Work Experience Portfolio

Compilation Guidelines

1. What is a Work Experience Portfolio?

Quite simply, a Work Experience Portfolio is a short collection of documents that brought together, in either a print or electronic format, demonstrate the skills, personal attributes and work-related knowledge, that you have acquired as a result of your work experience.

2. Why produce a Work Experience Portfolio?

As the graduate labour market becomes more competitive, employers look for potential new recruits who can offer more than a degree alone.

Some employers, e.g. in engineering, law and medicine will require specific technical skills or knowledge. However for all jobs, including those with a strong technical content, employers want individuals who possess a much wider range of skills and personal attributes such as communication and interpersonal skills, initiative, problem-solving and team working abilities. These are known as transferable skills because no matter where you develop them (e.g. via a part-time job, placement or voluntary work) you can transfer and use them in any job you do, including graduate jobs.

To impress future employers, it's not enough just to have done work experience. You must be able to demonstrate that you have thought about your experience and show what you have learnt from it. All too often, applicants fail to pass the first stage of the recruitment process because they have not provided enough evidence about what skills and attributes they have developed as a result of their experience.

Your Work Experience Portfolio will:

- help you think about your skills, personal attributes and work-related knowledge in a way which will enable you to communicate them clearly to employers during the application process

- act as a handy reminder of the above when you make applications (for jobs or courses) in the future

- provide a useful resource to show your tutor and other contacts, when you ask them to write references for you.

3. Who should develop a Work Experience Portfolio?

Every student would benefit from creating their own Work Experience Portfolio:

- first, second or penultimate year students can use it to help them make more effective applications for work experience (particularly summer internships and placements)

- final year students can use it to help them enhance their graduate job applications or applications for further study.

4. When should you compile your work experience portfolio?

Ideally, you should start to compile your portfolio shortly after you commence your work experience. Although you can use it to retrospectively review previous experience, this isn't as effective as producing a 'live' Portfolio as you go along, but still a very worthwhile exercise.

5. What types of work experience can go into a Portfolio?

Part-time jobs and temporary vacation work: These include a range of opportunities from bar work and retail to clerical or manual work, which you may well undertake primarily to earn some extra cash.

Summer placements / internships: These are formal, organised company work placements, which can range from anything up to 3 months over the summer through to longer-term assignments taking place at other times of the year.

Voluntary work: This essentially fails into two categories. 1) You may choose to undertake voluntary work with a recognised charity or not-for-profit organisation. 2) You could set up some unpaid project work with a commercial organisation to gain valuable work experience in a sector relevant to your future career plans.

Year out opportunities: These are offered by some larger organisations and can be either related to your course or type of career you think you may enjoy. You will need to speak to a member of staff within your department if you are considering taking a year-out. If this is of interest to you you should review the 'Placements' information available at: http://www.shef.ac.uk/placements.

If you are looking for work experience, use the "Finding Work Experience" web page for help with where to look for vacancies: http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/studentjobs/finding.html.

6. What transferable skills and personal attributes should be recorded in a portfolio?

Some of the skills and personal attributes you should record in your portfolio include:

• Commercial awareness	• Leadership
• Communication skills (written and oral)	• Negotiation skills
• Confidence and assertiveness	• Networking
• Creativity and initiative	• Numeracy and IT / computer literacy
• Decision making	• Planning, organising and time management
• Drive and determination	• Pro-activity and commitment
• Enthusiasm and willingness to learn	• Problem solving
• Flexibility and adaptability	• Self-management
• Initiative and motivation	• Teamwork
• Interpersonal skills	

Please see: More information about 'Gaining Skills' on the Careers Service website: http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/gainingskills.html

You should also be aware of the 'Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate': http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/04/83/65/TLSU%20report2.pdf

7. Which technical skills/knowledge should be recorded in a portfolio?

This will depend completely upon the type of job you are doing and could relate to the skills developed in your degree course: e.g. engineering related, languages, law, medical etc. If you are studying for a degree which is accredited by a professional association it is a good idea to refer to information available directly from the relevant association so that you are aware of the type of skills expected and you can provide evidence from your work experience wherever possible.

