

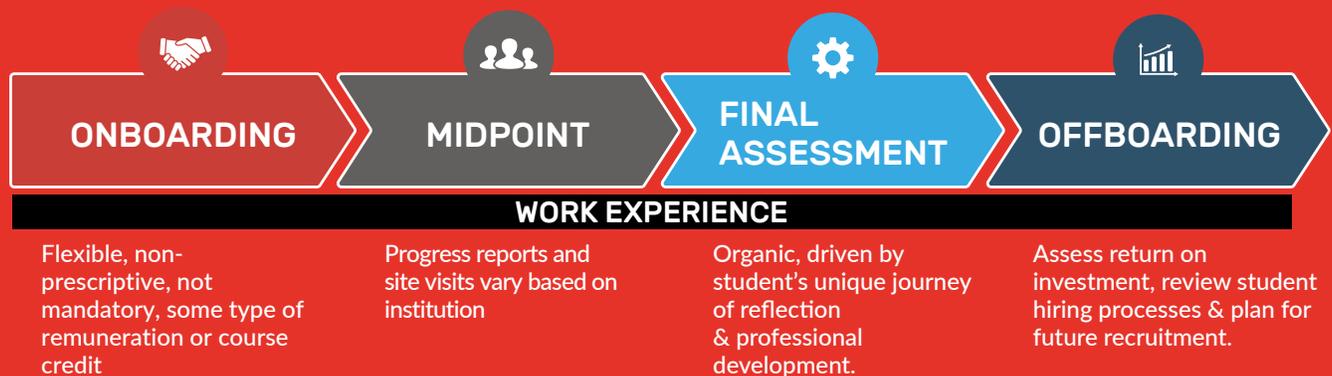
WORK EXPERIENCE

For WIL partners

The Work Experience Work Integrated Learning (WIL) type is customizable and flexible. Its non-traditional format allows WIL partners and students to create meaningful, self-directed experiential learning through solving organizational problems that more traditional WIL types don't enable.

Work Experience typically involves one full-time workplace experience. Not all Post Secondary Institutions (PSI's) have formal Co-op or Internship programs, and the Work Experience WIL type fills in these gaps. It is similar to Co-op and Internship without the prescriptive hour and time frame criteria, lowering the barrier to student and WIL partner participation. However, like all the other WIL types, Work Experience is a component of, and is embedded into, different university or college programs across Canada.

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SUPPORTING BUSINESS OBJECTIVES WITH WORK EXPERIENCE

Top 5 ways Work Experience can support your business objectives

1. Fill short term staffing needs
2. Leverage day-to-day business operations support
3. Increase resource capacity during peak business times
4. Access resource support for new or existing projects
5. Build your talent pipeline

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ONBOARDING & PRE-ENGAGEMENT

Non-traditional WIL opportunities like Work Experience are becoming increasingly popular in Canadian universities and colleges. If your organization and current employment needs are not suited to a Co-op or Internship, participating in a flexible Work Experience opportunity may be a good fit. The Work Experience WIL type allows you the flexibility to hire students for flexible, short-term, project based work.

Steps to get started with a Work Experience student

1. Determine your business goal and needs
2. Assess your budget
3. Assess your ability to offer supervision and mentorship

BUSINESS GOAL & NEEDS

Review your business goal.

Before bringing a Work Experience student onboard you will want to assess your specific project or business goal and what skill clusters are needed to successfully complete the job.

Engage your organization and consider what staffing or skills gaps you have. What projects or work do you want to complete? Similar to Co-op and Internship roles, you will want to create a position that fits both your employment needs and the student's professional development goals.

Narrow down your skills needs.

Determine specific skill clusters the Work Experience student will need in order to help you accomplish your business goal. Are the skills you require niche, like animation or video editing, or are they a cross-section of business and technologies? Does your organization have a specific project that multiple students across different disciplines could accomplish together? You can hire a team of students to solve your organization's tough problems. You can engage students in community-based Work Experience to affect social change and improve the lives of others.

Because the Work Experience WIL type is less traditional and more flexible than both Co-op and Internship you are able to customize the workplace experience in a way that makes sense for your business and the student(s). Additionally, you may find a larger pool of skilled student candidates who are not as restricted in their availability.

