

Work experience - A toolkit for secondary care providers



This toolkit provides you with a step-by-step guide for hosting a successful work experience placement in secondary care.

It is for NHS trusts and secondary care healthcare organisations that wish to establish, grow or improve their work experience programme. It will provide you with ideas on what to offer throughout the organisation for aspiring clinical and non-clinical staff.

Within this toolkit you will find links to:

- Forms and templates that you can use for your work experience programme. They are designed so you can easily edit them and we encourage you to adapt them for use in your own context.
- Supplementary information that provides more detailed guidance on key areas.

Like healthcare, work experience is constantly evolving and has to react to the wider healthcare environment. Here is the **latest information about work experience**.

“The NHS Constitution states that everyone counts, therefore it is right that we maximise our resources for the benefit of the whole community, and make sure nobody is excluded, discriminated against or left behind. Good quality work experience has a vital role in connecting the potential that exists in all corners of our society with organisations that will benefit from having wider diversity of perspectives and background a part of their workforce.

“Health Education England’s toolkit provides you with everything you need to support participants on their work experience journey in your setting – including resources, templates and information that you can implement, use and adapt appropriately for your scale and context.

“Thank you for making a vital contribution to a new era in healthcare, growing a diverse and flexible workforce that is representative of the community the NHS serves.”

Dr Navina Evans CBE, Chief Executive, Health Education England.

Contents

1. What is work experience?	3
2. Set up	4
2.1. Wider Context	4
2.2. Getting buy-in	4
2.3. When and how long?	4
2.4. Risk and health and safety	5
2.5. Confidentiality	5
2.6. Insurance	6
2.7. Indemnity	6
2.8. Safeguarding	6
3. Placement design	7
3.1. Where?	7
3.2. Timetable	7
3.3. Helping them to prepare	8
3.4. Induction	8
3.5. Supervisor and buddy	9
3.6. Informing patients	10
4. Recruitment	10
4.1. Who?	10
4.2. Finding applicants	12
4.3. Application process	12
5. Evaluate	14
6. Reward and celebrate	14
7. Further resources	14
Acknowledgements	15
Disclaimer	15

1. What is work experience?

Work experience is an opportunity for direct experience of work within an organisational setting.

Work experience helps people prepare for professional study and their future career. It allows those on placement to see what the job is really like, understand the demands of the career and find out if it is suited to them.

It gives the participants the opportunity to develop and demonstrate the values, attitudes and behaviours necessary to work in the NHS.

Work experience can help you to:

- Develop your future workforce by providing a route to opportunities and showcasing shortage areas
- Create further relationships with your local community, providing an opportunity for you to engage, inspire and inform people
- Widen access to opportunities in healthcare and support greater diversity and inclusion
- Develop and engage staff – it is an opportunity for all staff to develop their management and teaching skills and for them to inspire people
- Gain fresh insights and see your organisation through someone else's eyes.

2. Set up

In the initial stages you will need to ensure you have organisational support alongside the necessary framework and resources in place. This will ensure you adhere to appropriate regulations and deliver a successful programme for all involved.

2.1. Wider Context

Before you start it is important for you to understand the local and national context.

Do some research on the work experience on offer within your local area. Ask yourself:

- How your provision will complement that on offer from other providers
- Can you work with others to avoid duplication or provide a more comprehensive offer?

Health Education England coordinate a work experience network that includes Trusts and other organisations. Members have been sharing resources and best practice, discussing ideas and challenges, and looking to collaborate on new projects. For more information visit the [website](#).

Work experience is very valuable but it is not the only way people can gain insight into the healthcare profession. Think about your offer can complement other opportunities such as online programmes, careers sessions, articles, videos and blogs.

2.2. Getting buy-in

For work experience to succeed you need to create and maintain a positive environment in your organisation.

Understand the history of work experience within your organisation. Are there lessons to be learned or areas to build on?

You'll need to get support from your colleagues, including:

- The senior team, those at executive and director level
- Departments and supervisors hosting the placements
- Key services including human resources, learning and development, communications, health and safety, security and the unions.

It is important to promote the benefits and encourage colleagues to be enthusiastic about the impact the programme can have. You can also take this opportunity to address any concerns there may be and reflect in the design of the programme.

We recommend that you identify someone at board level, a champion, who is enthusiastic about work experience and understands its importance. Ensure the board has sight of:

- Your work experience policy
- Annual reports on the size and impact of the programme, including value to the organisation.

