

## Improving the Quality of Work Placements

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## Conceptual Framework

Based on four tools from the author's recent longitudinal study (1st three years) of the Early Career Learning at Work of accountants, engineers and nurses. These are:

- an epistemology of practice and its implications
- a typology of modes of learning
- a typology of learning trajectories (holistic and longitudinal approach)
- a two-triangle model of factors affecting learning and their mutual interaction

## Elements of professional practice

**Assessing clients and/or situations** (sometimes briefly, sometimes involving a long process of investigation) and continuing to monitor them

**Deciding what, if any, action to take**, both immediately and over a longer period (either on one's own or as a leader or member of a team);

**Pursuing an agreed course of action**, modifying, consulting and reassessing as and when necessary;

**Metacognitive monitoring** of oneself, people needing attention and the general progress of the case, problem, project or situation; and sometimes also learning through reflection on the experience.

## Interactions between Time, Mode of Cognition and Type of process

Type of process	Instant reflex	Rapid intuitive	Deliberative analytic
Assessment of the situation	Pattern recognition	Rapid interpretation Communication on the spot	Prolonged diagnosis Review, discussion and analysis
Decision making	Instant response	Recognition primed Intuitive	Deliberative analysis/discussion
Overt actions	Routinised actions	Routines punctuated by rapid decisions	Planned actions with periodic progress reviews
Metacognitive engagement	Situational awareness	Implicit monitoring Short reflections	Monitoring of thought and activity Reflective learning

### Work Processes with learning as a by-product

Participation in group processes  
Working alongside others  
Consultation  
Tackling challenging tasks and roles  
Problem solving  
Trying things out  
Consolidating, extending and refining skills  
Working with clients

### Working alongside others allows students

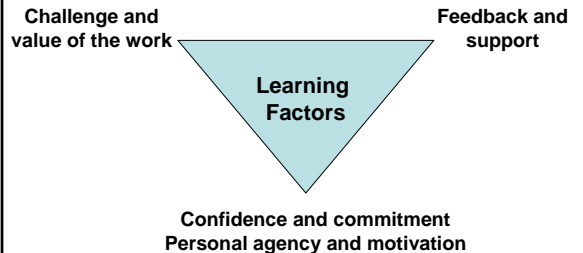
- to observe and listen to others at work
  - to participate in shared activities
  - to learn new practices and perspectives
  - to become aware of different kinds of knowledge and expertise
  - to gain some sense of other people's tacit knowledge.
- This mode of learning is important for acquiring the tacit knowledge that underpins routines and intuitive decisions and is difficult to explain

### Personal Agency

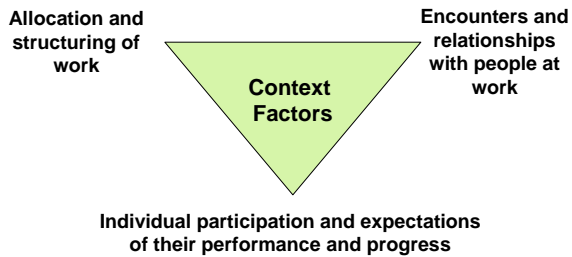
Colleagues take many practices and features of their workplace for granted.  
A few students might just settle for general familiarity with the "world of work", when more could be achieved.  
Hence the *personal agency* of placement students is often crucial for finding out:

- What skills and situational understandings they might need?
- How best they might access them, either directly or through their supervisors?
- Whether there are informal mentors who are prepared to offer help?

### Factors affecting learning in the workplace # 1



## Factors affecting learning in the workplace # 2



## Illustrative Groups of Trajectories

Task performance  
Role performance  
Awareness and understanding  
Personal development  
Teamwork  
Academic knowledge and skills  
Decision making and problem solving  
Judgement

## My Role at Surrey

To engage with staff and students to use these tools to help students on placements:

- to understand their work environments and reflect on their experiences
- to consider their learning goals
- to ascertain learning opportunities
- to develop possible ways of accessing these opportunities directly, or through helpful intermediaries
- to handle negative experiences.

## Current ways of improving the quality of placements

Pre-placement activities in the university  
Post-placement activities in the university  
Student to student sharing of issues, experiences and helpful contacts at work (especially when one student follows another in the same employment setting)  
Documents for students, university supervisors and employer supervisors  
Training supervisors, informal or formal  
Direct engagement with employers

## Faculty data

Phase 1 involved analysing documents and interviewing faculty responsible for placements in 12 different subjects. This led to two reports:

The norms and variations in current practice described by the interview data

A review of relevant literature on work-based learning.

## Student data 2007-8

SCEPTRe launched a competition for students returning from placements in September 2008, in which they were asked to write an account of their placement on the theme of *Learning to be Professional*.

28 accounts were provided and are analysed by Lori Riley in another conference paper.

8 authors volunteered to be interviewed by Eraut, to clarify and amplify significant aspects of their experience and to discuss the roles of those who most influenced their learning opportunities for good or ill.

## Student data 2008-9

A substantial on-line questionnaire was sent to all placement students in February 2009, and completed by 127 students by March 9th.

