

Job Shadowing at SOAS

1. Introduction

Job shadowing has many potential benefits for an organisation such as SOAS. It can help improve communications across departments, directorates and faculties, and even with other HE institutions. It is an excellent networking tool, an opportunity for sharing best-practice and for self-development.

SOAS is committed to encouraging, supporting and delivering training and development for staff throughout the School using a wide range of learning opportunities, including job shadowing. This is very often a learning experience for both parties involved and a key benefit is bringing people together from various parts of the organisation. The School's Staff Development & Review Scheme asks staff to consider their personal and professional development, with job shadowing one possibility that can be considered.

This guidance is for members of staff interested in gaining a better understanding of another role within the School and aspects of the work involved in it through job shadowing. These guidelines will ensure that job shadowing benefits participants, those being shadowed and the School.

1.1. What is Job Shadowing?

Job shadowing means that one person (the shadow) visits another (the host) to experience their work by observing them for an agreed period of time. There are no hard and fast rules for the time period involved and this should be agreed in advance between the parties. However, a one day or two half day time period would be usual. Job shadowing provides a unique opportunity to find out how other staff work. It enables participants to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of other roles and functions in the School.

1.2 What are the Benefits of Job Shadowing?

There are a number of benefits of job shadowing for both the shadow and the host. Shadowing:

- Broadens the knowledge and understanding of the participants' roles and Departments / teams as well as broader issues in the HE sector
- Increases the understanding of the wider institutional goals and objectives
- Brings people together who might not normally have contact and provides networking opportunities
- Allows the opportunity to compare and contrast standards and achievements in the shadow's own Department with those elsewhere
- Improves communication within the organisation
- Provides the opportunity to observe good practice elsewhere
- Breaks down barriers and myths about how others work
- Allows good practice to be brought back to the shadow's current role

- Encourages the realisation that other people have different ways of doing things and provides fresh ideas and insights about how to be more effective in their own work
- Identifies areas for further personal development and widens experience, skills and future career opportunities
- Provides learning opportunities for the host – explaining a particular task or activity can provoke analysis and improve communication and feedback skills

1.3 Types of Job Shadowing

There are different ways of arranging job shadowing depending on how 'involved' the shadow wants to be in the host's work. The important thing is that this is discussed beforehand by the host and shadow and an agreement made about which approach(es) to take. Each of the differing arrangements has advantages and disadvantages.

a) Observation

As a visitor you will spend the period observing the day to day work of your host and attending relevant meetings where appropriate. This is suitable where an understanding of the role of the host is required. Your host will provide opportunities for debriefing to ensure both parties benefit from the shadowing expectations.

Advantages: the shadow's role is clear; little interruption to the host's work during the shadowing.

Disadvantages: little interaction; little chance to learn as you go along

b) Active involvement

The partners discuss what is coming up i.e. briefing before a section of the day's work "Next is the Welfare Committee, I have to present a brief report". At the end of the day a more thorough de-briefing covering the wider view of working practice, and a reflection on what both have learned.

Advantages: an excellent learning strategy; items don't wait too long to be discussed; a reasonable interaction.

Disadvantages: some interruption to the host's work; some need to adjust the roles according to the tasks; may take longer than observation and have less opportunity for interaction than hands-on (details below).

c) Regular briefings

You will shadow your host for specific activities which are preceded by a mini briefing and followed by a debrief. This is most effective if you and your host are closely located enabling the shadow to attend in shorter blocks of an hour or so. This type of shadowing provides short periods of focused activity, rather than passive ongoing observation. It will need to be carefully scheduled if it is not to become too disruptive.

Advantages: really focuses on the shadow's learning objectives as it is very targeted.

Disadvantages: fairly time intensive for the host; relies on realistic learning objectives; may be unintentionally too narrow in focus.

d) Hands on

This is an extension of the observation model, where you undertake a task for your host during the period. This will provide you with hands on experience in the role whilst under the supervision of the host. This type of observation provides first hand experience of the role together with a meaningful task to undertake.

Advantages: minute-by-minute explanation, discussion and interaction.

Disadvantages: slows down and affects the host's work.

Versatility is the key and schemes may be agreed for a period from a couple of hours to several days. Most job shadows will probably be of one or more mornings/afternoons or a day in length.

1.4 Eligibility

The scheme is open to all SOAS staff who have successfully completed their probation period.

2. How do I Arrange to do Job Shadowing?

You should first seek the permission of your line manager and discuss with them the type of role you would like to shadow, what you want to get out of the experience and the learning and skills you hope to obtain. This meeting should also clarify the objectives of the shadowing. The period and activity to be shadowed should also be subject to discussion and to the agreement of your line manager, who will have to consider the relevance of the shadowing on your current and/or future roles as well as possible staffing issues.