2.3. When and how long?

You can hold your work experience at any time in the year.

For students school holidays are good times, although schools normally organise work experience placements in June and July.

The placement should be long enough for those on placement to gain an understanding of

working in a healthcare environment. We recommend that the work placements last two to five days. Some trusts provide five-day work experience placements. This gives enough time for those on work experience to gain an understanding of the profession to help with their future career decisions or application for further study.

Many organisations have other activities for people to gain an understanding of a career in healthcare. Build on these activities so that work experience is a natural progression for those interested in working in the health sector.

2.4. Risk and health and safety

In clinical areas restrict work experience to observation and shadowing. Participants on work experience cannot get involved in any clinical activities, such as taking blood pressure. We provide **examples of activities** that can be undertaken on placement.

As an employer, you have primary responsibility for the health and safety of the individual.

It is advisable prior to the placement to ask those coming on the placement to complete a **health questionnaire**, which will alert you to any conditions or needs that you need to be aware of.

It is recommended that potential risks be discussed during induction, checking that participants understand what they have been told and how to raise health and safety concerns.

Guidance from the **Health and Safety Executive** makes it clear that if you already employ young people you will not need to repeat risk assessments for work experience placements. However, it is advisable to review your risk assessment and we have included a **template** that covers all the major risks within a clinical environment. Additional risks can be added for specific areas.

Ensure that all information about those coming on work experience are kept in accordance to your data protection regulations and are in line with all appropriate consent.

2.5. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is crucial. We would suggest that it is covered in:

- **The pre-placement information you send out**
This includes a placement **agreement form** that includes agreeing to keep all information confidential. It is also reinforced in **clinical** and **non-clinical work experience guides** for participants.
- **The induction**
The induction should stress the importance of confidentiality, check the participant's understanding and make them aware of confidentiality protocols.

Remind the participant that confidentiality extends not only to the patient records, the appointment book and treatment, but also to the fact that someone is a patient of the trust.

Always consult patients about the presence of people on work experience. For individual patient consultations seek the patient's permission before they attend. We suggest that you ask those on work experience to introduce themselves to the patients, explain what they are doing and ask if they are happy for them to be there. A patient's verbal agreement is enough, however, we also have a **template patient consent form** if you would prefer them to acknowledge in writing.

2.6. Insurance

Individuals on work experience are covered by your existing employers' liability insurance policy, provided your insurer is a member of the Association of British Insurers.

Schools and colleges do not need to separately run a risk assessment. Your risk assessment will be more than sufficient.

The Association of British Insurers, the British Insurance Brokers Association and Lloyds of London have agreed that, as a matter of convention, individuals on work experience placements should be treated as employees for the purposes of insurance against bodily injury (that is, they will be covered by your employers' liability policy), where the employer is legally liable for a loss.

For more information visit the [Association of British Insurers](#).

2.7. Indemnity

Indemnity is not a barrier to providing work experience. Most indemnity organisations view the supervision of work placements as part of your healthcare role.

Work experience participants must be given an appropriate induction that explains the risks and stresses the importance of confidentiality. At induction they should sign **an agreement** to keep all information, including the identity of patients, confidential. When interacting with patients they may only observe with appropriate consent from patients - who must understand the status of the individual undertaking work experience (that is they are not a medical student).

The benefits of indemnity would apply to members only and would not extend to the provision of assistance to those on work placement if a claim were made directly against them. As work placement is purely observational it is unlikely that those on work placement would find themselves facing such an action.

2.8. Safeguarding

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is not required for staff supervising young people aged 16 to 17 on work experience.

A DBS check may be required for a person who supervises a student under the age of 16. This will be required where the person providing the training or supervision to the child is unsupervised and is providing the training or supervision frequently (at least once a week or on more than three days in a 30 day period). In these circumstances, the work is likely to be regulated activity and the education provider can request a DBS check for that supervisor.

No DBS is required for students on work experience because they must be supervised at all times.

You have the right to refuse requests by the education provider that checks are carried out for those supervising students aged 16–17. For more information, visit the government's [**disclosure and barring service**](#).

As part of your risk assessment do consider how you can minimise those on work experience coming into contact with a distressing situation. Some may have had experiences of ill or dying relatives and may be uncomfortable or upset with some of the patient's stories. You will not be able to prevent this entirely, and so consider how you will support.

