 Managing risks associated with placements

New and inexperienced persons are at higher risk in workplaces as they may be:

- Unfamiliar with the work environment and the risks associated with some work processes;
- More susceptible to specific hazards; and
- Less aware than more experienced persons of their workplace rights and responsibilities, and may not have the confidence to speak up about issues that affect them.

Areas for risk management consideration include: health and safety, confidentiality, intellectual property, conflict of interest, access and discrimination, what students may need to disclose and insurance.

### 4.4 Managing Adverse Events

In the context of supervision of students on placement, the term 'adverse events' refers to a range of issues that require risk management. 'Adverse events' in this context generally fall into five main categories.

- Events in which client safety is at risk;
- Events in which student safety is at risk;
- Host Supervisor absence ;
- Student illness or disability; and
- Other student special circumstances.

In the event, that any of the adverse situations identified arise, please contact the Course Examiner or the appropriate contact personnel.

## 5. Student – Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for students as part of a professional work experience include:

- Securing their industry placement for the requisite hours as per the course specification;
- Negotiating with the Host Organisation and/or Host Supervisor to determine duties to be undertaken, objectives to be achieved, and project to be completed during the placement;
- Ensuring all relevant documentation, including the Placement Proposal form and Student Placement Agreement is completed, signed as required and returned to the Course Examiner for final approval prior to commencement of placement;
- Participating actively in the learning process and taking responsibility for their learning including ensuring they obtain adequate feedback on their performance from their Host Supervisor
- Acting as good ambassadors for the University by maintaining the expectations and responsibilities as outlined in the [USQ Student Expectations and Responsibilities Policy](#)
- Behaving in a professional manner at all times and endeavouring to complete to the best of their ability the duties, tasks, and/or project objectives as outlined by the Host Organisation;
- Showing respect and politeness in communications with all persons they interact with in their capacity as a University student and adhering to rules, bylaws, policies and procedures of the facility;
- Maintaining confidentiality and respecting the privacy of information if exposed to sensitive and confidential information;
- Treating any personal or confidential information encountered while undertaking the professional work experience activities as private and confidential, and not disclosing or using the information for personal purposes and abiding by the [Privacy Act 1988](#) (Cth) or [Information Privacy Act 2009 \(Qld\)](#) as relevant;
- Complying with the Organisation's dress code and ensuring that they meet any additional licencing requirements;
- Attending workplace induction and adhering to all workplace health and safety regulations;
- Advising the workplace supervisor of illness or other unforeseen circumstances that require leaving or not attending the workplace;
- Ensuring that students are fit for this placement and able to complete the requirements of this placement. (If there are any concerns, these must be discussed with the Course Examiner prior to signing the Placement Proposal Form); and
- Alerting the University through the Course Examiner or appropriate contact person should any matters arise that might affect their ability to successfully complete the placement.

If students have health concerns which could potentially affect their placement, they are encouraged to discuss their issues with USQ Disability Resources. It may also be appropriate to inform the Course Examiner or Host Supervisor of the circumstances through a confidential discussion. Student Services can provide free, confidential, psychological assistance through USQ Counselling Support.

[Appendix 1](#) provides students with a checklist of activities to assist with tracking their professional work experience requirements. [Appendix 2](#) lists some tips for success in relation to having a successful industry placement.

## 6. Course Examiner

The Course Examiner is a point of reference within the tertiary institution in providing advice and support to the student and Host Organisation in relation to academic or administrative matters relating to the placement. The Course Examiner will also:

- Assess the suitability of the placement, the tasks to be undertaken and the objectives to be met;
- Provide guidance, advice and support to the student and Host Organisation/Supervisor should they have any academic or placement concerns that will affect the student's ability to complete assessment tasks or other concerns such as progress, risk management or confidentiality issues during the placement;
- Support and provide feedback to the student and Host Organisation/Supervisor during the placement;
- Provide accessibility by telephone and email for communication on placements issues and return calls/emails as soon as possible and within 48 hours;
- Discuss issues as they arise with the Host Supervisor and act to resolve problems cooperatively; and
- Disclose any financial or other possible conflict of interest that they have which could impair professional judgement when dealing with the Host Organisation.

### 6.1 Student Disclosure

The University is committed to providing equitable access for students with disabilities and medical conditions as outlined in the [Equity and Education Policy and Procedure](#). There may be situations where USQ students may need to disclose personal or medical information to a USQ disability advisor so any necessary adjustments can be made to maximise the student's participation and minimise disruption in the workplace. The Course Examiner will communicate with the Host Supervisor to assist with any adjustments required in the work environment.

