Best Practice Guidelines
For Vocational Placement
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An Overview

About Vocational Placement

Vocational Placement is a structured workplace learning experience where a student has been placed in a desired Vocational Placement Organisation, to which they will then receive practical training and experience which goes hand in hand with their current theoretical studies. The purpose of Vocational Placement provides an opportunity for students to undertake tasks that relate to their specific course of study, to which they will be able to demonstrate a competency standard upon completion of their placement.

It is intended these Guidelines will be used in conjunction with the Vocational Placement Agreement (VPA). The VPA delivers the minimum requirements expected from each party in a Vocational Placement arrangement; clarifies the responsibilities of all participants; and provides clear processes for dispute resolution and contract variations or cancellations.

PLACEMENTS ARE MOST SUCCESSFUL WHEN:

- each party is aware of their responsibilities and requirements prior to commencement and when there is ongoing open and honest communication between all parties for the duration of the placement
- the skills to be developed are clearly specified and agreed in writing and there is a designated person at the workplace with the necessary skills and experience to support the Student working toward those skills

Benefits for Vocational Placement Organisations (VPO)

Participating in Vocational Placements gives VPOs the opportunity to meet and evaluate Students who have potential to become skilled employees, including some who can bring additional cross-cultural diversity to the workplace.

By adopting a Best Practice approach through using the VPA and Guidelines, VPOs will also:

- clearly define the standards, performance levels and approach to tasks expected in the workplace
- ensure theoretical education translates to practical applications or practical skills that are relevant for the sector
help Students to develop behaviours which are a good ‘fit’ with the culture of the real-world workplace

demonstrate the site as ‘an employer of choice’ to qualified people in the sector, who will recognise the site as one which is committed to quality training and development

promote the site to the community as a ‘learning facility’ committed to ensuring high standards

Benefits for Training Providers

Training Providers use Vocational Placements to access ‘real-world’ practical applications to help Students better understand the theory of the training program and explore different learning techniques.

By adopting a Best Practice approach through using the VPA and Guidelines, Training Providers will also:

know their Students are appropriately prepared prior to the placement and suitably supported throughout

know their Students are ‘work-ready’ upon course completion, because their training has been more meaningful

have a foundation for effective communication with VPO Providers throughout all aspects of the placement

build relationships with VPO Providers that facilitate future opportunities in the sector, and Manage risk – because roles and responsibilities are clearly defined

Benefits for Students

Students learn differently – and apply what they learn differently – when that learning comes from workplace experience rather than from a formal ‘education’ setting. They also have the opportunity to showcase themselves to potential employers during Vocational Placements and to make informed choices about career pathways, future training and specific potential employers.

Students who participate in a placement where the VPA and Guidelines have been used in a Best Practice approach will also:

feel comfortable that they know what is expected of them and how they are meant to behave
feel confident that the skills they are developing are relevant to the work environment
understand the requirements of the workplace in terms of using those skills and the pace at which they need to apply them
manage risk – because they have a clear understanding of what to do, how to seek help, what they need to report and how to do that

How Does Each Party Raise The Bar?

A Best Practice Vocational Placement Organisation Will:

- work collaboratively with the Training Provider and the Student to identify learning experiences which are specifically appropriate to the objectives of the placement
- provide a thorough induction for the Student on commencement – as though they were a new employee
- designate a staff member with appropriate skills and experience to work with the Student in the role of Workplace Supervisor – to provide appropriate instruction, guidance and feedback while serving as a personal example of what ‘Best Practice’ means in the workplace
- use the Workplace Supervisor and other means to ensure appropriate WHS policies and systems are followed throughout the placement – so that all stakeholders are in a safe environment
- take steps to ensure that Students are not asked to perform tasks beyond their competency or the competency that they might reasonably be expected to achieve as part of their training program
- follow through at the end of the placement to provide constructive feedback to the Training Provider