3. Placement design

The goal is to provide a real insight into what working in healthcare is really like.

Work experience can build knowledge and understanding in:

- Being a clinical professional treating patients
- The work of the wider healthcare team
- Medical administration, the work that is involved in running a ward
- Running a trust, including administration, reception, catering and facilities.

During the placement introduce the variety of roles. Through this participants will get a wider appreciation of the different aspects of healthcare, and the importance of teamwork.

3.1. Where?

Work experience placements can be in any part of your organisation, in clinical and non-clinical settings. They can range from supporting the catering or facilities team to assisting on wards.

All clinical areas can host work experience placements. For each specialty there are different considerations.

There is no obligation placed upon clinical leads and general managers to facilitate the creation of work experience placements. You will need to work with them to encourage them to host placements. Reassure them that work experience placements do not compromise the provision of safe and effective patient care and that hosting work experience placements contributes to ensuring the next generation of health professionals.

Refer to our [FAQs](#) for potential supervisors.

3.2. Timetable

We suggest that the placement includes:

- **Observation of different healthcare roles**
Through this they will get a wider appreciation of the range of clinical and administration roles, and the importance of teamwork.
- **Opportunity to reflect each day**
It is good practice for participants to consider what they have learned. The process of filling out a workbook, either with a supervisor or on their own, gives that time to encourage self-awareness and an understanding of their skills and strengths. We have included guides for [clinical](#) and [non-clinical work experience](#) that encourage reflection.

Alongside the clinical aspects reinforce good timekeeping, reliability, team working and problem solving.

We have provided example work experience timetables for both [clinical](#) and [non-clinical opportunities](#) and some [suggested activities](#) to make the experience enjoyable and insightful.

Make the work placement timetable available as it will help them see what they will be doing each day.

A [blank timetable](#) is provided for you to complete.

3.3. Helping them to prepare

It is important that you help those coming on placement to prepare. We suggest you send them a:

- **Welcome letter** outlining the timing of the placement, who to contact and your expectations.
- **Placement agreement** outlining the terms of their placement, including confidentiality.
- Guides for **clinical** and **non-clinical** roles that include what to expect, what to wear and how to prepare (including activities).

Make a badge for participants to wear, it will help them to introduce themselves, be known to staff and patients, feel valued, and part of the team.

3.4. Induction

Everyone should receive an induction to the workplace that will help them to integrate quickly and learn about working life. They may be entering the world of work for the first time and may not know how it functions and how they should behave.

We would suggest you ask those on placement to turn off their mobile phones or leave them somewhere safe.

Include in the induction:

- **Getting to know them:**
 - What they want to gain and learn from the experience
 - Any concerns they have, including anything they may find upsetting
 - Their experience of healthcare
 - Their future plans and aspirations
 - Any needs they may have (for example, prayer facilities)
 - If there is anything specific they wish to see.
- **Introduction to the team and the organisation:**
 - The work of the trust, its mission and values
 - Who is on the team and their different roles
 - How to access their placement areas
 - A tour of the facilities including
 - Where to get food from both inside or outside of the building and where to eat lunch
 - The nearest toilets
 - First aid facilities
 - The fire exits and evacuation points.

- **Clarifying expectations:**

- What they will be doing
- Confidentiality
- Health and safety
- How to act in a consultation or around patients and the team
- Who to speak to if they have any concerns or questions
- What to do if they cannot attend
- What to do for lunch and refreshments
- Dress code
- Timetable for the duration of the experience.

It is common to underestimate the knowledge and ability of a 16-year old while also overestimating their confidence and maturity. Recognising that they have been offered an opportunity, they may wish to impress you and not ask the questions they may need to. With simple clear instructions, they can feel reassured and focus on observing.

You can run inductions centrally, ensuring that all key aspects are covered. However, if you do this you also need a local departmental induction, so that those on placement are aware of working practices where they are based.

3.5. Supervisor and buddy

Be clear with participants who will be looking after them and who they can speak to if they have any questions or concerns.

During the placement we suggest you identify a supervisor. The supervisor will:

- Lead the induction
- Help participants be in the right place at the right time
- Be available at the start and end of the days to welcome and review.

We would encourage the supervisor at the end of the placement to write a brief statement on the participant. A school or college may request a statement on the participant, and provide their own template. A suggested **template** is included.

