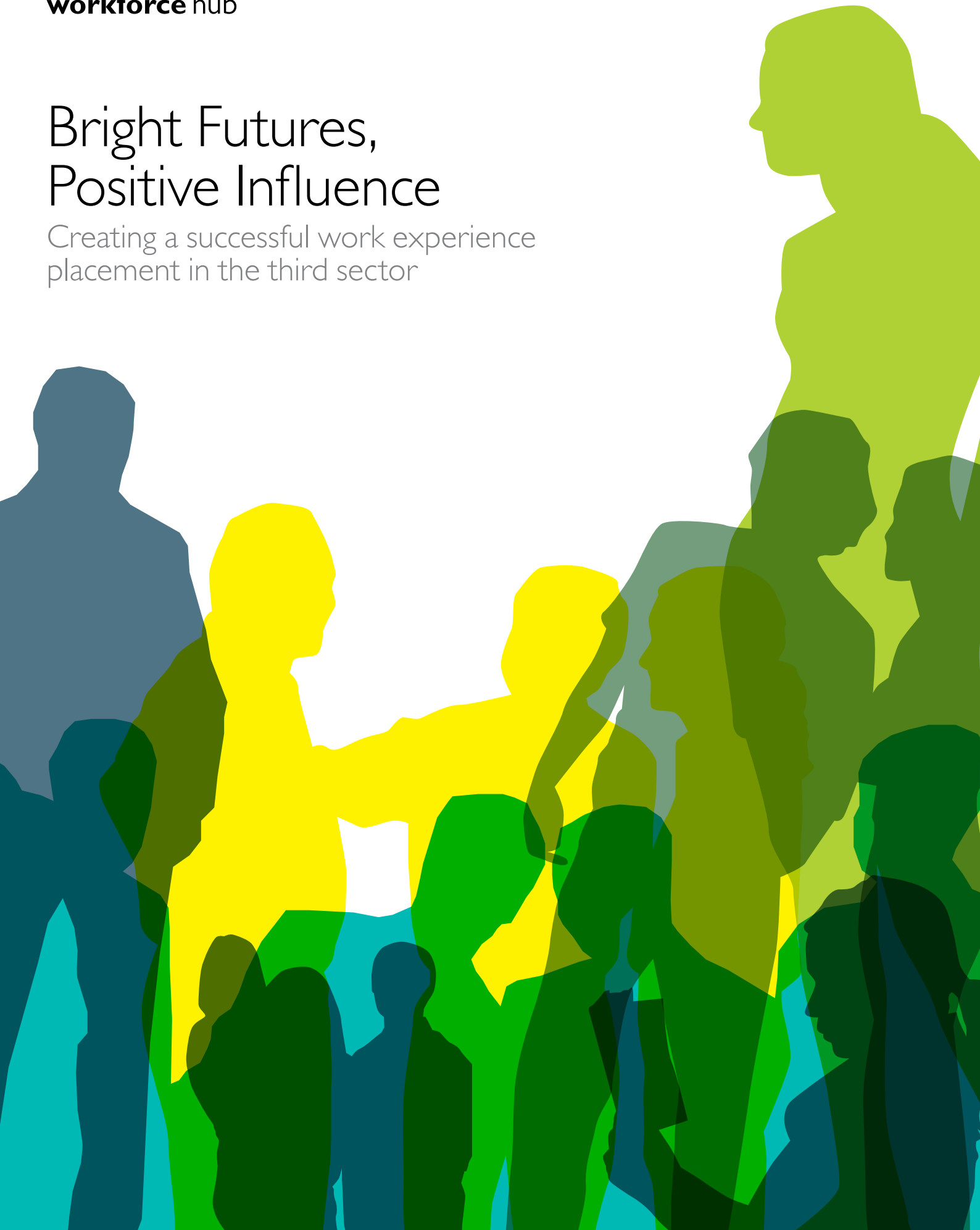




workforce hub

Bright Futures, Positive Influence

Creating a successful work experience
placement in the third sector



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Five step process for hosting work experience

Step 1

Decide whether to host a placement

Step 2

Prepare and plan for the placement

Step 3

Recruit and select the students

Step 4

Manage the placement

Step 5

Evaluate and learn from the placement

Step 1: Decide whether to host a placement

Can we host a placement?
Yes. What are the choices?

What type of
placement?

Block placement
One week or more, full time

Extended placement
One or more days per week
for an agreed period

What age group
would suit this
placement?

Key Stage 4
Year 10/11
14–16 years old

College/University
Over 16 years old
Usually 18 and over

Adult
Career changers or returners
to work

Can we host a placement?
No. What are the alternatives?