Once the job shadowing has been agreed in principle with the line manager, the signed Job Shadowing Application form should be returned to the Staff Learning and Development Office. The shadow will then be contacted by the Staff Learning and Development Officer to discuss issues relating to the shadowing i.e. who the host is, objectives for the shadowing, best practice in shadowing etc. After this discussion, the job shadowing can go ahead once the host has been identified and has agreed that they are happy to proceed.

For application forms go to: www.soas.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/ or email staffdevelopment@soas.ac.uk

2.1 Preparation for Job Shadowing

There will always be a briefing meeting with the shadow, the host and the Staff Learning and Development Officer where the objectives and ground rules for shadowing are agreed. This meeting should be held at least one week before the shadowing takes place and should include consideration of the following:

- objectives of the placement
- areas of particular interest
- how job shadowing fits in with the shadow's wider professional development
- agreement on issues of confidentiality
- the shadowing activities, dates and times

Preparation by both the host and the shadow is essential if the experience is to be beneficial.

In preparing for the experience the shadow should:

- Provide the host with an outline of their expectations for the period.
- Familiarise themselves with the procedures and working practices of the host.
- Ensure that their work colleagues are aware of their absence and appropriate cover is arranged.

2.2 The Job Shadowing Experience

During the shadowing the shadow should:

- Show tact, discretion and awareness by withdrawing when circumstances deem it appropriate.
- Maintain confidentiality at all times.
- Provide the host with feedback and reflection on the experience.
- Ensure the host is informed if their absence is unavoidable.

The host should:

- Provide the shadow with a work outline and a time table for shadowing to take place.
- Choose carefully when to host the shadow, dependent on work schedule and the shadow's objectives.
- Ensure colleagues and contacts are briefed about the shadow's role and responsibilities.
- Provide opportunity for the shadow to ask questions and provide feedback.
- Provide the shadow with relevant and constructive feedback.
- Be punctual at all times.
- Provide the shadow with appropriate notice if the shadowing activity has to be altered or cancelled.

2.3 Evaluation

At the end of the shadowing experience it is important that the shadow reflect on what they have learned.

- What were the main things you learned from the experience?
- What did you enjoy about it?
- What did you least enjoy?
- How can the lessons learned assist in you in your current role?
- Was the experience what you expected?
- Has the shadowing identified any future areas for development?

The shadow will be required to complete a Job Shadow Evaluation form at the end of the shadowing and send the original to the Staff Learning and Development Office and a copy to their line manager and the shadow host for discussion and possible follow-up action.

3. Guidance for Line Managers

Line managers should be involved in discussions with the shadow when setting up a job shadowing placement to ensure that the placement is relevant to the shadow's work or development; that it fits in with the shadow's/ team's current workload and commitments and that the potential benefits are more significant than the potential disruption being absent from work may cause.

Things to consider are:

Relevance: The relevance of the shadowing arrangement to their staff member's current and/or future role.

Workload: The member of staff's/ team's workload.

Benefits: The weight of the perceived benefits of the job shadowing arrangement versus time out from their contracted role.

Equity: Are team members receiving equal access to job shadowing?

The shadow's manager needs to agree to the shadow's involvement in a job shadowing placement, to ensure that the information and skills gained from the placement are transferred back to the workplace and to support them if there are any problems. It is the line manager's responsibility to become involved if there is a problem on either side of the relationship.

Line managers should discuss the success of the shadowing placement with the shadow afterwards asking the following questions:

- How did the placement meet its purpose and the specific objectives set out?
- Were there any specific objectives that were not met? If so why and how could they be met?
- How do you plan to use the learning from the placement in your current/future role?

4. Guidance for the host

Preparation: Clarify the purpose of the placement with the shadow and clarify the specific objectives with them. Use these to determine what you are going to let the shadow observe. Identify what you are not going to let the shadow observe and explain this and why to the shadow. Arrange all the necessary access/permits etc for the placement to take place including environmental issues such as seating and a private space to talk. Explain to your colleagues that you will have a shadow with you on the specified day.

Start with the shadow: From the outset ask the shadow what they already know to ensure that the placement is as effective as possible. Encourage them to make the most of the experience by asking questions and taking notes (where appropriate) throughout. Encourage the shadow to reflect on what they have seen and what they might be able to apply in their own situation.

Timing: We all have good and less good times in our weeks/days to undertake particular tasks. Carefully choose when to conduct your placement with the shadow so that you can be productive with the time available.

5. Confidentiality

Some information learned during the job shadowing may be confidential and must not be divulged to any other parties. Additionally, shadowing reports should concentrate on how far the objectives were achieved and should not negatively report on anything that is detrimental to the person being shadowed or their colleagues.

6. What Next?

If you are interested, and feel that job shadowing could enhance your knowledge and be beneficial to you and your team / department, discuss this with your line manager. There is an opportunity for this during your annual Staff Development and Review meeting, but this can be raised at other times.

Job Shadowing Process