If you offer a placement that is more than one-day in length we recommend that you identify a 'buddy'. Their role is to be a friendly face, who can 'check in' with the participants to explore any concerns, discuss what they have learnt and confirm details for the next day. It is important that the buddy is someone that the participant will feel comfortable talking to.

3.6. Informing patients

Consult patients about the presence of a work experience participant, they are usually happy to consent. We advise you that you inform patients when they:

- Arrive at reception
- Enter the consultation.

Be sure that patients understand the status of those on work experience for example they are not a medical student. Informing them is enough but you may wish them to sign a **patient consent form**.

Give work experience participants the opportunity to introduce themselves to the patient. Inform them in advance about where they should go if a patient does not consent for them to be present. Should they wait outside the room? In the staff room? Will you come back to get them?

4. Recruitment

4.1. Who?

Work experience should be accessible to all who are interested in working in the healthcare sector.

We recommend that work experience in clinical areas is available to those from the age of 16 years because:

- Placements are in high demand, with often limited availability
- A certain level of understanding and maturity is required, as patient consultations can be emotionally challenging.

You may wish to offer work experience to those from the age of 14 years in non-clinical areas, or as part of a wider programme.

We would encourage you to offer places to those who have no work experience in the NHS. There is limited availability and we want to ensure that as many people have access to this opportunity as possible.

Work experience opportunities should be open to all, and we should ensure that those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and who have more limited connections get the opportunity. This will help to create a health service where the clinicians and our workforce represent the population they serve. Offering and allocating work experience in a transparent and fair way can help to improve social mobility and diversity in our workforce.

It is important that all informal work experience opportunities are part of your centrally coordinated programme. This will make sure that the work placement is covered by your organisation's insurance but you will also know who is offering what, and be able to target people who need the experience the most. Many working in the NHS wish to support their friends and family to access placements. HEE does not endorse placements being allocated directly to friends and family outside of any organisational process, as these processes aim to ensure that the placements are fair, equitable and safe for all. Where friends and family arrangements are in place, we would recommend that considerations are made to address diversity and increase the availability of placements. For example, those seeking a placement for a friend or family member could offer additional placements to those without contacts to call on. If anyone has friends or family wishing to find a placement ask them to contact the central work experience team.

Encourage supervisors to complete a short proforma with the details of the **placement opportunity**.

The NHS holds the principles of equality and inclusion at the heart of everything it does and all that it stands for. Work experience placements can offer an opportunity for people from underrepresented communities to gain experience that may be difficult to access through other routes. Many of our healthcare professions require degree-level qualifications and in order to widen participation the higher education sector has adopted criteria to identify and engage those that are underrepresented. You may wish to use the criteria that includes:

- Eligible for free school meals, or the 16-19 Bursary Fund or Discretionary Learner Support or Means Tested Benefit or Pupil Premium
- In, or been in local authority care
- Studying in a school that achieved below the national average Attainment 8 score at GCSE or had attended to the age of 16 or from a school with a high percentage of students receiving free school meals¹
- Living in an area of low participation to higher education²
- Living in an Opportunity Area³
- Are a young carer
- From a family where the parents do not have a university degree from the UK or abroad
- Are not in education, training or employment (NEETs).
- Have had an extended period of unemployment.

Use the data about applicants and participants to monitor the diversity of your cohort. You will be then able to understand if you are reaching those you wanted to target, or recruiting them to your programme.

Remember to consider the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) impacts of your work experience placements. It is a good idea to work with your local EDI team when developing your work experience programme.

1 Available from the Department for Education's website. www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables

2 You can check participation by home postcodes at the Office for Students website. www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/

3 You can find a list of the Opportunity Areas on the government's website. www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

4.2. Finding applicants

There are two main approaches to reaching potential work experience applicants:

- Working with another organisation to find people for you
- Dealing with direct applicants.

You will get people approaching you directly for work experience. However, to build greater diversity we would suggest you also consider working with others. You can, for example:

- Contact local schools in your area who are representative of the communities you are looking to reach. You can get a sense of which schools to contact by looking at their school data (for example, the percentage of students on free school meals) available at **Department for Education**
- Speak to local universities who run outreach programmes, they are likely to have programmes that you may be able to contribute to
- Speak to local careers advisers, who will be supporting schools and colleges in your area. The **Careers Enterprise Company** can help and put you in touch with the relevant contacts
- Work with Jobcentre Plus and the Prince's Trust who can identify people and provide free support
- Engage with charities, such as **IntoUniversity**, that are working in social mobility that can help identify individuals.
- Working with another organisation, such as a school, can help in many ways, they can:
 - Identify individuals who are interested, highly motivated and would value the work experience
 - Prepare individuals for the work experience placement
 - Provide support if any issues arise.

