



It is possible to place students in virtually any field,” says Marco Travaglia, Managing Director of Business Class Education in the UK, which provides work experience placement services to the Kings Group of Schools. “We had a Portuguese student with a textiles background in a textiles factory in the north, a Spanish student with an interest in fire protection systems placed in a multinational corporation in this field based outside Gloucestershire and an Italian whose family own a chain of supermarkets placed at Tesco’s headquarters just outside London.”

Travaglia underlines the appeal of work experience programmes to students around the world, who are signing up to such programmes in increasing numbers, according to providers. Barry Morris, Director of Totnes European School in the UK, agrees that demand for work experience programmes is growing year by year. “We are now offering placements to international students as well as European students,” he says. “Whatever the student’s vocation, we attempt to organise work experience placements.”

Within the work experience sector, there are many types of opportunities available to international students, and aside from targeted vocational experience, the other key type of placement that both language schools and work placement organisations offer is paid work experience – very often in the hospitality industry.

Sometimes distinguished as

putting language to work

Working in a foreign country, whether in a paid or unpaid position, is a very attractive option for international students. AMY BAKER investigates one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors of the industry.

work experience, as opposed to an internship in a company relevant to the student's business interests, paid work experience also appeals to a growing number of students around the world, and Daniel Ebert at Center for Cultural Interchange (CCI) in the USA explains why.

"[Work experience] is a wonderful and affordable way to experience life in the United States by means other than just tourism," he says. "Most of our students are interested in our programme as a cultural exchange programme as opposed to just being a means to increase their finances."

Financial matters

The key distinction is, of course, finances. For those students keen to perfect their language skills and experience a working environment in another country but without the financial means to support themselves while they undertake an internship, paid work experience offers them the chance to do so. Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, students travelling to countries where the cost of living is higher than their own will often favour this option.

Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Brazilian students are most keen to undertake the work experience placements offered by CCI, according to Ebert. He says placements are generally "entry-level placements in the hospitality industry".

The availability of jobs within the hospitality sector means that this tends to be the most common source of work placements for students. At Southern Lakes English College in Queenstown, New Zealand, Maree Aoake says that jobs on offer tend to be in hotels, restaurants or shop work. "We can only offer the students what is

available. Most of the work in Queenstown is in the hospitality industry," she confirms.

Visa and immigration rules also control what work is available to which students. Many countries have working holiday programmes for nationals from certain countries that allow them to apply to work in that country for a period of up to 12 months. Aoake says, "We only offer this [work experience] programme to students who already hold work visas."

Access to jobs

In the UK, the government introduced a Sector Based Scheme (SBS) initiative in 2003 that was designed to allow anyone between the ages of 18 and 30 to apply for a work permit to work in the food manufacturing and hospitality industries. The SBS hospitality quota was temporarily suspended in March this year because the quota of 10,000 hospitality sector work permits had almost been reached for the year. Work experience organisers in the UK can often offer paid work experience via this scheme.

"We offer mainly unpaid placements, although we have a paid placement programme in Bournemouth with hotel and catering jobs only," says Carolle Raynor at Aspect Internships in the UK.

Paid employment is offered by a number of language schools worldwide, although specialist work placement agencies also offer these employment opportunities. For example, CCI in the USA is an accredited placement and exchange organisation that is able to issue J-1 visas and language courses are not offered with the programme. "Every student is screened for proper English proficiency before



Case study



"When I began my placement, I was prepared to do everything in an efficient way. Also, I was enthusiastic to work with publishers, because I never had worked for any kind of magazine before. I never realised that the company, Hothouse Media, where I was working, was so organised and friendly. I could learn about British habits, [as

well as] the specific language that they used to talk about publishing. I learned how to have an optimistic attitude and to improve my vocabulary and my written skills, doing business research for the company. In my work placement, technology was essential, because I sent emails and faxes to more than 10 different countries. Hothouse Media is a wonderful company that has

a great structure to support the work experiences and give them real opportunity to improve their abilities and knowledge. It was a pleasure to stay with them for four weeks, because [it helped] my English and my career at the same time." *Miedja Okada, 20, from Brazil spent one month working for Hothouse Media in London, UK. She was placed by Aspect Internships in London.*

being accepted on to our programme," says Ebert, who says he does not work with language schools.