Work shadowing
Individual students

Work observation
Group of students

Work based projects
Students use access to workplace to
support project work

Mock interviews

Professional development placements
Career development for teaching staff

Step 2: Prepare and plan for the placement

Initial liaison

- What the placement would involve
- How will it be managed

May be with school organiser or specialist placement broker

Visit to employers' premises

- Focus will be on health and safety
- Supervision arrangements
- Any special needs of the student

The initial visit will normally be carried out by a specialist broker

Health & safety measures

- Risk assessment
- CRB checks
- Insurances (Employers' Liability, Public liability etc)
- Training and Supervision

Organisations will combine their own standard procedures with advice from organiser or broker

Written agreement

- Dates and duration
- Location and hours
- Duties and responsibilities
- Dress and conduct
- Transport and meals
- Insurance, risk & control measures
- Mid-placement visit
- Full set of contact details of all parties including emergency contacts

The agreement is usually made directly with the school. Mid-placement visits usually conducted by the school

Steps 3-5: Recruit, manage and evaluate the placement

Step 3 Recruit and select the student/s

Create Job Description
Criteria for suitability

Interview
Establish suitability and practicalities

Notification
Invite to placement or feedback to organiser

Step 4 Manage the placement

Induction
Welcoming and essential briefing (including Health & Safety)

Supervision
Allocate named supervisor; give clear task instructions, check understanding, review progress

Step 5 Evaluate and learn from the placement

Help students reflect on learning

Evaluate lessons learned by host organisations

School or organiser may conduct their own evaluation

Introduction and overview

Defining work experience

Providing work experience opportunities for school pupils and college students can be a mutually beneficial process, cementing links with your local community, accessing additional help with your workload and providing development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

In order to be successful on both sides, it is essential that work experience placements are properly planned and managed. This guide sets out the main stages of the process, together with case studies from voluntary organisations who have been willing to share their experiences of hosting student placements.

Work experience may be defined as: a placement on employer's premises in which a student carries out a particular task or duty, or a range of tasks or duties, more or less as would an employee, but with an emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience. (Work Experience: a guide for employers, DfES, 2002)

Types of work experience

There are broadly three groups of individuals to whom you might consider offering work experience:

- School students in their last two years of compulsory education (Key Stage 4)
- College or university students – generally studying a relevant subject
- Adults returning to the labour market or entering it for the first time – they might have special needs or simply need to update their skills and build confidence

There are two main types of placement:

- Block placement – work experience on a full time basis for a set period of time – this might range from one week up to a period of three to six months or more.
- Extended placement – work experience on a specified number of days per week or month, whilst attending school or college on other days. Typically this might be one day a week across one or more terms.

The focus of this guide is on providing Key Stage 4 school placements, as these understandably have the most stringent requirements attached. The guide also includes some guidance on providing placements to those aged 16+ such as college and university students, and on hosting adult placements.

“On a personal level, it was very rewarding passing on knowledge and information, and having an influence on someone's learning at an early stage of their career.”

Paul Nicol, Coffee Life

“Providing placements is good for partnership working as we link into and network with other local organisations. It also raises awareness amongst young people of what it is like to work in the voluntary sector.”

Sandra Malone, Action for Blind People

Why offer work experience?

Benefits to employers in the voluntary and community sector

Organisations generally find that offering work experience is very rewarding. Some frequently cited benefits are:

- Raises profile of the organisation in the community
- Raises profile of the voluntary and community sector as a place to work
- Gives the organisation some additional hands-on help with completing specific tasks and projects
- Provides a learning opportunity for staff involved in preparing and supervising work placements
- Raises awareness of health and safety issues amongst staff and volunteers
- Provides an injection of new ideas
- Allows for reflection on working practices

Benefits to students

Students often see work experience as a way to increase their employability. Other benefits include:

- Working in a setting in which they can put theory into practice
- Developing an awareness of the realities of working life and career options
- Building confidence and self esteem
- An opportunity to develop a range of personal and interpersonal skills such as time management, team working and communication skills
- Assistance in developing career choices and strategies, and becoming aware of opportunities, as well as building up a network of contacts.

Key Stage 4 placements

Since 2004, work related learning has been a statutory requirement for all Key Stage 4 students. As a result, the majority of school students in England undertake a work placement between the ages of 14 and 16 years, normally during Year 10. There is plenty of scope for organisations that are interested in offering placements to get involved, as over 450,000 placements take place annually across England.

Key stage 4 work experience normally takes the form of a block placement for a period of up to two weeks. Some schools like to send all their pupils out on work experience during the same two weeks, usually in the summer term; others are more flexible in releasing students during the school year. One advantage of undertaking placements earlier in the year is that students have more time to integrate the experience with their schoolwork. Clearly both schools and organisations need to be clear about the number of work experience students that a particular employer can realistically host at any one time, and spreading placements out is a practical way of increasing the opportunities on offer.

Those under school leaving age may only take part in schemes for which arrangements have been made as part of a student's education by the Local Education Authority or the schools' governing body on its behalf. Placements are usually organised through a specialist broker, and even in cases where school arrange placements themselves they will in almost all cases arrange for a broker with specialist expertise to visit employers and to carry out essential health and safety checks.

Case Study: Action for Blind People



Organisation Description

Action for Blind People is one of the largest charities in the UK working with blind and partially sighted people to enable them to transform their lives. Its mission is to inspire change and create opportunities to enable blind and partially sighted people to have equal voice and equal choice. Founded in 1857, this national charity provides direct support for more than 22,000 visually impaired people every year, including the provision of advice, employment, housing and leisure services.

For more information visit: www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Description of work placement/s

In the past we have involved people of varying ages and abilities on work experience placements at our Liverpool office. The placements are always in administrative roles, due to concerns of client confidentiality. Our organisation is a national one, so there may be different practice at our other locations.

The placements have varied in length, from 2 weeks to several months, depending on where the person comes from and what qualification (if any) they are working towards. We have provided placements to people with, or recovering from mental illness, as well as to people from our own client group.

Every year we offer a 2 week work placement to a child from a specialist local school for blind children, and this case study focuses on these placements.

How do you manage the process?

