

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 toolkit 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.



Work-Based Learning experiences can have powerful impacts on learners¹ 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 through which learners interact with employer partners, providing structured learning experiences in the workplace 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 learners to build a bridge from adolescent roles in the classroom to adult roles in professional settings. These interactions are most valuable when they occur at a workplace, or where learners are engaged in "live" interactions with employer partners.

Quality Work-Based Learning includes both remote and virtual options for most activities. Remote activities maintain learner and professional adult interaction via the use of technology, while virtual activities are generally simulations and provide employer exposures through recordings, online research and related classroom activities.

When offering remote and/or virtual options to learners, it is important to pay attention to technology access and equity in the distribution of opportunities in addition to ensuring the necessary permissions, protections and guidance are in place to promote learner safety.

Why Work-Based Learning?

High-quality Work-Based Learning provides opportunities for the acquisition of skills in three areas: academic, technical and work-readiness skills. 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 work-readiness skills (sometimes referred to as professional or "soft skills)." To support 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.

¹ Learners include K-12, community college and college students; youth and young adults engaged in workforce development programs; and adults participating in career development activities.

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

This toolkit has been developed to address the need to provide a range of high-quality opportunities to 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 Learners

Through Work-Based Learning activities, learners build awareness of potential careers in a particular industry, explore options and start preparing for their future. WBL provides opportunities for hands-on learning and the development of relationships with professional adult role models. Participating learners acquire experience and build work readiness 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, learners will often set their sights higher than an immediate job and are likely to remain committed to their education through 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 recruit, train, and retain their future workforce. Employers report increasing mismatch between the skills required for entry into their industry and those of most recent graduates. By opening their place of business to learners and providing high-value Work-Based Learning opportunities, employers can benefit from productive learner 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 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, and validate, in the classroom curriculum among educators. 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. Learners complete community projects and are visible as contributing members of society. They are growing to become 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 additional Work-Based Learning 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 learners to the multiple career options available at a workplace. Work-Based Learning engages 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. Learners are served through individualized learning plans defined for each experience and are 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 training to enable their participation, and school staff are trained in how to design 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. Learners are guided and supported by an individualized career development plan, where Work-Based Learning activities are sequenced and connected to the learner's next step.

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