

# Managing student and graduate work placements

## A Guide for Employers

step enterprise manages work placement programmes including those funded by various organisations.

	<p><b>graddtobusiness</b></p>  <p>east midlands development agency the catalyst for change</p>	 <p>Enterprising Derbyshire</p>
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		<p>For further help and information please contact step enterprise on <a href="http://www.stepenterprise.co.uk">www.stepenterprise.co.uk</a> or <b>0115 977 5030</b></p>



Three thick, white, curved lines of varying lengths and positions, overlapping each other on a solid blue background. They are arranged in a way that suggests movement or a path.

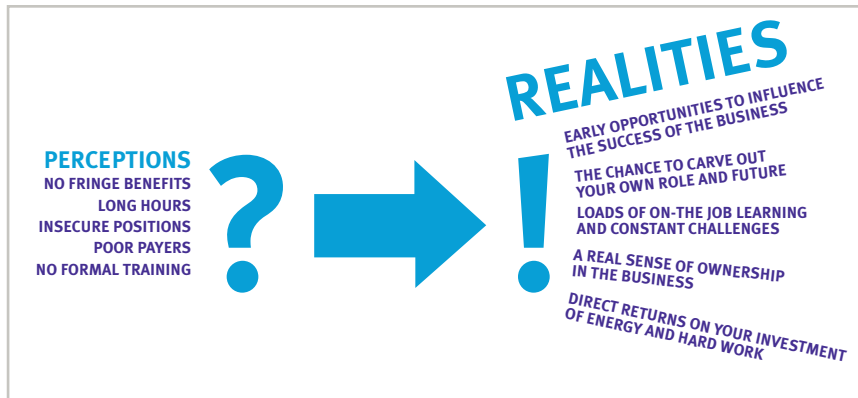
creating opportunities

A single, solid white circle centered on a solid purple background.

realising futures

# Graduate perceptions

However you choose to communicate with potential graduate recruits, there are some key issues that you'll need to consider. Firstly, most graduates have received far more information about big corporations than small businesses. This may mean some have unrealistic salary expectations; but often they're willing to work for other benefits:



Helping graduates to understand the benefits of working in smaller businesses is an ongoing challenge and you may find an initial need to dispel a few myths while driving home a few other key points.

It is certainly the case that not all graduates can handle the flexible environment of SMEs, or the high level of autonomy and initiative required in most SME roles. However, with the right graduate on your side hand-picked by step enterprise, they'll discover a thirst and eagerness to launch into the world of work and achieve real results for you.

Coupled with the increasing number of graduates leaving university with a good level of industry work experience you can rest assured that the UK's graduate community is fast becoming an increasingly attractive recruitment target for all ambitious small businesses.

**If you're ready to take advantage of these emerging talents, now's the time to get in touch with step enterprise. Work experience and first-time jobs may be of huge benefit to the graduate, but the results you could achieve will add real benefit to your business.**

# Thank you

for your interest in our work placement programmes. We are the UK's leading provider of students, graduates and postgraduates for short and longer term work placement programmes. We've been supporting SMEs and businesses like yours for over 7 years.

This handy guide can help you determine exactly how your business will benefit from employing undergraduates, graduates and postgraduates. It can help you to work out how to maximise the long-term advantages of appointing a dedicated resource through one of our temporary work placement programmes this year.

For further information, please email [enquiries@stepenterprise.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@stepenterprise.co.uk) or have a chat with one of our dedicated placement managers on **0115 977 5030**.

Philip Donnelly  
Managing Director,  
step enterprise

*P.S. we can now offer full service recruitment solutions for your permanent vacancies too.*

# Contents

- 04** Unlocking potential with step enterprise
- 05** Your business
- 06** Undergraduate solutions
- 07** Business benefits
- 08** Choosing step enterprise
- 09** Case studies
- 10** **Your work placement**
- 11** Maximize impact
- 12** Plan
- 13** Manage
- 14** Review
- 15** Next steps
- 16** **Employing graduates**
- 17** The graduate scene
- 18** Graduate perceptions

# Unlocking potential with step enterprise

How can the skills of undergraduates and graduates drive your business forward through our structured work placements?

