

"Have you ever wanted to give a student work experience but not known how to use them? Here is what one employer has done with accounting work placements."

Peter has had a number of work experience students and has found that careful selection of the student project is the key to success. Most organisations have a list of jobs they would love to complete but are unable to do so because of time constraints. Many of these jobs can form the basis of a student work experience project.

Peter worked for a large retail organisation that had many stores across the metropolitan area. Electricity accounts were variable from store to store and a number of suppliers provided power to the organisation. If this information could be collected, collated and analysed it would be possible to make an informed decision about electricity usage across the organisation and negotiate a deal that would have the potential to reduce power costs. The project was kept aside until a work experience student joined the organisation. In the first week the student collected the bills from across the stores and collated the information onto an Excel spreadsheet. Once the data was compiled the project entered the next phase and provided the student with an opportunity to use their analytical skills and make recommendations. At the end of the student's work experience it was easy for Peter to assess how productive the student had been and he had a body of information that could form the basis for further decisions.

Peter has now moved to a different organisation in the not-for-profit sector. The organisation has approximately 250 mobile phones and needs data on how they are being used. Employees are expected to pay for private phone calls but the organisation does not currently have data on employees who are and are not making this contribution. In addition, the organisation needs to ascertain whether certain roles need phones as some have little or no use. Given that the organisation has multiple cost centres (over 150) it is not easy to access the data but a student could potentially undertake the research independently once they have learnt the basic skills. On the other hand the supervisor could quickly assess the student's progress at any point and provide feedback. Such a project would provide the student with an insight into the issues organisations face and the use of information upon which an informed decision can be made.

Peter has found that discrete projects have the greatest potential for student projects. The data collected is of value to the organisation, progress with the project is straightforward to monitor, and the nature of the work allows the student to quickly master the skills and then apply these.