

Approaches to Work Experience That Supports Employers and Students



Context

Dundee City Council was looking at ways to achieve its vision to retain graduates and provide more practical experience in planning. At the same time, funding for summer student placements had been lost. The service already had strong links with the University of Dundee, where they had worked in partnership to provide planning-related work experience and internship opportunities for students. The planning service was looking to support its own workforce development while giving students meaningful and practical experience in a planning department.

What Happened

Dundee City Council offered a number of different workplace placements:

30 hour internships: This was an offer to second year students to develop experience in development management. They had opportunities for shadowing, mentoring and site visits, giving them real live planning experience. Usually, these last for five weeks.

250 hour internship: A pilot is currently being undertaken where a final-year planning student at the University of Dundee completes a 250-hour practice-based internship as part of their degree, as an alternative to a dissertation. They were embedded within the planning service as a full member of the



team, working across development planning, regeneration, and development management. There is no financial cost to the council, it is three months full time and gives them valuable work experience.

Student Work Experience Days: The council also provided one-day student work experience placements with structured activities such as team introductions, live planning application work, site visits, and Q&A sessions.

An 18-month modern apprenticeship is also being appointed, funded through Discover Work Dundee. This role will work across planning and building standards teams.

Informal engagement with students was also supported, including staff participation in university interviews for dissertations and project discussions.

Areas of Collaboration

The key areas of collaboration were:

- Council and university partnership: the approach was built on a close partnership with the University of Dundee to align academic requirements with workplace experience and assessment.
- Cross-team working: The intern worked with a number planning officers rather than a single supervisor, to take account of hybrid working arrangements and to support them to gain wider experiences across the service.
- Cross-service working: The intern worked across development planning, regeneration, development management.
- Wider council involvement: Similar internship models were in place in related areas such as climate change and sustainability, responding to increased demand from the university.

Overall Result

The student gained practical experience, was able to contribute to real planning work and gained hands-on experience of project development and management, policy review, development management processes, site visits, and use of professional systems and GIS. This enabled the intern to build their confidence in a professional environment and their feedback indicated that the experience improved their readiness for employment.

The Council benefited from additional capacity and new perspectives. The flexible structure of placements worked well for both students and the service whilst the council benefited from additional resource capacity and the opportunity to assess potential future talent in a live working environment.

Lessons Learned

It is important to have a clear work programme and expectations to ensure placements are meaningful and add value. This can help interns to integrate quickly and to agree their focus. Discussing the intern's interests and expectations beforehand allows for better matching of work to learning needs.

Regular feedback and opportunities to engage with different staff members can help to improve the learning experience. This should involve structured reviews from both the council and the university to help reinforce learning and development.



Allowing interns to work across different parts of the service can help them to learn more, to boost their confidence, and improve their understanding of the organisation. This can be particularly important in hybrid working arrangements.

Externally funded and flexible placement models can successfully replace more traditional approaches. Maintaining strong relationships with universities is central to making this work effectively.

There is a growing demand from universities who are seeing increased student interest in placements. Planning authorities should look to anticipate this through exploring graduate apprenticeships and additional formal or informal work experience.

This case study has been prepared in collaboration by Dundee City Council and the National Planning Improvement Team at the Improvement Service. We publish good practice case studies identified through our work on the National Planning Improvement Framework and the National Planning Hub. They aim to support the sharing of good practice and build collaboration across the sector in addressing common challenges. Please email us at npi@improvementservice.org.uk if your authority has a good practice case study to share.