## The graduate scene

The next step for many businesses who experience the benefits of hosting undergraduate placements is to employ a full-time graduate.

Every year over 250,000 graduates leave university with a degree - and that's not including those achieving a postgraduate qualification. Of these graduates, the unemployment rate after a couple of years is just 6.2%<sup>1</sup> so their prospects overall are looking good.

It's widely assumed that most of these graduates look for employment in big corporate organisations, seeking maximum salaries and juicy benefit packages. In reality this situation is changing, with a definite downturn in the number of graduate training schemes available, and a slowly increasing awareness of the opportunities available in SMEs and business start-ups. According to The Graduate Experience 2002 Report, only 14% of respondents were on such a scheme within 6 months of graduating, meaning that more are looking for alternative career options.

SMEs already employ around 58% of the working UK population, so you've a real opportunity to target these emerging graduates - almost three quarters of them are actually heading for careers in the private sector. In fact, the SME employment market is predicted to create two million new jobs by 2010, many of which are expected to go to graduates.

If you run a small business and share the views of many SME employers who haven't traditionally looked to universities to find ideal employees, it's time to think again. With graduates leaving university with an average debt of around £13,000<sup>2</sup>, they have to work harder than ever to achieve real value for money.

According to a survey by the Institute for Employment Studies, 42% of undergraduates have to manage part-time jobs during term-time. Many more are seeking work experience during summer and taking a year out. This change in circumstances is believed to benefit future employers, with 50% of AGR members questioned agreeing that there are positive benefits for students having to work their way through university.

<sup>1</sup>What Graduates Do, 2007  
<sup>2</sup>2006 Natwest Student Survey 'Money Matters'



# Employing graduates

Businesses taking part in one of our work placement programmes may also consider graduate opportunities.

## Your business

The importance of small businesses to the UK's economy has officially been recognised, with the SME community heralded as the country's centre for innovation and entrepreneurship. However, it comes as no surprise that core difficulties such as time restraints, skills development and access to finance remain the primary challenges of running an SME.

### Time

As the owner or manager of a small business, you probably find it quite difficult to delegate key tasks to other departments - unlike managers in big businesses. In an ideal world, it would be great to free your time temporarily so you can concentrate solely on the company's strategic development. Even then, your management team will be absorbed in day-to-day activities, not to mention managing development projects to ensure progression. This means that many new ideas and potential revenue streams may remain on the back burner until you have more time - which often never happens.

### Skills

Small businesses are often based on the technical skills and knowledge of the founding owner. And as a business grows a massive range of skills are needed to support this knowledge base. This reality means that training might be necessary for your existing team, or you may have to recruit another team member - both of which take time and cost money. It could also be risky to recruit an employee with new skills unless there's a guarantee that those skills will bring in the revenue and demand needed to sustain their position.

### Finance

A historic problem for small businesses like yours is being able to get your hands on that all-important finance in order to grow - without losing control to external financiers. It's a drain on your time finding and completing loan and grant applications, removing you from core business activities with no guarantees of success. What's more, assistance is often only available on the basis of pre-defined project parameters and timescales.

“Matching the most enterprising graduate talent with forward thinking companies has helped produce outstanding results.”

Fiona Smith,  
graddtobusiness Project Manager





# Undergraduate solutions

There is an easy and productive way to address the everyday challenges faced by today's SMEs. Across the country, small businesses are tapping into an ever-flowing source of skills, enthusiasm and ambition: university undergraduates. And these bright individuals are keener than ever to take on the challenge of work experience during their university careers.

## The business perspective

If you manage a small business, we make it easy to test the water and discover how productive an undergraduate placement could be. Internal projects that have been left unfinished or need kick-starting can be tackled by an intelligent and enthusiastic young person with around two years of training in relevant specialist skills on their side. These skills include anything from web design and marketing to accounting and finance. Students on theoretical or science-based courses are also seeking opportunities to put the commercial applications of their skills into practice – and add that extra something to your business. The result? Access to specialist fields of knowledge - for a fraction of the cost that professional service providers charge.

