

# EXPERIENCES OF WORK

A best practice guide



FORM THE FUTURE

Cambridgeshire  
& Peterborough  
CAREERS HUB



## Overview

Form the Future, in conjunction with the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Careers Hub, has created this guide to support employers to deliver high quality experiences of work places and help young people make the most of work experience placements.

The guide has been designed to cover the essential information required to create and maintain a good work experience offer. The guide is designed to be used by those with responsibility for work experience programmes within their organisation, it is primarily targeted at those new in their role or offering work experience for the first time.

## Further support

Organisations seeking further support in developing the experiences of work that they offer can contact Form the Future. Form the Future offers a managed work experience product that helps an employer develop their programme, find the students most in need of placements and connects those students with the employer.

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## Benefits to businesses

A well-planned work experience offer brings multiple benefits and opportunities to young people. This guide will help employers ensure these benefits are understood and accessed by those participating in their programme.

Hosting work experience also rewards your business and your staff.

For a business, work experience can lead to increased brand and opportunity awareness, development of a future talent pipeline, engagement with the local community and a genuine opportunity to increase equity of opportunity for disadvantaged young people.

For staff, work experience brings development opportunities in leadership, management, team-building and coaching; increases staff wellbeing and provides an opportunity to give back to the community.

On top of all this, young people can bring new ideas and fresh perspectives to your business. Listening to the suggestions and feedback of a younger person can help your business identify ways to support all staff, not just those experiencing a workplace for the first time.

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# WHAT IS WORK EXPERIENCE?

“forms of employment or activities that provide practical experience in a particular job or industry.”



- “Experiences of work” is an inclusive umbrella term that covers the variety of ways in which young people can gain experience of workplaces. When people talk about “work experience” they tend to think of a single week’s placement during Year 10. This is the most common format that experiences of work take, but it is not the only one.
- Experiences of work will become an increasingly important approach as under the Labour government it is likely that there will be a push for more varied opportunities to experience workplaces across a longer timeframe within young people’s education.
- This is a commonly used definition of work experience, note that it uses the plural, “forms” and is relevant to experiences of workplaces as much as it is the single week’s work experience.



# WORK EXPERIENCE CAN ALSO BE...

- Shadowing opportunities
- Virtual projects
- Placements
- Volunteering
- Part-time jobs
- Internships
- Open days
- Starting a business



- **Shadowing opportunities:** where individuals observe professionals in their work environment to learn about a specific role or sector.
- **Virtual work experience and projects:** in which an individual or group of students take part in workplace tasks via a virtual medium (this could mean being set tasks by an employer who shows students how they carry out the task in their own workplace)
- **Placements:** which are often part of a vocational course and can last up to a year
- **Volunteering:** usually unpaid work for a good cause – students could do voluntary work with a local charity, faith group or community activity: examples could include preparing meals at an old people's home or taking part in a river clean up project
- **Part-time jobs:** any form of part-time job counts as work experience: the classic paper-round or weekend shift at a local business would fall into this category
- **Internships:** where students or graduates work temporarily to gain relevant skills
- **Open days:** where a business invites young people (sometimes along with their family or school) to visit their premises, meet some staff and gain an understanding of what happens at their workplace
- **Starting a business:** being an entrepreneur is a form of work, so students who start their own business are experiencing work – examples could include selling homemade products on Etsy or mowing neighbour's lawns

## SOURCES:

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/what-types-of-work-experience-are-there/>

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/types-of-work-experience>



# HOW DO EXPERIENCES OF WORK HELP STUDENTS?

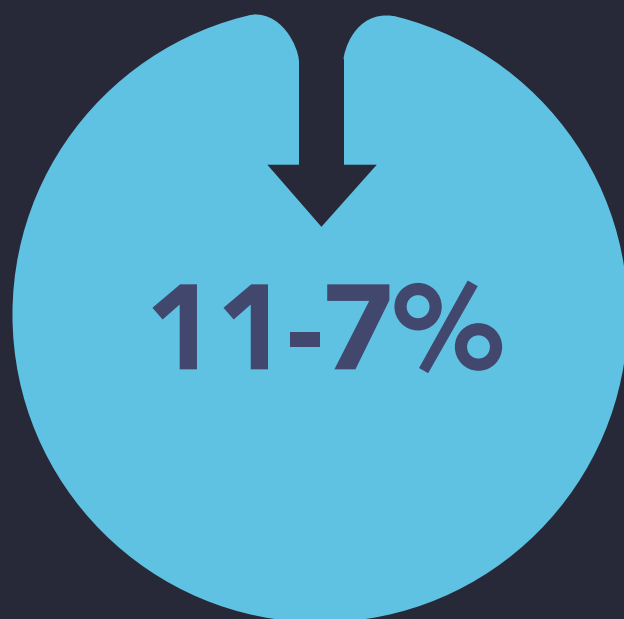
- Real world context
- Gain transferable skills
- Develop self-awareness
- Boost motivation
- Informed decision-making
- CV and personal statements
- Building a network

