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AN EVIDENCE-BASED **DISCUSSION PAPER** ON THE ISSUE OF **STUDENT WORK PLACEMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Prepared for the Aged Services Industry Reference
Committee (ASIRC) on behalf of SkillsIQ.

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PURPOSE

This Discussion Paper is one of a series that aims to stimulate critical and creative thinking around the potential future of education in the aged care sector. **This paper is focussed on student work placements in aged care within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector** and includes Certificate III in individual support, Certificate IV in ageing support, and Diplomas in Nursing.

What are best principles and best practice with respect to providing high quality work placements to VET-level students of aged care programs?

This executive summary briefly outlines work placement models, explores possible models nationally and internationally that suggest positive outcomes with respect to best principles and practice, and will pose key questions for consideration by The Aged Services Industry Reference Committee (ASIRC). For more details please see the discussion paper.

The discussion points raised in this paper have implications for three stakeholder groups:

- Students – access to quality education to become job-ready to deliver high-quality care
- Training providers – offering quality, world-class education, in line with industry requirements
- Industry – engaging a job-ready, reliable, efficient workforce

In respect to reform of work placements; any change to the current delivery of student placement should ultimately ensure the delivery of best possible care to users of aged care services.

This document reports information gained from a rapid review of the literature and interviews with industry and training providers who volunteered their views. The content of this paper does not necessarily represent all models of placement currently in use or all views on this topic.

WORK PLACEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION DELIVERY AND PROGRAM DESIGN

EDUCATION DELIVERY MODELS

Australia currently offers two models of education for VET in aged care: certificate qualifications through classroom-based technical learning or traineeships for those already employed in the area. Both models involve work placement.

International education models are similar to Australia's, with the addition of a strong focus, particularly in Europe, on apprenticeships. The European model of apprenticeships – specifically 'dual apprenticeships' is equivalent to an apprenticeship in Australia, where students alternate time learning on the job in the workplace, with time studying with an education provider.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS OF WORK PLACEMENT AS AN ELEMENT OF PROGRAM DESIGN

Different education models provide possibilities for different placement models and have significant impact on the ratio of time given to workplace training in comparison to theoretical training. Placement and training outcomes may therefore relate to both the education model and placement models used. Key elements of program design include **how much time throughout the program is dedicated to work placement**, and at **which stages or intervals of the program work placement is delivered**.

THEORY TO PRACTICE RATIO IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

Australian Personal Care Workers (PCWs) are required to complete 120 hours of placement during their training and ENs 400 hours. Table 1 presents the division of theory and practice in the training of PCWs in some European countries.

TABLE 1. CURRICULUM THEORY/PRACTICE RATIOS IN PCW TRAINING IN EUROPE¹

Country	Theory/Practice in time or percentages
Austria	50%/50%
Belgium	50%/50%
Czech Republic	40%/60%
Denmark	32 weeks/54 weeks
Germany (Lower Saxony)	1800/960 hours
Spain	960/440 hours
Poland	720/160 hours
Slovenia	1700/1018 hours
Ireland	550/450 hours

An equal division of theory and practice as recommended for PCWs internationally, can also be seen in the training of ENs in some countries. As an example, the structure of the Diploma of Nursing in New Zealand requires 1,800 hours divided equally between theory and clinical experience (900 hours each)²

The ideal education model will deliver an appropriate balance between on-the-job and theoretical classroom-based training to ensure that students gain knowledge of, and contextualise, the skills required to be effective aged care workers.

WORK-PLACEMENT MODELS

Work placements offered in Australia and internationally can be divided into two models based on the stages or intervals in which the work placement is delivered: block placements; and distributed/integrated placements.

BLOCK PLACEMENT

The block placement is the standard model in Australia, which allocates students to one workplace for an extended consecutive period of time. Block placements commonly use a preceptorship style of supervision where one student is assigned to one nurse/care worker for most of their work-based training. In Australia, this is commonly a block of placement in the final month of training, however, blocks may be allocated at any time during a program.

DISTRIBUTED PLACEMENT

Distributed placement models have placement days distributed throughout classroom training periods; students may spend 1-2 days per week with an employer and the rest of the week in a classroom learning environment. This model provides students with fewer consecutive placement hours in a row, but they are typically involved in a particular workplace for a longer period of time.

INTEGRATED-DISTRIBUTED PLACEMENT

An Integrated-distributed placement has placement days spread throughout the duration of the training program (reflective of the distributed work placement model) but are notable in that classroom-based learning takes place on-site at the healthcare organisation. This is done in an effort to further integrate theory and practice.

