Work Experience Industry

Introduction

Since 1977, the Property Group at RMIT has, in close cooperation with the Australian Property Institute, organised a Work Training Program for full-time students of the Bachelor of Applied Science (Property) or (Valuations) degrees.

The Program, which operated during the academic year, involves students mainly undertaking their course work at the RMIT on Mondays and Tuesdays, and their placement with appropriate employers as trainees on Wednesday to Friday inclusive.

The aims of the scheme are to improve the quality and employment prospects of graduating students, and to expose students to actual property practices in order to complement their formal theory studies.

How the Scheme Operates

For most students, the Program operates for 3 days a week (Wednesday – Friday) over the major part of the academic year – that is from mid-March until mid-October (26 weeks). Exact dates of starting and finishing will vary depending on the arrangements with individual employers. Some employers endeavour to take 2 students in a year, and thus, starting times would be January, or June/July, and some employers take on several students at the one time. The scheme operates inclusive of university holiday periods. If students are unwell or cannot attend for some particular reason (e.g. exams) this time is required to be made-up.

A carefully completed logbook/work experience diary is proof that the work experience has been obtained, and is the basis of a claim to the API for credit of experience for the period, and is particularly relevant to those who will eventually be seeking Certified Practicing Valuer status.

How to Become Involved

As an Employer
David Higgins at RMIT will be pleased to advise you how to become involved, and a quick phone call will register your interest as a prospective employer. As the scheme operates from mid-March, it is helpful if offers from employer be received well before the New Year.

Once the offer of employment is made by an employer to RMIT, you still reserve the right to withdraw, although this is rare, and more importantly, an interview is arranged between yourself and prospective student employee(s). It is useful for RMIT to shortlist students with two or three presenting for interview. ‘Matching’ is done on the basis of work-type and location preferred by the student, together with requirements and conditions of the employer. As the year progresses, you can expect to be contacted by an RMIT staff member to ensure that everything is operating smoothly. As is noted elsewhere, individuals of the Membership Committee of the API may also speak to the students and monitor their progress through the work diaries.

What are the Benefits?
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- **As a Prospective Employer**
  Employers participating in the scheme gain the services of an energetic, enthusiastic assistant for at least half a year, at a very low cost.

  As with all new employees, the employee will be undertaking some of the basic tasks within the practice, but it is also expected that the student employee will be given as much assistance and exposure to property problems and issues as possible. It is important that this point be clearly understood: the program is critical as far as the employee learning is concerned, as this is a formal part of their course, and may well be the start of a career in Property. Full experience in property work is the aim of the Program.

  The program also provides an unequalled opportunity to evaluate a prospective long-term employee. Where else would you have the opportunity of a 26 week 'working interview'?

- **As a Prospective Employee**
  For students, this Program is unequalled in its ability to provide a practical introduction into property practice. It will complement your studies, and provide an opportunity to put theoretical considerations into practice.

  It is not intended that the program provide only the good side of work. As a Property Advisor / Manager etc. you will have to undertake many of the routine tasks associated with the operation of a business. That is, however, part of a Professional’s life and must be given the proper attention if overall competency is anticipated.

**What are the Duties of the Employer & the Employee?**

As outlined, the aim of the Program is to provide students with work experience. This involves both parties, and there must be a concerted effort to ensure that there is mutual understanding.

It is pointed out that there is an onus upon the employer to devote time to discuss critical property issues, valuations, sales, principles, etc. This is considered a very important factor and it has been neglected by some employers in the past.

Some problems will clearly arise due to the operation of the Program on three days per week. Various office procedures, meetings, valuation, and other tasks involve other days as well and therefore where an employee is involved in a big job, care is needed to ensure that briefing occurs at the start of each week’s work.

The employee is expected to undertake all aspects of property work – from sales data collection to analysis, collation of information from the Title Office or planning bodies, collection of information from authorities such as Councils, measurement of lots and buildings, plan drawing, preparation of reports, meetings with landlords or tenants, perhaps briefing with financiers, and of course for valuation students, the making of valuations under strict supervision. In short, the employee is expected to fully participate in all possible aspects of the work of the employer company.
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Many employers operate combined Real Estate Agencies and Valuation Practices or various property and related advice. In this case, it is pointed out that some experience in all areas is very valuable, but that the primary aim of the program is to provide experience to the student in the area of their specialisation, and that every effort is needed to ensure that.

Standards of dress should be discussed and agreed upon between the employer and the student. The aim of these dress regulations is to provide the basis of acceptable experience at all times, and thereby rendering each employee available for client related work at any time during the Program’s operation.

As discussed in the following section, payment to students is made to cover expenses incurred by the employee and some remuneration. It is the duty of the employer, however, to ensure that the employee is not ‘out of pocket’ for items which should be covered by the employer in the normal course of business.