- Each type of work experience offers unique benefits and insights, helping individuals build their skills and develop a clearer understanding of their career interests and goals.
- Experiences of workplaces provide a real-world context to apply and refine both technical and soft skills learnt in education – and – they allow students to contextualise their learning and see where it could take them in future.
- It's a chance to gain new skills that are essential in the workplace, such as communication and interpersonal skills – these are the skills that all employers look for in a candidate and are crucial for students who lack confidence in their academic abilities
- A placement can increase self-understanding, maturity, and confidence
- When a student can see where education can take them and/or how hard they have to work to get a career they value, it can boost their motivation to apply themselves harder to their work
- Additionally, work experience can offer insights into various career options, helping young people to make informed decisions about future career paths – even when the best information is available in writing or video, nothing compares to feeling what a workplace is like
- The skills and responsibilities accessed through a placement are vital material for a CV. They could equally be used in applications for Sixth Form, College, University, Apprenticeships etc.
- The placement can give a student contacts, provide them with a referee and sometimes even lead to an offer of a job

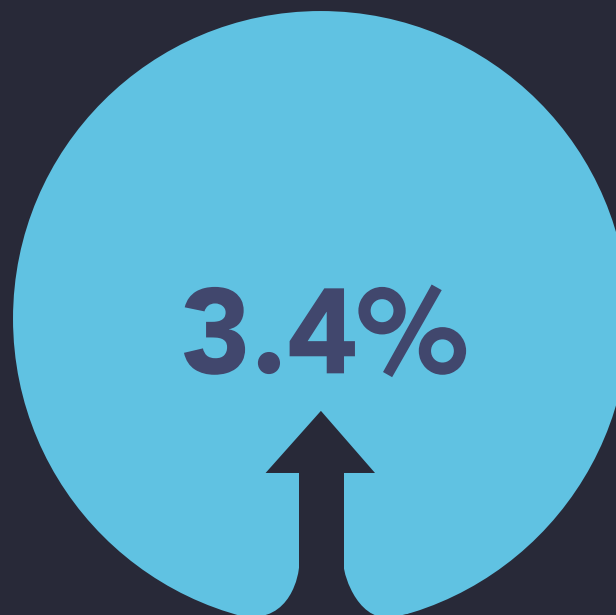
SOURCE:

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/how-work-experience-can-help-you>

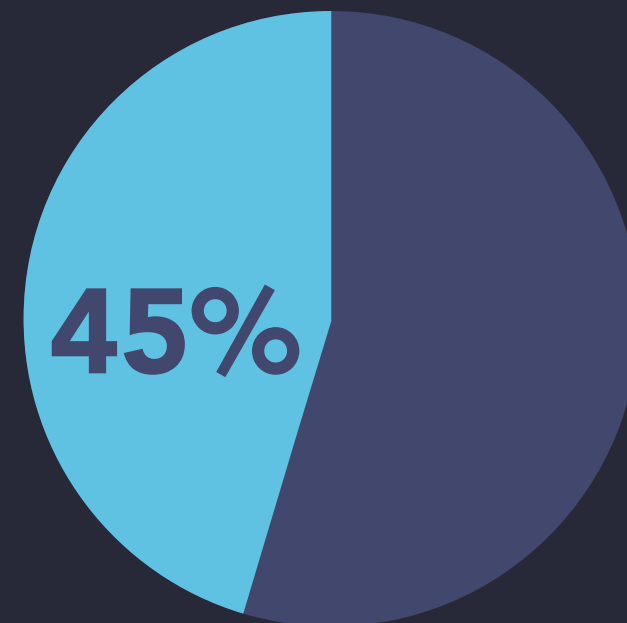
# LONGER TERM BENEFITS



For those who took part in Work Experience in secondary school the risk of being Not in Education, Earning or Training (NEET) is reduced from 11% to 7%



For each additional type of work experience reported throughout secondary school, respondents reported a 3.4% higher average wage (after controlling for socio-economic factors)