Before each placement starts, I need to be clear as to why they are undertaking it, and what they want to gain from it. On the first day of a placement I take the young person on an orientation tour of the office and introduce them to team members.

I then allocate work at a suitable level, and see how they manage. I encourage the person to undertake new tasks and use new equipment as and when I feel they are ready and they indicate that they would like to.

What do you see as the benefits?

It is very good for raising awareness of our services, work experience students may talk about us within their families, and might come back as clients and tap into our services. Providing placements is good for partnership working as we link into and network with other local organisations.

It also raises awareness amongst young people of what it is like to work in the voluntary sector.

What have been the challenges, and how have you overcome them?

Overall these placements have been a success, but they are not without their problems and each one throws up new challenges for all concerned.

Most of the young people who come to us from the specialist school have additional special needs, and require a good deal of supervision. As a result, I have to ensure that I have no special projects or deadline to meet during their time with us, as I spend as much time with them as possible in order to explain what they have to do and why they are doing it.

Many young people need lots of reassurance about their abilities and how they are doing in the workplace. It is usually a shock to their system to be out in the "real world" and have to think for themselves rather than rely on the teacher or assistant to tell them what to do and when to do it. They often wait to be told what to do and can't see when things need doing, as they are so used to the school system.

The majority of our placements need special equipment and software in order for them to take part fully, and these additional needs can sometimes be a problem, but we try our best to accommodate and ensure those taking part get the best from their time with us.

What advice would you give to other organisations considering offering work experience placements?

We have learnt from experience that it can really help to interview the young person first, if you can, to ensure they will fit in and you are going to be able to provide them with the experience they need and expect.

If you are hosting a placement for a child with special educational needs, you will need to be quite tolerant and aware. Don't be afraid to ask them about their needs, and about what they are capable of doing, and happy doing. Some kids are shy to start with but I usually find that by the end of the two weeks they are ready for anything. It is great for their confidence, allowing them to communicate with a wide range of people outside of their usual environments. It can be very rewarding for the placement provider, even if it is only for a short period of time.

Thanks to Sandra Malone, Senior Administrator from Action for Blind People's Liverpool office for this case study.

Managing work experience placements

What kind of opportunities could you offer?

Work placements are available within a wide range of organisations, including local authorities, voluntary organisations and businesses. Figures on the numbers of voluntary and community organisations offering work placements are not currently collected, however there is evidence that many are already doing so, and that there is scope for more VCS organisations to get involved. According to Charmian Roberts who chairs the National Support Group for Work Experience, “[voluntary organisations] are often more supportive and offer a sheltered experience for work experience students. We would be lost without them.”

“Work experience students wanting to get into retail would get an overview of the duties involved. Each role is so unique, I think everyone will find something they enjoy.”

This section outlines the main points to bear in mind when considering the practical management of a work experience placement. For more detailed information, we recommend that you read *Work Experience: A guide for employers*, published by DfES (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families), together with *The Right Start, work experience for young people: Health and safety basics for employers*, published by the Health and Safety Executive. See Section 4 for details of these and other sources of further information.

Work experience and the voluntary sector

Office administration

An administration role should include a good variety of tasks. For example: answering the telephone, filing, attending team meetings or suitable external meetings, working on documents or spreadsheets.

Make sure that all tasks are clearly defined, so if for example students are undertaking filing, consider indicating the relevant destination file on each piece of paper. Think about how you can mix routine tasks with a few more challenging activities, particularly as students' confidence grows. Are there interesting meetings or training activities that students can attend? Can you offer time within different teams or departments to give a broad overview of what working life can be like?

Charity shops

Tasks could include sorting and pricing books, replacing outdated stock, meeting and greeting customers, arranging window displays. According to Heidi Carter, Oxfam: “Work experience students wanting to get into retail would get an overview of the duties involved. Each role is so unique, I think everyone will find something they enjoy.”

According to the National Association of Charity Shops: “Many charity shops will accept children of school age as volunteers, but it is always worth checking the charity's individual policies.” The National Association of Charity Shops can provide guidelines to help with policy making. Oxfam shops, for example, usually accept young people from the age of 14, although they are not allowed to use the till until they reach the age of 16.

Frontline services

Hands on help with frontline tasks will depend on your organisation's work, in a horticultural setting, for example, tasks could include watering, weeding and planting.

Support with frontline services can bring up additional issues around safety, confidentiality and boundaries, but can also provide a truly interesting experience, particularly for students with a genuine interest in a career in a related area. Ensure adequate induction and supervision is available. Make sure you prepare accurate job descriptions so that students know what is involved before taking part.

Designing a placement

“We always emphasise to staff that you can't just ask students to spend two weeks stuffing envelopes for mailshots or shredding paper. You need to show them what you are doing, offer different experiences so they learn something.”

Joan Brunt, The Scout Association

When designing a placement, think about the following areas:

Personnel

- who will manage the process?
- who will undertake the initial liaison with the school?
- who will interview the prospective student?
- who will supervise the placement?

Tasks

- can we put together an interesting job description?
- what tasks would be genuinely useful to both the organisation and the student's learning?
- what activities could give a student a real flavour of the work?

Practicalities

- what are the health and safety issues?
- what are the insurance requirements?
- how many placements can we realistically host?

Bear in mind that schools and colleges will be keen to ensure that work experience placements have a direct link with students' education, including links with the National Curriculum and with personal and social development as well as general learning about the world of work.