The preliminary analysis presented today describes the variations between responses, between faculties and between individual students. The Surrey faculties are:

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences (AHS, N=41)

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS, N=41)

Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences (HMS, N=17)

Faculty of Management and Law (ML, N=28)

## Work activities: Medium & high (3+4) ratings (N=121-2)

Activity	Importance	Frequency
Taking the initiative	96 74ML	86
Development of relationships	95 100HM	80
Problem solving	91 100HM	63ML 79 94HM
Information Searches	72 88HM	76
Management of People	53HM 71 85ML	15ML 27
Administration	34EP 45 65ML	35HM 55 70ML

### Work activities: Medium & high (3+4) ratings (N=121-2)

Activity	Importance			Frequency		
Evaluating projects, reports, proposals	88	100ML		44AH	65	
More sophisticated technical work	42ML	62	90EPS	34AH	55	93EPS
Research developing product and design	35ML	53	78EP	22ML	40	61EPS
Finance	24HM	45	65ML	0 HM	19	41ML
Marketing	24E/H	34	65ML	6HM	21	41ML

### Student Views of Placement Quality

N=124 (1-5 scale)	Quite good & V Good	Very Good
Quality relationships	80	36ML 49 59HMS
Access to expertise	64ML 78	36ML 51 61EPS
Supervision	77	45 59HMS
Informal support	57ML 74 88HMS	29ML 43 65HMS
Challenging opportunities	70	39 53HMS
Allocation of appropriate work	54ML 69 88HMS	21ML 31 37AHS
Opportunities to be creative	60	22EPS 28 5HMS

### Student views of Career Outcomes

Career Outcomes N=124	Quite High & V High (4+5)	Very High (5)
Awareness of your strengths and potential	80	15AHS 24 41HMS
Awareness of what you need to achieve in your final year	78	32ML 41
Quality of what you achieved in your placement	75	29 35HMS
Awareness of the kind of work you want to do in the future	50ML 65	24EPS 30 41HMS
Awareness of the work you do not want to do in the future	47HMS 60	15HMS 24 32ML

### Support for learning Tasks

N=117-8	OK & Great (3+4)	Great (4)
To what extent has the choice of tasks given you enough scope for progression in:		
<i>taking responsibility</i> for tasks?	86	32EPS 44 69HMS
<i>your range of assigned tasks?</i>	80	35 46HMS
<i>task difficulty?</i>	77	36
How much have you learned from: consulting other people?	90	60ML 67 88HMS
sharing tasks with others?	76 4HMS	27ML 41 71HMS
How much help have you had in learning your assigned tasks?	82 94HMS	49 71HMS

## Support for Project Work

N=119	OK & Great (3+4)	Great (4)
To what extent have you been challenged by Project Work?	76 94HMS	31ML 43
How much responsibility have you been given in project work?	62ML 78 100HMS	27ML 44
To what extent has participation in projects helped you to learn: the content of the project? new skills?	88 100HMS 88	31ML 53 76HMS 42ML 54 71HMS
how to work with other people on a focused piece of work?	77 94HMS	32ML 41 65HMS
how to handle uncertainty?	76	24ML 38 47HMS
how to keep to deadlines?	81	45

## Responsible Roles

Support for these responsible roles	OK plus Great (3+4)	Great (4)
develop initiatives or projects	66	33 41HMS
monitor progress	71	25 35HMS
evaluate outcomes	64	25
manage people	24HMS 36 46ML	4ML 15 18AHS

## The most influential people

Role	A 85-95	B 77-89	C 63-72	D 22-27	E 15-17	Number chosen
Your supervisor	61	12	4	1	1	79
Your manager	20	34	9	4	1	68
A senior person	4	27	28	0	1	60
Recent graduate	5	9	14	5	1	34
Experienced worker at graduate level	3	7	8	10	4	32
Experienced worker not at graduate level	2	4	11	5	4	26
Another student on placement	4	5	6	2	3	20
Others	2	0	2	4	6	7

## Level of Support on 17 items

The table presents the range of percentages for the top two choices on a 7 point scale. For example, the persons chosen as A by each respondent had average percentages in the 60s for six of the 17 items

Person chosen	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-82
A			4	4	6	3
B		3	6	6	2	
C	4	4	7	2		

### Personal Agency 1

Have you asked? (N=101)	No Need	Not tried	Yes- no success	Yes- success
To visit other sections, sites or departments?	23	20	11	46
To work with a different person or group?	35	24	9	33
To move to a different section or department	50	28	11	11
About different kinds of work	13	7	3	77
To do different kinds of work	21	23	13	44
To be introduced to a person you want to meet	23	33	6	39

### Personal agency 2

Have you asked?	No need	Not tried	Yes, no success	Yes- success
For feedback on your work	3	27	4	66
For new tasks in your work	13	23	9	65
To work on a project?	23	24	9	45
For more responsibility?	25	28	6	42
Have you persuaded others to back any of your initiatives?	24	25	8	43

### Preparation before your placement

Opportunities to meet returning students:	None	Little	Quite good	Very good
In your own subject	21	30	31	18
From organisations that interest you	27	32	29	12
From particular parts of an organisation.	40	32	26	8
<b>Choice of Placements</b>				
Understanding the advantages of placements	2	10	49	39
Help in deciding on the kind of placement you want	6	28	44	21
Help in finding a placement	6	26	27	40

### University support for placements

Support before and during placements	None	Little	Quite good	Very good
General briefings on placements	2	17	60	21
Seminars focused on the nature and quality of placement learning	7	27	51	14
The work of the careers' service	23	24	40	12
Advice from administrative staff	15	32	41	12
Through visiting tutors	6	27	38	29
Through contacts with other staff	28	30	28	14
Through discussing your placement report(s)	25	34	28	13