

Allied Health Professions

Quick guide to work experience



Developing people
for health and
healthcare

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About this quick guide

This guide describes the role of Allied Health Professionals in supporting people to engage with work experience within AHP services. Although COVID-19 has meant a change in many of our practices and opportunities to have additional visitors in teams, there is still a need and plenty of opportunities to deliver work experience. This step by step guide identifies the reasons for offering work experience, links to resources available to support the development of work experience opportunities and shares good practice from both pre and post COVID-19.

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an extraordinary impact on all our lives. The response of the AHP workforce, to support the national effort to combat the coronavirus and save lives has been phenomenal. Alongside this recent workforce modelling currently estimates that the Allied Health Professions will need to grow significantly between 2020 and 2025 to meet the requirements arising from the NHS Long Term Plan, the new GP contract and the NHS People Plan.

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) published in January 2019 details a vision of healthcare that is more personalised and patient-centred, more focused on prevention, and more likely to be delivered in the community and out of hospital.

Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) will be vital to the delivery of these ambitions.

The NHS People Plan describes a need to ensure that there is a workforce ready for the future, it provides Health Education England with a clear aim of developing a pipeline of AHPs by increasing applications to undergraduate AHP education. In order to achieve this we need to focus on making AHP the career of choice.

AHPs skills can be developed further is one of the 4 priorities in [AHPs into Action](#). The case studies in this document support how by sharing clinicians skills, demonstrating the value of each profession and teaching others as part of promoting careers and offering work experience, AHPs in practice are evidencing this priority.

In order to ensure future generations of AHPs to serve our citizens I encourage you to do this by getting involved in promoting AHP careers within schools, register as a [NHS ambassador](#) at [Inspiring the future](#) which will connect you to schools in your area who would like to showcase career opportunities. Use resources developed by Health Education England, such as the [Allied Health Professionals Roles](#) and [The WOW Show](#). By developing an increased interest in our professions, there will be a need to offer varied work experience opportunities for prospective AHPs so they can be sure a career as an AHP is the right choice. This resource is a helpful guide to those either initiating or expanding work experience opportunities in their service.

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Introduction

National trends suggest significant shortages exist in a number of AHP professional groups, including radiography (both diagnostic and therapeutic), prosthetics and orthotics, orthoptics, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and podiatry. Occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, radiography and paramedics are all on the [shortage occupations list](#) (NHS Employers also offers information on this). There is a risk that this under supply could have a detrimental impact on the system's ability to transform services.

Research also identifies that with some exceptions such as Physiotherapy, most AHP careers suffer from low awareness preventing their consideration as attractive alternatives to those interested in healthcare but not going into medicine or nursing ([Smaller and Specialist Allied Health Professions Qualitative Research, 2017](#)). The report also highlights that work experience can be a strong influence in drawing someone towards the profession and where they have an inspirational professional talking about the profession students had more interest in pursuing it as a career. With the most effective learning activities being those that are interactive and which encourage self-reflection. To support this, HEE and Health Careers has a suite of [career resources](#) for those interested in pursuing AHP careers, whilst [inspiring the Future](#) has a list of AHPs willing to promote careers in schools. In order to support this we need to ensure we provide the work experience alongside this.

Education providers follow the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#) which states the need for them to ensure they provide good quality careers advice and work experience as well as encounters with employers for their students.

What is work experience?

Work experience traditionally took place in the workplace, lasted 2 weeks and allowed people to experience what it was like to be a certain profession.

However, it can vary from 'tasters' lasting just a half day through to programmes over one or two weeks. Within that time, it can be hands on experience with or without patients, insights, observations, shadowing or something more virtual/interactive. However, following COVID-19 and the recent guidelines on social distancing and PPE it could be considered harder to provide work experience opportunities, so there is a need to ensure we think differently and imaginatively. Virtual open days/sessions and use of technology are all possible.

The aim of work experience is to open individual's eyes to careers and inform career decisions. It is also a chance to demonstrate and observe attitudes and behaviours that are expected in the work place. It is vital in bridging the gap between education and the world of work.

The report by the Department of Education, Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges 2017, breaks work experience down to 3 types of activities

1. 'Work experience inspiration activities': used to describe any exposure to work or working practice that does not involve a specific placement within a company. Activities may include employer talks, mini-enterprise activities, skills competitions etc.

