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Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's Work-Integrated Education (WIE) programme. We trust this partnership will prove mutually rewarding to you, the employer, and to our students. We hope it will also serve to raise the bar for industry standards throughout the region.

In today's competitive world, it is vital that graduates possess both "hard" and "soft" skills to reach and remain at the pinnacle of their businesses. At The Hong Kong Polytechnic University we seek to equip our students with technical and theoretical knowledge. We look to you in industry to help them build the "soft" and practical skills needed to become rounded professionals and competent practitioners in their chosen sectors from day one.

This handbook is designed to help you maximise the benefits of employing PolyU students on a work experience basis. It is a result of the PolyU's years of experience in operating WIE programmes and is also derived from a recent cross-departmental study of WIE placements from the perspectives of students and employers.

The Faculty-Wide/Cross Department Learning & Teaching Development Project 2005-2008 has enabled us to identify best practices and potential pitfalls arising from WIE programmes. We have also, where relevant, drawn from similar studies conducted overseas, and from the World Association for Cooperative Education, Inc.

Introduction

This study, entitled Learning Through Off-campus Work-integrated Education, was conducted by the following departments and members:



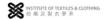
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Mr Tony Tse (Project Leader), Dr Simon Wong, Dr Sylvester Yeung, Dr Benny Chan, Mr Chris Luk;



Dept of Industrial & Systems Engineering:

Dr Winco Yung;



Institute of Textiles & Clothing:

Dr Zhi-ming Zhang;



Student Affairs Office:

Mrs Dorinda Fung.

A number of the specific findings gleaned from student and employer feedback in the study have been quoted and are referred to in the body of this handbook. In the interests of narrative flow, we have reserved most of the study details for the appendix. We have also included a summary of dos and don'ts gleaned from the text which we hope will prove a useful check list.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and its WIE Programmes The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is the largest University Grants Committee-funded tertiary institution in terms of student-numbers in Hong Kong. If offers a wide range of courses which directly meet industrial, commercial and community needs.

In addition to meeting Hong Kong's manpower requirements, PolyU also makes significant contributions towards the territory's success by providing the public and private sectors with its expanding range of consultancy, professional training and applied research services. Through these activities, the University maintains a strong partnership with the business and industrial sectors.



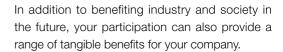




Students in all departments at PolyU are required to participate in one or more Work-Integrated Education (WIE) programmes during their time at the university. Each department/school/faculty sets specific requirements for its students. They can vary from two-month long summer jobs to long-term industry placements of up to 48 weeks, depending on the course of study. The success of WIE programmes to a large extent depends on the continued support of the industry.







You have access to useful, enthusiastic workers already equipped with the theoretical basics required at a reasonable wage.

It gives you the opportunity to identify and evaluate good future employees and provide them with early-bird training, therefore reducing both the expense and wastage rate that accompanies the recruitment process.

In the longer term, well-trained graduates, particularly those already versed in your company culture, cut the cost of entry-level training, wastage and orientation.

Benefits of WIE to Employers







You as an employer are invited to provide feedback to the PolyU, which assists us in ensuring academic programmes meet professional standards for the future needs of your industry.







What Students Hope to Achieve from WIE

Most students say that their self-perception improves significantly after their placement.

While some students, especially those close to graduating, hope a placement will lead to their first job, the benefit singled out as of primary importance by the majority of students in our survey was practical hands-on experience.

This is related to the second-ranked benefit: providing them with a clearer view of what the future holds. Also high in the ranking was the opportunity to take-part in real-life team work.

Employers surveyed in the study noted the areas in which students required the greatest assistance was in preparation and understanding precisely what was demanded of them. This is useful to remember when preparing an orientation plan and coaching.

Inexperienced WIE students can be nervous at first and shy about asking for help, which can lead to their abilities, potential and enthusiasm being underestimated.





One particularly interesting point revealed in our study was the improvement in self-confidence and self-esteem that many students reported after completing their WIE experience. Students become more able to accept responsibility and work as a team member.

Supervisors can help foster the confidence, leading to an improved professional demeanour, by actively nudging and coaching students and by ensuring good two-way communication channels. It also helps students when their role is put into the context of their department, how the department fits into the company and how the company fits into its industry niche.







Obviously students are expected to be enthusiastic, open-minded and willing to learn. In strictly practical terms, he or she should be punctual from the first interview to the last day of work.

He or she is expected to be properly groomed and dressed appropriately.

He or she is expected to show initiative in discovering as much as possible about his or her WIE employer and understand what is expected during the work placement. We at the PolyU encourage students to be proactive; to ask for training plans, feedback and coaching. They are encouraged not to settle for weeks of idleness.

