

Delivering
**Work
Placements**

Guide for employers

Work Placements

Introduction

'Work placements should enable young people to experience a relevant, challenging, enjoyable and appropriate learning experience within the contemporary workplace. A placement should help the young person to make informed decisions about their future careers.' (Developing the Young Workforce, Work Placements Standard, 2015)

During their school careers, young people will experience the world of work through a range of activities. Taking place in the senior phase (S4-S6) work placements are an important part of careers education, offering young people an opportunity to experience a work environment and help them to plan their future career.

As an employer, you can have a huge impact in preparing young people for the realities of the world of work. Poorly organised, unstructured work placements don't really benefit anyone, but a great work placement can have a positive lasting impact on young people and employers.

The purpose of this guide is to give you practical advice and support to deliver engaging and meaningful work placements to young people in education.

Benefits for young people

Young people can really benefit from the insight into working life that a work placement gives them. A work placement can support them to:

- Understand the world of work and feel prepared to make choices for their next steps
- Discover how subjects, interests, strengths and skills relate to job roles
- Build networks and social capital, skills, confidence, knowledge and ideas for choices and next steps

A work placement can also support a young person to better understand the expectations and demands of the workplace, allowing them to experience practical realities such as:

- The need to turn up on time every time
- Dressing appropriately for work
- Working as part of a team of colleagues of different ages/backgrounds/genders etc.
- Adjusting to the 'culture' of the workplace
- Representing the company in interactions with customers

Although the working environment may feel very familiar to you, to a young person who has not experienced it before, it can be very daunting. Joining the world of work can be quite a scary prospect for them. Equally, young people can have unrealistic expectations, which can lead to disappointment if they haven't had a chance to adapt these expectations to the reality.

Hosting a young person in education for a work placement is your opportunity to help them get off onto a firm footing, to boost their chances of a happy and successful start into employment.

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Benefits for business

The benefits of work experience for young people are clear, but there are also many benefits for businesses too:

- Preparing your future workforce – this is a great chance to introduce your business to potential future employees, to capture the imagination of the brightest and the best, and to build local relationships and loyalties.
- Promoting your sector – this is an opportunity to influence perceptions of the desirability of your industry, and to create positive associations in the minds of young people who are making decisions which will affect their future direction
- Recruitment – the young person has the opportunity to test out the experience of working for you, and potential waste of much time, effort and money can be avoided by minimising poor appointments.
- Developing your staff skills – the experience of supporting young people through work placements offers great personal/professional development opportunities to your staff, in honing management, supervision, mentoring and coaching skills.
- Giving an opportunity to reflect on WHY you do the things you do in the way you do (and whether you should) – there is nothing like having to explain to someone else why/how you do things, to make you see your business operation with fresh eyes.
- Benefiting from young people's energy, enthusiasm, fresh ideas and skills – whether it is the latest IT skills, marketing ideas or just their youthful perspective, young people will bring things to your business which you didn't know you needed, and which can open up whole new ways of seeing and doing things for you
- Meeting your Corporate Social Responsibility commitments through providing meaningful, impactful work placements and enhancing your profile in the community as an employer of choice

Work placement models and Foundation Apprenticeships

Work placements come in many different shapes and sizes – just like the trainees. Some ages/stages/skill levels of young people may be more suitable to your business than others. Your business may also have the resources and scope to support a range of different placement types.

In a rapidly changing world of work, work placements have needed to adapt to reflect the needs of young people, education and business. Examples of different work placement models are highlighted below:

- A week-long experience of the workplace with potential for additional opportunities
- Work Tasters: half day or single day experiences of the workplace
- A flexible placement where a young person will attend your workplace for one day per week for a month or one afternoon a week for a couple of months
- Placements undertaken out-with the school day (during term holidays e.g. internship model).

Foundation Apprenticeships

Foundation Apprenticeships are work-based learning opportunities, lasting 1-2 years, for senior-phase secondary school pupils in S5-S6.

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Young people spend time out of school at college or with a local employer, and complete the Foundation Apprenticeship alongside their other subjects like National 5s and Highers.

For more information on Foundation Apprenticeships please visit: [Apprenticeships.Scot – Foundation Apprenticeship](https://www.apprenticeships.scot.gov.uk/).

Different young people will be at different stages in their personal journey as they approach work placements. They may be unsure of what career path to pursue, and hoping to try out different options. Whatever their reasons for coming to you, and whether they stay in your sector or not, you will be providing them with invaluable transferable skills for future employment.

Health and Safety considerations

Q: 'But it's a Health and Safety Nightmare...., and what about Insurance?'

A: No it's not - and it's simple.

Many businesses worry that there is a complex series of hoops to jump through regarding H&S and insurance, before being able to deliver work placements. This is not the case. You will already carry out risk assessments, and you simply need to extend this to the young person. In the case of anyone under 16 and/ or in school, you will be asked to complete relevant paperwork, and you must share the Risk Assessment with the school and/or local authority.

As part of their induction, you must talk to the young person about the management of risks associated with their placement, including any jobs/areas/items which are out of bounds to them. Make them aware of your policies and procedures, in clear and simple terms, and of their responsibility as part of the team, in following these.

You will have Public Liability Insurance, which should cover you to take on a young person on a work placement. You would be well advised to inform your insurers of your plans to take on young people, but this should be a simple phone call. If you have any doubts or queries at all, contact your local council work placement team.