Case Study: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



Organisation Description

The Mission of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is

'To inspire and deliver science-based plant conservation worldwide, enhancing the quality of life'

This is achieved through science and research activities, underpinned by extensive collections of living and preserved plants and fungi, associated artefacts, literature and archives. The Gardens at Kew and Wakehurst Place provide an amenity for the public, offering the opportunity to learn about plants and its wider work.

Education programmes, dissemination activities and national and international partnership networks ensure the transfer of specialist knowledge to the global community.

For more information see: www.kew.org

Description of work placements

Kew and Wakehurst host around 50 placements annually for young people aged 15–17 years. Placements are administered by the Kew HR department, with local co-ordinators sourcing the actual placements. These take place throughout the year, excepting Christmas and during August and include two-week block placements in horticulture, one-week science placements in the Jodrell laboratories, plus one or two week placements in the childrens' playzone, Climbers and Creepers.

For placements for young people aged 18+, a number are requested by students studying at horticultural colleges looking for horticultural work experience as an integral part of their course or to supplement their education.

How do you manage the process?

We have strong links with local borough Education Business Partnerships which contact us at the beginning of the academic year to arrange set work experience placement dates that they can put on their calendar. We also have strong links with local schools, both state and independent. In addition, many students phone us direct to find out about

opportunities for work experience within Kew. Schools normally contact us from July to October and most individual enquiries come December to May. The most popular dates for placements are in June & July and these are usually fully booked by the end of January. The application process takes 4 to 6 weeks to complete.

Our paperwork for the process includes a work experience application form; risk assessment checklist; a supervisor's authorisation form and checklist; plus guidelines to supervisors on working with children. The young person's risk assessment must be sent out with the placement confirmation letter for parents to view. Supervisors go through the risk assessment with students on their first day.

In principle, schools want students to contact employers about work experience. However, in practice it is often the parents who initiate contact. Once a placement is agreed, we ask the student to contact the placement supervisor to arrange a short, informal interview. This is seen as a valuable experience: it gives the student first-hand experience of being interviewed. At the end of a placement the student and supervisor complete an evaluation form together.

Students aged 18+ come under Kew's volunteer programme. They are sent an amended version of the volunteer application form. Older work experience people need less supervision, so it is easier to slot them in.

What do you see as the benefits?

The majority of placements are very successful. We are keen to ensure there is a large practical element to placements, rather than the student watching how others work. We receive letters from students saying they loved every minute of it – exciting and interesting and grateful to have felt part of a team.

Benefits to Kew include: an extra pair of hands (e.g. watering, data entry) and the chance to demonstrate the variety of work and career paths at Kew. It is not uncommon for students to come back to work at Kew, either on apprenticeship schemes or as volunteers. One student who came back year on year is now undertaking a PhD. Work experience can help directly with the educational side of our mission. Other benefits include opportunities for staff to practice supervision, opportunities for staff to hear a younger perspective and to have continued awareness of Health and Safety issues.

What have been the challenges, and how have you overcome them?

The administration for placements can be time consuming, from handling the initial phone calls, to keeping on top of the flow of paperwork at peak times and ensuring placements are co-ordinated well.

Work experience students who come to Kew have different levels of interest and motivation for coming here. Staff try to provide variety and to engage students and some of the more reluctant students get more motivated as the placement progresses. Staff go out of their way to offer a worthwhile and memorable experience. As resources and time allow we would like to offer more formal training to staff as the programme develops.

What advice would you give to other organisations considering offering work experience placements?

Make sure you've got your policies and procedures in place and that your staff understand why you're doing it.

Give time and thought to ensure placements offered will benefit both the student and the organisation and fit into the working pattern of the team or supervisor. Provide clear guidance for staff not used to supervising work experience placements.

Send clear 'placement descriptions' out with the application form. These ensure students know what they are applying for and what will be expected of them.

Thanks to Theresa Harcombe, HR Adviser Learning and Development, and Belinda Parry, Volunteer Co-ordinator for this case study.

Schools liaison

Successful placements tend to come about as a result of good relationships between the host organisation and the work experience organiser. Some schools organise placements directly, others go through a local co-ordinating agency - these include local Education Business Partnerships, Connexions and Trident.

Many placements start informally; for example schools will ask pupils to look out for placements with employers that they know. However, once the initial link has been made, schools will need make sure that the placement is suitable and checks have been carried out.

If you are interested in offering a placement, but do not already have links with schools or co-ordinating agencies, then contact your local Business Education Partnership or Trident. Their national websites will signpost you to your local agency. You could also contact a local school direct and ask for guidance on how they manage placements. According to one Surrey school who ask students to find their own placements: "we are always looking for placements for the few that don't find anything themselves."

National Education Business Partnerships Network

The NEBPN is the umbrella organisation and national voice for 126 Education Business Partnerships working across England and Wales. www.nebpn.org

Trident

The Trident network encompasses 55 area offices across England. www.trident-edexcel.co.uk

Visits to employers' premises

School or work experience organisers need to satisfy themselves about your management of health and safety. This is part of their legal responsibilities towards the young people they send to work placements. Before you start hosting students, the work experience organiser will arrange a vetting visit to your premises and you can expect them to ask questions such as:

- Do you have a health and safety policy and how do you carry it out? (it must be written down if you have five or more employees, including work experience participants)
- Have you carried out a risk assessment recently and does it cover the particular risks from work experience?
- Have you taken the necessary measures to control these risks?
- Is there a named person in the workplace who will be responsible for work experience students?
- How will work experience students be supervised and given health and safety induction and training?
- Can you draw up a clear plan of work experience?
- Will you provide any necessary personal protective equipment?
- Can you make appropriate arrangements for young people with special needs, for example, those who have particular disabilities or learning difficulties?

