



Work Experience A Guide For Students

What is a work experience placement?

A placement with an employer in which a young person carries out a range of tasks in much the same way as an employee, with the emphasis on learning from the experience. Work experience provides opportunities for learning about the skills, behaviours, careers, roles, and structures that exist within a workplace.

How do you benefit from a work experience placement?

Work experience supports you to make career decisions, develop employability skills and support successful transition into college, university, apprenticeships and the workplace. Taking part in work experience can help you gain:

- More confidence.
- Improved self-esteem.
- Ability to communicate with adults.
- Improved timekeeping.
- Additional practical work skills.
- Team working skills.
- Problem solving skills.
- Time management and organisation skills.
- Clarification about job roles within industry.
- Broadened horizons in relation to career routes and job roles available.

How to find a work experience placement

Depending upon the school or college that you attend, you may have the opportunity to undertake a placement. Work experience can only take place from year 10 onwards. Your school or college will have a work experience coordinator who you can talk to about the different options to find a placement.

Before your work placement

It is recommended that you arrange a pre-placement meeting before the placement starts. This will allow you to have a 'practice run' for the travel element, to see the business premises and meet with your contact so it is not so daunting on the first day. It will also provide a valuable opportunity to ask questions such as:

- What time should you arrive and what time will you finish?
- Where to report to on the first day and to whom?
- What are break/lunch arrangements – is there somewhere to buy lunch or should you bring a packed lunch?
- What is the dress code and do you need to provide any PPE (Personal protective equipment e.g. protective footwear)?
- Do you need to bring anything extra with you?

It is a good idea to keep a diary of your experiences while on placement and any feedback from your employer as you may be able to use this at college or job interviews. The employer may also be willing to provide you with a reference when you are applying for jobs, so make sure you give a good impression!

Travel

It is your responsibility to get to and from the placement. You should;

- Be aware of how you are getting to your placement.
- Ensure you know and understand any timetables for public transport and the costs.
- Consider any potential problems with travel i.e. roadworks, public transport strikes.
- Have a backup plan to your method of travel in case of an unexpected scenario i.e. bicycle has a flat tyre.

Health and Safety

You need to take responsibility for your own Health and Safety and those around you. At the start of the work experience placement, you should receive an induction which as a minimum should include:

- Tour of the working area/premises.
- Fire procedures.
- First aid arrangements.
- Overview of expected tasks during the week.
- Prohibited tasks and/or areas.
- Requirements for personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Introduction to colleagues.
- Confirmation of working hours and breaks.
- Shown welfare facilities.

Employer expectations

Prior to the placement, it is a good idea for you to research your employer to gain a basic knowledge of the company in order to understand the possible expectations that the employer will have.

Employer expectations will also be discussed at the pre-placement meeting, however, you should be aware of the expectations that all employers will have:

- Positive attitude.
- Shows interest.
- Polite and friendly.
- Ability to follow instructions/listening skills.
- Hard working.
- Punctual and reliable.
- Appearance and hygiene – appropriately dressed.

Your expectations

You may have a different expectation of what a placement will be like compared to reality. Therefore, you should have realistic expectations.

- Age, lack of experience, lack of training, knowledge, skills and health and safety restrictions will limit some tasks that you can do.
- Time will be spent observing colleagues especially in environments that are high risk, such as building/construction, garages and engineering.
- Routine tasks such as cleaning, tidying, filing etc will be carried out.
- A full working day will be undertaken in the majority of placements and not 'school hours'.

Working hours

You should not work for more than 5 days in any consecutive seven-day period and it is a requirement that students should not work more than a standard eight-hour day or forty hours in a week. This will include appropriate breaks. You will be informed of the exact times of the placement by your employer.

Verbal and non-verbal communication

You should ask questions to show interest and be aware of negative and positive body language. Examples of positive body language are:

- Making eye contact.
- Sitting up straight.
- Paying attention.
- Relaxed posture.
- Keeping hands out of pockets.

Examples of negative body language are:

- Staring.
- Slouching.
- Yawning.
- Crossed arms and legs.
- Looking at your watch.

Mobile phones/social media

Use of mobile phones will not be allowed during the placement 'working hours'. You may be asked to place phones in bags or lockers or as a minimum, phones should be turned off or placed on 'silent'. Mobile phones are not permitted in childcare/school placements due to safeguarding procedures. Inappropriate content and use of social media whilst on placements may result in placements being terminated.

Pay

You will not be paid whilst on work experience, as it is an educational experience not employment.

Lateness/Absence

If you are going to be late or absent for your placement then you should:

- Contact the employer.
- Apologise that you will be late or absent and explain the reason.
- Provide an expected arrival time if you are running late.
- Provide an expected return date if you are unable to attend the placement.
- You should also follow the correct protocol for informing your school.

Placement reflection

Work experience should be treated as a 'learning experience' and not just a week out of school. Therefore you need to reflect upon your placement to consolidate what you learnt and apply it to your future career planning and goal setting. You should ask yourself:

- Did you enjoy the placement and was it beneficial?
- What new skills did you learn and develop?
- Do you now have an idea of what employers require from their employees?
- Has it given you a better idea of what career path you want to take?

If you didn't enjoy the experience this is also a positive thing! Now you can investigate other career paths which may be of interest. Above all, use the experience to help you make informed choices about your future