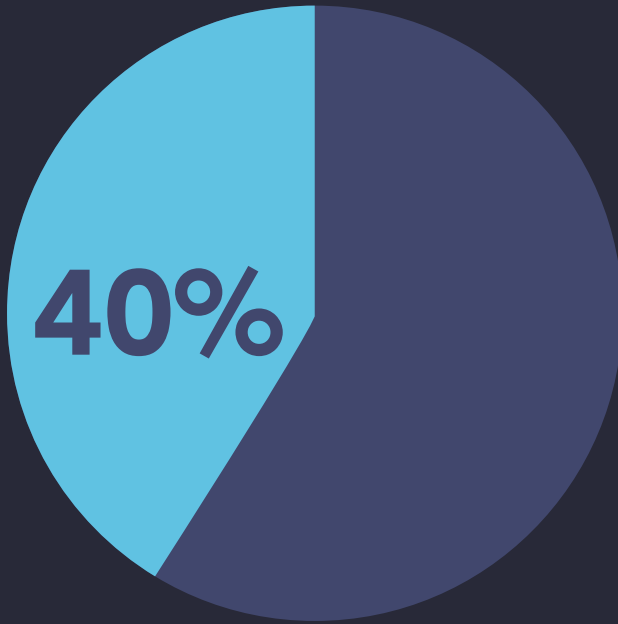
Workers who gain work experience tend to move between roles more frequently, which helps them acquire new skills and boost their earnings. About 40–50% of such role changes lead to significant pay raises

## SOURCES:

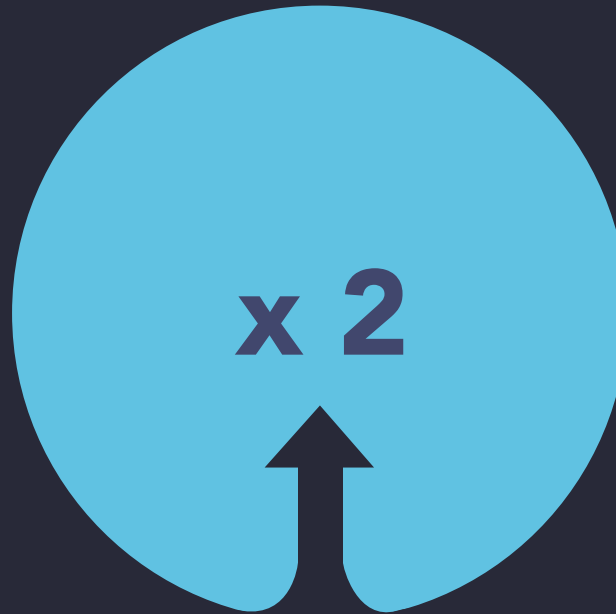
[https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074\\_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report\\_v1.pdf](https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report_v1.pdf)

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/human-capital-at-work-the-value-of-experience>

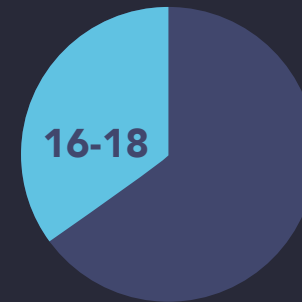
# WHO IS MISSING OUT?



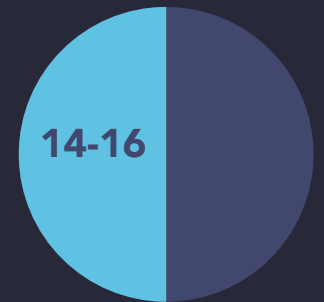
A KPMG study found that only 40% of young people from lower socio-economic statuses have participated in work experience, compared to 47% of young people across all socio-economic backgrounds.



Pupils attending independent schools are twice as likely to have multiple placements vs their state school peers



Participation in Work Experience has reduced over the last decade, with 1/3 of pupils aged 16-18 years and only half of 14-16 years accessing opportunities



## SOURCES:

[https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074\\_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report\\_v1.pdf](https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report_v1.pdf)

<https://kpmg.com/uk/en/home/media/press-releases/2023/06/social-class-could-be-holding-young-people-back-from-their-preferred-career.html>



# WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

A good work experience programme includes several key elements to ensure that the work experience is beneficial for both the participant and the employer, providing valuable insights and skills that can shape future career decisions.