What is Expected of Students Engaged on WIE





Students are told they have to be flexible and willing to start at the bottom and will have to perform chores as part of their assignment, but not to expect to perform unskilled work for the duration of their assignment.

Students are required to complete written reports of their WIE for submission to the PolyU as an integral part of their course.







What Makes a Successful Work Placement

WIE is designed to be an industry-based, onthe-job, structured and measurable learning experience for students. It aims to provide them with the opportunity to apply theoretical learning to real-life situations at work. In short, tackling and learning from tasks and problems in the real workplace.

Ideally, PolyU places students within a sector or industry relevant to their academic studies. However, this is not always possible. In such cases, the university seeks placements in businesses or institutions that can provide generalised work experience.

In either case, there are two basic points to be emphasised: structured and measurable.

"Structured" means that work experience should be purposefully designed to reach learning goals and not just occur incidentally or as a side effect of work.

Student learning should be "measurable" in that the students are required to document their experiences. These can include reports, journals or assembling portfolios. They should also be subject to substantive feedback from their WIE employers.





Ideal Types of Work Placement

There are broad themes that many employers will find useful when considering deploying WIE students. These include but are not limited to:

On-the-job learning: Basic practical tasks such as (in the case of hotel/tourism students) clerking. checking-in guests, filing, making beds, cutting carrots, photocopying, inventory checking, and answering the phone. These are examples of useful skills for students to acquire, as well as learning "from the bottom up".

However it is important to rotate students through a variety of on-the-job-training tasks to provide them with a broad sub-set of skills and experiences and avoid treating them as merely cheap labour fulfilling repetitive tasks.

Apprenticeships: This requires students to be assigned a master or coach to pass on specialist skills. The master must have the time, expertise and willingness to teach. Whether the coach is a chef, a sales manager or a financial controller, this is a demanding role and not everybody is suited to the position. Apprenticeships are better suited to longer-term placements.







Projects: By their nature, projects are of a short-term or modular nature and are ideally suited to WIE students present for a set period of time. Projects are often demanding tasks for regular employees who have to weave them into their regular and, these days increasingly busy, work-day. Properly briefed and supervised WIE students are ideally suited to relieving this burden. In addition, certain projects can prove useful for senior students who are required to complete a "capstone project" as part of their course.

Breadth of Experience

Top of the list of aspirations cited by students according to our study is job rotation. When going out into the world they are keen to put their theoretical knowledge to use and expand their horizons. Gaining exposure to a variety of tasks and roles was the most-mentioned concern by students. A good WIE programme is particularly successful when it provides such opportunities.





Communications

The transition from campus life to a business environment can be a big step into the unknown, particularly for younger students. It is therefore important to establish practical two-way channels of communication to ensure students know what vou, the employer, expects of them.

Getting Started

Agreements: Student participants in our study reported they appreciated clear, written guidelines on practicalities such as remuneration, dress code, work hours, duties (and duration of tasks if they are to be rotated) AHEAD of starting work.

Mentors: The provision of a "point person" to serve as a guide, mentor, sounding board and provider of feedback (both direct and indirect) was judged to be invaluable.

Orientation: Students placed in Hong Kong and overseas companies reported that an orientation course at the start of their placement was vital. This can, for example, include a who's who, guidance on how to address staff of various levels of seniority, tours of facilities and in-house jargon. Students are required to research their work placement ahead of arrival but the amount of information in the public domain is by nature, limited.





Culture shock: Those students placed assignments outside Hong Kong also appreciated an orientation course and tips on living as well as working in the particular town or country. In addition, the appointment of a member of staff, often a younger member, to act as an informal "big brother" or "big sister" can be a useful way of banishing cultural and linguistic uncertainties.

Numbers: Feedback from our survey shows that when a group of five or more students from PolyU were accepted by a single institution, they found it easier to pick up professional vocabulary and demeanour. This appears to be partly because they get the opportunity to practice their newfound knowledge within the safety-net of a pool of friends.





On the other hand, both students and employers have to keep a watch out for students spending too much time within that "safe" peer-group and ensure they make the effort to launch themselves into new experiences and interact fully with company personnel.

Remuneration: It goes without saying that employers can expect to receive useful work in return for wages paid. Unless the placement is a volunteer position, the best results are achieved when a fair wage is paid in return for a fair day's work.



Everyone has heard anecdotal WIE horror stories. About the student who acted as if she was doing her WIE employer a favour in just turning up, to the heartless employer who assigned the student to months of humping boxes in a dingy go-down.

The truth is less dramatic. It primarily centres on lack of planning, unrealistic expectations and weak feedback. A poor work placement can put good students off the entire industry.

At the most basic, engaging one or more WIE students should not be a spur of the moment decision. Thought has to be given to whether the company has roles that students can realistically fulfil.