## The connection

Traditionally, links between universities and local SMEs have been placed on a back burner due to a focus on blue-chip opportunities and formal graduate training programmes. These days, policies for graduate retention have enabled strong links with universities, local businesses and careers services.

Regional support agencies are also providing financial incentives for employers to benefit from the graduate community.

## The undergraduate perspective

As undergraduates discover the opportunities available in small businesses, their desire to get involved is increasing – usually through work experience whilst still at university. Undergraduates are also realising that in order to achieve immediate high-level employment, evidence of that all-important drive to succeed, combined with relevant work experience can be a massive advantage when it comes to progressing their future careers.

# Next steps

As well as providing your business with high-calibre project management skills and identifying new development opportunities, you can also extend your step enterprise experience in other ways:

## 1. Further business development

Your end-of-project review may identify follow-up action that requires the skills of your work placement student/graduate. Many employers ask their students/graduates to stay on for an extra few weeks, or to return on a flexible part-time basis. You can also ask step enterprise about additional work placement opportunities available to suit your requirements.

## 2. step enterprise recruitment

To attract and retain the best talent, step enterprise offers a bespoke recruitment service that's second to none.

Based on long-term relationships with UK and selected foreign universities, step enterprise can tap into a pool of quality candidates, all with high-calibre work experience.

Whatever your recruitment needs - for one-off projects, short-term placements or full-time opportunities – step enterprise can help.

## 3. Business advice

Business Link is a service dedicated to making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a business. Through the nationwide network you can access first class business support, information and advice on how to start, develop or improve a business.

For further information, please visit [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk).

## 4. Wider research

We are often in the process of carrying out research projects to measure the impact of work placements on businesses, graduate retention and the economy.

We will contact you to give you the opportunity to input your views, whenever we are doing research relevant to your placement.





## Review

### Useful tools for an end-of-project review include:

- a) Skills Tracker online ([www.skillstracker.org.uk](http://www.skillstracker.org.uk))  
As part of your student support package we offer all our students and graduates an online skills account to record and assess their business skills development. At the end of the placement all students are encouraged to complete a final review. Host businesses are also requested to submit their feedback.
- b) The final report your student will produce.
- c) The evaluation form you'll receive at the end of your project, and an opportunity to feed into wider evaluation research on the impact of student placements in businesses.

In reviewing your project you also need to consider both the immediate and longer-term impacts of the project:

### 1. Immediate impact

Although your prime concern may rest with project outcomes, most businesses also feel a responsibility to help their students review, understand and articulate their work experiences in a way that will help them lay the foundations for their future careers. To do this, you need to refer back to your project plans and assess the following:

- Have your business' project goals been reached?
- Have your placement student's goals been reached?

### 2. Longer-term impact

No matter how well defined your initial project brief, it's highly likely that your placement student will uncover issues and positive opportunities that you didn't expect. In fact, even the outcomes you did expect could have a longer-term impact on your business. These should be explored and listed specifically with follow-up action planned wherever possible.

## Business benefits

In our experience, businesses that take on undergraduates for work experience find the benefits outweigh any costs involved:

- **Enjoy new skills and knowledge within your business**
- **Take advantage of a fresh perspective on current practices and development plans**
- **Promote your business to potential employees – and even test them out**
- **Benefit from closer relationships with local universities**

If you think that your business could benefit from an injection of undergraduate skills, there's a number of options available:

### Short-term/flexible projects

2-3 month projects over a summer vacation, or flexible projects during term-time - both popular choices for students who cannot afford to take a full year out from education.

### Long-term placements

Often called a 'sandwich' year (a work placement year in between two or more years of academic study), where the student undertakes a full-time 12-month project. Alternatively, a slightly shorter project is available that lasts the duration of the academic year (roughly October to June).

### Off-site projects

Some courses allow students to manage their own projects as part of their course, without needing to be based on site. It's the ideal opportunity for small businesses with limited resources.

Contact us directly for a chat, and we can help you to decide which undergraduate placement is best suited to your business. And because we're flexible, we can tailor all our placement options to meet your specific needs.