## SOURCES

Making work experience work – CIPD: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/work-experience-guide/>

Work experience, apprenticeship and internship programmes - <https://www.cipd.org/uk/topics/apprentices-interns-work-experience/>

# ELEMENTS OF A GOOD PROGRAMME

- Clear objectives
- Structured plan
- Support and supervision
- Variety of tasks
- Feedback mechanism
- Evaluation and reflection

- **Clear objectives:** Define what both you as an employer and the participant aim to achieve. This helps in setting expectations and measuring success.
- **Structured Plan:** Develop a detailed plan outlining the tasks, responsibilities, and learning outcomes. This ensures that the participant gains meaningful experience and skills relevant to their career interests.
- **Support and Supervision:** Assign a mentor or supervisor to guide the participant. This person should provide regular feedback and support, helping the participant to integrate into the workplace and learn effectively.
- **Variety of Tasks:** Offer a range of tasks and projects to give the participant a broad understanding of the industry and the specific role. This variety helps in keeping the experience engaging and educational.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Implement a system for providing constructive feedback. This helps participants understand their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering their professional growth.
- **Evaluation and Reflection:** At the end of the programme, conduct an evaluation session to reflect on what was learned and how the experience can be improved for future participants.

# LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Technical skills
- Transferable skills
- Professional behaviour
- Industry insights
- Personal growth

- **Technical skills:** Students should gain an understanding of the technical skills required to carry out the role or roles they are experiencing. Students should have the chance to practice the skills in a supervised environment and be aware of how they contribute toward a given task and/or the wider objectives of the business.
- **Transferable skills:** Students should be made aware of the transferable / soft skills required to carry out the role or roles they are experiencing. Students may need to be made aware of what transferable skills are, how they are exemplifying them and other situations in which they could be used.
- **Professional behaviour:** Students should be taught about professional behaviour, provided with contextualised examples of how to behave in the workplace and learn why professionalism matters.
- **Industry insights:** Students should gain an understanding of what the business exists to achieve and the role of the wider industry. Ideally, students will learn about pathways into the role(s) they are experiencing and wider opportunities within the industry.
- **Personal growth:** Students should have opportunities to develop personally, be it in terms of their confidence, chance to take responsibility, becoming aware of the world beyond school or any other area of personal development. Much of this growth will take place by chance through what they experience during their placement and would be reinforced through an end of placement reflection with their designated line manager.

# PLANNING

- What do you want them to get out of it?
- Who is going to be supporting them?
- What are the specific tasks they could be set?
- Where will they be working?
- How will they commute to their placement?
- What are the barriers to engaging in the opportunity

A short planning checklist for an employer to help make an experience fulfilling and effective:

- **What do you want the student to get out of the placement?**  
Employers must ask themselves this fundamental question when starting to plan a placement. A good core principle to follow is that a student should have a variety of experiences that provides them with as rounded an understanding of the business as possible in the time available.
- **Who is going to be supporting the student?**  
A designated person(s) should be identified to act as the students mentor and line manager. The individual needs to be an appropriate fit in terms of skills and relatability, as well as being able to guarantee enough time in their schedule to support the student.
- **What are the specific tasks they could be set?**  
The tasks should be interesting and based on/contribute to real tasks that take place in the business. Employers should aim to provide a mix of tasks that challenge the student and push them to try something new, but that are also achievable and don't make them feel out of their depth.
- **Where will they be working?**  
Whether it's at a specific desk, within a lab or at different sites across a longer time period, make sure you know where and when you will need your student to be, plus plan relevant communications accordingly.
- **How will they commute to work?**  
Some students may be coming from an area with poor transport connections or have a long journey each day. Talk to them in advance about how they will be getting to work. Consider making funding for transport available from day 1 of the placement and ask your employees if anyone can help the young person get into work.
- **What are the barriers to engaging?**  
There are many barriers, both visible and unknown, that could limit a young person's ability to engage in a placement. They could have anxiety about taking part and require reassurance of the steps involved, they may need to support their family by taking a part-time job that would mean the placement isn't possible. You won't know what barriers exist for an individual and in some cases might never find out. Your best option is to therefore design a programme that is prepared to provide the best level of support possible to create equitable access for all.

# EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

- Each employer will have its own priority areas to evaluate and receive feedback on in order to discover how effective their programme was. Decisions over what areas are evaluated should be based on wider strategy that could fall within corporate outreach, ESG initiatives, recruitment etc.
- The example given below shows how an employer can create an evaluation framework based on the Learning Outcomes suggested on page 8.
- Going from left to right, the framework starts by looking at the desired outcomes that a business holds for the work experience programme as a whole.
- Next, these outcomes are applied to an individual. Often this results in only a change in language or framing of the outcome, this step is important though as it helps understand how the individual would benefit from the outcome – and – it makes the next step easier.
- The final step is to create questions that will be used in evaluation surveys that students complete at the end of their placement. Each question stems from the outcome and should be used to evidence the extent to which the programme helped the student reach the outcome.
- The outcomes and questions shown are only examples and won't necessarily fit the purposes of each business. However, the overarching outcomes based on the suggested learning outcomes will be applicable to any business offering young people experiences of work.