Providing access to paid employment is, however, a more difficult area to work in for schools and agencies and the regulations governing employment of foreign nationals differ according to country. As Guido Lavezzo of English and Travel & WeUSA in Argentina points out, the USA has clear visa categories for paid work opportunities. In the case of other countries, part-time work rights, if available, can sometimes be a better way for students to sample a working environment if they want to be paid.

Alternatively, as Robyn Donnelly at the Centre for English Language in the University of South Australia (Celusa) in Adelaide, Australia, explains, "There are many working holiday visa holders who study for a short time at Celusa and who work in many industries in South Australia, the most popular from November to April being fruit picking." Working Holiday Visa programmes allow eligible nationals from 18 to 30 to apply for work rights in participating countries. But these programmes exclude many nationalities, typically only involving Japan, Korea, Western European and North American countries.

Classic internships

The main focus of the work experience sector within the language training environment is, as Kamil Rechowicz of Travel, Exchange & Education in Poland describes them, "classic internships": professional experience without remuneration. In Spain, Malaca Instituto has recently teamed up with Seville-based placement organisation, Oneco, to offer such programmes. Bob Burger of Malaca Instituto explains that only unpaid work experience is available. "The course is described as language and professional training," he says.

In Canada, work placement organisation Global Lifestyles Canada (GLC) works with four language schools in Victoria as well as offering stand-alone programmes. Paula Jamieson at GLC says that they offer very few paid positions, although she says, "We will

be developing this part of our programming in the next six months." She adds, "We have only worked with Working Holiday Visa holders, so our student base has been limited to Japan while we thoroughly research and develop other streams."

In the USA, Steve Cahn at Rennert Bilingual, which has been offering an internship programme for over 10 years, states, "To date, we have offered unpaid internships. However, we are considering the option of offering paid internships."

In France, Eleri Maitland at French in Normandy explains, "[Our] programme is designed for those students who wish to perfect their French language skills in a French-speaking environment while gaining a professional experience. No payment is made to the student therefore this programme should not be confused with a student job. However, a place on the programme will offer real opportunities and responsibilities in a company environment."

Maitland adds that eligible students who are able to apply for a working holiday visa are also offered an interview for a potential "pocket money" job that they can undertake alongside their placement if they are successful in interview.

Placements offered by French in Normandy include tourism, architecture, sales and marketing, human resources and other office-based industries. "We run the course with the International Department of the Chamber of Commerce and so we are very lucky as they are responsible for the placement section and have excellent knowledge of companies in our area," says Maitland.

Growing demand

French in Normandy launched its work experience course this year, as did Malaca Instituto in Spain. "During the last 10 years we have been bombarded with requests by our agents to offer Spanish language courses combined with work experience," explains Burger.

In the UK, the Cambridge Centre for English Studies in Cambridge also launched a programme this year, by teaming up with a specialist work placement company. "We introduced work placement

Language and non-language based demand - opportunities for agents

The two types of work experience available – internship or paid work experience – are very different, and the type of student that requires each type of placement normally expects something different from their experience.

In Mexico, paid and unpaid placements are available at the Institute of Modern Spanish in Merida. Janese Ott Cerón at the school acknowledges that "internships" are detailed and career-oriented, involving monitored

care. "If the student is to receive college credit for the placement and therefore needs a high level of supervision, it is difficult to find a paid position," she says.

Those students interested in internships are usually dedicated to improving their professional and language skills at the same time and have long-term academic or career goals, while clients interested in paid work experience may already feel their language level is adequate and are more interested in the cultural

exchange that work experience affords them.

Potential internship and work experience candidates, however, whether interested in career prospects or financial remuneration, are likely to use an agency to find out about options available to them. Agents have the opportunity to branch into non-language based placements, as agents already active in the sector testify that straightforward work experience is the most requested type of

placement, without the incorporated language learning element.

"We'd say 40 per cent [of students we place] request programmes with a language school, 60 per cent want only work experience," says Brigitte Schwarzenback of Experiment in Switzerland. Oksana Golovina of Evmar agency in Estonia reports a similar trend. "About 35 per cent request language and work experience programmes and 65 per cent request work experience programmes only," she says.

programmes because we had been receiving an increasing number of enquires from students and agents about this kind of programme,” says Jenny Mutlu-Collins, Administration and Marketing Manager at the school. She adds, “We pass on requests to the placement organiser as we don’t have the contacts or staff to manage placements ourselves; we can facilitate the students’ applications but concentrate on what we are good at, which is teaching English.”

