



Traineeship: Supporting young people to develop the skills for Apprenticeships and other sustained jobs

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About this document: Traineeships

In January 2013, the Government published a discussion paper setting out its ideas for introducing Traineeships from September 2013. Developed in response to concerns voiced by some employers that young people often lack the right skills and attitudes when they apply for an Apprenticeship or other employment, the proposed Traineeship programme aims to support young people aged 16-24 to develop the skills they need to impress potential employers and to secure and succeed in employment or an Apprenticeship.

The Traineeships would offer young people the opportunity to undertake a substantial work placement and work skills training, and would also offer them support in improving their English and maths.

NFER wishes to contribute to policy thinking and its practical application for this skills priority area of the Coalition Government and has consequently responded to the opportunity to submit evidence in response to the proposals in the discussion paper. For this submission we have drawn on an extensive track record of research relating to youth transitions and vocational education undertaken by NFER, including research on training provision for young people aged 19 to 24 years of age who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); evaluations of Diplomas and an IT training programme for 16- to 18-year-olds; and the ['From Education to Employment'](#) strand of the NFER Research Programme.

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What are your views on the elements that are essential for an effective programme to support young people to prepare for Apprenticeships and other jobs?

Drawing on NFER research, for example McCrone *et al.*, (2013), Burge *et al.*, (2012) and McCrone and Filmer-Sankey (2012), our views on the essential elements of an effective programme to support young people to prepare for Apprenticeships and other jobs are:

- **One-to-one personalised support** so that young people can, for example, access mentoring or careers guidance that is individualised to their needs.
- **Short, interactive vocational courses** that are practical, applied in nature and offer technical skills and where the learning environment is as realistic to the world of work as possible.
- **Numeracy and literacy skills** that are, wherever possible, applied to the practical areas of interest to the young people.
- **Employability skills** so that young people can develop an understanding of, and enhancement of, the skills employers want young people to have (such as problem- solving and team-working skills).
- **Life skills** such as how to apply for a job, what to wear for an interview and how to present oneself in an interview.
- **Interaction with employers** either through, for example, work experience or through employers' involvement in project work.
- **Careers education programmes** to develop young people's self awareness of, for example, their strengths and areas in need of development.
- **Impartial one-to-one careers guidance** to enable young people to understand the options open to them and how they can access them.

The evidence shows that when these elements are in place young people's confidence, aspirations and motivation to further develop their skills and progress into employment are enhanced.

References

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What makes work placements high quality and effective?

Drawing on NFER research, including Morris and Wade (2005) and Spielhofer *et al.*, (2005), and other key reports, we provide the following summary of the principles underpinning high-quality and effective work experience:

- **Clear purpose, aims and objectives** which are negotiated and agreed with the young person, school/college and employer/training provider. For example, work experience learning objectives could be related to the acquisition of one or more of the following: technical knowledge and skills, workplace awareness/experience, teamwork skills, employability skills, literacy and numeracy competence, IT expertise, communication skills, or career awareness and understanding. The learning activities and outcomes should be an integral part of the course, relevant and linked explicitly to the programme of study/curriculum. This may include learning transfer which relates theoretical learning to practical experience.
- **Planning and preparation** are important to ensure that all parties understand their role and responsibilities. These pre-placement functions include briefing young people, school/college staff and employers/training providers; checking legal, insurance and health and safety requirements; and matching individual young people with particular occupational/workplace placements. Any selection criteria should be transparent. Visits by young people to the workplace and discussions and interviews with managers may form part of this. Short guidance documents for work experience providers and young people can assist the preparation process. Some organisations liaise with Trident or a local education business partnership to find work experience placements.
- **Work experience provision** should include an induction for the young person to the organisation providing the placement so that they understand its aims, expectations, products and services, ways of working, and clients. A structured placement will include a timetable of learning goals, tasks and activities which motivate, interest and 'stretch' the young person. Guidance and support should be provided by a workplace supervisor and a mentor/buddy who may also be an on-the-job coach. Supervisors, mentors and other staff will help to mediate the young person's learning in the workplace. The work experience should finish with an end-of-placement debrief which enables the young person and employer/training provider to feedback their experiences to each other and assess what has been achieved and what could have been done better.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and review** are essential parts of work experience. The young person's performance – completion of tasks and learning activities - should be recorded and monitored on a regular basis by the workplace supervisor and by school/college staff who visit the young person in situ. The young person may be asked to keep a diary of their placement. Monitoring information feeds into the evaluation which, drawing on feedback from all parties, will assess the fitness of

process and organisation as well as learning outcomes, including the extent to which the young person's learning objectives and goals have been achieved and any other (unexpected) learning gains. The evaluation will also assess the experience of and benefits to the employer/training provider. Longer-term evaluation will assess the contribution of undertaking work experience on young people's progression to further education, Apprenticeships and employment. The review will reflect on the provision of work experience at the macro level and identify possible improvements to provision.