The VPA developed by Shafston House College Pty Ltd, lists the obligations to be met by each party. However, the philosophy behind the obligations can be expressed more generally. A Best Practice Training Provider Will:
• collaborate with the VPO Provider prior to the placement about appropriate tasks – adjusting requirements to recognise prior skills, knowledge and experience where relevant

• ensure appropriate WHS systems are in place and appropriate on-site support will be provided

• forward Students to a Vocational Placement only when confident they have achieved the minimum criteria previously agreed with the VPO Provider as necessary for placement commencement

• ensure Students have all the communication skills and functionality necessary to be able to fully participate in that placement

• prepare Students fully about what will be expected of them in the workplace including documentation needs and the pace at which they’ll need to work

• prepare Students about the range of issues they may encounter in the workplace and how to address those issues

• Initiate regular contact with both the Student and the VPO Provider throughout the placement to discuss progress; provide and receive feedback; mediate emerging issues and gather evidence that competencies are being attained, and Perform assessments against nationally accepted criteria.

**Student’s Role in Best Practice**

The Student’s role in a quality Vocational Placement is to perform appropriate tasks safely and to the best of their ability, behaving in a way which at all times maximises their learning opportunity.

To do this they need to be prepared, aware of expectations and supported. Later sections in this booklet describe how this can be achieved.
Getting Started
Initiating a Partnership Approach

This isn’t about the Training Provider ‘selling’ the Vocational Placement Organisation on accepting one or more Students for Vocational Placement – nor is it about Students ‘finding their own work experience’.

To meet the criteria for Registration, Training Providers are called upon to engage employers in the development, delivery and monitoring of training and assessment – and to ensure students ‘receive support from all parties engaged in their training and assessment’.

In Best Practice, the initial meeting between the prospective parties will include a comprehensive discussion and site tour.

Engagement is the key to a healthy long term partnership. Direct contact between the Training Provider and VPO Provider – prior to, and throughout, the Vocational Placement – is an essential step toward that engagement.

Blue Card and Vocational Placement Information

Volunteers and adults who work with children and young people must hold a blue card, unless an exemption applies. A volunteer or unpaid trainee student must not commence regulated child-related work (vocational placement) until they hold a valid blue card.

Shafston initiates the Blue Card application process at orientation. The application may take up to 28 working days to be processed.

For more detailed information about the blue card please click on the link to the blue card Government website and you will find further information about the volunteer blue card as listed below.


Volunteers & students

Do I need a blue card?
Who is disqualified from applying for a blue card?
When do I need to apply?
How do I apply?
Your rights
Your obligations
Deciding who is eligible to work with children
The Training Provider Will Want To Know:

the VPO has the capacity to provide the appropriate learning experiences for the Student – in a safe environment.

In order to feel confident about this, the Training Provider will seek information about the:

➢ extent of opportunities for the Student to achieve competency and be assessed against competency standards
➢ availability and access to suitable equipment and resources relevant to the specific training program
➢ availability of appropriately skilled support personnel to work with the Student during training shifts
➢ potential for suitably skilled personnel to gather workplace evidence of acquired competencies
➢ WHS policies, procedures and safe practices that are in place to protect the Student and others
➢ induction processes that will be used to familiarise the Student with workplace practices
➢ flexibility that could be offered for a Student with special needs
➢ potential for any special projects which could enhance the Student’s learning experience

The Vocational Placement Organisation Will Want To Know:

about the site’s specific role and responsibilities – including learning requirements.

The VPO will also want to feel assured that the:

➢ Training Provider will maintain contact, monitoring and support throughout the placement
➢ student will have the personal attributes and functional capacity to undertake workplace training
Preparing Students

Successful Vocational Placement involves a two-strand approach to initiating Student participation:

1. Selecting only those Students for a specific program who have the capacity to succeed in it
2. Preparing Students well for the workplace training component of that program

1. Selection of Students

Best Practice selection of Students does more than consider whether they are capable of undertaking classroom aspects of their program, but also forecasts whether they will have the capacity, when the time comes, to undertake the workplace component. Because entry to the study program can occur more than twelve months prior to the Vocational Placement, this can be problematic – especially when there may be a need to forecast, for example, how well a Student may progress with developing English language skills.