WHAT MODELS/OPTIONS OPTIMISE THE QUALITY, EXPERIENCE AND INTEGRATION OF WORK PLACEMENT?

FLEXIBLE PLACEMENT OPTIONS

Looking at successful placement models nationally and internationally shows that best practice requires flexibility in placement models. The United Kingdom, Finland, Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria, offer multiple flexible options for industry placements including either one or several block placements, or distributed placement throughout the training program.^{3,4} Australian providers also highlight the importance of flexibility in successful placements. The Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce⁵ noted training needs to be **fit for purpose and responsive to supporting students**, workers and the aged care industry in its changing environment.

Despite individual providers finding great success with various different models, overall the literature and personal communications collated demonstrates there is no **'one type fits all'** placement model. Placements are best adapted to the specific training organisation, worksite, and student.

Flexibility in placement options ensures employers of different sizes and resources, and students with different strengths and life commitments can find a placement model to suit them. In the United Kingdom, an industry placement Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is important in then ensuring that despite the differences in models, all placements are of a consistently high quality.⁶

STRONG LINKAGE BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND TRAINING PROVIDER

In Europe, successful models of workplace training heavily involve the **apprenticeship model** and the subsequent work placements that fit within that model. One of the clear benefits to these reportedly successful models is the **strength of the relationships between industry employers, training providers and the student**. An apprenticeship model requires:

- 1) significant buy-in from industry partners but also a
- 2) high degree of commitment from students and training providers, ensuring solid integration of clinical or work experience, and theoretical components of learning.⁷

Outside of direct work placement, this strong linkage opens channels to address differences between skills required to be job-ready and program content delivered through training programs as well as other quality of placement feedback loops between student and training provider. These benefits are less strongly reflected in traineeships, both in Australia,⁷ and internationally.⁸

COORDINATED PLACEMENTS

The relationship between **industry work placement** and the **classroom based theoretical** component of training is key to the success of apprenticeship models, yet this level of integration is likely possible for other models too, particularly if there is a well-coordinated/defined cooperative placement program.

One example of a state based specific coordination program in use is a partnership between TAFE SA and the State Health Department to coordinate work placements for their Certificate III and IV, and EN students through the one database. This central coordination benefits the students, who have a greater variety of locations for their hours; TAFE, via reduced paperwork and negotiations with each individual site; and the Health Department, through a consistent stream of potential new staff. Some placement sites also have their own educators, who work closely with TAFE educators to ensure students are meeting their training requirements, and to assess their

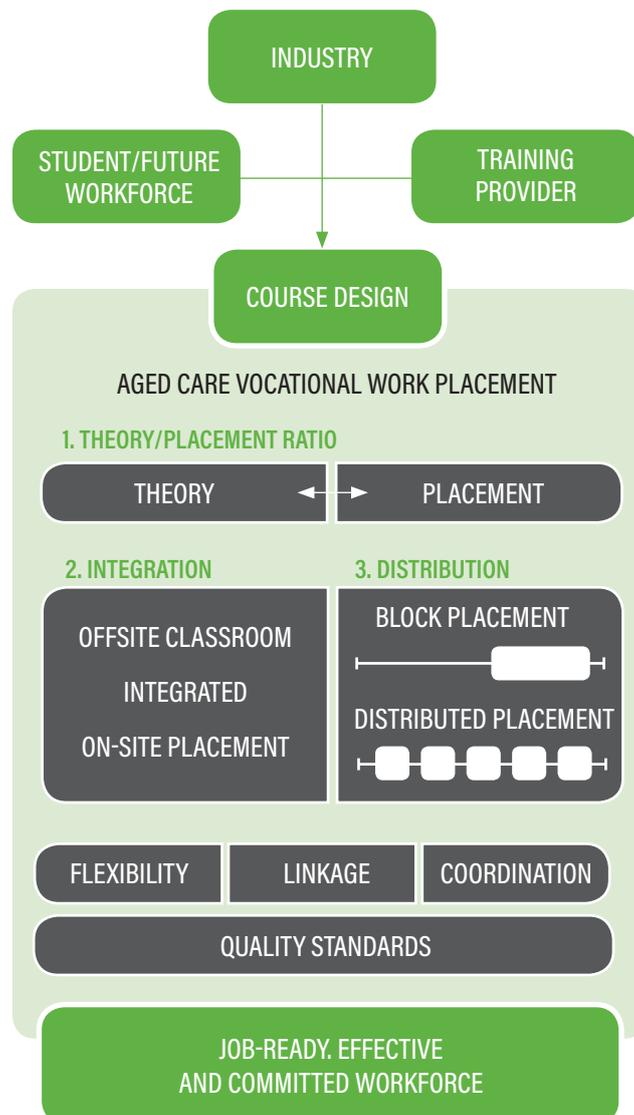
competence. These educators have usually completed training through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to ensure they meet the current requirements for supervision of students.

