

Work experience arrangements : Best practices

Background

At its 2004 meeting, the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), endorsed [Document IAMLADP/2004/R.6](#) containing the report of its Working Group on Training (WGT), including the report of the Task Force on Work-Experience Placements and Internships. In so doing, IAMLADP urged organizations actively to promote and implement different forms of work experience for language staff, and called upon WGT to draw up some guidance in the form of a set of “*best practices*”.

Objective and benefits

The primary objective of work-experience arrangements¹ for the organizations is to contribute to ensuring that students graduating from courses designed to train language staff are as well equipped as possible for work in the organizations, thereby helping to expand and rejuvenate the pool of qualified candidates available for recruitment for permanent, freelance and contractual work.

Such work-experience arrangements also help to publicize the organizations and the language professions as potentially attractive sources of employment, promote relationships with universities, offer an opportunity to identify promising candidates, increase networking between different players in the profession, and even provide a source of motivation, learning and renewal for the incumbent language staff in the organizations.

In many cases, the actual work produced by the trainee may also contribute to a service's output, although placements/internships must not be seen as potential source of “cheap labour”.

Scope

The language professions covered by the IAMLADP study on work-experience arrangements are interpretation, translation, précis-writing, referencing and terminology, editing and proofreading.

“Best practices”

In view of the huge variation in the organizations, for example in terms of the regulatory framework, administrative practices, climate and culture, budgetary situation, workload, capacity, needs, and so forth, it would be somewhat hazardous to venture to be in any way prescriptive. Add to this the different characteristics of the language professions, and one might question the validity of “best practices” entirely.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the WGT report, which draws on extensive inputs from a cross-section of organizations, universities and trainees covering the different professions², it is possible to formulate a number of success factors for placements, which translate into the attached guidelines.

¹ As reported in Document IAMLADP/2004/R.6, work-experience periods may take many forms and a wide range of terms are used, often with different meanings in different organizations.

² The questionnaires used for the survey and a synthesis of the replies from the organizations, universities and students can be found on the IAMLADP website at <http://www.wipo.int/iamladp/en/user/> under "Working Group on Training" and "Task Force on Placements".

“BEST PRACTICE” GUIDELINES FOR WORK-EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS/INTERNSHIPS IN THE LANGUAGE SERVICES OF IAMLADP ORGANIZATIONS

1. Period

The optimum period will depend very much on the specific situation, but as a general rule **longer periods** are more productive.

- Placement during a course of study: 3-4 weeks
- Graduate traineeship after completion of course: 1- 6 months
- Study visit: 1 day – 1 week
- Familiarization period before a first paid contract: 1-2 weeks before contract
- Terminology work: Tailor to a specific project or assignment

2. Selection

A successful work-experience period depends on a good match between the student's profile and expectations and the needs and expectations of the organization, and hence on the **selection process**. The selection process and criteria should thus be carefully tailored to the situation, ranging from rudimentary or ad hoc methods (e.g. university nomination, ad hoc discussion, CV, very general criteria such as languages, level, etc.) for short, inexpensive types of arrangement to more elaborate and rigorous processes (e.g. full file, interview, test, competition) for longer and more costly arrangements.

3. Contractual arrangements

It is important to set down the **conditions** of the arrangement in writing, in order to specify the key rights and obligations of all parties, even if only in a fairly basic *convention de stage* or similar document. Items to be covered include:

- Period
- Description of duties
- Financial conditions
- Accident & sickness
- Name of person responsible for the trainee
- Attestation, certification, evaluation report

4. Preparation

A simple and low/zero-cost aspect that can enhance the value of the placement immensely is effective **preparation**, and the provision of a good **physical** and **psychological environment**. Useful preparatory measures include:

- Discussion between the organization and university (e.g. needs, expectations, standards, etc.)
- Selection/screening of candidates, based on clear criteria
- Help with finding accommodation
- Putting the trainee in contact with past trainees

- Provision of/access to background material and documentation in advance, ideally including a dedicated "information pack" or trainee manual
- Preparatory tutorials or seminars
- Logistical preparation prior to arrival (office, IT tools, supplies, etc.)
- Overview of the service at the start of the placement
- Introduction to staff of the unit concerned and other related units.

5. Funding

Cost is the single biggest obstacle to work-experience periods. As a general rule, some **financial assistance** should be provided by the organization. While it is recognized that a "full" salary is an ideal that may not be possible in most cases, possibilities include:

- Accident insurance coverage (should be mandatory)
- Sickness insurance coverage (desirable)
- Travel expenses, living allowance, maintenance grant, stipend, DSA
- "Trainee" salary, lowest-grade salary

6. Content

The best results are achieved when, as far as possible, the trainee is set **genuine tasks** and **integrated** in the actual work environment:

- Ensure that the trainee is given a reasonable amount of work (neither idle nor overburdened)
- Ensure that the work is of the right level, commensurate with the trainee's profile and in line with the agreed conditions
- Vary the work as far as possible (language, subject, length, type)
- As far as possible, give the trainee real, "live" work
- Wherever possible, integrate the trainee in a team

7. Supervision, feedback and evaluation

As they consume valuable staff time, **supervision**, **feedback** and **evaluation** often constitute the main investment required of the organization. However, they are also probably the single most important success factor, and should thus not be neglected. The trainee needs to have people to turn to on administrative, professional, material and even personal issues, and to know how he/she is doing.

- **Supervision:**

- Identify a single formal supervisor (*maître de stage*) with administrative responsibility for the trainee (usually head of service, reviser, etc.)
- Identify a mentor with overall responsibility for professional coaching (may be same as above, or delegated)
- Identify a more informal contact for material/psychological needs (usually unit secretary, possibly social welfare officer).

- **Feedback:**

- Provide regular, honest but sensitive feedback
- Wherever possible, feedback should come from several sources (e.g. different interpreters, revisers)

- Avoid lengthy spells without feedback (e.g. unsupervised interpretation in silent booths), which may lead to the formation of bad habits

- **Evaluation**

- Provide a formal evaluation at the end of the period (certificate, reference, letter, *rapport de stage*, formal test)

8. Other assistance

Other useful assistance that can be provided during a placement includes:

- Where possible, allowing the trainee to practise any **other relevant language activities** that may be feasible (e.g. organizing an interpreting or précis-writing stint for a translator trainee)
 - Where possible, providing the trainee with access to **other organizations** (e.g. time off to "do the rounds", formal introduction to recruiters in other organizations)
 - Helping the trainee to **network** as broadly as possible (e.g. with freelance interpreters/translators, reference clerks, terminologists, library, etc.)
 - Taking time to explain how the **profession** functions (different types of contracts, professional associations, professional domicile, salary scales, etc.)
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