

GATSBY BENCHMARK 6

Experiences of workplaces

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every student should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities, and expand their networks.

- **By the age of 16, every student should have had at least one experience of a workplace, additional to any part-time jobs they may have.**
- **By the age of 18, every student should have had one further such experience, additional to any part-time jobs they may have.**

A workplace visit gives students the opportunity to see a work environment first-hand, observe work processes and talk to staff about their roles. They may also use the visit to investigate a topic, issue or problem related to a subject they are studying.

Work shadows see a student follow an employer or employee at work for a day or longer to find out what they do. It allows students to find out about aspects of a particular job they would not have access to through a work experience placement.

Work experience involves students doing real work tasks in a workplace. They may do one day a week over a few months, such as supported internships for college students, doing technical courses or a one or two-week block.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

- Experiences of workplaces are part of a structured programme of work-related encounters at each stage of a student's course or education, rather than a bolted-on arrangement. Students, parents, teachers and employers fully understand their scope and purpose. Younger students and students in academic or general education explore careers and the world of work, relate their learning to the real world and develop their employability skills. Post-16 students, especially those in technical education, focus on activities closely aligned to their study programmes.
- Students are active participants in the process of choosing workplace experiences that will fulfil their needs and interests, often with the help of their families. The school monitors the quality of placements offered to students from deprived backgrounds to ensure that they are not unfairly disadvantaged.
- Students are prepared well for the experiences they are about to have. This is more than just dealing with organisational matters. It is about framing learning so that students know what they can get from the experience. Schools work closely with employers to make the experiences as positive as possible.
- Students are well-supported during the workplace experience and have opportunities to talk with a trusted and familiar adult about what they are doing and finding out.
- After the experience, students undertake structured reflection in a specially-arranged session and/or in subject lessons to reinforce what they have learned.
- Employers provide valuable feedback to the school. They provide information about how well students have performed doing work experience or work shadowing placements. They also evaluate their experience of taking part in activities arranged by the school.
- Consider alternative models of work experience to ensure time is well structured and has maximum impact. This could mean there is less focus on the length of the work experience and more on quality and evaluation.

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WHY THIS MATTERS

- Fewer students are experiencing the world of work through part-time jobs – only 18% of 16 to 17-year-olds, down from 42% in 1996.
- Students learn employability skills, such as treating customers well and business awareness, much more effectively in real work situations. Over 95% of schools identify employability skills and increased self-confidence as key benefits of experiences of work.
- Students can gain important insights into their career interests and values, which will help them with their future decision making.
- Career management skills, such as organising, negotiating, networking and self-presentation can be practised.
- Students can develop and apply skills they are learning at school.
- Experiences of work are part of the talent pipeline for businesses looking to recruit school leavers and apprentices.
- Experiences of work give young people a competitive advantage – about 80% of employers think work experience is essential and two-thirds of employers would be more likely to hire a young person with work experience over someone with none.

TOP TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Schools must decide whether adults working with pre-16 work experience students need to be vetted by the Disclosure Barring Service.
2. Set open-ended and real-life projects to inspire students and develop their enterprise and problem-solving capabilities.
3. Formulate a policy for your organisation around the links you want to have with schools. It should explain the business and philanthropic case for having links, such as social responsibility and bringing on the next generation, and enable you to prioritise your use of resources.
4. See your organisation's links with schools as a training and development opportunity for your staff, especially for newly-appointed staff who can learn valuable skills while supervising students.
5. Participate in local collaborative networks such as the local enterprise partnership, local chamber of commerce, Rotary or similar grouping to co-ordinate and plan links with schools.
6. Explore different work experience models and get accredited with the [Fair Train work experience quality standard for employers](#).

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TOP TIPS FOR SCHOOLS

- Successful schemes depend on building on staff and local contacts to establish strong and sustainable relationships with employers.
- Never be afraid to ask – most employers will agree to help if they can.
- The satisfaction levels of students and employers drop considerably when arrangements are made at the last minute and when the matching of students to placements is poor.
- Make sure that students and employers are clear about the purpose of the activities you are arranging.
- Employers know that schools are busy places but they are likely to be just as busy. Remember to make every effort to communicate well with the businesses that support you, for example, give employers feedback on what they have done for your students.
- Ensure that preparation of students goes beyond just spelling out the essential practical arrangements to cover potential learning opportunities. Staff satisfaction tends to be higher when workplace experiences are embedded in curriculum learning.
- Ensure a full debrief takes place with the student to help them understand the learning outcomes from their placement.
- Staff support for students during placements is very important – students want a trusted and familiar adult who they can talk to about their experience.
- Structured opportunities to reflect on their activities is the difference between 'having an experience' and 'learning experientially'.
- Monitor the participation of individual students to ensure a balance between support for their current thinking and challenging them to explore opportunities they have not considered previously.
- Assess the impact of your scheme on equality, diversity and inclusion. This means, for example, taking steps to ensure that students without good family connections are not disadvantaged and that your scheme does not perpetuate occupational stereotyping. Support the Social Mobility Foundation's [One +1 campaign](#) to encourage professionals to support less well-connected students.

EXAMPLE RESOURCES

- Your Enterprise Coordinator will have details of all local providers of work experience programmes.
- Read our report, '[Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits, what works?](#)', to find out more about the effectiveness of these activities, and for examples of best practice
- Your local Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools Adviser can help with sourcing work experience placements.
- [Barclays LifeSkills](#) produces a guide to organising and managing work experience as well as other resources for students and staff.
- [Founders4Schools](#) helps schools connect to local business leaders in high performing businesses
- [RBS Career KickStart](#) produces careers lessons for teachers to use and resources for students.
- [TeachFirst's Access Toolkit](#) provides schools with ideas and resources to help students make the most of their experiences of work.
- The Career Development Institute has produced, "[Why Does Employer Engagement Matter? A tool kit for managing employer activities in schools and colleges](#)"
- A search on 'work experience diaries and logbooks for schools' will yield many useful examples, including [Barclays LifeSkills work experience log](#).
- A number of awarding bodies offer accreditation for students who have completed work placements, including ASDAN Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and their Careers and Experiencing Work short course.
- [DBS checks](#) for pre-16 work experience students may be required.

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AN EXAMPLE OF A WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

In an 11-18 school in the East Midlands, students in year 9 take part in a one-day work shadowing day, based on the 'Take your son or daughter to work day' model.

Then, in the summer term of year 10, students have a one-week work experience placement for which they are well-prepared in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons.

When they return to school, they have half a morning off to discuss their placements in small groups and to produce a mock newspaper article about something that happened to them on their placement.

Year 12 students have a one-week work experience or work shadowing placement in the summer term. It is enquiry and problem-based so that students can gather information and evidence they need for extended project qualification or another purpose.

Students draft 100 and 250-word descriptions of what they achieved on their placements for future CVs, personal statements and application forms.

