

# The future of healthcare work experience

## Discovery Report Summary

March 2021

The Widening Access and Participation team, within HEE, commissioned a six-month discovery into the landscape of work experience (WEX) and online alternatives.

### How evidence was gathered for the report:

- Remote workshops
- One-to-one meetings
- Comparative evaluation
- Case studies
- Desk-based literature review
- Google search strings

### Nine user groups of WEX were identified:

- School pupils aged 14-15
- Young people aged 16-18
- Veterans
- Additional needs
- Resettled refugees
- Unemployed
- Prison leavers
- Care experienced
- Career changers

### Insights

- **Silo-working:** Although WEX is widespread it isn't recognised in the NHS Long Term Plan or Interim People Plan and as such it is not sufficiently acknowledged as contributing to the workforce pipeline. Coordination is inconsistent and resources are being duplicated.
- **Applicant friendly:** Coordination is primarily via paper application forms, often without clear information about who can apply, when they will hear back and what the selection criteria are.
- **Evaluation/Evidence:** Digital resources and online experiences (Technology Enhanced Learning) as alternatives to WEX have accelerated, including e-learning platforms, virtual reality (VR) content and sessions delivered via virtual meeting software. They can reach more people and provide new, rich insights into roles including challenges but require robust evaluation and basis in educational theory.

### Some of the recommended options for HEE to consider and respond to:

- A** Further explore the development of a National Management Platform; a long-term digital end-to-end service provided to staff locally for advertising and coordination, but which allows applicants across the country to visit one site.
- B** In the future, launch a national communications campaign, integrating a positive message, reframing the profile of WEX and work-related learning (WRL).
- C** Develop online work-related learning content for specialities with no current resources i.e. midwifery, pharmacy and ambulance services along with short pre-modules. Share guidance of educational theory & best practice of learning online.
- D** Continue to provide and enhance the National Work Experience Network, fostering a culture of collaboration, sharing resources and discussing what has and hasn't worked.
- D1** Encourage a focus on in-person work-related learning, when it is deemed safe to do so, instead of WEX to allow staff to recover from the pandemic.
- E** Seek high level buy-in across NHS arms-length bodies and develop a National Work Experience Strategy.



## The shift online - terminology matters

The term 'work experience' is used very broadly, undermining its impact, and leading to unrealistic expectations. A wide range of online experiences and resources are being promoted as 'virtual work experience'. While this may not be an issue in other sectors, a comparative evaluation suggests that what is shown, felt and learnt within health care work experience, is unique. The risk is that employers and staff in Higher Education will not be able to determine the value of such broad 'virtual WEX' and overtime these experiences will be relegated to 'lesser than' in-person, diminishing their impact instead of embracing and celebrating what they can offer.

Recommended option C1 is that HEE adapt their definitions within data returns and via a communications plan (see below) including all online activity as 'work-related learning'. This approach aligns with the Gatsby Foundation and Medical Schools Council who have avoided the ambiguity of the term 'work experience' & encourages self-explanatory titles like: 'Virtual Dentistry Simulation' 'Live Streamed Surgery'.

Term	Definition
<b>Work experience (WEX)</b>	Takes place in the workplace and allows people to experience what it's like to undertake a job supervised by staff who already work in the environment. Can last half a day through to programmes over one or two weeks. Often referred to as placements. Some offer hands-on experience, while some provide insights, observation, and work shadowing.

Term	Current HEE definition	Recommended change
<b>Work-related learning (WRL)</b>	Developing exposure and insight into roles that provide a deeper understanding of the skills and knowledge required of the workplace. This could include careers/skills events that are hosted by the employer, open days and tours.	Can be online or in-person. Provides a deeper understanding of the skills and knowledge required in the workplace through curated content, with clear learning outcomes.  Can include skills events, simulation, demonstrations, scenarios, and Technology Enhanced Learning methods.
<b>Careers information advice and guidance (IAG)</b>	Information advice and guidance (Not a term previously used to capture / report activity in Talent for Care).	Can be online or in-person. Aims to inform and inspire. Information presented may include: an overview of the NHS, job opportunities, the skills required, qualifications or training routes and application processes. Examples: webpages, day in the life videos, careers fairs, open days, lectures, employer talks, competitions, and webinars.

Access the full discovery report at [hee.nhs.uk/workexperience](http://hee.nhs.uk/workexperience)

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