

## Quality Work-Based Learning

### Introduction

This overview provides an introduction to the principles of Quality Work-Based Learning (WBL) and lays the foundation for developing any Work-Based Learning experience. The WBL Quality Standards and Essential Elements presented in this toolset serve as an easy reference of things to pay attention to when creating high-quality, learning-rich experiences across the full continuum of Work-Based Learning activities.



These experiences can have powerful impacts on students or other learners as they build their knowledge of potential careers, explore areas of interest and develop, practice and demonstrate new skills. They can also help provide relevance and help refocus attention and effort on academic and occupational learning in the classroom.

### What is Quality Work-Based Learning?

Activities that occur at a workplace, providing structured learning experiences for students or other learners through exposure to a range of occupations and career options, and classroom or community activities that incorporate employers as speakers, advisors, instructors or career mentors. WBL allows students or other learners to build a bridge from adolescent roles in the classroom to adult roles in professional settings.

Students or other learners learn by observing and/or actually doing real work. Learning in the workplace or from industry professionals supports academic learning and promotes the development of broad transferable skills.

### Why Work-Based Learning?

High-quality Work-Based Learning provides opportunities for the acquisition of skills in three areas: academic, technical and workplace professional skills among students or other learners engaged in career-related programs or courses of study. Regardless of industry, employers consistently underscore that new workers must have experience and mastery in all three skill areas, with a growing priority on the development of core employability skills. To support students or other learners in developing these skills, authentic workplace experiences are important when combined with academic study, classroom training and other college and career-readiness activities. Guest Speakers, Career Days, Career Mentoring, Workplace Tours, Informational Interviews, Job Shadowing, Mock Interviews, Workplace Challenges, Internships and Work Experiences all provide real-world context and the opportunity to learn about the workplace and prepare for the future. Providing authentic workplace experiences and bringing employers into the classroom as part of the career development process can create powerful learning experiences and deepen the educational experience.

Work-Based Learning activities engage the employer as both a customer and a partner, providing developmental experiences for students or other learners in the workplace while helping build the future workforce. These experiences augment school-based classroom activities, offer the opportunity to learn about potential careers and to practice and demonstrate professional and defined work-readiness skills.

This toolset has been developed to address the need to provide a range of high-quality opportunities to students and other learners in the Earn & Learn community, and to help schools, workforce intermediaries and their employer and community partners deliver educationally rich and authentic Work-Based Learning experiences.

### Benefits for Students and other Learners

Through Work-Based Learning activities, students and other learners build awareness of potential careers in a particular industry and can explore options and start preparing for their future. Work-Based Learning provides opportunities for hands-on learning and the development of relationships with professional adult role models. Participating students or learners acquire experience and build core employability and occupational skills while learning about the training or education required to succeed in specific careers. They are better able to understand real-world applications of academics and occupational training, and can answer the question, "Why do I need to learn this?".

By integrating a range of workplace exposures and experiences with school or classroom-based activities and guidance over time, students and other learners will often set their sights higher than an immediate job, and are likely to remain committed to their education though completion of their personal and career-related goals.

### Benefits for Employers

Participation in Work-Based Learning offers an effective and appropriate vehicle for employers to help build and retain their future workforce. Employers report increasing mismatch between the skills required for entry into their industry and those of the emerging workforce. By opening their place of business to students or other learners and providing high-value Work-Based Learning opportunities, employers can benefit from productive student work or gain a new perspective on an issue or a problem. Employers can observe potential future employees in a "long-term interview" context and participate in shaping their future workforce. Students or other learners also provide access to a customer resource and point of view.

An employer's existing workforce benefits from more productive and engaged employees and from the opportunity to offer leadership and supervisory skills development to its current workers. Participation provides an opportunity for companies to support local schools and help develop a highly skilled and productive future workforce. It builds awareness in the community of the employer's role in the local economy and offers a public relations benefit.

### Benefits for Schools

Work-Based Learning extends the classroom to the workplace and brings employer volunteers into the school and classroom. It helps build awareness of industry-identified skills to incorporate in the classroom curriculum among educators and validates curriculum instructional models. It provides touchstones in authentic workplaces to help make classroom learning relevant and helps schools and programs build relationships with the community. WBL also provides opportunities for networking and relationship-building to promote future collaboration with employer partners.

### Benefits for the Community

Work-Based Learning activities connect the community to schools and local economic development efforts, promote civic engagement and help address community priorities and issues. Students or other learners complete community projects and are visible as productive and contributing community members of society and helps grow a more productive and committed workforce.

## Work-Based Learning Quality Standards

Quality Work-Based Learning is:

- Designed to promote enhanced learning, skill development and workplace awareness
- Structured to be effective, safe, legal and measurable
- Supported by appropriate planning, tailored training and efficient processes
- Connected to classroom learning, individual career development plans and sequenced education, training and workplace activities

*Quality Work-Based Learning is designed to promote enhanced learning, skill development and workplace awareness.*

Work-Based Learning supports and enhances classroom instruction by providing a context for learning. It provides unique opportunities to practice and demonstrate new skills, and assists in the development of workplace awareness. It helps build the skills required for specific occupations by exposing students or other learners to the multiple career options available at a workplace. Work-Based Learning engages students or other learners in their own education and skill development and provides multiple opportunities for reflection on the experience, both verbally and in writing.

*Quality Work-Based Learning is structured to be effective, safe, legal, and measurable.*

Work-Based Learning provides authentic and relevant "learning and doing" experiences that are safe, legal and in compliance with state, federal and local regulations. Learning objectives are met through ongoing assessment and continuous improvement activities. Systems are in place to support teachers, faculty and program staff in designing and implementing quality WBL experiences and to make it easy for employer and community partners to participate.

*Quality Work-Based Learning is supported by appropriate planning, tailored training and efficient processes.*

Work-Based Learning has defined services and procedures to manage expectations and foster communication among all partners. Students or other learners are served through individualized work-based learning plans defined for each experience and are sufficiently prepared and supported throughout the experience. Part of this preparation is providing appropriate safety and health training for young workers and helping them understand their rights and responsibilities as employees. Employers and community partners receive support and appropriate training to enable their participation, and school staff are trained in how to design and deliver high-quality experiences.

*Quality Work-Based Learning is connected to classroom learning, individual career development plans and sequenced education, training and workplace activities.*

Work-Based Learning supports a community-wide vision and collective expectations for both academic and occupational learning. Experiences are designed to directly support academic and occupational learning, build core employability skills and provide a planned sequence of experiences that links academic concepts to real-world application. Students or other learners are guided and supported by an individualized career development plan, where Work-Based Learning activities are sequenced and connected to the student's next step.

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Adapted from "Creating Quality Work-Based Learning", New Ways to Work © 1998, 2002, 2010, 2016, 2019, 2020