However, it’s important the initial selection process includes discussion about requirements which will need to be met later – and that Students understand a failure to meet those requirements will not only exclude future employment in the sector, but also prevent the completion of their training program (the Vocational Placement).

Personal Qualities and Behaviours

The attributes required for employment in chosen industry are equally important for Vocational Placement. Requirements will depend on the course, but applicants for a Diploma in Early Childhood Education, for example, should be able to demonstrate good communication skills; show patience and understanding; have a caring and supportive approach to people; and be adaptable, honest and respectful.

English Language Skills

While care needs to be taken not to discriminate against people because of their cultural background, English language skills are critical. Students need to be aware of the standard they’ll need to achieve before they participate in Vocational Placement. One way to measure the need for additional support is to use a scale such as the General Module of
the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which provides scores for Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.

2A. Preparation of Students for the Work Environment

The clear focus of this next stage is to ensure the Student is ‘ready’ to work in an environment involving vulnerable people. To be confident about this, Training Providers will use a combination of assessment and preparation. Evaluating Student ‘readiness’ should begin with a review of issues raised in the previous section about Student Selection.

Best Practice Assessment Will Include:

General Safe Work Practices

To demonstrate the Student knows how to behave so as to not harm themselves or others in the workplace

Communication Skills

As a minimum, the Training Provider should feel confident the Student has sufficient command of the English language in listening, speaking, reading and writing to be able to function effectively in the work environment. An assessment tool such as IELTS should be used where there is any doubt.

2B. Best Practice Preparation Will Ensure Students Understand the Importance of:

Medical Fitness

In particular, the potential impact on Children if Students attend the work environment with Cold or Flu symptoms. (Best Practice Vocational Placement Organisation Providers will encourage Flu Vaccinations for Students prior to commencement of the placement)
I. Presenting for work in a fit state

Apart from medical issues, Students need to understand the ramifications of presenting for work under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including prescribed medication)

➢ Behaving in a professional manner

Which at all times complies with the site’s Code of Conduct

➢ Strictly adhering to the site’s WHS policies

Which includes specific processes and procedures

IV. Documentation

Hold a current Working With Children Certification (bluecard for Queensland)

V. Complying with safe and reasonable directions

But advising immediately if designated tasks appear beyond their current capability

VI. Not attempting additional tasks beyond their current level of Student learning

While initiative is encouraged, Students need to be aware they could place themselves or others at risk by attempting to ‘jump ahead’

VII. Maintaining confidentiality of information

About the Vocational Placement Organisation; children; families; co-workers and visitors – unless there is an issue of concern, which should then be raised with the Supervisor or another appropriate person involved with the Vocational Placement, and students entering the work environment should also have a good knowledge about challenging behaviours they may encounter

VIII. Cultural Barriers

It’s also important to identify and address any cultural barriers which may impact on workplace performance – including language issues where, for example, a Student may have good English speaking skills but is unfamiliar with Australian meanings attached to certain words and phrases.

Setting up a formal agreement

During the initial discussion between the Training Provider and Vocational Placement Organisation Provider each participant will have had the opportunity to gauge the other’s suitability for a ‘partnership’ arrangement – and to form an understanding of how that arrangement might operate.
In a Best Practice arrangement, those ‘understandings’ will now be formalised and documented in a written agreement. This might commence with an exchange of correspondence which commits each party to using the VPA and these Best Practice Guidelines – and identifies who has the authority to sign the VPA from each Organisation.