8. How to create your Work Experience Portfolio

Remember: The aim of your work experience portfolio is, in essence, to demonstrate the skills, personal attributes and knowledge, which you have acquired as a result of your work experience.

Your work experience portfolio can be compiled in either a print or an electronic format e.g. in an A4 ringbinder/lever arch file or as part of an e-portfolio. You may wish to show all or part of it to academic tutors, referees and future employers. Therefore, it must be organised so that it is easy to read.

Outside of the 'Contents' section, you need to divide your portfolio into three sections as follows:

SECTION 1 – My Skills Record Sheets

This first section of your portfolio will act as a quick reference tool for the reader to refer to find out where and when you worked and what roles you have undertaken. In addition, they will gain an overview of your skills and the evidence you are presenting to demonstrate that you have these skills.

An example of a completed 'Skills Record' sheet is given on page 4. You need to develop a similar record for your portfolio.

You need to:

1. Complete the top section of the 'Skills Record Sheet' with details of the name of the organisation where you work, your dates of employment/experience and a brief description of your role. Note: It is a good idea to always incorporate your job description within your portfolio.

2. Enter details of the skills/attributes/work-related knowledge you have developed during your work experience into the 'Skill/Attribute/Knowledge developed' column (Column 1). Each time you develop a new skill etc, you should enter it on the record sheet.

3. Provide details of the activities or incidents you were involved in during your work experience, which demonstrate that you have developed each skill/attribute etc in the 'Example(s) to demonstrate this in action' column (Column 2).

4. Include appropriate references to any supplementary evidence you have collected in the 'Supplementary evidence ref.' Column (Column 3). For further information about supplementary evidence see 'SECTION 3' – 'My Evidence' on Page 5.

Example of a completed Skills Development Record Sheet

ORGANISATION WHERE EXPERIENCE TOOK PLACE: Northern Wildlife Trust

DATE: June – September 2007

JOB TITLE and BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WORK UNDERTAKEN: Voluntary Assistant. Worked in a group with four other volunteers to design and carry out a survey of Trust members and visitors to local attractions.

Skill/attribute knowledge developed	Example(s) to demonstrate this in action	Supplementary evidence ref.
2. Teamwork	Throughout my volunteering, I worked as part of a team to design and execute the survey, which meant liaising with others to get things done, making sure I organised myself so that I didn't let others down and having to compromise in areas where I did not agree with the rest of the group about how we might undertake the work.	
3.Commercial Awareness	Through working on the survey, I was able to learn a great deal about how the organisation works, from the managers down to each volunteer. Working on the survey, I could see how the information collected would be used to improve the work of the YWT and therefore hopefully increase visitor numbers.	
4. Time management / organisation	Being part of a team, where we relied on each other to perform our allocated tasks and fulfil our role within the overall execution of the survey, meant that I had to organise myself and manage my time well so that I didn't let others down by not delivering my work on time – thus hampering someone else's progress.	Ref. 5 Task list Ref 6. Project plan
5. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)	I was required to use the software system SPSS to manage and analyse the data collected from the survey. I produced a report which was presented to the marketing committee.	Ref. 7 SPSS Document Ref. 8 Report

SECTION 2 – My Reflections

In this section you can incorporate any examples of audits, action plans, logs, journals or other tools that you have used to help you with your development during your work experience. This section will be very personal to you and you will develop this section to suit your own style. There may be parts which ultimately you wish to remain private and do not wish to show to anyone. What you incorporate here should be useful to you to refer to when you are compiling your 'Skills Record Sheets' (See Section 1). Some general questions you could ask yourself regularly to help you to reflect upon what you are getting out of your work experience are:

- What exactly did I do (today, this week, this month)?
- What did I like?
- What did I dislike?
- What did I learn?
- What skills did I develop?
- Have I achieved what I set out to achieve?
- Is there anything getting in the way of what I want to achieve? What can I do to get round it?
- Have I developed skills or learnt about areas of work that I didn't plan for?
- What skills or knowledge do I still need to develop?
- What opportunities can I take advantage of to progress my development or develop more/new skills?
- What can I do now in this skill area that I couldn't do previously or what can I do now because I have built upon this strength?
- What worked well? Why?
- What difficulties did I encounter?
- How did I overcome these difficulties?
- What do I want to be able to do in the future but cannot do now? How will I achieve this in the future?