The work experience organiser may ask you to sign a written agreement which can be especially helpful in making the responsibilities of both sides clear. Sometimes this is combined with consent from the parent/guardian and the young person. For instance, the parent/guardian will be able to see your risk assessment and control measures and at the same time you will be able to see information on, for example, the health of the student.

According to Beverley Graves from the National Education Business Partnership Network, small employers tend to look at visits from work experience organisers as a help rather than a hindrance. The work experience organisers are there to support you in ensuring a successful placement. They can offer practical information and if necessary can advise you on where to seek further assistance.

In addition to the initial vetting visit, you can normally expect a representative from the school and/or work experience organiser to arrange a visit during the course of the placement itself.

"Have a structured approach, pay attention to health and safety and ensure students are covered by Employers' Liability Insurance."

Joan Brunt, The Scout Association

Planning and preparation

Good planning is essential. The Department for Children, Schools and Families recommend that the details of placements are confirmed in writing to the school or college involved, and that the details include :

- Dates and duration
- Location and hours of work
- Duties and responsibilities of the post
- Dress and conduct
- Arrangements for transport and meals
- Position regarding Employers' Liability and Public Liability policies
- Significant risk and control measures
- Confirmation of any mid-placement visit by a representative of the school
- Name and telephone number of the student's supervisor and other relevant workplace contacts
- Name and telephone number of who to contact in case of emergency

Payments and expenses

Work experience is part of students' education and employers should make no payment for work performed. It is open to employers to meet all or part of a student's out of pocket expenses if you wish. Whatever the situation, it should be clearly agreed with the school.

Complaints and disputes

Most problems can be avoided through careful planning, and matching of the pupil to the placement. Any problems that occur must be notified immediately to the school, which will need to decide whether or not to continue the placement.

In setting up the placements it is therefore vital to ensure that clear procedures are established, and that all those involved know exactly who to contact in the case of any problems that the student may encounter, as well as procedures for addressing any problems with the student's performance or conduct.

Working hours

The Working Time Regulations 1998 also apply to work experience.

Students on work experience should not be asked to work more than a standard eight hour day, or for more than five consecutive days out of seven.

It should be emphasised that Key Stage 4 work experience is arranged as part of a student's education. If you are considering employing young people under any other circumstance, you must adhere to the strict laws governing the employment of those under the minimum school leaving age. For example, those under the minimum school leaving age must not work more than two hours on a school day or Sunday, or more than 12 hours a week during term time. More information on employing young people can be obtained from Business Link, details in section 4.

Health and Safety

When you offer a work experience placement to students you have the same responsibilities for their health, safety and welfare as for all your workforce. Under Health and Safety law, these students will be regarded as your employees.

As an employer, you will already have to carry out a risk assessment. This means looking at what in your work could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

You must protect your work experience students from the risk of accidents or ill health. You must assess the risks to young people before they start work/work experience and tell them what the risks are. Try to look at your workplace from an adolescent's viewpoint: What dangers will they recognise? They may not be fully grown – will they find their workplace awkward and the tools too big?

You should also:

- Take into account that these young people are likely to be inexperienced, unaware of health and safety risks and physically or mentally immature
- Put in place measures to control the risks which will remove them altogether or reduce them to the lowest possible level
- Let the parents/guardians of any students (and employees) below minimum school leaving age know the key findings of the risk assessment and the control measures taken before the young people start work experience

Young people need training most when they start a job or work experience. They need to be trained to do the work without putting themselves and other people at risk. It is important that you check they have understood training which covers, for example:

- The hazards and risks in the workplace
- The control measures put in place to protect their health and safety
- A basic introduction to health and safety, for example first-aid, fire and evacuation procedures

Young people will be facing unfamiliar risks from the job they will be doing and from their surroundings and are therefore likely to need more supervision than adults.

Child protection

Steps should be taken to ensure the safety of young people on work experience. This should include policies and procedures to minimise risk to the young person, and child protection training or briefings for staff or volunteers involved in arranging work experience. Practical steps to protect work experience students include not putting them in situations where they are working one-to-one with an adult. You will also of course, need to ensure that any children or vulnerable adults using your services are not put at risk as a result of the involvement of work experience students.

In some circumstances, the need for child protection might involve Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on individuals working with a child as part of the placement. According to DfES guidance published in December 2004: "The assessment of the general suitability of the placement will now need to include consideration of whether any additional safeguards are necessary and, if so, whether there is someone who is eligible for a CRB check. Placement organisers are required to make a judgement in each case as to whether someone meets the criteria for a CRB check. Eligibility for CRB checks is governed by the law and only

those people who meet defined criteria can be checked. People will be eligible for a CRB check if 'they are in a position the normal duties of which include regularly caring for, training, supervising, or being in sole charge of a child.'"

CRB checks are currently free for volunteers, but paid for in the case of staff. It should be noted that a new Vetting and Barring Scheme will be introduced during 2008. For more information see the links in section 4.

Insurance

Let your insurance company know that you are hosting work experience students and the nature of the activities involved. It is important to make sure that work experience students are covered by your Employers' Liability policy, as well as any Public Liability, Material Damage or other insurance policies that you may have in place.