Best Practice participants will also consider whether specific attachments are required to support the VPA. This may involve:

- specific requirements the Training Provider may have in terms of learning opportunities for specific courses
- specific preparation or assessments the VPO may require before accepting a Student on a Vocational Placement
- specific time frames during which the Vocational Placement must be completed
- an agreement for the Training Provider to assist at the work site to provide appropriate workplace support

**A Three-Way Agreement**

There are three parties to the VPA – Training Provider, VPO and Student. As a signatory to the VPA, the Student must be in a position to fully understand the document and the reasons for it. The VPA has been written in English, in a Best Practice approach the Training Provider will lead the Student carefully through the document and ensure all items are understood.

This is also when items such as ‘behave in a professional manner’ can be more fully explained, so that the Student understands exactly what that means in a work environment. In particular, the Student must be comfortable with procedures to be used if concerned about any issues arising in the workplace – and what to do if there is any indication of dispute or conflict.

The Training Provider will have responsibility for ensuring the Student understands the VPA and is able to comply with the role and responsibilities outlined, the VPO must also feel comfortable this is the case. Because there may be some time lapse between the Training Provider’s explanation of the VPA and the commencement of the placement, a Best Practice VPO will also include the document in the Induction and Orientation program.

**Why So Many Insurances?**

All parties involved in a Vocational Placement should take their own advice on Insurances. However, there is a very broad explanation which can help to alleviate confusion. Should
an accident, injury, or other ‘claimable’ incident occur, there is likely to be one of four scenarios:

1. The VPO may be found to be ‘at fault’ – perhaps because they haven’t provided a safe work environment. In this situation, the VPOs Insurance (Public Liability or Professional Indemnity) would be expected to meet associated costs.

2. The Training Provider may be found to be ‘at fault’ – perhaps because the Student hadn’t been trained in a way that had been claimed. In this situation, the Training Provider’s Insurance (Public Liability or Professional Indemnity) would be expected to meet associated costs.

3. The Student may be found to be ‘at fault’ – perhaps because they behaved in a way contrary to their training with both the Training Provider and the VPO Provider. In this situation, the Training Provider’s and/or VPOs Insurance (Public Liability) would be expected to meet associated costs.

4. Something happens that’s ‘nobody’s fault’ – perhaps a lightning strike? This is when the Student would need their own cover for personal injury, loss or damage. The above is not a legal opinion. It is offered as a sweeping interpretation of a complex and specialised field.

The Site Induction

VPOs accepting a Student for Vocational Placement have a right to expect that the Student will come to them suitably prepared for the experience – but assumptions should never be made.

A Best Practice introduction to the work environment will confirm this ‘general preparedness’ as well as deliver specifics about the site. Ideally, it follows an Orientation-Induction-Settling sequence.

Orientation

Orientation is about familiarisation with the worksite, amenities, equipment and reporting structure – and also the people with whom the Student will interact during the placement. However, Best Practice Orientation is much more than a ‘meet and greet’ and site tour. It’s also about ensuring the Student is comfortable with the coaching support that will be available to them and clarifying ‘expectations’ – not just what is expected of Students, but what they can expect in return.
On The Job
Induction

Induction gives people clarity about their role – security about what they will be doing and how they should be doing it. The Induction process therefore should, as a minimum, cover policies and procedures relating to:

- Code of Conduct
- Bullying and Harassment
- Use of Information Technology
- Use of Illicit Drugs and Alcohol
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Duty of Care

Mandatory Reporting

It’s important to remember that a Student at the beginning of a Vocational Placement is in ‘information overload’. Best Practice will take the time to ensure the Student understands the written documents.

Settling

In many ways a Student remains in a ‘settling’ stage throughout the entire Vocational Placement, but it’s important to recognise there will likely be a more ‘intense’ settling period at the beginning of the placement. This is the time when – despite training, preparation, orientation and induction – the Student is confronted for the first time in a service.