Research by the NFER, conducted by Morris and Wade (2005), found that there was a consensus among the employers interviewed that the characteristics of quality work experience were that 'it needed to be stimulating and informative, it needed to be targeted to the abilities of each individual and it needed to give a real flavour of the work' (p.3).

A report by the Adecco Group (2012) recommended that work experience should be combined with careers advice to create an 'employment experience programme' which should 'engender a better understanding of what it means to be a successful employee' (p.5). In his review of work experience, Mann (2012) notes the benefit of young people undertaking work placements at age 16 years or above which he thinks 'optimises opportunities for jobs ultimately to be secured, it also suggests that earlier exposure can help young people make more informed choices about desirable qualifications and experiences to make them as competitive as possible for later job openings' (p.29). A recent report by The Work Foundation, Crowley *et al.*, (2013), recommends that '... all employers offering work experience adhere to the CIPD guidance for work experience placements' on the grounds that 'A large part of whether work experience is beneficial or not depends on the quality of the placement offered, and whether it is directly linked to a job (for example in the form of a guaranteed interview)' (pp. 4-5). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) guide for employers identifies best practice in key areas of work experience including selection of candidates; induction; supporting young people in the job; supervision and mentoring; and reference and feedback.

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What are your views on the proposed Traineeships model? Are the core components right? Is the balance between flexibility and specification correct?

Further to our views on the essential elements of an effective programme to support young people to prepare for Apprenticeships and other jobs (above), we think that the proposed model would support young adults in their progression towards further training, Apprenticeships or employment. We feel that the target group of young people (that is, those who are 'motivated to work') is appropriate. Spielhofer *et al.*, (2009) evidenced that young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are not a homogeneous group. The research identified three groups: the 'open-to-learning' NEETs (which represent 41 per cent of young people who are NEET) who were positive about education but 'churn' between courses; the 'undecided' NEETs (22 per cent of NEETs) who were dissatisfied with available opportunities and their inability to access what they wanted to do; and 'sustained' NEETs (38 per cent of NEETs) who face multiple and complex barriers to engagement in education. We consider that the Traineeship model is well-suited to the first two sub-categories of NEETs listed above.

We agree that the core elements should comprise work preparation, work placements and numeracy and literacy (in contrast to English and maths). However, we think that a further element should include face-to-face careers guidance, as evidence suggests that this is critical for young people to make an informed decision about their futures.

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The success of Traineeships will rely on employers offering high-quality work placements. How can we best support and encourage employers to offer these? What will employers see as the benefits of being involved in Traineeships?

NFER research, including the national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas for the Department for Education (Lynch *et al.*, 2010), has explored the employer perspective on offering work experience. Our findings show that the following strategies could assist in supporting employers to provide placements:

- **Having a key contact** within the Traineeship provider (a college tutor, for example), so that the aims of placements can be agreed beforehand and so there is a channel of communication/support.
- **Identifying the employer's own interests** and aiming to meet/tailor the programme to these.
- **Being flexible**, for example, allowing employers to offer traditional block placements, day-visits over a number of weeks/months, employability seminars offsite, business projects, tours/visits/talks.
- **Offering financial incentives**, trade vouchers, college/provider training for staff, access to college/provider facilities for events or training, or training for employer staff as work experience mentors.

We consider that there are likely to be different successful engagement strategies for different types of employers, for example, small and medium-sized employers (SMEs).

The benefits to the employer of offering work experience have been reported to include:

- **Building relationships** with - and skilling-up - the young people who might be the future workforce.
- **Providing a valuable service** to the local community which can be good for public relations/corporate social responsibility.
- **Working with young people with innovative ideas**, which can help employers to keep in touch with the views of local young people (for example, it can serve as good market research).
- **Involving placement students** in projects which benefit the company.

Reference

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