[Brock University's Interactive Arts & Sciences program offers students opportunities to engage in a variety of Work Experience learning initiatives with industry. Typically these industry engagements are organic and driven by an organization's business needs. "Canada Summer Games approached us to see if there was a possibility of hiring a team of students to do a digital animation series." ~ Thomas Browns, Project Coordinator](#)

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Length of time to complete your project

How much time is needed to accomplish your business goal? Work Experience programs typically involve one or more full-time workplace experiences that can be customized to meet your particular needs.

"The Canada Summer Games project was strategically developed ahead of time and meant to be on-going initiative where multiple different students from the course could jump onto the project at different points and gain practical Work Experience in the different workflows of a large real life project. From collaboration to planning to execution, to publishing and maintenance. The flexible unstructured nature of the model allows for multiple students to have short bursts of work.~ Thomas Browns, Project Coordinator."

BUDGET

Review your budget.

Work Experiences are typically remunerated in some manner whether it be direct (Ex. Paid wage or stipend), indirect (Ex. In-kind contribution), or via some type of course credit.

Federal and provincial funding programs are available to help hire students doing Work Experience and offset some costs.

SUPERVISION & MENTORSHIP

Explore and develop work experiences in a flexible mutually beneficial way.

Despite being more flexible, Work Experience programs still require the WIL partner to create and foster a learning environment where students are given an opportunity to develop their skills and engage in professional development activities.

Work experience programs are designed to support employers and students to explore and work together in a mutually beneficial way, rather than adhering to a prescribed set of criteria.

You will want to assign a mentor, supervisor or manager who can provide guidance on the related job tasks or projects and facilitate professional development. One of the primary benefits of bringing a student into your organization is the idea of recruit once, hire twice. Participating in WIL allows you to screen potential candidates for full-time future roles in your organization.

"We gave the students the transition report from the previous student so they could get up to speed on the project. We then booked a morning of training where we went through the report and the project plan and had weekly check-ins to check for clarity and understanding"
~ Work Learn Supervisor, UBC Vancouver Campus

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As with Co-op work terms and Internships, it is important to create a fully immersive experiential learning experience. Do this by setting clear expectations; connecting students with key support people; providing regular feedback and a range of challenging work and responsibility levels; encouraging students to research and ask questions of colleagues; and acknowledging achievements.

Performance feedback should be given regularly in one-on-one meetings. Focus on both the tasks accomplished and the way they were handled. Discuss deliverables, but also workplace skills such as time management and collaboration. Evaluate the goals you set in week one and adjust them if required.

The aim of the Work Experience WIL type is to provide opportunities for students and WIL partners outside of typical Co-op or Internship programs, increasing accessibility and lowering the barrier to entry.

"We really are both learning together. I like to first check in with the student about their interests to help direct their learning. A lot of the training was done while working alongside others in the lab going through all the safety and experiment protocols in great detail. We meet once a week to discuss project progress, any areas where they might need support, and set goals for the upcoming week." ~ Work Learn Supervisor, UBC Vancouver Campus

WORK EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

- Full-time
- For credit or remunerated
- Can be mandatory or not mandatory
- Competitive recruitment process



6 ONBOARDING STEPS

1. Determine your business goal and skills needed.
2. Determine when and how long you need to hire students to meet your business goal.
3. Research Work Experience programs.
4. Reach out to PSI's with your employment needs.
5. Post positions in Outcome Campus Connect.
6. Apply for WIL funding.

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MIDPOINT CONSIDERATIONS

Because Work Experience programs vary widely across PSI's and academic disciplines, expectations for WIL partners at the midterm are defined by each program.

Formal worksite visits are not a typical occurrence in Work Experience programs as this type of WIL is highly student and partner-directed. However, it is expected that participating partners will engage students in meaningful work, facilitating ownership and responsibility through creating an environment of self-awareness and reflection, offering students an opportunity to apply their knowledge in your organization.

Regularly touch base with the student throughout the work term, not just to offer feedback but to answer questions. Ensure there is enough work to do and that it increases in complexity as the work term continues.