You may find it useful to refer to your academic department's information relating to Personal Development Planning (PDP) for help with this section.

You will wish to divide this section into sub-folders which are personal to you.

SECTION 3 - My Evidence

This section will include everything you feel would be appropriate for the reader to see to clarify what you have outlined on your 'Skills Record Sheets' in Section 1. Each time you place anything in this section (often referred to as supplementary evidence) you must ensure that you code it in order for the reader to find it easily. (This is the reference you place on your Skills Development Record Sheets in Column 3). You need a logical system e.g. for a printed portfolio you may like to consider a numerical coding system, for an online system you may like to file everything alphabetically.

Supplementary evidence can take many forms, some examples include:

- Examples of work done (e.g.: drawings, reports, completed forms, letters written, flyers, checklists, policies, presentations, questionnaires, and any other documents you produced) can demonstrate a variety of skills, e.g.: written communication, numeracy, computer literacy, creativity, initiative, accuracy, etc. The relevant website address should be included for any web-based evidence.

- Copies of formal progress reports you may have written for your supervisor.

- Copies of feedback from any reviews, appraisals, coaching sessions, etc. (formal or informal) you had with supervisors can demonstrate that you have developed a range of skills.

- If applicable, you might include a copy of a letter inviting you back to work for the organisation at a later date, either for another period of work experience or for graduate employment. This can show that you have impressed your employer and adds credence to what you have written in your Record Sheet.

- Copies of open-references/testimonies, which highlight the skills that your employer thought you demonstrated during your work experience. Ideally these should be written on headed paper and be signed and dated by the person who has written it.

- A list of names and contact details of people who may be useful to you in future can demonstrate your networking skills, as could copies of invitations to any networking events you went to, etc.

- If you have undertaken any skills-development training activities whilst out on work experience, you could include proof that you completed the course successfully (e.g. a copy of a certificate) or, if these aren't available, a copy of the course details which show the topics you covered.

- Written confirmation of any awards or prizes you won as part of the work experience, e.g. 'sales of the week' or written confirmation which shows you met your work-related targets, as appropriate, make good supplementary evidence.

- If you received thank-you letters from happy customers / clients, this provides excellent supplementary evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of skills like customer care, interpersonal skills, problem solving ability, etc.

- Details of any social / charity events you organised – and feedback from it afterwards! – can show your interpersonal skills as well as teamwork, organising, planning etc.

- Photographs of work you have done e.g. displays (especially before and after), activities you have taken part in, etc can demonstrate the effectiveness of your skills.

- Copies of any research you have done into the company, the industry within which it operates, etc can demonstrate your commercial awareness.

You will wish to divide this section into sub-folders which are personal to you.

9. Further Support

If you need any assistance with the development of your portfolio please use our email enquiry service: http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/emailenquiry.html

10. Useful Resources

Careers Service http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers - advice and information for students and graduates on graduate careers and further study. Includes the access to the 'Careers Skills Module,' the 'Gaining Skills' information and the Student Jobshop http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/studentjobs/ - the work experience section of the careers service website.

Prospects: http://www.prospects.ac.uk - The UK's official graduate careers website – includes 'Prospects Planner' online careers guidance tool

Hobsons http://www.get.hobsons.co.uk - a comprehensive graduate careers website with a vacancy service

Target Jobs: http://targetjobs.co.uk/home/default.asp - graduate jobs and careers intelligence