Set out the number of work experience placements you would be able to accommodate each year and establish an on-going link. You will also need to let them know about the type of work experience on offer, number, eligibility criteria, duration, times of the year as well as your application process. Be clear that this can be part of an on-going relationship.

4.3. Application process

Consider your application process so that it is fair and inclusive to all potential applicants.

Often applicants feel very uncertain about the process.

Let everyone know:

- The type of placements available
- The number of placements
- When the placements will take place
- The closing date for applications
- The date by which they will hear if successful.

Aim to make your application process transparent, so that anyone that is interested in applying are clear on what you are looking for, what is available, and how their application will be treated.

Application form

We would encourage you to ask everyone to complete an **application form** and an **equality monitoring assessment**. It will give you an opportunity to find out more about the person and the type of applicants you have.

Think about what you want to find out through the application form and the questions you want to ask. The template application form includes:

- **Eligibility and prioritisation criteria**
This is to help you to diversify your intake.
- **Qualifications, subjects and predicted grades**
This will help you identify those that would gain most from different types of experience.
- **If they have a relative working in the trust**
This information will help you identify where to place them.
- **Space for those applying to explain why they have chosen this placement**
This gives you an opportunity to find out more about their interests and motivation. Do remember that everyone may not be able to express themselves clearly.
- **A data protection statement**
This outlines why you need the information.

To help applicants you can send some guidance on how to complete the application form. We have provided a **template**.

Ensure that your privacy notice reflects the information you will collect and use for work experience. We have included a **template privacy notice**, which you can adapt to reflect your organisation's practice.

Online application forms are often more accessible, and provide ease of administration for large numbers. It can be easier as well to organise anonymised selection.

Supervisors will find the application form of use, providing more information on those coming on placement.

Selection

Establish clear criteria on how you will select those to come on placement. Bear in mind that when reviewing the form that for many applicants this may be their first time in writing an application.

Consider what information those making the selection need to see. For example, you may wish to remove names and other identifiable data to reduce any unconscious bias.

We would suggest you look at all your applicants together, as part of a gathered field.

Establishing a deadline for applications means that you do not accept the first applicants and it is accessible for those who need longer to complete it.

Respond to everyone who took the time to apply whether successful or not to inform them of the outcome. You do not need to offer feedback.

5. Evaluate

As part of your monitoring and continuous improvement you could consider the following:

- A debrief with those involved to share what needs to be done to improve the programme
- Ask the supervisors to evaluate the experience from their perspective. We have provided a brief **evaluation form**
- Ask work experience participants to complete an **evaluation form**
- Discuss with the school or partner the programme and ask about the onward progression of the participant(s).
- Consider how you quality assure your programme. You may wish to see how it fits with your organisation's processes or follow an external standard.

6. Reward and celebrate

It is important to recognise the achievements of all work experience participants.

We would suggest you provide:

- A **letter** or **certificate of attendance**
- Brief **feedback** to those on placement and partner.

Take a moment to thank them, if possible in front of the team.

We would also encourage you to gather promotional material, for example:

- Short video films from the participants
- A written blog about the participant's experience
- Short insights from the supervisors.

These can be used to promote the programme, but also inform future participants forming part of any induction.

Finally, let others know what you are doing locally and nationally. This can be through articles, blogs and social media.

7. Further resources

If you are unable to offer work experience or if you can only offer a short placement, then you can signpost those who approach you to other options for relevant experience:

- General caring experience at a care home
- Volunteering in your organisation
- Online work-related opportunities.

A list of **up to date opportunities** is available.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks must go to all those in trusts across the UK who support work experience placements and make a real difference to people's lives and futures. Thanks to the HEE Clinical Fellows and the National Work Experience Network for feedback on drafts.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this toolkit is for general guidance purposes only. We do not accept and, to the extent permitted by law, exclude liability to any person for any loss that may arise from relying upon or otherwise using the information contained in the toolkit. Whilst every effort has been made when producing this toolkit to help the user in planning and support work experience, no liability is accepted for any error or omission. Should you have a particular query or issue which is not covered in the toolkit then we would strongly advise you to seek legal or other professional advice, rather than relying on the information in this toolkit.

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