Desired outcomes from experience of work	What does the outcome look like for a participant?	Question to discover how effectively the outcome was reached
Increase confidence in employability prospects	Participant has increased self-confidence in their ability to gain employment	As a result of the placement, has your confidence in your chances of getting a job that you consider worthwhile increased?
More developed understanding of the given sector	Participant gains better-rounded understanding of the sector	Thinking about the insights and understanding you gained about the sector or industry that your placement was within, has your opinion of it changed?
Build work-readiness skills	Participants practice skills that they will need upon entering the workplace	Has the placement impacted your knowledge and / or ability in any of the following categories (tick all that apply):
Aid decision-making re. next steps	Participants are in a better position to make informed decisions about their next steps	Thinking about the career of education you might pursue next, which of the following options best describes how you feel:
Build work-seeking skills	Participants gain skills that help them in seeking employment	Through this placement have you gained skills and abilities that will help you apply for jobs or education courses in future?
Increased motivation to stay in education / pursue further study	Participants feel more motivated to stay in education / pursue further study	Do you feel more inspired to pursue education or training that would help pursue a career in this field?



# STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS



# BEFORE PLACEMENT

Many students benefit from additional support and these suggestions are not necessarily limited to the most needy. However, students with specific plans laid out for their educational needs will need the extra support detailed here.

- TA (Teaching Assistant) Support
- Travel
- Enhanced Safeguarding
- Parents, Guardians or Carers
- Pre-placement visit
- Additional workshops

- As in any circumstance of supporting an individual with additional needs, the type and level of support should be based on the needs of the individual and what is written in an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan)
- **TA Support:** if a young person is supported by a TA, they will usually be entitled to the same hours of TA support during their work placement. The school / organising body should know this and let you know in advance; where this is the case, make provision for the TA within the placement.
- **Travel:** Ask the school and/or relevant adults supporting the student if transport support is provided, if so, contact those providing transport to ensure they are aware of timings, parking etc. Some students may wish to practice the travel to work before the full placement, if this is the case, please support them in doing so.
- **Enhanced safeguarding:** The school and/or relevant adults supporting the student will conduct enhanced Safeguarding checks, including Accessibility and Health and Safety considerations; be prepared to give time and cooperation as necessary.
- **Parents, Guardians or Carers:** Encourage parents, guardians or carers to undertake pre-placement checks and visits, as they will usually be required to sign to agree their child can attend. Parents may require some additional reassurance, invite them in to discuss, answer any questions, and (if possible) involve them in the preparation process.
- **Pre-placement Visit:** Arrange a visit for the young person, with a familiar adult, to familiarise themselves with the working environment, and meet the main employer contact.

# DURING PLACEMENT

- Communication tools
- Booklets
- Special items
- Check-in

- **Communication tools:** Ask the school and/or relevant adults supporting the student what communication tools they require and familiarise yourself with how they are used. Examples could include: PECS cards, Visuals, Assistive Technologies, Social Stories
- **Booklets:** Some students may be provided with booklets to take with them with which they can use to document their experience, this can later be used to create a portfolio of experience when applying for work. If a student has one of these, learn how they used them and make them part of the end of placement review process.
- **Special items:** Be aware that students may require extra items to get through a working day, such as: fidget toys, medicines, dietary foods etc.
- **Check-in:** Make contact with the school and/or relevant adults supporting the student to let them know how it is going; best practice recommendation is two or three on-site visits by an adult who knows the student well.

# SOURCES

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/young-workers/employer/work-experience.htm>

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/work-experience-employer-guide/key-questions-for-employers-offering-work-experience-to-ask/>

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/work-experience-guide/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employers-could-you-offer-work-experience/work-experience-employer-guide>

[https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/7414%20BHCC%20Work%20experience%20toolkits%20V6FINAL\\_Shiromi%20Cabraal.pdf](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/7414%20BHCC%20Work%20experience%20toolkits%20V6FINAL_Shiromi%20Cabraal.pdf)

<https://www.ucas.com/careers/getting-job/10-ways-get-most-out-work-experience>

[https://formthefuture.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/ProgrammeDeliveryTeam/EXYM1jse4zJFuH2SHwAr2iEBwdCeJt9h75Gq\\_1RgNhqYZA?e=znqJoP](https://formthefuture.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/ProgrammeDeliveryTeam/EXYM1jse4zJFuH2SHwAr2iEBwdCeJt9h75Gq_1RgNhqYZA?e=znqJoP)

# THANK YOU.

Further reading, the OCR provide a guide on Best Practice in Work Experience:  
<https://www.ocr.org.uk/images/168852-the-ocr-guide-to-best-practice-in-work-experience.pdf>

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