

WORK-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

A Guide for Students and Placement Supervisors

**Developed by the CIEH Accredited Universities
and
Supported by the Chartered Institute of Environmental
Health**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The BSc/MSc courses in Environmental Health are vocational driven programmes which are the academic foundation leading to the professional qualification of Environmental Health Practitioners (EHP). In addition, the student is required to complete a supervised period of professional practice at an appropriate organisation (Local Authority, HPA, PCT etc). During this period, the student is required to receive a wide exposure to those professional issues dealt with by EHPs. This includes work-based experiential learning which has to be recorded in the Experiential Learning Portfolio (ELP). This document must be submitted and successfully assessed by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) before the student is able to take the professional examinations.

In order to obtain maximum benefit from the work-based experiential learning period it is important that the learning be appropriately planned and structured. The purpose of this guide is to provide the student / Training Supervisor and training organisation, with sufficient guidance and information to help achieve this aim.

The guide contains the following:-

- a) aims and objectives of work-based experiential learning
- b) form and structure of the work-based experiential learning period
- c) responsibilities of the student
- d) responsibilities of the work-based experiential learning training supervisor
- e) placements / experiential learning in the private sector

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF WORK-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The work-based learning period is primarily intended to develop and reinforce the academic studies of the programmes and to provide opportunities for experiential learning:

- (a) to involve the student in the day to day practices and problems encountered in the professional context;
- (b) to give the students experience of the responsibilities and inter-relationships of local authorities, industry and commerce and other environmental agencies, to develop their skills and knowledge in a non-academic, but supervised situation;
- (c) to allow the student to place the academic study already completed in context ;
- (d) to develop the problem solving skills of the student in the context of professional practice;
- (e) to develop the student's communication skills, enhance his/her personal confidence and maturity.
- (f) to obtain experience of the discipline of the working world.
- (g) to understand the role of Environmental Health within complex organisations.
- (h) to understand the functioning of Environmental Health organisations and the role of the Environmental Health practitioner within them.
- (j) to understand the diversity of constraints that influences the formulation and implementation of an Environmental Health system.
- (k) to help prepare the student for the successful completion of the CIEH Professional Examinations.

These aims should be achieved through:-

- (a) a planned programme of experiential learning involving visits and investigations with Environmental Health personnel and other professionals;
- (b) undertaking personally, but with appropriate supervision, routine visits and investigations and making professional decisions for approval by the placement supervisor;
- (c) undertaking short periods of work-based experiential learning in organisations which have a close relationship with the Environmental

Health function eg. Social Services, PCTs, Crime Reduction Partnership, HPA etc).

- (d) the preparation of reports, internal discussion and the presentation of talks and lectures to appropriate internal and external bodies;
- (e) developing an understanding of the administrative and management structure of their host organisation and the decision making processes which underpin the day to day operations of professional practice;
- (f) taking an active part in the social, cultural and professional life of the host organisation.

2.1 One of the key objectives of the academic programmes is to develop the **Reflective Practitioner** who regularly and actively reviews their professional actions in a critically evaluative manner as part of an on-going process of professional continuous development. Experiential learning, as required by the CIEH, compliments this approach within its expectation on the student to undertake 'learning that involves not only both 'seeing' and 'doing' but, additionally, involves 'checking', 'questioning', 'reflection' and the development of real understanding.

Learning conducted in this way is much less likely to produce a practitioner who relies on inherited and sometimes incorrect 'wisdom', but one who is able to think for him / herself and who has the skills to develop and justify a course of action and to amend it if it doesn't work out.' (*CIEH – Success in Experiential Learning – 2004*)

The CIEH also anticipate that the experiential learning will allow students the opportunity to develop the following skills:

- i) Preparing and researching problems
- ii) Developing appropriate aims and supporting objectives for 'interventions'
- iii) Inspecting, auditing and investigating
- iv) Identifying, selecting and justifying options for the intervention
- v) Critically reviewing and reflecting on the effectiveness of the intervention in comparison with the initial aim and objectives
- vi) Demonstrating and applying underpinning knowledge.
- vii) Communication

3.0 FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE WORK-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PERIOD

Students and Training Supervisors are urged to visit the CIEH website where they can download copies of relevant guidance – e.g. for information about the ELP go to: -

<http://www.cieh.org/education/pdf/2004StudentELP.pdf>

With regard to the ELP, the CIEH does not prescribe any officially set maximum or minimum timescale regarding the learning period. However, CIEH has made it known that it believes, for the majority of people, the task is likely to take around 9 to 12 months. The student and placement organisation should take a measured approach to work-based learning for professional practice and **not** allow it to be driven principally by:

- a) The ELP requirements
- b) The students natural desire to qualify at the earliest possible opportunity

It is important the when the student approaches their professional examinations they have had the widest possible experiences to draw on, and have had sufficient time to prepare themselves to succeed at their first attempt.