The length of time required for confidence about skills and abilities to develop will depend on variables such as age, life experience, work experience, cultural background, length of time in the classroom and extent of exposure to simulated procedures. A Best Practice approach to is flexible to accommodate these variables and will provide settling support for as long as it’s required.

Work Health & Safety

Under the Work Health and Safety Act (2011) employers may have a duty to ‘ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that the employee is, while at work, safe from injury and risks to health’. While a Student on Vocational Placement is not an employee, the principle is the same and the VPO Provider has responsibility for an appropriate WHS Induction.
Settling in
Building a positive experience

This is the foundation for Best Practice management of the placement period – which will provide the best learning outcomes for the Student and therefore the best long-term outcomes for the other parties. The VPA clearly identifies the responsibilities for each party throughout the Vocational Placement – while the following guidelines are about fulfilling those responsibilities in a way that ensures a positive experience for all.

The Best Practice Guidelines for Vocational Placement has been developed to ensure that happens – so that Students feel their decision to work in their chosen field has been the right choice.

Interpreting the relationship

A Student on Vocational Placement is not an employee of the VPO Provider and the principles of Vocational Placement mean a Student on site should never bring about the displacement of an employee.

The VPO has certain legal responsibilities relating to the ‘duty of care’ required for all persons on their premises and some legislation treats Students on Vocational Placement similarly to employees. In summary, a Student on Vocational Placement is:

- not an employee for Worker’s Compensation purposes
- considered an employee for Workplace Health Safety purposes
- considered an employee for Equal Opportunity purposes

A Best Practice approach will therefore manage the various aspects of the relationship through appropriate supervision, continuous monitoring and support.

Providing the Appropriate Level of Supervision

All Students participating in a Vocational Placement must be supervised.

However, the level of supervision required at any one time is dependent on a number of variables, including the specific task they are performing – and the level of risk that task presents to the Student, the Child and the Organisation.

Direct Supervision

Is when the supervisor is actually present and personally observes, works with, guides and directs the person who is being supervised.
Monitoring and Support

Although Vocational Placement shifts the Student’s training to ‘on-the-job’ rather than ‘in-the classroom’, this isn’t a ‘hand-over’ to the VPO.

In a Best Practice placement, the Training Provider and VPO will work together to ensure desired learning outcomes are achieved during the on-site training period.

A Best Practice Vocational Placement Organisational Provider Will:

- designate an appropriate staff member to act as a Workplace Supervisor for the Student. This is more than appointing someone to ‘buddy’ the Student to facilitate orientation and socialisation to the work unit – or even about supervision or mentoring.

A Workplace Supervisor will specifically help the Student meet the learning objectives of their placement by:

- working with them to identify learning opportunities relevant to their training program
- providing instruction before and during tasks
- providing constructive feedback during and after tasks
- serving as a clinical resource by sharing knowledge while demonstrating skills
- acting as a Role Model to convey Best Practice

The Workplace Supervisor therefore needs to be Diploma Qualified – and needs specific personal qualities to be able to fulfil the role successfully, such as good communication skills and appropriate feedback techniques.

Invest in developing and using Workplace Supervisors to work with Students

VPOs who feel they may not have suitable staff to fulfil the role of Workplace Supervisor should raise this with the Training Provider during initial discussions. In some instances, Training Providers can offer training support for staff who will facilitate Vocational Placements.
International Students on Student Visas

Only CRICOS approved courses can be offered to international students studying in Australia on a student visa. The ESOS Act sets out the legal framework governing delivery of education to overseas students studying in Australia on a student visa. The Australian Government, through the Department of Education, administers the ESOS Act and its associated instruments.

The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (current) governs:

- the registration process and obligations of registered providers;
- the Tuition Protection Service;
- enforcement and compliance powers

The National Code

The National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (the National Code) provides nationally consistent standards for the conduct of registered providers and the registration of their courses.

The standards set out specifications and procedures to ensure that registered providers of education and training courses can clearly understand and comply with their obligations under the National Code.