2. 'Work experience placements': used to describe work undertaken in a specific workplace over an extended period of time (this may be a block of time, such as a week or a fortnight, or a day a week over a number of months).
3. 'Work-related activities': used to describe both work inspiration activities and work experience placements.

Work experience can be for any age group yet for the purpose of this document it will focus on school and college age individuals particularly:

- prospective AHP course applicants
- school children in England who are looking to find out about different careers, as there is evidence that a very small number of students are able to access meaningful work experience opportunities, with most under 16 year olds not getting access to clinical areas.

However, work experience for those who might be older or looking for a career change would also follow a similar process.

What are the benefits of work experience?

he workplace, lasted 2 weeks and allowed people to experience what it was like to be a certain profession.

1. To develop your future workforce
2. To work with the local community, providing an opportunity to engage, inspire and inform people
3. To develop staff – it's a chance for all staff to build management skills
4. To gain fresh insights – see your organisation through someone else's eyes
5. To increase staff engagement – colleagues get a genuine buzz from inspiring people.

Alongside this, as registered members of staff, HCPC states that CPD activities should 'include a range of activities that benefit service users' describing service users as anyone who uses your service or is affected by your work – which could include students.

For a clinician and the wider team the following skills could be gained, all of which tie in with HCPC standards:

People Skills

Interpersonal skills
Verbal communication
Versatile team worker
Motivational/inspirational clinician
Leadership skills (delegation, decision making, negotiation)
Engaging young people

General employment skills

Time Management
Time Management
Presentation skills
Customer awareness/service
Problem solving/creativity
Organisation and planning

Offering work experience can also lead to other opportunities including the opportunity to link with or become a health ambassador for the member of staff and might also result in the individual doing the work experience becoming part of the volunteer workforce long term or even a future team member.

How to do it

There are many different ways to enable individuals to experience professions and the work place. A document by HEE, '[What comes next](#)' provides 4 goals for organisations or your team in engaging with work experience and suggestions as to how this can be achieved with different age groups.

- Awareness – improve perceptions, knowledge and understanding of potential opportunities in health care
- Aspirations – encouraging young people to recognise their potential and set ambitious aims
- Access – expanding access to work-related experiences and opportunities
- Achievement – supporting young people to increase their academic attainment and reach personal goals.

In order to support work experience at these different levels in your own department you need to understand the policy in place within your organisation. It is often useful to link to your HR department and also training department, as there are likely to already be policies in place. You should also be able to answer the following questions in order to produce evidence if a business case is required.

- How will it assist your organisation to meet its strategic objectives?
- How is it linked to your workforce plan?
- What is the professional priority for your area?

It is also recommended that you contact your local Widening Participation team, their role is to increase career understanding to students and also open up opportunities to work experience and connections with schools. Recently they have moved a number of their activities to virtual participation increasing the opportunity for us all to engage with them.

There are clear stages that you need to complete when setting up work experience which are clearly defined in the HEE [work experience tool kit](#) (May 2015).

Step 1: Plan

Identify the format of the work experience:

Firstly, consider what you can do virtually (e.g. delivering an online workshop in real time) or online (sharing activities, content, videos which can be viewed at any time). This might result in more students being able to participate and experience the profession or various professions at one time. The technology used in services, schools and homes has increased greatly since the start of COVID-19 and should be fully embraced to offer alternatives to work experience.

- Can you run a virtual open day?
- Use of virtual technology or simulation labs?
- What equipment/technology can you take to the schools to provide experience?
- Joining/shadowing virtual/online appointments?

Please note: many young people do not have access to a computer or device 100% of the time and many only have access to a smart phone. It may not feel preferable, but to provide increased equity of access, wherever possible, create content which is mobile-friendly (adjusts to a mobile screen).

If you may be able to offer face to face work experience, consider the following:

- Weeklong experience, either in the same setting or a variety
- Day sessions
- Open days
- Individually bespoke
- Taster sessions
- Project work, this could be a project alongside the work experience or a presentation at the end

It is worth thinking about what the benefits of each of these are for you; your service/team; your organisation. It must include the linking of other trust departments including HR and learning and education.

Areas that you do not need to worry about include:

1. DBS – the students do not require them as they will be supervised at all times. Yet the staff might if they have students under the age of 16
2. Insurance – they are covered by your organisations existing liability insurance if Trust processes are followed and the work experience lead is involved
3. Pay – there is no expectation to pay or cover costs for those on work experience

This stage is essential as evidence shows that the more structured the programmes the better the feedback and the more rewarding it is for clinicians and students.