Figure 1 demonstrates the coordinated approach, engaging student, training provider and industry to augment a progressive inclusive design.

Situating a work placement component within program design requires consideration of theory to placement

ratio; the level of integration between classroom and facility; and the distribution of work placement throughout the program. These decisions should be underpinned by flexible placement options, strong linkage between industry and training provider, and sophisticated placement coordination. Appropriate quality standards are required to ensure that student outcomes are consistent regardless of program and placement design.

FIGURE 1. ELEMENTS REQUIRED TO DELIVER AN INDUSTRY READY WORKFORCE



SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND KEY QUESTIONS

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT ON, RATIO OF DELIVERY AND DISTRIBUTION OF WORK PLACEMENTS

Best practice vocational training in aged care involves both classroom and work-based training. Currently there are mandated minimum placement hours for aged care workers and enrolled nurses in Australia, but some international models and the literature indicate the value in a high ratio of practice to theory, **with the recommendation of more than or equal parts clinical hours to classroom-based hours**. Contemporary distributed models of placement delivery appear to deliver quality outcomes for all stakeholders.

How much time should be spent learning theory in respect to undertaking work placement? How many hours overall should a student be required to complete in work placement? Are distributed placements a more viable form of placement delivery in comparison to the traditional block placement model?

FLEXIBILITY IN PLACEMENT MODELS

Flexibility in placement models helps to ensure that student placements can work well for different student and industry needs when factors such as hours, size, location or type of organisation may impact optimal placement formats.

How can flexible placements be offered while ensuring consistent quality and outcomes?

STRONG LINKAGE AND ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

A key aspect of best practice and successful models of placement nationally and internationally is the strong employer engagement with students and RTOs. Effective engagement from employers may arise in part from the opportunity for industry to take a more active role in work placement planning.

What elements of program and work placement design would foster stronger linkage between industry and RTO's?

CENTRALISATION AND STREAMLINING OF PLACEMENT PLANNING

Current work placements in Australia require the RTO to canvas care facilities and organisations to secure placements.

Would a centralised unit that liaises between RTOs and industry be effective in streamlining work placements for all stakeholders? Could this centralised unit assist in the planning and uptake for rural and remote aged care placements and support rural and remote organisations and students?

ASSESSMENT AND SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT

When we consider partnerships between training organisations and industry to provide placements for students, the division of roles and responsibilities needs to be considered, and there are implications around this to ensure that all parties are equipped to fulfil their parts.

Who is best placed to fulfil assessment and supervisory roles? How can supervisory and assessment tasks be effectively undertaken, considering the diversity of workplaces in which aged care is delivered?

What would a world-class, vocational work placement program in aged care look like; and how do we get there?

COMMON AND UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT MODELS

Our overview of national and international models of VET level work placement has highlighted some commonalities between successful work placements, and some unique elements that particular systems offer for consideration (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. COMMON AND UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT MODELS DISCUSSED IN THE REPORT

Common elements	Unique elements
Strong employer engagement	A single placement can be split across 2 employers if required, with a single set of learning objectives across both employers (UK)
Blended learning involving both classroom and work-based training	Up to 35 hours of work-taster activities can count towards placement hours (UK)
Flexibility to work with different industry needs; multiple models allowable including block, day release or a mix	Student's external employment can be counted towards their placement hours if occupationally related (UK)
Mandated minimum placement hours or ratio of placement in the program; ideally more than or equal parts clinical hours to classroom hours	Each placement block focuses on learning a different element of the job (Netherlands)
Agreed learning objectives and/or contract before placement begins; clear roles and responsibilities of all parties	Students on placement are paid an apprentice-wage and considered an employee (Switzerland, Denmark, Austria)
Quality assurance procedures administered by an external single body or jointly by training/host organisations	Placement occurs after students choose their specialisation so they can hone relevant technical skills and benefit the employer (UK)
Subsidies or incentives for employers, and/or national or regional funding to support placements	Training is offered for industry mentors (Finland, Australia). In some cases, employers must undertake this training for accreditation as a placement host (Netherlands)
Placements (and vocational training programs) align and respond to national, regional or local labour market needs	Trainees are required to demonstrate competency through a certification exam, which includes a written portion and skill demonstrations (USA, some states)
Cooperation between industry and RTOs to ensure best fit to industry and student needs/abilities	Online only programs are an option for those who already work in a relevant job (NZ)

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