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# **Work Experience Guide for Higher Education Students on practice based Media courses**



### **Using this guide**

Work experience comes in all shapes and sizes including part-time jobs, vacation work and voluntary work. This guide offers advice on course related work experience placements for higher education students on practice based media courses. It is intended to be used alongside guidelines provided by individual universities. Students from other disciplines who are interested in pursuing a career in the media industry may also find the guidelines helpful.

### **Why is work experience so important?**

Getting a first job in the media industry is very tough – more people want to work in the business than there are jobs available and entry level positions are rarely advertised. Employers, always keen to attract the brightest talent, can therefore afford to look for people who have some practical experience as well as relevant qualifications and genuine enthusiasm. For this reason alone, undertaking a placement as part of your higher education course is an invaluable opportunity.

Placements also give you the chance to develop other skills that employers value; things like team working, problem solving and communication skills. As well as helping you to develop skills that will make you more attractive to future employers, placements can also help you to gain a real insight into how the industry operates, to make contacts and to network.

All in all undertaking a placement can give you a real competitive edge when it comes to looking for your first job in the media industry.

### **Finding a placement**

Finding a placement in the media industry takes time and effort; employers receive many CVs every week so you will have to work hard to stand out from the crowd. The key to success is to prepare thoroughly, do your research and organise your placement in good time.

### **What do you have to offer?**

Think carefully about what you have to offer an employer. As a student on a practice based media course you will be able to offer an understanding of the production process, generic skills like administration and research, and technical skills like editing and camera.

Students from other disciplines who are interested in a media career may be able to offer subject-specific skills which would be useful to an employer. For example, a student on a biology degree might be helpful as a researcher on a natural history programme.



### What do you need to learn?

Next, think about what you need to learn. A placement should give you the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills that you've acquired during your course to some real tasks and challenges. Discuss this with your tutor or your careers/placement office.

Other things to think about when planning your placement are:

- What kind of department or production are you interested in working in?
- Which role are you interested in? For more information about different job roles look at the Skillset job profiles at [www.skillset.org/careers/jobs](http://www.skillset.org/careers/jobs)
- Do you need to be paid or are you prepared to do an unpaid placement?
- Employers are not required to pay national minimum wage rates to students studying certain UK based higher education courses who are undertaking a placement as part of their course and where the placement does not exceed one year. For further advice on any aspect of the national minimum wage contact the NWM Helpline on 0845 6000 678.
- If you are prepared to work for no or low pay, how will you cover travel, accommodation and other living expenses during your placement?

- How long a placement do you need? This will be determined partly by the requirements of your course and partly by the area of the industry in which you are interested in working. Employers in media production seem more likely to offer shorter placements since the publication of new industry guidelines stating that “generally two weeks is an appropriate period for an unpaid placement, but where, for it to be a genuine learning experience, it is appropriate for it to be longer, it should run for no more than four weeks”. The new guidelines can be found in full at [www.dti.gov.uk/files/file37253.pdf](http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file37253.pdf)

### Identifying opportunities

With your initial preparation complete, start making a list of the organisations for which you'd like to work.

You can begin building this list by getting in touch with your careers/ placement service to see what resources and contacts they can supply. They are likely to have a range of directories and reference books, and may also be able to provide lists of employers who have provided placements in the past or information about current opportunities that they've received from employers.

Next, widen your search to other places where placement opportunities may be advertised. Check the websites of individual organisations you'd like to work for and investigate websites of trade or professional bodies. Appendix 1 contains a comprehensive list of resources and sources to help you identify and research potential employers.



Last but not least, think about creating your own opportunities by making speculative applications. Many media employers, particularly the small and medium sized companies which make up so much of the industry, do not advertise work experience opportunities because they receive so many speculative enquiries. You can find out who's doing what, where and when by reading the trade press, looking at websites, consulting directories and making use of any personal contacts that you have.

### **Finding out more about companies**

Once you've drawn up a short list of companies that you're interested in, research each one and get a good understanding of their business. Find out:

- What they do – if you're interested in a placement with a production company, find out what kind of programmes or films they make, and watch them.
- How you can help them - identify what skills and personal attributes you can offer that they might find useful.
- The name and job title of the most appropriate person to approach - in a small company it might be the chief executive or managing director, in a larger organisation it might be some one in the human resources or personnel department.

### **Contacting companies**

With your research completed, it's time to start contacting the employers in which you are interested.

If you are responding to an advertised opportunity, you should follow the specified application process. If you are making a speculative enquiry, send your CV, by post or email, together with a covering letter to the named contact identified through your research.

Your CV should always be tailored to suit the organisation in which you are interested. Your careers/placement service should be able to give advice with writing CVs, covering letters and interview technique. You can also find tips on writing a CV for the media industry on the Skillset website.

Think carefully about what to include in the covering letter and make sure that you:

- Address it to a named contact.
- Are enthusiastic about the company and explain why you are interested in getting work experience with them.
- Introduce yourself in a positive way, explaining what you have to offer them in terms of skills, the relevance of your course or other experience.
- Explain the benefits to the company of taking you on and request an introductory meeting.
- Double check spelling and grammar – letters containing mistakes are likely to end up in the bin.