Most employers should already carry insurance policies that cover most risks arising from student visits, provided that the insurers know in advance the type of activity planned. This is a matter of conforming to the basic principle of disclosing to insurers material facts that may affect the terms of the policy.

Induction

The placement should always start with an induction, covering the following areas as a minimum:

- Arrangements for access to premises
- Introduction to supervisor and relevant staff
- Background information on the organisation and its work
- Confirm start/finish and break times
- Health and Safety policy and safety guidelines
- Tour of working area
- Location of toilets
- Emergency procedures including fire alarms, emergency exits and fire assembly points
- First aid facilities
- Accident procedures, location of accident book, process for reporting accidents and injuries

“Have job descriptions so you can send them out with the application forms... make it clear what's involved, for example if the work is physically demanding, and include practical information such as what to wear.”

Theresa Harcombe, HR Adviser,
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Recruitment and selection

It is good practice to produce an accurate job description, and send this out at the application stage, and important that this adheres to equal opportunities principles. It is also normal to interview students before they start their placement, this helps your organisation to ensure that the student knows what to expect and that the placement is likely to be mutually beneficial. Think about how you might deal with a situation in which you clearly feel the student to be unsuitable.

You might be able to adapt the tasks to suit the student's interest and abilities. Your work experience organiser should be able to advise you if this happens, and if necessary arrange an alternative placement for that student.

An interview is also part of the developmental process for the student, so that they can learn from the experience of being interviewed. If constraints such as time or distance prevent a face to face interview, then at least try to ensure you schedule a telephone conversation. The interview should cover areas such as:

- Introductions to supervisor
- Description of duties
- Hours of work
- Advice on suitable clothing
- Health and safety issues
- Confirmation of contact details on both sides
- Time for questions

Case Study: The Scout Association



Organisation Description

The Scout Association provides adventurous activities and personal development opportunities for 400,000 young people aged 6-25 in the UK as well as internationally across 216 countries. Personal development means promoting the physical, intellectual, social and spiritual well-being of the individual, helping them achieve their full potential. The Scout Association believes that young people develop most when they are 'learning by doing' when they are given responsibility, work in teams, take acceptable risks and think for themselves. For more information, visit www.scout.org.uk

Description of work placements

We host work experience placements for 15 year olds in our head office, and activity centres, about 20 in total. Office placements include a variety of tasks across different departments, tailored where possible to a student's interests. Placements last two weeks, spread out over the school year, and we prefer to arrange placements on the campsites to be undertaken in pairs.

We also offer longer placements for older students, both unpaid internships and paid work placements of 6-8 weeks through Career Academy.

How do you manage the process?

We work with our local Trident office who undertake liaison with the schools. We tell Trident how many placements we can accommodate and provide job descriptions so students can choose their preferred option. We also get students writing directly to us. Placements are arranged around July for the following year, and are co-ordinated internally by the HR team.

What do you see as the benefits?

In our offices, students get to see a range of activities. It's not just sitting at a computer, we put together a timetable across different departments, for example: HR, media, legal.

In the campsite, they experience the reality of working outside in all kinds of weathers, once they have experienced what the elements throw at them they can decide whether this kind of work is really for them.

What have been the challenges, and how have you overcome them?

It can be a struggle to provide something meaningful. We always emphasise to staff that you can't just ask students to spend two weeks stuffing envelopes for mailshots or shredding paper. You need to show them what you are doing, offer different experiences so they learn something.

Provide suitable work can be difficult, if for example if matters are confidential. You need to explain the situation and to be very clear about what is required. We have also had issues with students not wanting to engage, which can put staff off.

Trident encourage students to attend an interview before they start. This is left to the student to organise with us as practice for world of work. Sometimes they don't phone us, so we will interview on the first day. We have also had instances of parents wanting to come into the interview too, and in these cases we explain the situation, that this is all part of the experience of learning about life outside school.

What advice would you give to other organisations considering offering work experience placements?

I would advise them to do it. I think it's of benefit, for example the children might turn into possible recruits. It's a good PR exercise.

Have a structured approach, pay attention to health and safety and ensure students are covered by Employers' Liability Insurance.

Have one person to co-ordinate. It's a big step from school to world of work, so students need a primary contact within organisation, this can be reassuring for them. Then if they are going to move the around departments identify someone in each department that they can go to for help.

Thanks to Joan Brunt, Head of Human Resources team, for this case study.

Supervision

It is essential that work experience students have adequate supervision, and the following represents good practice in this area.

- Allocate a named supervisor for all students
- If students are moving department, ensure they also have a clear point of contact within each department
- Give students clear and adequate instructions for all tasks

- Check that students have understood what is required of them
- Ask for regular feedback from students about their work: are they happy with what they are doing? Do they have any questions? Do they feel ready to take on additional tasks?
- Ensure that supervisors are properly trained and briefed and that they can refer any concerns to a more senior manager if appropriate

“Many young people need lots of reassurance about their abilities and how they are doing in the workplace. It is usually a shock to their system to be out in the ‘real world’ and have to think for themselves rather than rely on the teacher or assistant to tell them what to do and when to do it. They often wait to be told what to do and can’t see when things need doing, as they are so used to the school system.”