The ELP requires that students gain experience of practice in a number of prescribed intervention areas. ('Interventions' are those actions that Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) take to control, eliminate or mitigate the public health implications that arise from the impact of environmental 'stressors' on the physical, social and human worlds.) These prescribed intervention areas are listed across the top of each of the five matrices, to be found in Appendix 1 of the guidance document to be found at the website detailed above. Additionally in Appendix 1, the prescribed 'skills', which must be developed within the prescribed intervention areas, are to be found. Here again it is necessary to establish an early familiarity with intervention areas and associated skills in order to plan the programme of experiential learning.

3.1 Key Personnel in the Work-Based Experiential Learning Period

Student/Employee	To be placed with an organisation or organisations where environmental health is being practised as a whole, or where individual aspects are being practised. Students are reminded that enforcement-related experiences may be acquired within a local authority environmental health section or other agency with environmental health enforcement responsibilities. There are, however, many opportunities in private sector organisations and non local authority public sector organisations which will go a long way to fulfilling the requirements of the ELP
Placement Supervisor	A permanent employee who is at an appropriate level in the organisation to supervise the student in the workplace

4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS

In general, each student must take responsibility for undertaking the work-based experiential learning programme. In particular the student should:-

- (a) Where clarification is needed on the programme, discuss the issue with the Placement Supervisor appointed by the employer
- (b) Complete intervention group matrices for the ELP and compile the necessary portfolio of evidence throughout the period of placement in accordance with the instructions given by CIEH. **Students are strongly advised to complete all entries for the Intervention Group matrices contemporaneously.** Valuable insights can be lost when entries are made sometime after the events.
- (c) Carry out duties allocated to the best of their ability. Work should be approached critically and analytically with a view to understanding the issues involved, the way in which problems are tackled and, where appropriate, considering alternative solutions.

5.0 THE ROLE OF THE PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR

What is a Placement Supervisor?

In the context of work-based experiential learning, a Placement Supervisor can be defined as the person who helps the student to learn from their work practice. Broad though this definition is, it emphasises the importance of support for the learning that occurs during the placement.

This is not, as is often thought, simply a matter of providing a student with a range of tasks and duties to perform in order to give them breadth in vocational experience. Although this is important, perhaps equally as valuable is the assistance, advice, and guidance that is given to the student in identifying, analyzing, reflecting on and assessing the learning opportunities which present themselves during their employment.

A Placement Supervisor should, wherever possible, act as:

Role model	providing inspiration, setting performance standards and demonstrating professional behaviour
Instructor	passing on knowledge, wisdom, insights, providing challenging tasks/ideas
Enabler	facilitating learning through the identification/provision of learning opportunities

Coach	offering encouragement, building confidence, giving feedback on performance, making suggestions for improvement
Counsellor	actively listening to difficulties, offering helpful advice
Assessor	contributing to the evaluation of performance and learning and assessing development

Essentially a Placement Supervisor helps the student to recognise and understand the learning that occurs throughout the placement.

Who should be the Placement Supervisor?

Ideally a Placement Supervisor should have the following attributes:

- a) Abilities to empathise with, encourage, coach, counsel, organise, direct and negotiate with the student. At the same time the abilities to be understanding of and sensitive to the student's inexperience and the additional demands placed on the student in completing the Matrices and bringing together a comprehensive portfolio of evidence
- b) Previous experience of the job itself and of being trained to do the job
- c) A qualified EHP who is registered with the Environmental Health Registration Board and a current member of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.
- d) Subject knowledge of principles and key aspects of professional practice
- e) Specific skills and competence in their own job

The Placement Supervisor therefore should be somebody who will have frequent contact with the student and will be aware of his or her duties and performance throughout the year. Within some organisations the student may be moved from one department to another or from site to site. In such instances it may be necessary for the role of Placement Supervisor to move with the student.

As part of the process of preparing students for their professional interview it is desirable that students upon completion of a placement within a section, receives a viva-voce examination by senior staff to assess the level of competence in core areas and as a means to determine the effectiveness of that training the student has received. In this way additional training can be identified to support the student.

When the student has completed a placement period they should be invited to attend an exit interview to give feedback on their experiences and support they have received. This can then be feed back into the organisation.

Note: Although Placement Supervisors should give advice, this should be done with appropriate discretion so as to permit appropriate student responsibility for progress, development and independent learning. The Placement Supervisor should therefore avoid taking over problems and solving them for the learner.

5.1 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR

The Employer organisation is responsible for appointing an appropriately qualified and experienced member of staff to take responsibility for student training/experiential learning on behalf of the sponsoring organisation. Clearly this person will have other duties to perform, but in relation to their responsibility for students, the CIEH would expect them to:-

- (a) Assist in the development of an appropriate work-based experiential learning programme taking into account the guidance given in the CIEH ELP Guidance Document;
- (b) Implement the programme effectively and ensure that the student keeps appropriate records;
- (c) Programme regular meetings with the student to review progress and resolve difficulties.