What Makes a Poor Work Placement



While everyone has to start at the bottom, little is gained from using students as drudges, sentencing them, for example, to weeks on end of photocopying or filing. Conversely, young students just starting out are likely to get out of their depth if asked to carry out unfamiliar tasks that are beyond their academic level and training. A realistic training schedule is vital.

Next, it has to be established that the company has the will and resources to assign staff to plan the WIE placement, supervise and provide feedback to students in addition to his or her regular duties. From both the student and the PolyU's perspective, a WIE student sitting around twiddling thumbs for weeks on end is arguably worse than being used as a drone.





- Provide Staff or Trainee Manual for students.
- Provide a training plan
- Discuss the training plan with students
- Arrange an orientation session for students
- Provide a mentor.
- Organise means for students to share experiences with each other
- Ensure students' work is monitored and assessed within the company and provide timely feedback to the individuals and to the PolyU. Require students to write regular reports on their progress
- Ensure channels are open for student feedback to the appropriate personnel within your company; encourage them to ask for advice and help
- Include students in departmental staff meetings and planning sessions when feasible
- Pay decent wages and/or allowances
- Expose them to as many different departments, tasks or roles as possible

Summary: Dos and Don'ts

• Give them appropriate levels of responsibility for tasks and let them build up to more challenging roles as they grow in the job

Don'ts

- Do not treat them as cheap, unskilled labour for mundane tasks such as photocopying, handing out leaflets, messengers or warehouse labourers only
- Avoid exposing them to situations beyond their abilities - for example, handling customer complaints in their first few days
- Resist requiring them to work substantial overtime
- Do not engage them in positions where a high degree of confidentiality is required. This will adversely affect the scope of their project reports and ability to share experiences with their peers and temporary work colleagues

This study, entitled Learning Through Off-campus Work-integrated Education, comprised three parts: (1) a student survey by questionnaire (2) in-depth student interviews and (3) an industry partner survey.

Part 1: Student survey by questionnaire

A total of 325 students at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University were invited to complete the survey in 2007 to gauge attitudes before and after their placement. The students were from the Faculty of Business, Faculty of Applied Science & Textiles, Faculty of Communication, Faculty of Construction & Land Use, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Health & Social Sciences, School of Hotel & Tourism Management and School of Design. All undertook their placements during the summer vacation.

The students were each asked to rate themselves according to 17 statements based on a Likert-scale of "1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree", both before and after their placement. The shift in ratings is used to reflect the change of students' self-perception in respect of the 17 statements.

The 17 statements were:

- 1. I have good understanding about relevant computer software for our profession
- 2. I have updated professional knowledge
- 3. I possess effective reading skills
- 4. I possess effective writing skills
- I can communicate effectively in foreign language
- 6. I can define and solve problems effectively

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- 7. I am able to work cooperatively with others such as a team member
- 8. I am able to work independently with minimal supervision
- 9. I am willing to accept responsibility
- 10.1 am adaptable and flexible to cope with a changing work environment
- 11. I have good presentation skills
- 12. I possess good professional attitude
- 13. I can manage other people's problems with understanding and sensitivity
- 14. I have genuine desire to help people
- 15. I can lead others effectively
- 16. Lam honest
- 17. Lam creative

Part 2: In-depth student interview

Fifteen students from the Faculty of Business, Faculty of Applied Science and Textiles, School of Hotel & Tourism Management and School of Design who completed internships in 2006 or 2007 were invited to participate in group discussions or telephone interviews. The internships undertaken by the 15 students were in the following sectors: hotels, theme parks, accounting, banking, biotechnology, design, real estate services and transportation. Placements took place in Hong Kong, mainland China, the U.K. and U.S.

Students were asked about their experiences. important things they learned, likes and dislikes, problems encountered, good practices in their workplace and for any suggestions.

Part 3: Industry partner survey

A telephone survey was conducted among 140 industry partners who provided placements to PolyU students in September 2007. Respondents were asked to rate student interns according to 14 statements on a Likert-scale ranging from "1=Unacceptable performance" to "5=Excellent performance". The mean score of each statement was used as an indication of employers' perceptions about PolyU students during their placements.

The 14 statements were:

- 1. Student arrived on time to work as scheduled
- Student arrived to work in uniform/proper dressing as expected
- 3. Student came to work prepared
- 4. Student displayed appropriate behaviour
- 5. Student used professional language as expected
- 6. Student displayed professionalism
- 7. Student asked for work as appropriate
- 8. Student displayed positive attitude
- 9. Student was suited to this type of work
- 10. Student was eager to learn
- Student was capable to understand demands of department
- 12. Student was genuinely interested in the responsibility of this organisation
- 13. Student worked well with others
- 14. Student accepted responsibility

