

Work experience in the NHS - A toolkit for teachers and careers advisers



This toolkit provides information and resources to help you find and maintain successful work experience opportunities within the health service.

Work experience is organised differently within individual trusts and other healthcare providers so we cannot provide you with all the answers. However, this toolkit will help you to understand what is on offer within the health sector, how to start to find placements for your students and the rules and requirements healthcare providers are working under.

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 provide 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 - that the NHS must maximise its 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 your students on their work experience journey—including resources, templates and information that you can implement, use and adapt appropriately for your scale and context.

“Thank you for the role you are playing in enabling students to access the many opportunities available – in turn this will help ensure the growth of 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 in the NHS?	3
2. Do students need work experience?	3
3. Opportunities available	4
3.1. Types of opportunity	4
3.2. When and how long?	5
4. Accessing opportunities	5
4.1. Finding placements	5
4.2. Building relationships	6
5. Set up	6
5.1. Risk and health and safety	6
5.2. Confidentiality	7
5.3. Insurance and Indemnity	8
5.4. Safeguarding	8
6. Supporting students	9
6.1. Helping them to prepare	9
6.2. Reflection	9
7. Further resources	10

1. What is work experience in the NHS?

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

2. Do students need work experience?

Work experience is often encouraged for students so that they can:

- Understand the world of work
- Have an understanding of the careers that they are interested in pursuing
- Build up their experience for job or further study applications.

For healthcare courses, universities and colleges will be looking for students that have:

- Had people-focused experience of providing a service, care or help to others and that they understand the realities of working in a caring profession.
- Developed some of the values, attitudes and behaviours essential to working in healthcare such as conscientiousness, good communication skills, and the ability to interact with a wide variety of people.
- A realistic understanding of healthcare and in particular the physical, organisational and emotional demands of the role.

The NHS Constitution sets out the principles and values of the NHS in England. Available from the [government website](#).

Work experience can take many forms. It can be a voluntary opportunity or a paid job.

Volunteering in a residential care home or working in a shop can be just as good a source of experience.

It is most important that students are aware that their experiences are only as good as their reflection on them. The ability to reflect on what they have learnt, both about themselves and about healthcare, is the key thing employers or universities are looking for when they assess their application.

The Medical Schools Council has produced guidance on relevant experience required for applying to medicine.

Work experience is not the only way students can gain insight into the healthcare profession. They can attend online programmes, speak to people working in the NHS, read articles and follow social media. More information is available [here](#).

The type, variety and volume of online work-related learning opportunities is increasing so keep in touch with your local trust so you are aware of the opportunities that exist.

3. Opportunities available

The goal is to provide a real insight into what working within the NHS and healthcare is really like.

Work experience in the NHS can build knowledge and understanding in:

- Clinical roles - what it is like being a member of the healthcare team including treating patients and administering their care
- Healthcare administration - the work that is involved in running a trust or a practice, from facilities and catering through to human resources and finance.

In clinical areas the work experience takes the form of observation and shadowing. Those on work placement cannot get involved in any clinical activities, such as taking blood pressure.

It is likely that those aged under-16 years will be given administrative and non-clinical placements. Those aged 16 years or over will have greater access to clinical placements, such as being based on a ward.

3.1. Types of opportunity

More people in England work for the NHS than any other organisation. In total the NHS employs 1.4 million staff. There are over 350 different careers ranging from healthcare assistants, doctors through to porters and administrative and communications professionals.

To understand the range of careers in the NHS encourage your students to visit the [Health Careers website](#). Alongside accessible information on work in the NHS, it has a careers quiz to help identify suitable future roles.

There are many different organisations within the health service that can offer your students work experience. The main organisations are:

- **Acute hospital trusts**
They provide medical and surgical care through hospital and outpatient treatment, and other services commissioned to meet local population needs. They will often have centralised coordinated work experience programmes (sometimes with other trusts).
- **Mental health trusts**
They provide mental health, learning disability and eating disorders services. There are work experience opportunities within these trusts, in managed environments.
- **Ambulance trusts**
They respond to 999 calls, transport patients, and provide out-of-hours care in some areas. Students will not be placed within an ambulance station or an emergency vehicle. Students will be placed in the support services, but will get to understand a healthcare environment.
- **Community trusts**
Community trusts provide a wide range of medical, nursing and therapeutic care to prevent avoidable admission to hospital and to minimise hospital stay. The work experience is unlikely to be based in a hospital, instead students will get to see a range of healthcare environments.
- **GP practices**
Many GP practices offer work experience. They will offer work experience to students outside of their catchment area, to protect the confidentiality of their patients. The work experience may often be less than a week.