For most businesses it's far easier to organise work experience through existing placement programmes. Many of the hassles of recruitment are removed, and all legal responsibilities are clarified and checked on your behalf.

**The rest of this guide highlights the realities and rewards businesses can enjoy when they choose to take on students through structured work placements. It also explores the paths open to businesses that would like to employ the ideal full-time graduate – a common outcome for businesses that have tested the water by employing undergraduates for placements.**





# Choosing step enterprise

The key point in all our work placement programmes is that you host a student with the specific skills and aptitude to manage a project that will help your business in terms of growth, development or sustainability. You set the project, you choose the student (from a selection provided by step enterprise) and you measure the results.

## Save time

- A dedicated and self-sufficient team member can concentrate on a specific project and provide an extra pair of hands for other major tasks arising during the course of the work placement.

## Find new skills

- Get new talent on board - without committing to costly training courses or additional employees - and test out the viability of a possible full-time position.

## No big financial costs

- Compared with training programmes or recruitment consultants - and because you're not actually employing the student - there are no employer NI or tax contributions to pay (except VAT, which is recoverable if you are registered).

step enterprise work placement programmes are highly flexible. The most popular work placement programmes see businesses hosting students or graduates for eight weeks over the summer vacation, although part-time flexible projects and full year projects can also be arranged. During this time, the student focuses on a specific development project that can assist your business with growth, development or sustainability. In this way, we can provide an effective and affordable way for you to:

## Research

- New products, niche markets, competitor and consumer behaviour, business development ideas...

## Improve

- Information management systems, internal communication systems, operational procedures, IT systems...

## Create

- Marketing strategies, promotional materials, internet and intranet initiatives, e-commerce facilities...

## Innovate

- Dynamic, fresh new ideas and perspectives to help move your business forward.

Most students who participate in work placements have completed at least two years of an undergraduate degree and have undergone an intensive interview and induction process before they enter your business - so they're more than ready to hit the ground running.

# Manage

Although most of our students and graduates are largely self-sufficient, we do require you to nominate a supervisor for the duration of the project. This person is responsible for initially explaining the project brief to your student and monitoring progress through regular meetings. The format of these meetings is entirely your choice, but you should try to cover the following aspects:

## 1. Initial meeting

### Your business

- Explain or provide information about your business and its core objectives.
- Explain any company requirements and expectations to which your student/graduate must adhere.
- Define the project brief and explain how this fits in with your wider business objectives.
- Introduce your student/graduate to the relevant members of your team.

### The project

- Set targets and deadlines.
- Agree ways in which you will measure the success of your project.
- Ensure that all resources are explained and, where necessary, demonstrated.
- Set times for progress meetings throughout the project's timeline.

## 2. Progress meetings

- These can be weekly, fortnightly or monthly, depending on the nature and length of the placement.
- Review targets and deadlines, and assess progress by the measures agreed in your initial meeting.
- Give your student or graduate the chance to feedback both positive results and any difficulties.
- Make any necessary revisions to project targets and deadlines.

## 3. Management problems

If you're concerned that things aren't working out as you expected at any point, please discuss this with either your student/graduate, or directly with step enterprise. In our experience, there's rarely a situation that can't be resolved if you contact step enterprise at the earliest opportunity to assess the problem and propose an effective solution.







# Plan

The earlier you can plan your desired project outcomes and identify the resources required to achieve success, the better equipped you will be to select the best student/graduate for the job.

## 1. What are the required resources

### Skills

- What specific skills does your student or graduate need in order to complete the project?
- What 'soft skills' must your student/graduate be equipped with to fit your business?

### Equipment

- What equipment will the student or graduate require - is this easily accessible?
- Will your student or graduate's use of equipment affect other aspects of operation?

### Management time

- Who is the designated 'supervisor' (and deputy, if possible) for your student/graduate?
- Will the supervisor require regular progress report(s) from your student or graduate?

## 2. What are your desired outcomes?

### Immediate impact

- What specific results do you want your student or graduate to achieve, and by when?
- How will you measure the success of these results?