If you haven't received a response in a week, follow up with a telephone call to request an interview. Always be positive, polite and professional.

When you are offered an interview, remember that you only get one chance to make a first impression. Arrive in good time and dress appropriately.

### **Confirming arrangements**

Once you are offered a placement, you can use the following checklist to firm up on the arrangements needed to make it a really good quality experience. Ask your employer to provide the following information:

- A clear and accurate description of the placement including which department or production it will be with and what activities will you be involved in.
- The name of your supervisor or mentor – this should be a member of staff who has some time and is prepared to take responsibility for overseeing your activities and to whom you can turn for advice and support.
- Start and end dates.
- Start and finish times for the working day, including arrangements for meal breaks.
- The location at which you will be working.
- Arrangements for payment, if applicable.
- What expenses you can claim and how you go about claiming them.
- Confirmation that they have adequate insurance cover, including Employers' Liability and Public Liability insurance, and that you are covered by it.
- Confirmation that they will safeguard your health, safety and welfare at work by carrying out a risk assessment in advance of your placement; briefing you about health and safety issues on your first day; and providing you with appropriate training for all activities you are asked to undertake which have health and safety implications.

Having written confirmation of these arrangements will help to make everyone's expectations about the placement clear. If you are undertaking your placement as part of your course then your university should provide model paperwork for you to use.



## The Placement

### Your first day

On your first day you should be met by someone, probably your supervisor or mentor, who will explain how things work, help you to settle in and brief you about health and safety issues. Don't be afraid to ask questions during this induction or to revisit any of the areas listed above.

Appendix 2 contains a Sample Induction Checklist which you may find useful if your university does not provide detailed guidance.

### Learning

Your placement is intended to be a learning opportunity, so it's important to agree specific learning objectives at the outset. Your supervisor or mentor will usually be best placed to agree these with you as part of the induction process.

You should try to have regular meetings with your supervisor or mentor to review your progress throughout your placement. This is particularly important if your placement is for longer than two weeks.

Your university will probably require you to record details of your placement in a log book which will form part of the assessment for your course. Whatever the formal requirements of your particular course, it's a good idea to keep a record of your experiences. Take time every day to think about the skills that you're developing, what you've achieved and any difficulties you've overcome. Then write it down. This process will help you to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and understand what you need to do or learn in order to improve.

### Professional behaviour

Your behaviour while on placement will influence your own employment prospects and can also have a bearing on whether an employer offers placements in the future. Remember to:

- Be punctual and do what you say you will. If you're running late or can't complete a task, explain the situation to the person concerned as soon as you can.
- Observe all your employer's policies and procedures in the same way as other employees.
- Work safely, within the health and safety guidelines set by your employer.
- Respect the confidentiality of all information relating to your employer, their customers, clients and suppliers.
- Be polite, courteous and helpful to everyone you come into contact with.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.



### **Dealing with problems**

If you encounter any problems while on placement, you should raise these with your supervisor or mentor as soon as possible. If the problem cannot be resolved or if you are having any kind of disciplinary problem you should get in touch with your university tutor or careers/ placement service without delay.

### **Feedback and evaluation**

At the end of your placement there should be an opportunity for feedback and evaluation, ideally a one to one meeting with your supervisor or mentor. Check with your university to find out if they require feedback from you and your employer in a particular format.

Appendix 3 contains a Sample Feedback Form which you may find useful if your university does not provide a template.

### **Staying in touch**

The media industry is a contacts business and it's important to make the most of the contacts made during work experience:

- **Write and thank your employer for the opportunity. If you're keen to work for them after you graduate, tell them and ask them to let you know about any suitable jobs.**
- **Keep in touch with your supervisor or mentor. As well as keeping you in mind for future jobs, they will be invaluable if you need a reference in the future.**



## Appendix 1: Useful resources

### Publications

**Broadcast** ([www.broadcastnow.co.uk](http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk)) – news, analysis, opinion and key data on the UK television and radio industry. Published weekly.

**Guardian Media Directory** ([www.mediauk.com/directory](http://www.mediauk.com/directory)) – lists websites, addresses, telephone numbers, programme schedules, live links and more for all areas of the online media.

**Kemps** ([www.kftv.com](http://www.kftv.com)) – free to search online production directory for the TV, film and video industries. Separate volumes for UK and international listings.

**The Knowledge** ([www.theknowledgeonline.com](http://www.theknowledgeonline.com)) – free registration gives access to the crew and facilities database, an online form and industry news. Predominately London-based, although now expanding to include some international listings.

**The PACT Directory of Independent Producers** ([www.pact.co.uk/pactdirectory](http://www.pact.co.uk/pactdirectory)) - an online guide listing UK independent producers who are PACT members. Free to search for PACT members and their staff, subscription charges apply to others. Includes company profiles plus details of credits and projects in development, key personnel and contact details. Ask your careers/placement service to arrange an educational subscription.