Most providers of internships and work experience are confident that demand will continue to grow in the future. In France, Valérie Lecamus Templin at Contact Europe, which is the placement agency for language school, Langues Sans Frontières in Montpellier, reports that placements have doubled in the last two years. “With the enlargement of the European Union, we have signed new partnership agreements [with accession countries],” she says. At Aspect Internships in the UK, Raynor adds, “Demand is always increasing as work experience is an asset as a career boost.”

Volunteering options

Most internship providers report that typical areas of interest include marketing, advertising, finance, IT and media. However, some schools focus on volunteering as an opportunity for students to experience a work-based setting in which to practise their language skills. This will invariably be in a non-office based industry.

In Canada, Jen Davies at Queens University School of English in Kingston, Ontario, says that the school has offered students volunteer work for a number of years. This is, in effect, unofficial work experience. Davies underlines, “These placements are on a voluntary

basis. Our students tend to express interest in working with children, the elderly and also with animals.” She adds, “We have noted a trend for students from certain countries, for example, Korea – where competition for jobs is intense – to seek volunteer placements.”

In Australia, the English College of Adelaide arranges volunteer placements in child care, aged care, elementary schools and on farms. Darren Donaldson at the school explains, “We offer work

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experience programmes but students must adhere to their visa conditions. Students on student visas normally have a period of one month after they finish their studies before they must either extend their visa or leave the country. This is normally the time we would arrange a longer volunteer placement. It is also possible for those interested in [work experience] to volunteer one day a week, provided that they maintain an attendance record of at least 80 per cent.”

Visa and language issues

One benefit of organising volunteer placements is that there are no visa complications. As Donaldson says, “Because of the nature of our placements, the student’s nationality makes no difference. Personality, a willingness to get involved and some ability to communicate in English are more important.” Students with a lower level of language competency are also more likely to be considered

Case study



"I have been working as a journalist at a newspaper company in Japan for 13 years. The reason I studied English and undertook work experience in Cairns is that I want to work at a branch office in the USA. During my work experience, I went to

interview the Aboriginal Corporation, the Mayor of Cairns and to a public hospital with reporters. I was a little nervous because I worried about my English ability. However, studying at Geos helped my communication. When Japanese female bones were uncovered in bushland behind Smithfield, I checked

Japanese websites and translated some articles from Japanese into English in order to help a police reporter. Work experience made me improve my language skills."
Takako Nonaka, 37, from Japan spent one week working for The Cairns Post in Cairns, Australia. She was placed by Geos in Cairns.

Within the EU, some schools testify that unclear or difficult regulations mean they tend to focus on European applicants only. Shireen Weston at Bidbury English for Individuals in Liss, UK, acknowledges, "As I have dealt mainly with EU nationals, I have not had visa issues to deal with." Lecamus Tamplin adds, "For countries who need a visa [for entry to France] it is more difficult and the process is longer with no guarantee at the end, which

is why we tend to concentrate on countries that have no restrictions."

Both suggest however that EU enlargement will increase their potential client base. "Opportunities to gain this kind of work experience in Britain would be very attractive to people from the 10 new

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countries," says Weston. She details the story of one Slovakian student who "job shadowed" in a major hotel near Winchester while initially spending three days per week learning English at Bidbury. After three weeks, he was accepted as a trainee at the hotel and feedback was regularly given to his language teacher. Eventually he was offered a permanent job. Such successful placement stories underline the appeal for both student and organiser of working in this sector. Weston sums up, "Once students have the necessary experience, they can command better jobs in their fields in their own countries or [further afield]."

Lecamus Tamplin at Contact Europe says, "The minimum language course required before placement is one week for a participant with an intermediate level of French. The lower the level of French, the longer the language course that will be advised."

Other schools state a minimum required language course prior to an internship is anything up to 12 weeks, while Travaglia at Business Class Education explains that students from outside the European Union (EU) must study for at least 28 weeks. "We follow the rule that states that non-EU students can work provided that they are on a course of longer than six months," he says.

Regulations vary according to definition, and elsewhere in the UK, Raynor at Aspect Internships says that according to their terms, "Interns from non-EU countries must have code 2 student visas to do a placement. The internship can only be one third of the internship programme. Alternatively, the candidate can do the work experience part-time whilst studying."

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