- **Dental practices**

Dental practices offer work experience. The work experience may often be less than a week.

- **Other healthcare providers**

Encourage your students to consider other healthcare providers. Pharmacists, opticians, hospices and nursing homes will all give students an experience of working in a healthcare environment and interaction with patients.

3.2. When and how long?

Work experience can be available at any point in the year.

The placements will vary in length. Within a trust or hospital setting the average work experience is five days. However, in smaller practices they can last from one to five days.

Encourage your students to focus on the quality of the experience rather than the time spent on placement. They should use the time to gain an understanding of the work in the organisation and of the profession.

Students might be able to combine placements with other providers in a different setting. The focus is not how much work experience someone undertakes but how they reflect on it and what they learn from it.

4. Accessing opportunities

4.1. Finding placements

With over 300 NHS trusts and many more healthcare providers, each with their own policies and structures, there are significant differences in the provision of work experience. Within your region there will be different models of work experience offered by different healthcare providers. Some regions may have a single hub for work experience coordinating work experience for a range of organisations, whilst some will be individually managed.

We would encourage you to contact your local healthcare providers and develop a relationship with them. These partnerships mean that work experience placements can be organised in consultation with you.

The Careers Enterprise Company has a number of cornerstone employers. These are employers who are experienced in engaging with education and give strategic support to clusters of secondary schools and colleges to empower careers provision in an area. To find out if you have a cornerstone employer locally check the [website](#).

Often work experience is located in the volunteering, human resources or learning and development departments. Make sure you keep trying – many healthcare providers are very large organisations and not everyone you speak to may know if work experience is taking place.

Contacts through friends and family may help your students access work experience opportunities for themselves, however, we would encourage you, where possible, to use the central work experience contact to ensure that all the standard procedures have taken place.

Also consider other opportunities for partnership. This might include working with working with universities. Some outreach programmes will involve supporting work experience placements. They are typically focused on clinical placements for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

For a full list of NHS trusts in your area go to the [NHS website](#).

4.2. Building relationships

A partnership with a work placement provider brings benefit to all involved. We would suggest you:

- **Get in contact early**
Make contact during the academic year before you want the placements to start. This gives you an opportunity to plan the placements together and for all paperwork to be completed.
- **Provide some of the solutions**
Many small organisations would love to offer placements but are put off by the thought of developing the appropriate forms and identifying the right people. You will often have the forms and information they need and can help them through the process.
- **Be flexible on timings**
Think about when your students can go on placement, can you offer more or different times of the year?
- **Allow for different models of work experience**
You know your students may need a week's worth of work experience but do these all need to be from the same placement or the same organisation. A shorter experience in the NHS, alongside other placements or experiences could be valuable to your students.
- **Match opportunities to students**
Ensure that the students are able to access the opportunities that are most relevant to them.
- **Prepare your students**
Encourage them to prepare for the placement, to think about what they want to learn and the questions they want to ask. Our clinical and non-clinical work experience guides can be provided to students to help them to prepare.
- **Make your students aware of patient confidentiality, health and safety, infection control and dress code.**
These are all important elements in any placement in the health service. Our clinical and non-clinical guides give some advice to students.
- **Support the students on placement**
Make sure they turn up on time, attend every day and debrief them.

5. Set up

5.1. Risk and health and safety

The trust or practice will have primary responsibility for the health and safety of the student. Schools and colleges do not need to separately run a risk assessment. The employer's risk assessment will be more than sufficient.

They are likely to ask prior to the placement for the student to complete a health questionnaire, which will let them know of any conditions or needs that they need to be aware of.

At the start of the placement potential risks will be discussed, and they will be told how to raise health and safety concerns.

In clinical areas, work experience will be restricted to observation and shadowing. Those on work experience cannot get involved in any clinical activities, such as taking blood pressure or weighing a patient. We have a list of activities that students could get involved in on placement.