Sandra Malone, Action for Blind People

Evaluation and review of learning

Students are doing work experience as part of their education. The supervision and management process should therefore build in time to help the student reflect on what they are learning both about the particular job that they are doing and about the world of work. Reflection should be built in on an ongoing basis, and the placement should end with an evaluation process to both help the student reflect on their learning, and to allow the organisation to receive feedback on the placement. Students should leave their placement with a written reference or testimonial that they can include as evidence within a portfolio.

Questions that might help with evaluation and review:

- What have you learned during your work experience?
- How does this taste of working life differ to being at school?
- What have you enjoyed the most?
- What did you enjoy the least?
- What have you noticed about this working environment?

Have one person to co-ordinate. It’s a big step from school to the world of work, so students need a primary contact within the organisation, this can be reassuring for them. Then if they are going to move around departments identify someone in each department that they can go to for help.

Joan Brunt, The Scout Association

Alternative ways to engage with work experience

Alternatives to work placements

If you do not feel able to provide a work placement, there are other ways in which they may offer experience to young people and support curriculum objectives. Have you thought about:

Work shadowing

Providing opportunities for an individual student to ‘shadow’ an individual employee going about his or her normal activities. This allows for close observation of jobs which for reasons of complexity, safety or security cannot be actively undertaken by the student. This type of activity can be undertaken in addition to or instead of a standard work placement.

Work observation

Guiding individuals or groups of students round the workplace to watch a range of employee activities or work processes. Encourage students to ask questions, and different members of staff to explain aspects of their jobs.

Work-based projects

Designing projects that students can carry out on your premises, such as work-related problem solving exercises set by employers or coursework assignments, designed with teacher input. Students often have some great ideas, so there is scope for designing projects which might genuinely be useful to your organisation as well as valuable and “real” for the students.

Mock interviews

Giving students an experience of being interviewed. This might be a good opportunity to provide interviewing experience for staff, especially if you pair up staff members with different levels of experience to conduct the interviews. Follow up the mock interviews with positive feedback and constructive suggestions to help build students’ confidence and skills.

Post 16 and adult placements

College/University placements

There are a variety of ways in which as an organisation you can host university or college students, as well as block placements and extended placements, you could consider offering sandwich placements which are assessed paid placements forming part of a course and often lasting for year.

It is important to bear in mind that minimum wage requirements mean that you will need to pay students the national minimum wage unless you are hosting students doing work experience as part of a higher education course. Links with local Further and Higher education establishments are key to hosting students in post-compulsory education.

The National Council for Work Experience can provide further information on hosting college and university placements. In addition, Business Link provides useful guidance on employing young people.

Adult work experience placements

Adults look for work experience for a number of reasons - a change of career, or to get back into the workplace after an absence, whether through family commitments, living overseas, or a period of illness or unemployment.

According to Elaine Smethurst, Manager of Working For A Charity at NCVO which organises 20 day placements for individuals wanting to move into the voluntary sector; there are benefits to being a host employer: "You get a resource you otherwise wouldn't have had, often someone highly skilled." Someone with HR skills could help you develop an HR strategy, or someone with financial or marketing skills could work on relevant aspects of a funding bid. Organisations often report that they have benefited from an outside viewpoint, suggestions as to how things might be done differently.

Benefits to the individual include gaining a real sense of what a career in the voluntary sector might look like. Roughly 50% of those who participate in the Working For A Charity programme go on to work in the sector. Others may go on to become volunteers and trustees, or in some cases to make the informed decision that the voluntary sector is not the right choice for them after all.

You need to think about how to make the placement worthwhile for both sides. Elaine's tips include:

- Have a clear idea of what skills you need for your placement, and how the tasks on offer can make the most of a person's abilities and experience
- Try to offer a focused and fairly substantial piece of work, something that the individual can put on the CV
- Ensure clear objectives and expectations at the outset
- Try to make your internal decision making process as quick as possible; it is difficult for individuals if they are kept waiting too long to hear if they have been offered a placement

Professional Development Placement

This is another way of engaging locally with schools and the enterprise education agenda. Professional development placements provide opportunities for teachers and careers guidance professionals to engage with employers and the world of work. Placements may be for one day or more, and should enable teachers to update their subject knowledge, to bring the real world of work to the curriculum, and to offer enhanced careers education and guidance. For more information and case studies, see the National Education Business Partnerships website.

Diplomas

Diplomas are brand new qualifications for 14–19 year olds, to be piloted and rolled out in stages from 2008 to 2013. The diplomas have been created to provide a real alternative to more traditional education. They will give young people a fully rounded qualification, combining theoretical and practical learning, and awarded at three levels. Work experience is an important part of these qualifications, and this may include more opportunities for employers to offer extended placements.

There will be 14 diplomas in total, and a number of them will have relevance to voluntary and community sector employers, including the Society, Health and Development Diploma which will be piloted from September 2008. This diploma will provide more opportunities for voluntary organisations working in health and social care to get involved in vocational education for young people.