### Wider impact

- How do specific project outcomes fit in with your wider business objectives?
- Does the rest of your team understand the reasons for the project?

## 3. Any obstacles?

- Can you envisage any potential obstacles in achieving your desired outcomes?
- Do you have resources in place to avoid or ease these problems?

Establishing a clear channel of communication so that any problems can be tackled openly and directly is essential. It is just as important that your student can find it easy to report difficulties as well as successes.



# Case study 1

## Dwayne Codling at British Rema

Dwayne Codling from Nottingham was placed at British Rema, a particle engineering company, as Simon Cuthbert (Managing Director) required a complete 'revamp and overhaul' of the company website. The old website was difficult to navigate around, making accessibility to information a significant problem.

Dwayne's expertise in web development not only resulted in a website that 'freshened up' British Rema's image, but his advice also encouraged Simon Cuthbert to change their 'web hoster', which now enables them to analyse traffic flowing through the website. Dwayne commented that "the new British Rema website compared to UK competitors is far superior in terms of aesthetics, navigation and accessibility". Simon Cuthbert is pleased with the new website ([www.britishrema.co.uk](http://www.britishrema.co.uk)) as it has enabled British Rema to improve efficiency within the business and increase their market presence – "as a real benefit we refer more people to the website with greater confidence."

Dwayne found this work placement a very rewarding learning experience - "Working in a real work environment has prepared me for the future graduate career I want to have." Not only has Dwayne improved his time management skills but he now feels he has a better understanding of the high standards expected in the professional arena. Simon Cuthbert was pleased with this work placement as he felt that the 'right' candidate was definitely found. He endorses the programme and the benefits of recruiting undergraduates and graduates within businesses and would certainly offer further work experience opportunities in the future, should the business need arise.



# Case study 2

## Katherine Howell at Ultimate Salon

The Ultimate Salon was formed in 2002 and offers hair, beauty and tanning services in Nottingham's city centre. The Ultimate Salon was lacking a corporate image and was missing a defined marketing strategy, resulting in them missing the opportunity to capitalise on seasonal events, for example Valentines Day and Christmas.

With these highlighted problems in mind, Katherine Howell, studying Business Studies (Marketing) at Nottingham Trent University was taken on.

To overcome the weak company identity and to reflect the salon's professional team, Katherine designed a range of business stationery, leaflets and posters. She also compiled an annual promotions schedule with accompanying promotional communications. To top it all off she also negotiated an array of advertising in local magazines and radio stations, whilst sticking to a very tight budget.

Karen Lamb was impressed with Katherine's professional nature and her commitment and ability to work using her own initiative. She was overwhelmed with the quality of her work and also the amount she achieved in the eight week placement. When commenting on the benefits to Ultimate Salon, Karen Lamb stated that "Katherine's work has given us a vision and mission moving forward. We have professional packages including a corporate package which goes out to large local companies. Having professional literature has given us an edge over the competition in the local vicinity.

Through this experience, Karen Lamb strongly endorses the use of undergraduates and graduates within any business environment.



# Your work placement

Our guide to help you plan, manage and review your success.

# Maximize impact

For a successful work placement it's important to get to grips with two sets of objectives – those of your student/graduate and those of your business.

## Student/graduate goals:

- To put university and life skills into practice.
- To gain experience in the workplace.
- To develop technical and general employability skills.
- To enhance post-university employment prospects.

Before selecting your student, it's important to be clear about what you expect of him or her – in terms of specific project goals and general behaviour. It's also critical to understand that a successful work placement relies on both the student and business achieving their objectives. From here, you're in a prime position to start planning an effective step enterprise work placement for your business.

## Business goals:

- To access affordable, effective skills and/or increase management capacity.
- To have a specific project managed or moved forward to achieve specific results.
- To add a valuable team member to enhance the existing team.
- To maximise the long-term benefits of your work placement project.

“Graham’s skills and expertise during his eight weeks have made a huge impact on our business. We now have a new suite of products solely due to Graham’s research and development.”

Michael Elliott,  
Managing Director, Over-C