## 7. Feedback and Assessment

### 7.1 Feedback

Students should be prepared to request and receive feedback from the Host Supervisor regularly throughout the placement and work to improve those areas that need attention. Receiving feedback and then reflecting on feedback is vital to career development. Students should ensure that the appropriate forms are downloaded from their course StudyDesk.

### 7.2 Assessment

The professional work experience will be evaluated through a variety of assessment tasks. Full assessment details are available on StudyDesk for the course. Please note, the feedback received from past students suggests that keeping a journal throughout a professional work experience placement is highly advantageous not only for the student's personal growth but also for assessment tasks at the completion of the placement.

## 8. Insurance

USQ maintains insurance coverage to protect the interests of enrolled students and USQ whilst USQ students are undertaking their studies on USQ approved study related activities.

USQ students undertaking **paid** activities, however, have very limited access to USQ insurance coverage. In these instances it is strongly recommended that the student seek/confirm their insurance coverage with the host organisation.

For detailed policy information please forward queries to [insurance@usq.edu.au](mailto:insurance@usq.edu.au)

## 9. Confidentiality

Please note that Students are expected to maintain the expectations and responsibilities of a student as outlined in the [USQ Student Expectations and Responsibilities Policy](#). In addition, students should treat any personal or confidential information they encounter while undertaking professional work experience activities as private and confidential, and not to disclose or use the information for their own personal purposes.

For work experience, USQ does not provide confidentiality contract documentation for use between a student and the Host Organisation. If the Host Organisation requires the student to sign a confidentiality agreement or deed, the Host will need to provide this to the Student. Also, if the Host Organisation requires the student to abide by the [Privacy Act 1988](#) (Cth) or [Information Privacy Act 2009](#) (Qld) as relevant, then they should also provide any contract terms concerning this to the student.

If a Course Examiner is asked to sign a confidentiality agreement or deed, this may be processed via the USQ Legal Office depending on the express terms of the agreement.

## 10. Intellectual Property

For work experience, the University does not provide Host Organisations with any contract documentation as regards student's intellectual property rights. It is the responsibility of the Host Organisation to provide this type of contract to the student if they consider this issue is important or relevant.

In the event a student is provided with a contract regarding their intellectual property rights, it is strongly recommended by the University that the students seek their own independent legal advice before proceeding and or signing the document. If the student has an issue with the placement due to the requirements of the Host Organisation as regards the student's intellectual property rights, they should seek further discussions with the University before proceeding.

# Appendix 1: Professional Work Experience Checklist

As you progress through your placement, refer to this checklist to ensure all steps are completed.

## Pre-Placement

- Have you secured an industry placement that is suitable, challenging and relevant?
- Have you met with or spoken to your Host Organisation and Host Supervisor?
- Have you negotiated the length of the placement?
- Have you clarified what tasks or activities you will be working on? Remember to take your course requirements into consideration when negotiating and planning your professional work experience.
- Have you established what your goals and objectives will be?
- Have you completed and submitted the Placement Proposal Form?

## During Placement

- Have you attended a thorough induction of the workplace?
- Have you offered to undertake a range of tasks/duties/responsibilities?
- Have you participated in a variety of everyday 'work' experiences (i.e. staff meetings, project debriefings, social functions, in-house training sessions)?
- Have you kept a reflective diary or made notes of your experiences?

## At the Completion of Placement

- Have you achieved the goals and objectives you set before the placement began?
- Have you discussed your overall performance with your Host Supervisor?
- Have you submitted all of your assessment pieces to the Course Examiner for marking?

## Appendix 2: Tips for Success

Professional work experience activities aim to enhance students' employability by developing key skills which are invaluable in today's competitive job market. To assist students to develop these skills, they are provided with the following tips for success that are linked to the USQ Graduate Skills.

### **Interpersonal skills:**

- Introduce yourself to all members of staff and make a concerted effort to remember names
- Don't spend your breaks alone, join your colleagues to help build rapport and witness how they interact with one another
- Observe decision making processes to see how staff members listen and negotiate

### **Teamwork skills:**

- Volunteer to work in a variety of group settings (i.e. work in small groups and large teams, liaise with different individuals and departments)
- Don't be afraid to contribute – speak up if you have an idea or question, but be diplomatic
- Don't let your team down – meet deadlines and finish the work you have been assigned