"Mid-point performance reviews are part of the student's professional development and we encourage all supervisors to conduct them once a term. A performance review is a great opportunity to provide feedback to a student and encourage deeper self-reflection on their personal and professional growth." ~ Work Learn Supervisor, UBC Vancouver Campus

Think of Work Experience students as temporary employees where the midpoint offers an opportunity for your organization to evaluate the student's work, performance and progress and assess if they could be a potential full-time employee.

Your role is to provide meaningful work that is relevant to the student's professional goals as well as be of value to your organization. Doing an informal midpoint evaluation will help you and your student(s) determine if things are on track.

Unstructured midpoint reflections

- Are your and your student's goals and expectations being met?
- How is the student doing with professional development, e.g., time management, collaboration and problem solving?
- Are you having regular one-on-one meetings with the student, offering feedback and asking questions?
- Are you or the student experiencing any difficulties?

Support is available

Academic institutions and programs who offer Work Experience opportunities have coordinators who will offer you as much or as little guidance and support as you would like during work terms.

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FINAL ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Work Experience work terms do not always require WIL partners to do a final assessment with the PSI, but some programs may require students to do reflective professional development assignments.

Unlike Co-op, you may not be required to complete a prescriptive final evaluation form after the work term has ended.

In order to create the greatest amount of value to your business and the student, it is recommended that you set aside time to evaluate the work term from your own standpoint.

"I provide each student with an exit interview so we can wrap up the term in some more meaningful way. Sometimes I'll just take the students to lunch but the conversation really acts as an opportunity to hear about what the student is proud of, what they want to do next. It also provides a more informal space for them to ask for a reference." ~ Work Learn Supervisor, UBC Vancouver Campus

Reflect on your initial business goal and skill requirements. Was the business goal you set at the start met? Did the student have the necessary skills and requirements? What feedback did you receive from other employees? Who was involved in supporting the student? What is your team's assessment of the value of the program?

What did the student contribute to the company, in terms of deliverables, energy, ideas, or perspective? Did other employees engage in the WIL process? Did the wider community within the company notice? What about the external community? What were the actual costs, in terms of money and time, of the work term?

Students in the University of Waterloo's EDGE program are evaluated on their performance by their professor or supervisor in their work or community experiences. However, throughout this process, employers help students to reflect on their Work Experience and how they see their career moving forward.

At the end of the work term you should have a clear sense of the impact of the work experience on the student, on your organization, and on the employees who played a role in it.

"We ask that supervisors provide an exit interview to their students at the end of their work term. These can be informal in nature but still an excellent space to look back at their many accomplishments over the term. Often we get so busy in the work, we don't get a chance to pause and celebrate our progress." ~ Work Learn Supervisor, UBC Vancouver Campus

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**OFFBOARDING CONSIDERATIONS**

Assess your return on investment, review student hiring processes and plan for future recruitment.

When your organization participates as a partner with a PSI to offer a Work Experience, you are directly contributing to building the skills-based workforce that Canada needs.

Canadian businesses and organizations continue (even despite COVID-19) to struggle to find and recruit qualified talent with the right mix of changing skill sets in a timely manner.

The Work Experience model is the most organic, flexible and novel of the WIL types. At the end of the work term, you will want to think about how you could build further WIL into your organization. You will have collected ongoing feedback, which you can use to create future quality WIL experiences to benefit your organization and students. Consider how the nuances of the Work Experience journey could help you in hiring other types of WIL students, or more of the same to meet your organization's needs.

Calculate the overall cost of the Work Experience program, in terms of finances and time. Survey the mentor and your employees about their experiences. Include the student's feedback in any assessment. Unfortunately, most Work Experiences cannot be extended like Co-op, so other avenues will need to be explored. If the student was a good fit within your organization and you would like the professional relationship to continue, consider making a job offer.

"We encourage students to branch out and find new experiences, even if they've been great working with us, we do want to see them grow and move on to bigger and better things. It's not uncommon for some of our former students to come back and work as staff but we also want to see them pursue whatever inspires them." ~ Work Learn Supervisor, UBC Vancouver Campus

For more information about Work Experience for WIL partners visit the [CEWIL Resource Hub](#).