On the matter of hours of work, the employer must make the usual hours quite clear. Hours of work are accepted by the employee and acceptance of the position, and it is expected that these items will be adhered to. Habitual lateness, resulting in loss of work opportunity, must be noted by the employer in the Diary.

As an employee you must therefore ensure that you know beforehand exactly what time you are expected for work and if necessary, where. This may mean that you may need to telephone your employer on Tuesday for instructions.

Payment & Other Duties

As mentioned earlier, the scheme is a voluntary one on behalf of the employee, and the payment is made to cover expenses incurred – e.g. dress requirements, food, transport to work, plus some financial reward for being a productive employee.

The amount of payment is determined by RMIT in conjunction with members of the API, and will be advised at the commencement of each year’s program.

The recommended minimum rate for 2009 is set at $115 per day. This is equivalent to an approx annual full-time salary of $30,000 per year. At this rate, employers should note that the services of these students are very affordable, and when properly utilised, the student will be able to contribute to the operation of the business. Subject to other income earned by a student, the $115 per day may be taxable, students should discuss this with their employer, and students should consider whether some expenses incurred (perhaps even study at RMIT) is tax deductible.
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This payment arrangement, however, only covers the Program’s Wednesday to Friday operation and in the situation where the employee reports to the employer’s usual place of work, and is able to be dismissed at the end of the day from that place.

Where the employee has to undertake additional travel, or where she/he uses her or his vehicle in connection with the employer’s business, the employer must arrange suitable recompense. Where the matter requires arbitration, it should be referred immediately to the Lecturer-in-Charge and the Manager of WIL (Work Integrated Learning unit) at RMIT.

Employers are not required to make sick leave or annual leave provisions whilst students are employed under this scheme. In the case of an employee being asked to undertake additional duties, outside the normal program, or where by mutual arrangement additional work is done, such work is to be paid at normal commercial rates.

The API Membership Committee is quite prepared to review such additional work, and where appropriate, the student may gain some additional credit of experience. On the matter of remuneration for this additional work it is suggested that both parties negotiate the rates before work commences. In that way, no misunderstanding should result. Careful note should be taken in respect of normal leave and other provisions for employees as such additional work does not form part of the Program, and the employer is liable to arrange appropriate cover for the employee.

The matter of insurance and superannuation is covered below.

**Insurance:**
Neither the Australian Property Institute nor the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology can effect insurance policies to cover students on their supervised professional practice. It is up to each employer to ensure that the student is covered by appropriate Workcover Liability and Accident Injury insurance.

**Car Insurance:**
Employers should negotiate at the beginning of the year whether or not students will be required to use their own car. If the student is to use her/his car then a comprehensive policy should be sighted by the employer.

**Superannuation:**
The Australian Taxation Office has ruled that work experience is to be treated as training and as such does not require superannuation payments to be made to students on this three-day-a-week Program.

What if that Doesn’t Work?
Human nature being what it is may (but only twice in recent years) lead to disagreement. Injury or sickness can mean lost time. Quantity or quality of work available may substantially alter, and the experience becomes not-existent or downgraded.

What to do?
These situations, and many others, are in fact readily resolved. In the Australian Property Institute there are many other members who may be able to take over as an employer, thus ensuring continuing experience for the employee.
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All that is needed is a discussion with David Higgins at RMIT. As a condition of the Program the situation will be remedied as soon as possible.

In the case of an unsatisfactory employee, a substitute employee may be available, but no guarantee can be made. However please understand these people are generally new to this type of employment.

Allowing for the type or amount of available work, some employers may consider that they can only offer a short period of employment. RMIT considers that three months minimum (i.e. half the Program), but in the case of highly specialised work a lesser period would be considered. No guarantees of an employee can be made; it depends on who is available. However RMIT will be pleased to discuss any proposal.

Withdrawal from the Scheme on the part of an employee must be accompanied by a written explanation to RMIT, to be placed in the Work Diary. There can be many reasons for withdrawal, but in order to operate the Program efficiently RMIT must know at once what is happening, and why.

Where necessary, API members will act as Arbitrators or Mediators if asked to do so. Where an employee misses part of the Program through sickness or injury, the period lost should be ‘made-up’ if possible, if a full credit for experience is to be obtained.

Where this make-up time cannot be effected – e.g. after the examination period – due to its length, or other commitments on behalf of either party, a pro rata credit is given by the Membership Committee, taking account that period worked and the experience gained.

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WORK EXPERIENCE DIARY

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Student No ....................................................

Week Number .........................
Diary Week Ending......................
Supervisor Name..............................

Work being Undertaken

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The above summary provides an accurate representation of the work carried out this week

Student......................................................... Supervisor ........................................
Date......................................................... Date..............................................