**Screen International** ([www.screendaily.com](http://www.screendaily.com)) – news, film reviews, features and analysis on film production, box office performance, distribution, technology and film festivals. Published weekly.

**Televsual** ([www.televsual.com](http://www.televsual.com)) – monthly magazine delivering news, features and industry surveys to the UK TV production community.

**The Writers' Handbook** - a comprehensive director of markets (mainly UK) for creative writers.

**Writers' and Artists' Yearbook** - a comprehensive directory of UK markets in all areas of the media for writers, artists and photographers.

### Employers and trade associations

**[www.bbc.co.uk/jobs](http://www.bbc.co.uk/jobs) and [www.bbc.co.uk/newtalent](http://www.bbc.co.uk/newtalent)** - information about opportunities at the BBC including information on BBC work experience placements. The BBC receives over 20,000 applications a year for its work experience placements.

**[www.channel4.com/4careers/4careers\\_new/work\\_experience.html](http://www.channel4.com/4careers/4careers_new/work_experience.html)** - register on the Channel 4 website for details of a very limited number of short-term work experience placements. Remember, Channel 4 commissions almost all of its programmes from independent production companies and does not produce programmes in-house.

**[www.itvjobs.com](http://www.itvjobs.com)** – information about opportunities at ITV plc. For information about work experience opportunities visit the regional pages in the 'Working at ITV' section.



**Pact** ([www.pact.org.uk](http://www.pact.org.uk)) – trade association representing and promoting the commercial interests of independent feature film, television, children's and animation media companies.

**Reach For the Sky** ([www.reachforthesky.co.uk](http://www.reachforthesky.co.uk)) – BSkyB's flagship initiative to support and inspire young people, including unpaid work experience placements for young people at school or college.

### Other websites

**[www.broadcastfreelancer.com](http://www.broadcastfreelancer.com)** - subscription based online database of freelance jobs and talent in UK TV. Provides job leads, news, information, careers and training information.

**[www.mandy.com](http://www.mandy.com)** - a film and television job site. Search through related jobs worldwide – some paid, low paid and voluntary. Jobs offered and jobs wanted pages. Mandy.com can email you weekly with the latest job info. Directory of services, classified ads, jobs and other resources for filmmakers tailored to people's choice of skill type and area.

**[www.productionbase.co.uk](http://www.productionbase.co.uk)** – a subscription based online database of film and TV professionals and directory of jobs.

**[www.theproductionguide.com](http://www.theproductionguide.com)** - an industry based site containing jobs offered, industry news and info on facilities.

**[www.shootingpeople.org](http://www.shootingpeople.org)** – a subscription based (£30 a year) online network of independent film-makers, providing daily email bulletins about opportunities for cast and crew.

**Skillset** ([www.skillset.org](http://www.skillset.org)) - the Sector Skills Council for the audio visual industries. Its website contains a wealth of material including profiles of different areas of the media industry e.g. film, television, animation; information about job roles; and hints and tips for people considering or starting a career in the industry.

**[www.ukscreen.com](http://www.ukscreen.com)** - a free, one stop centre for film and music making from casting, networking and crewing to broadcasting and distribution.



## Appendix 2: Sample induction checklist

This checklist is reproduced from the Guidelines for Television Employers Offering Work Experience Placements to Individuals, co-ordinated by Skillset and published by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Individual's name: .....

Supervisor/mentor's name: .....

Company/department: .....

Placement start date: .....

Placement end date: .....

Agreement signed and returned:  
Yes   
No

Temporary ID pass obtained:  
Yes   
No

Informed of who to call in case of sickness:  
Yes   
No

Given details of hours of work and meal breaks:  
Yes   
No

Given outline of placement programme:  
Yes   
No

Introduced to supervisor/mentor/point of contact:  
Yes   
No

Fire and evacuation procedure explained:  
Yes   
No

Other emergency procedures and health and safety information detailed:  
Yes   
No

Informed of prohibited areas/activities:  
Yes   
No

First Aid facilities explained:  
Yes   
No

Any significant risks associated with work placement explained:  
Yes   
No

Given instruction in safe use of any equipment including IT equipment, adjusting workstation and taking adequate screen breaks:  
Yes   
No

Any further information:  
.....  
.....

I have been informed of the above/given the appropriate training.

Signature: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....



### Appendix 3: Sample feedback form

This form is reproduced from the Guidelines for Television Employers Offering Work Experience Placements to Individuals, co-ordinated by Skillset and published by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Individual's name: .....

Supervisor/mentor's name: .....

Company/department: .....

Placement start date: .....

Placement end date: .....

#### Section A: To be completed by the individual

Were the tasks you undertook or shadowed during the placement those indicated in the original placement description? If not, what tasks were you given the opportunity to carry out and/or observe?

.....

Did the placement enable you to achieve your specific objectives?

.....

Which aspects of the placement did you find most useful?

.....

What, if anything, would you change about the placement?

.....

Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

.....

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

#### Section B: To be completed by the supervisor/mentor

General evaluation

.....

Strengths

.....

Weaknesses

.....

Recommendations

.....

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Job title: .....

Date: .....