The National Code 2018 is contained at the follow link:-


Source: ELICOS Standards 2018

A Best Practice Training Provider Will

Initiate regular contact with the Student and Vocational Placement Organisation during the placement

Direct contact with both on-site parties is important to identify whether the placement is progressing according to plan. Apart from responding promptly to any requests for contact, a Best Practice Training Provider will also initiate it – ideally with the Student’s direct Supervisor as well as the representative with whom initial discussions and negotiations have occurred. In a Best Practice approach, feedback received during this contact can initiate immediate changes so the desired learning outcomes can be achieved.

Mediate between the Student and VPO if required

As the coordinator of the Vocational Placement, the Training Provider is best placed to mediate any unresolved issues in terms of the Student’s performance management, misunderstandings or disputes between the on-site parties – or when a Student feels their learning needs are not being met.

A Best Practice Vocational Placement Organisation Will:

Prepare staff for the arrival of the Student

Cross-Cultural Awareness training for staff brings benefits to the organisation well beyond providing support for a Student on placement. Helping your staff to better understand other cultures, beliefs, behaviours and communication conventions will therefore bring long-term benefits.

Prepare parents and children for the arrival of the Student

This can be achieved by expanding their acceptance of ‘differences’ as valid by perhaps inviting cultural groups on-site, attending cultural festivities in the community or maybe hosting a staff/resident lunch with multicultural food, dancing or displays.

The Assessment Process

Assessment of competency is often the aspect of Vocational Placement that causes the most confusion for participants. Who does what? The VPA developed by Shafston clearly designates the role of each party.

However, assessment is recognised to be an on-going process, rather than a single event and it is therefore noted that evidence for the assessment will be gathered ‘in conjunction with the VPO’.
In other words, the VPO Provider will witness the demonstration of competency as it is applied in the workplace – and may provide descriptions and evidence of that competency to the Training Provider – but it is the Training Provider who has to be satisfied the competency has been achieved.

**Useful Feedback to the Training Provider**

While the Training Provider will have knowledge of how the Student performs in their study, only the VPO Provider can provide feedback on how the Student performs in a functioning workplace. This feedback is therefore important on each of the skills listed in the Student’s logbook. Other feedback useful to the Training Provider includes information about the Student’s overall attitude, attendance, behaviour, workability, adaptability and the time taken to develop skills.
Managing Issues
Dispute Resolution Process

The VPA provides a structured Dispute Resolution Process. This allows for immediate suspension of the placement by either the Training Provider or the VPO Provider if concerned a serious breach of the agreement has occurred – and termination of the placement if subsequent investigation proves the concern is valid.

Disputes which cannot be resolved between the parties should be referred to an independent mediator.

Although issues such as these may be managed on site, the Training Provider will want to know – and will mediate if necessary. Best Practice involves the Training Provider early – not only to enhance learning outcomes for the current Student in the current placement, but also to facilitate continuous improvement for future Student placements.

The Training Provider should be notified immediately about any issues which present a risk – either to the Student or others. This could include the Student presenting at the workplace in an ‘unfit state’ or any other serious misconduct, such as deliberate misuse or damage of property.

Alternatively, the VPO needs to made aware immediately if the Student is arrested, charged or convicted of any criminal offence during the term of the placement or of any other serious issues which become apparent (such as use of illegal substances) which might impact on the Student’s fitness to work in an environment with vulnerable people.

If Things Go Wrong

Most Vocational Placements go smoothly. The risk of ‘things going wrong’ is reduced through the use of a formal agreement such as the VPA and these Best Practice Guidelines.

However, occasionally incidents arise in even the best managed placements. In a Best Practice Vocational Placement immediate action and effective communication will often prevent the ‘incident’ from escalating into something more serious – or becoming a long term issue for any, or all, of the placement participants.
Shafston College wishes a successful journey in working together to develop great educators for our Early Learners!

For any further information, please see contact information below;

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