There are activities that young people are legally prohibited to do, if it:

- **Is beyond their physical or psychological capacity**
This could be as simple as checking a young person is capable of safely lifting weights and can remember and follow instructions.
- **Involves harmful exposure to substances that are toxic, can cause cancer, can damage or harm an unborn child, or can chronically affect human health in any other way**
This will not be within the placement, and care will be taken of any substances a young person might come into contact with.
- **Involves harmful exposure to radiation**
The exposure to radiation will be restricted and will not exceed the allowed dose limit.
- **Involves risk of accidents that cannot reasonably be recognised or avoided by young people due to their insufficient attention to safety or lack of experience or training**
A young person might be unfamiliar with 'obvious' risks. Risks will be covered in their induction and they will be closely supervised.
- **Has a risk to health from extreme cold, heat, noise or vibration**
In most cases, young people will not be at any greater risk than adults, and for workplaces that include these hazards there will already be control measures in place.

For more information, visit the [Health and Safety Executive](#).

We provide [examples of activities](#) that could be undertaken on placement.

5.2. Confidentiality

There is often a misunderstanding that work experience cannot be held in certain areas, such as general practice because of confidentiality. This is not the case.

Dental surgeries and GP practices do have more restrictions on who they can take for work experience. Work experience placements will not be offered to anyone who is registered at the practice, as they are more likely to know patients.

Patient dignity and confidentiality must be maintained and the employer will use their discretion and judgement when identifying suitable areas and duties. Particular care will be taken in areas where there are vulnerable patients.

Patient dignity and confidentiality will be written into their signed work experience placement agreement. If there is any disclosure of information they will dismiss them from the premises and, if necessary, consider further action. You may wish to consider what further action you may wish to take. It would be helpful for you to stress how important confidentiality is, it includes:

- Patients in the practice
- Records of patients
- The appointment book
- Discussing the care named people received.

In addition to this the supervisor will ensure that those on work placement are introduced to the patients who have consented and observe any consultation, treatment or procedure.

5.3. Insurance and Indemnity

Individuals on work experience will be covered by the employer's existing liability insurance policy.

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

For more information visit the **Association of British Insurers**.

Indemnity is not a barrier to providing work experience. Many indemnity organisations view the supervision of work experience placements as part of working in healthcare. The benefits of indemnity would apply to members only and would not extend to the provision of assistance to those on work experience if a claim were made directly against them. As work experience is purely observational it is unlikely that individuals undertaking such experience would find themselves facing such an action.

5.4. Safeguarding

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

A DBS check may be required for a person who supervises a young person 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 or intensively (at least once a week or more than three or more days in a 30 day period). In these circumstances, the work is likely to be regulated activity and as 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.

For more information, visit the government's **disclosure and barring service**.

6. Supporting students

Alongside the job role, reinforce the other aspects of the placement including good timekeeping, reliability, team working and problem solving.

6.1. Helping them to prepare

It is important that you help those going on placement to prepare.

Before the placement we would encourage the students to:

- Research and consider the roles that they will come across as part of the work experience
- Learn about the organisation, the number of people that work there, any specialisms they have, and the services they provide
- Plan how they will get to the placement, including how long it will take
- Organise what they are going to wear. In clinical environments there will be strict dress codes in place.

Give them confidence to ask questions. Recognising that they have been offered an opportunity, they may wish to impress and not ask the questions they may need to. Reassure them that with simple clear instructions, they can feel reassured and focus on observing.

We have put together two guides to help students to prepare before the placement, but also encourage reflection of what they have experienced and learned. The guides are available for those on **clinical** and **non-clinical** work experience.

6.2. Reflection

Reflection helps us to understand and learn from situations, to develop competencies and to think clearly about career choices. Reflection is a key aspect of any healthcare career and essential for work experience participants. The focus is not how much work experience participants undertake but what they learn from it.

To help participants get the most out of the placement, make time for them to reflect on what they have learnt and put these thoughts into a diary. There is no right or wrong way to reflect. By just describing what they did will help them consider what happened and how it made them feel.

Our guides for **clinical** and **non-clinical** placements provide worksheets that can be used to reflect.

7. Further resources

We recognise that sometimes it may be difficult to get work experience. Here are some other ways to gain experience and knowledge.

Online resources

There are some free online resources available that will give your students a taste of what working in healthcare is all about.

Volunteering

Encourage your students to volunteer in their spare time. All forms of voluntary work can provide helpful work experience. Encourage them to consider volunteer work in the NHS or working with other people in a caring or service role, and in particular with people who are ill, disabled or disadvantaged is preferable.

Other resources

Encourage your students to follow the news and listen to healthcare professions. Many healthcare professionals post online about their working experiences. Encourage your students to listen to what they have to say and reflect on this.

We have information about **free resources** available to your students.

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.

Text by: **Nursaw Associates**.

Design and layout: **Wax DesignWorks Ltd**.