In implementing the programme, the Placement Supervisor will need to ensure that other colleagues in the department are fully informed of the requirements of the CIEH ELP. In particular they should persuade other colleagues to adopt a positive and sympathetic approach to the problems of student work-based experiential learning. It is appreciated that not all colleagues respond positively to students, who are particularly vulnerable during the first few months of the programme. The Placement Supervisor would be expected to lend the student support at this time.

Placement Supervisors should also bear in mind that when students start their work-based experiential learning period, they have only completed half the course and cannot be expected to be proficient in all aspects of Environmental Health. **The BSc/MSc provides the “foundation for competence” but the student lacks the experience of the practical application of that knowledge necessary to achieve full competence.**

It would help their development if the Placement Supervisor would ensure that students undertake a programme of guided reading when entering each phase of the work-based experiential learning programme, particularly in relation to appropriate statutes and case law. In addition, it is good practice to assess the student's current state of knowledge upon joining a section so that more directed training may be given.

It is strongly recommended that the Placement Supervisor attends a CIEH training workshop on the nature and role of the ELP, so they are better able to supervise and advise students.

6.0 WORK-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

Students undertaking experiential learning in accordance with the CIEH ELP are not subject to any set maximum or minimum timescale. However CIEH have expressed the view that for the majority of students, the completion of the prescribed interventions and development of the prescribed skills is likely to take around 9 to 12 months. The permutation of workplaces visited, and the duration of such visits, so as to ensure appropriate experiential learning over this period, is at the student's discretion, as negotiated with experiential learning providers. For some students it will be possible to secure a contract with a single organisation to complete the whole of the process; for others, it may be necessary to take-up a series of short-term learning opportunities. All are possible, but it should be borne in mind that enforcement-related experience may only be possible within a local authority environmental health section or other agency responsible for environmental health enforcement. Costs of external visits should be borne by the training provider.

Placement Supervisors and students are encouraged to make use of the Wales CIEH Student Training Directory which can be accessed at: www.cieh-cymruwales.org This directory provides useful training opportunities both within public sector organisations as well as private sector organisations – and it is not just for those students in Wales!

7.0 SUPPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY

Normally Universities have no formal role to play during the student placement. However some programmes may well assess the placement learning experience as part of the degree award. If this is the case, students will receive specific advice from their University. Placement Supervisors should also make contact with the University to confirm what assessments, if any, the University may have in place that may impinge upon the placement period. This is important if the placement organisation has a number of students from more than one University and placement programmes will need to reflect each Universities own requirements. Most Universities undertake visits to students whilst on placement and it is strongly advised that the Placement Supervisor is available to meet with the University representative to discuss the performance of the student and to formalise any remedial and / or training requirements.

8.0 SUPPORT FROM THE CIEH

The CIEH runs a mentoring scheme for students undertaking completion of their ELP. The way the scheme works is that several of the ELP assessors have volunteered to assist students undergoing work based learning and completing the ELP. The scheme is very informal - and free!!!

Peter Wright (on behalf of the CIEH) operates the scheme. He is contactable on:

Tel: 01706 223671

Email: p.n.wright@btinternet.com

Once contacted Peter will put students in touch with their most appropriate mentor(s) and the student (and mentor) can then make whatever arrangements are appropriate to themselves.

Students are strongly recommended to contact and make use of the Mentor to help and advise on the writing up and completion of the ELP. It should be borne in mind that the mentor does not in any way replace the training supervisor – he/she is an 'added extra!'

Peter also runs a series of workshops for students and training officers, details of which are published in Environmental Health News.

9.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY

The welfare of students whilst undertaking work-based learning is important and students should ensure that their own personal safety, and that of others with whom they may be associated, is not compromised in any way.

Health and Safety is the primary responsibility of the training provider; however, the University and the student have a certain level of responsibility.

Students should have an understanding of their rights and responsibilities concerning health and safety from information given by the training provider and/or university. They must be aware of potential hazards and associated risks of environmental health work – for example lone working, manual handling, aggression etc. It is important that they understand what to do to minimise risks from any hazards they may be expected to encounter. The training provider should make copies of any risk assessments available.

Students are recommended to:

- a) Read the training providers Safety Policy and understand what is expected by the provider and the student during the period of work-based learning.

- b) Read all appropriate risk assessments and take appropriate measures to minimise risks
- c) Ensure that the training provider has liability insurance and that the student is covered for all work activities including time spent away from the immediate area (e.g. visits to other training locations)
- d) Use suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) where necessary
- e) Read, understand and adhere to any 'working alone' policies and procedures
- f) When working outside the office have a means of contacting colleagues at all times (e.g. by mobile phone) and of being contacted by colleagues
- g) Report any incidents that could have endangered their health and safety (or that of others) to the training supervisor or other appropriate person