### **Communication skills:**

- Make a good first impression – make eye contact, dress appropriately
- Be respectful – always begin a conversation or phone call by asking if the other person has a moment to talk
- Always proof read documents for spelling, grammar and format
- Remember that listening is a major component of communication – listen to instructions and feedback carefully
- Think about your tone and body language – if you look and sound positive, this is how you will be perceived

### **Cultural literacy:**

- At your induction, ask about the organisation's values, workplace culture and codes of conduct
- Volunteer to work with diverse groups within the organisation
- Use professional language/body language at all times (colloquial language and some gestures may offend certain people)

### **Problem solving skills:**

- Look for answers before relying on your Host Supervisor
- Think for yourself – ask questions and make suggestions
- Think laterally; don't always go for the obvious solution
- If you have a specific problem seek out an expert in that field to help you (i.e. if it's an IT problem ask IT for help before going straight to your Host Supervisor)

### **Management, planning and organisational skills:**

- Create an action plan by breaking down big tasks into smaller tasks
- Think about contingency planning (i.e. what is your backup plan if something goes wrong?)
- Diarise meetings and important deadlines
- Prioritise your workload
- Schedule a regular meeting with your Host Supervisor to report on the status of tasks and projects

### **Ethical research and inquiry skills:**

- Act professionally at all times and take responsibility for your actions (i.e. be honest and don't make excuses)
- Observe the conduct of other members of staff for guidance when it comes to ethical discussions

### **Academic, professional and digital literacy:**

- Familiarise yourself with Microsoft programs including MS Word, MS Excel, MS Outlook and computers in general
- Make real and meaningful connections between the theory you've learnt and the world of work

### **Creativity, initiative and enterprise:**

- Get involved in as many activities as possible from daily routines to large functions
- Add value and be proactive – ask for challenging projects to show dedication
- Think ahead so that you have some ideas about what to do next rather than waiting for instruction
- Take ownership of your work and use your initiative to develop your role

## Appendix 3: Frequently Asked Questions

### *What tasks will a student undertake on a placement?*

Every placement is different and will need to meet the needs of both the student and the Host Organisation. Before the placement begins, the student and the Host Supervisor will negotiate the types of tasks and activities that will be undertaken. Below are some examples of the types of activities could be undertaken:

- Project work – you examine a specific workplace issue and report your finding by a deadline
- Research work – you conduct research for the organisation either independently or in a support role as part of a research team
- Work shadowing – you are partnered with an industry professional to observe and assist them
- Workplace rotation – you work alongside a range of supervisors to develop a broad appreciation of the work undertaken in that industry/organisation

### *How long does a placement last?*

The terms and duration of each work placement will be different depending on your course requirements and the capacity or availability of the Host Organisation. **You** will need to decide how best to fulfil your course requirements and negotiate this with your Course Examiner and Host Organisation prior to the commencement of the placement. Refer to the course specification for the specific placement hours required for your course.

### *Am I covered by insurance?*

As Professional work experience is an unpaid placement, the Course Examiner will support you as part of the administration process regarding insurance coverage. Once the placement is approved, a notification is sent to the student and the Host Organisation regarding insurance coverage.

### *What if things don't work out?*

Sometimes work placements do not work out for various reasons. If things are not working out you need to contact the Course Examiner (if it is an academic issue) as soon as possible to discuss your options. Our hope is that you successfully complete your work placement with your initial Host Organisation but if this is not possible, arrangements can be made to cease the work placement and complete your placement elsewhere.

## Appendix 4: Definition of Terms

### Professional work experience:

An arrangement made between the University, the student and Host Organisation whereby the Host provides supervised professional work experience for the student as part of an approved course of study.

### Course Examiner:

A university academic staff member/lecturer who is responsible for all academic aspects of the professional work experience course including assessment, course content, approach to learning, feedback to and from students, host supervisors and any special considerations.

### Host Organisation:

Refers to any individual, business, or organisation that provides a work placement for the student.

### Host Supervisor:

An individual (or individuals) from within the Host Organisation who is assigned to supervise and support the student during a professional work experience placement.

### Stakeholder:

Any individual or organisation that participates in or impacts on professional work experience - university staff, students, industry professionals, community members or groups.

### Student Participant:

An individual who is enrolled in a program of study at USQ and who participates in a professional work experience is to be referred to as a student participant or student.

### Graduate Skills and Capabilities:

Key qualities that students develop throughout their studies which enable them to apply their learning across a range of contexts and work with a diverse range of individuals and groups, in local, national and international environments to attain personal and professional goals.

### Term of Placement:

The amount of time students will spend at their placement host organisation.

### Work Integrated Learning (WIL):

An umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum. (Patrick et al. 2008)

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