Step 2: Role identification

There are 2 key roles in organising work experience that need to be identified: co-ordinator and supervisor. The co-ordinator will be responsible for linking with those wanting work experience, it could be the schools/colleges or individuals directly, whilst the supervisor is responsible for them whilst they are on placement.

Step 3: Eligibility and prioritisation criteria

You need to have a clear eligibility and prioritisation criteria; this might be different for the different methods of work experience. For example open days might have flexible and inclusive criteria whilst individually bespoke sessions might be aimed at those who have a clear professional preference.

Step 4: Application process

Ideally contact with schools and colleges will be a priority to advertise the offers, however other methods might also be used such as social media or websites. An application and selection process will then need to be in place. This will vary depending on the offer. Currently organisations use the following methods: NHS jobs; internal HR processes; team direct contact; specific career websites.

Step 5: Planning the placement

Prior to any placement starting it is necessary to understand what the individual wants to get from their work experience, to ensure that the service can meet the need and expectations are equal. It is important to remember that quality of the experience is more important than length.

Step 6: The Placement

Once the individual starts on a placement – particularly for weeklong or day sessions, it is essential that the following is in place:

1. Clear induction, including confidentiality and any health and safety issues.
2. Clear plan in place for how their time will be spent.
3. Provide a reflective log for the individual to complete each day as it encourages them to consider what they have seen, reflect on experience and identify what else they want to achieve.
4. Finish with a debrief session to ensure there are no concerns.

AHPs' role in providing work experience

System leaders:

- Define the system wide need for work experience – working with the AHP Council and/or AHP Faculty in the system to develop place-based plans for;
 - o Careers difficult to recruit to based on vacancy data
 - o New service developments
- Develop a network of schools and colleges to promote the offer and the professions.
- Develop cross system opportunities to work experience ensuring a variety of offers and opportunities.

AHP Leaders and AHP's:

- Support organisational wide policy and organisation of work experience
- Understand the opportunities in your services for work experience and who can support.
- Develop opportunities in job plans to support work experience.

Key themes for success from case studies

- Plenty of new opportunities to use digital platforms and equipment to be creative when offering work experience
- Where students have an understanding of AHP careers before the work experience they gain more from a structured opportunity
- Where you have staff that are ambassadors in schools you get a higher uptake
- Schools/colleges need time to ensure applications are processed
- For those who are under 16-year-old, tailor made opportunities are the most effective

- Consider the length of each session for shadowing, 75 minutes for an activity maximum
- Where organisations had provided a positive work experience, individuals were more likely to return to work in that setting.

CQC Standard Evidence for teams that support work experience

Safe – Work experience can act as a way of demonstrating that safety is promoted in the work place, especially around patient information, training and support mechanisms for staff and those in the work place.

Effective – Supporting work experience enables staff to develop and gain different experiences

Caring – Clinicians can demonstrate that they treat everyone with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect, this includes patients and those completing work experience. It also gives clinicians the opportunity to think about how they protect the privacy and dignity of patients whilst offering work experience.

Responsive – Providing work experience opportunities can help to demonstrate flexibility in service planning and supporting the community.

Well led – Engaging in work experience with the local community is evidence of an inclusive approach to delivering care. This satisfies the criteria that the leadership, management and governance of the organisation assure the delivery of high-quality, person-centred care, supports learning and innovation, and promotes an open and fair culture.

References

AHPs into Action, January 2017

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ahp-action-transform-hlth.pdf>

Gatsby Benchmark

<https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>

Healthcare Careers

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/>

Inspiring the future

<https://www.inspiringthefuture.org/>

NHS Long Term Plan, January 2019

<http://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>

Shortage Occupations List

<https://workpermit.com/immigration/united-kingdom/uk-tier-2-shortage-occupation-list>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-shortage-occupation-list-2020>

What Comes Next

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Strategic%20Framework%20-%20What%20Comes%20Next.pdf>

Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges, 2017

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/601373/Work_experience_and_related_activities_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf

Work Experience Tool Kit, May 2015

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/NHSWorkExperienceToolkitfinal.pdf>

WOW Show

<https://www.thewowshow.org/health-careers-special/>