Sources of further information

General guidance

Work Experience: a guide for employers, from DfES Publications, 2002 (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families) www.dcsf.gov.uk

Placement Survival Guide

Online tool from Trident – with sections aimed at employers, students and teachers. Includes basic health and safety information and an FAQ section www.placementsurvivalguide.com

Connexions Direct

Information and advice aimed at young people, including advice on work experience and other options for work-based learning and training. www.connexions-direct.com

Health and safety, risk assessment and child protection

THE RIGHT START Work experience for young people: Health and Safety basics for employers, HSE www.hse.gov.uk
www.hse.gov.uk/PUBNS/indg364.pdf

Five Steps to Risk Assessment – Health and Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indgl63.pdf

Workplace Health Connect

A government funded service providing confidential, practical and free advice to small businesses and voluntary organisations (5–250 staff) on workplace health and safety. www.workplacehealthconnect.co.uk
Tel:0845 609 6006

Criminal Records Bureau

An Executive Agency of the Home Office, providing access to criminal record information through its disclosure service. This service enables organisations to make safer recruitment decisions by identifying candidates who may be unsuitable for certain work, especially that involving children or vulnerable adults. www.crb.gov.uk

Work experience organisers

The vast majority of work experience placements are organised through specialist brokers. Different brokers are active in different areas of the country, and the national websites provide access to local providers.

National Education Business Partnerships Network

The NEBPN is the umbrella organisation and national voice for 126 Education Business Partnerships working across England and Wales. www.nebpn.org

Trident

The Trident network encompasses 55 area offices across England. www.trident-edexcel.co.uk

Post-16 placements

For those interesting in providing placements to students in post-compulsory education, the following websites and guides can help:

National Council for Work Experience

Exists to promote, support and develop quality work experience for the benefits of students, organisations and the economy. The NCWE website contains general information and advice on providing work experience for college and university students, and you can order the publication Red Hot Talent from the website. This costs £17 plus postage and is a practical guide for small and medium enterprises on how to recruit and manage work experience students. www.work-experience.org

UK Career Academy Foundation

Career Academies offer opportunities for 16–19 year olds, opening up enterprise education to young people from disadvantage areas in partnership with local employers. The programme includes a six week paid internships – for more information see: www.careeracademies.org.uk

Working For A Charity

Offers a programme for individuals wanted to work in the voluntary sector. Includes a series of seminars and a 20 day placement within a host organisation. Generally this is in the form of extended placement over an eight to ten week period. www.workingforacharity.org.uk

Business Link

Provides a useful guide to the rules around employing young people, including under-16s, 16–17 year olds and 18+. Includes an outline of the legislation, and details of the minimum wage as it applies to different age groups. www.businesslink.gov.uk

Diplomas

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Information on the new 14–19 Diplomas being introduced from September 2008 www.dfes.gov.uk

Skills for Health

Information on the Society, Health and Development Diploma for young people. www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/diploma

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Case Study: Oxfam GB



Organisation Description

Oxfam GB is a development, relief, and campaigning organisation that works with others to find lasting solutions to poverty and suffering around the world.

Oxfam GB has over 700 shops, which span the length and breadth of the country and, like any other major player in the high street, it takes professional teams to run them profitably. Oxfam shops operate just like any other retail business and need to incorporate exactly the same skills within retail teams: display, stock control, marketing, accounting, customer service etc.

For more information, see www.oxfam.org.uk

Description of work placements

Work experience students have been known to carry out a range of tasks such as sorting and pricing, replacing outdated stock, meeting and greeting customers, arranging window displays. Oxfam shops usually accept young people from the age of 14, although they are not allowed to use the till under the age of 16.

How do you manage the process?

Work experience is managed at a local and regional level, as we are such a large organisation – we have 700 people in our main office plus 200 volunteers, and it would not be feasible to co-ordinate centrally.

All shop managers have training in recruiting and managing volunteers, and work experience students are recruited under the conditions of our volunteer policy. HR Advisers and area managers are also on hand to advise on any issues encountered by shop managers. We also suggest that managers work closely with work experience organisers and go back to them if they have any queries connected with the process or paperwork involved.

What do you see as the benefits?

These types of roles are ideal for students wanting to get into retail as they would get an overview of many of the duties involved. Each role is unique, I think everyone will find something they enjoy.

Shop managers have found having work experience students very helpful. Some of them even go on to become regular volunteers.

What have been the challenges, and how have you overcome them?

We need to protect young people when on work experience or volunteering in our shops, and because of the nature of the work, we are working with the CRB to ensure that when appropriate, checks are carried out quickly and efficiently.

Young people on work experience in Oxfam shops are covered by our insurance and all the rights and safeguards that apply to young people under the organisation's Volunteering Policy, and this approach works well in practice. For example, shop managers would ensure that students are never put into a situation where they would be working unsupervised in a one-to-one situation with an adult and health and safety risk assessments help to highlight any potential hazards and measures can be put in place to minimise them.

My personal view is that I wish schools and colleges would allow work experience to be for longer, as by the time individuals have been inducted and understand a task, it is often time for them to go. I remember doing work experience for a week when I was young, and the time flew by. Alternatively, encouraging students to have two very separate experiences would enable them to have a comparator.

What advice would you give to other organisations considering offering work experience placements?

Plan and Prepare. I think before offering work experience organisations should think about why they want work experience, what they have to offer in terms of a role or task and the logistics of having work experience. I think work experience works best when individuals apply because they are keen and interested in your organisation or the type of work that you do. I think placements are least effective when then individual is 'sent' to you. A consideration could be to 'recruit' your work experience?

Thanks to Heidi Carter, HR Executive, at Oxfam, for this case study.

The UK Workforce Hub is one of the six national hubs of expertise funded by the Government's ChangeUp programme

The UK Workforce Hub offers guidance and advice to help third sector organisations to attract, develop and retain the staff and volunteers they need.

The Hub promotes good employment practice in the third sector by offering a one-stop-shop website and helpline for organisations and a variety of publications and networks.



workforce hub

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