Further guidance on young people and work placements can be found here: [Health and Safety Executive – Young People and Work Placements](https://www.healthandsafety.gov.uk/young-people-and-work-placements)

Preparing for the Placement

The cornerstone of a successful placement is motivation – you need to be committed to delivering a really great experience, and the young person really needs to want to be there. The school should have done much of the work in establishing that there is a good match between the individual and the work placement, and you can confirm this through meeting up before the placement starts.

A good way to set the tone and the right expectations, is to ask the young person to apply for the placement as if for a job. This could be via your own application process, by sending

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in a letter and CV or undertaking an interview. It's all good practice for them, and requires a certain investment of time and focus, which is helpful in setting the tone for the placement from the start.

Once you have established that they are suitable for (and committed to) the placement, you should undertake some further groundwork:

- Communicate with the school and establish prior learning/experience, any particular barriers/support needs/issues and agree points, means and regularity of communication during the placement.
- If the young person is undertaking this placement as part of a qualification, such as a Foundation Apprenticeship, be sure that you are clear on any expectations or requirements relating to this.
- Before the placement starts, aim to meet the young person. Find out whether they have any particular skills/interests/expectations and also any anxieties and issues. Agree targets/goals for the placement, set realistic expectations, talk about practicalities – working day times, breaks, suitable clothing, lunch provision etc.
- You should be advised by the school on how to contact the young person.
- You should be told about pupils on free school lunches, and arrangements should be made for their lunch to be provided.
- Try to ensure that their work supervisor is involved in preliminary meetings to ensure rapport from the start. If possible, have a separate mentor, to whom they will report, and who can be approached with any issues during the placement.

During the placement

On first day of the placement, undertake the full induction. Introduce the trainee to the team, establish the status of the placement – they are respected as a team member, and expected to respond in kind.

- Establish the pattern for supervision (and mentoring)
- The young person should start using their work log (Work Placement Pack)
- Establish the habit of reflection and feedback as a 2-way process, using the work log
- Be sure to make your feedback mutual, meaningful and constructive
- Encourage them to challenge themselves (whilst being sensitive to their capacity to do so), to try new things, but also to persevere with seeing difficult tasks through to completion
- Use plenty of praise and positive reinforcement. Encourage colleagues to do likewise
- Challenge any issues as they arise and report back to the school/referring agency immediately (when in doubt, ask – if you have any concerns, raise them)

After the placement

- After the placement provide feedback to the school/ referring agency, and the trainee, on what they did well and what they could do to improve their skills and employability. If in the future you would welcome an application for employment (part-time or full-time), or an apprenticeship, tell them this, and tell them how to be aware of opportunities and the application process etc.

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- Internally, review how the work placement went (what went well and what could be done next time to make it even better) and give feedback to the young person's supervisor and mentor so their work is reflected in their appraisal / performance management review.

What activities and tasks should be included in a work placement?

There are no strict rules when it comes to what to include in a work placement, however it is important that the tasks and activities planned for the work placement give a realistic insight into the world of work.

It can work really well to have the young person focus on a particular project or projects, which gives a strong sense of focus and ownership on a task during their time with you.

- Do agree in advance what they will be doing, even if there needs to be some degree of flexibility.
- The project can be real or a 'simulation' (though this must be a realistic parallel to real work operations in your business)
- Appoint a project supervisor to manage the trainee within it
- The trainee should be involved in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the project
- Feedback should be delivered as part of the process

Other tasks and activities that have worked well are interviewing a senior member of the team on their role, shadowing a team member, presenting an idea to a small group, writing a blog or article on their work placement experience, research on the organisation and routes and pathways into the sector, and if possible, meeting with any apprentices within the team.

Remember to include the young person wherever possible in normal workplace activities, all of which will provide a fuller experience of working life. For example, meetings, client visits, negotiations, and other business operations will all be of interest and use to the young person in fleshing out their growing understanding of your business.

So much of most businesses is about the soft skills of communication, getting on with other people, courtesy, time management, personal presentation etc. It is really important that the young person gets a sense of the part these things play too.

And hopefully you will emerge from the placement experience with a strong sense of satisfaction in having done something really worthwhile, investing in the future of an individual young person, but also something which will have been beneficial to you and to your business.

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Additional resources and information

There are a wealth of resources to support the delivery of meaningful workplaces for young people in education. Some of these are included below:

Education Scotland

The following resources have been published by Education Scotland to provide guidance for employers, educators, young people and parents and carers on work placements

[Developing the Young Workforce: Work Placement Standard](#)

[Developing the Young Workforce: Work Placement Standard - Gaelic](#)

[Virtual work placements guide](#)

Skills Development Scotland

Information on the apprenticeship family, including Foundation Apprenticeships.

[Apprenticeships. Scot](#)

Health and Safety Executive

Guidance from HSE on hosting young people on work placements.

[Young people at work: Work Placements](#)

Work placement delivery tools from external organisations

The following documents have been produced by employers and organisations to support the delivery of work placements:

[Siemens Work Placement Guide for Employers](#)

[Digital Skills Education & Skills Development Scotland: Learning by doing toolkit](#)

Young Person's Guarantee

If you are providing a work placement for a young person in education, you can pledge your support to the Young Person's Guarantee. To find out more and pledge your support, please visit the [Young Person's Guarantee](#) website.