



**Evidence for  
Excellence in  
Education**



**Top Tips for senior leaders  
in schools and colleges:**

**How to provide meaningful  
experience of the world of work  
for young people as part of  
16 to 19 study programmes**

# Introduction

A core part of 16 to 19 study programmes is the provision of work experience for all young people. It is increasingly recognised that young people need to develop their employability skills, alongside qualifications, in preparation for the world of work and securing a job.

This top tips guide offers advice to schools and colleges wishing to implement and deliver new work experience offers/opportunities. It recommends some ideas that have been tried and tested and suggests some techniques for the development of relationships between employers and education providers and ways to further develop employability skills in young people.

## Using this top tips guide

It is recognised that providers will be at different stages in their journey towards ensuring that young people are more work ready. It may be useful to consider the core elements identified in the top tips (see below) and carry out an audit to gain an overall picture of your institution's current position and to identify areas to prioritise for further development.

### Work experience audit

	Not yet	Planned	Actioned	Impact
We proactively engage with the needs of local employers and work in partnership with them				
We have a structured programme of work experience, enterprise and/or work placement activities embedded across our institution				
We have created work experience models that provide mutual benefits for our young people, local employers and our institution				
We actively involve employers to prepare young people prior to work experience placement				
We have a well-regulated system to record and monitor work experience				
We ensure that young people are engaged in real pieces of work or projects that are valued and used by employers and reflect current needs and practice in the workplace				
We have created a dedicated team, led by a senior leader, that offers young people extensive experience of the world of work				

## Proactively engage with the needs of local employers and work in partnership with them

- Develop work experience activities, and young people's broader experience of the world of work, in partnership with local employers.
- Aim to ensure that students gain 'hands on' experience and develop the skills that local employers need.
- Nurture long- term relationships with employers.

### TOP TIP 1:

#### Working in partnership

##### **Birmingham Metropolitan College**

launched its Professional Services Academy (PSA) in 2014. The PSA was developed in response to the needs of employers that had been identified through research and highlighted a 'skills crisis in the Professional Services Industry'. Working in partnership with leading firms from the financial, legal, accounting and business community, the PSA is the 'first of its kind in the country'. It is open to students studying AS/A Levels in law, accounting, economics, business studies and mathematics and those on apprenticeships in accounting, business administration and legal studies. Students have the opportunity to join the PSA by application. The programme provides: technical lectures; soft skills development; employer mentoring; employer site visits; and, networking opportunities; real work experience through opportunities to apply to one of the partner employers via a competitive process.

#### Proactive engagement

**Oldham college** has established an Employers Advisory Board (EAB) that consists of 20 local business representatives and has been highly effective in strengthening relationships between the college faculty, the 'Digital and Creative Centre', and industry personnel. This enables Board members to emphasise the skills, competencies and abilities they need in their future employees. The EAB has, to date, informed curriculum delivery, modified individual units, improved career pathways and integrated the development of behaviours expected by employers into the curriculum to support students' employability: 'The industry is rapidly changing and the college has to reflect this and be flexible in what it offers its students to make them employable'.

The EAB is also a mechanism through which senior staff at the college work with employers. This includes developing assignment briefs for students, providing work experience placements and offering continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for college staff.



## Embed a structured programme of work experience, enterprise and/or work placement activities across your institution

### TOP TIP 2:

#### Embedding work experience

##### Walker sixth form in Newcastle

has developed their approach to employability skills as a central strand of their current offer in the sixth form. It is underpinned by a commitment from senior leaders to make students 'work savvy'. Work experience placements are embedded in the Level 2 and 3 courses on offer. The sixth form provision is designed to enable students to progress to employment or secure apprenticeships or other work-related training/education.

- Adopt a structured approach to embedding activities that will raise young people's awareness and experience of the world of work across all departments or faculties within your institution.
- Implement a structured programme of activities to ensure that students are able to get the best out of work placement activities, are better prepared for work and supported to find productive employment following their studies.

- Identify a local need and work with local employers to grow a flexible solution that benefits all parties.
- Use innovative approaches to adapt work experience opportunities to local context.
- Be open to working with a wide variety of partners.

#### Gaining mutual benefits

##### St Brendan's sixth form college in Bristol

works with Career Academies UK (CA) to provide employability opportunities for Level 3 students. CA is a national charity, which aims to bridge the gap between the world of work and education, by providing a range of experiences for students, including internships. The internship involves the completion of one or more projects, which are designed to allow the student to apply their subject knowledge, and to provide something of value to the employer. One employer commented: 'There are benefits for the company – enthusiasm and fresh thinking can be very helpful, and these young people bring energy into the office'. A student observed: 'As well as confidence, it helped me with my IT studies, because I was able to make links'.

### TOP TIP 3:

## Create work experience models that provide mutual benefits for your young people, local employers and your institution

#### Creative solutions to benefit all parties

The Sports' Directorate at **Birmingham Metropolitan College** has developed a work experience model where its students provide sports coaching and PE sessions in local schools. To develop the model of provision, the college worked with a local provider of sport and physical activity provision in the city. The programme has potential benefits for all

concerned: the students gain opportunities for 'hands on' experience of working with young people in schools and a pathway to employment; schools have the opportunity to receive structured coaching and PE lessons but with the freedom to use their Sports Premium Funding in other ways; and the local provider of sport and physical activity assisting with the development of the model has access to a pool of skilled people for its services e.g. running school sports clubs, holiday clubs and coaching.

## Actively involve employers to prepare young people prior to work experience placement

- Invite local employers to support the preparation of young people for their work experience placement.
- Prepare young people for their placements by ensuring they have a mindset that will support them to proactively engage with employers before, during and after a placement.
- Ensure there is 'best fit' between the young person and the employer offering the placement.

### Involve employers in preparation for placements

At **Oldham College**, prior to embarking on a work experience placement, employers have come into the college and provided master classes and other forms of employability-related support and guidance to students. In addition, to raise the profile and status of work experience, students have also been required to submit CVs and be interviewed for a placement, reflecting on the process and competitive nature of securing employment.

### Encourage young people to be prepared to engage proactively with employers

#### Pimlico Academy

believes that 'smart matching' between the young person and the placement is vital in terms of, for example, the interests of the young person and the skills targeted for development (such as hard knowledge-based skills or softer employability skills). A member of the team also explained that ensuring that the young people have the right 'mindset' is important: 'They need to be active rather than passive. They need to ask questions. They need to be inquisitive. They need to think about how they present themselves. They need to consider: "What can I learn and what do I want to learn from this experience?" We also work hard to encourage them to reflect about their experience and what they have learnt.'

## TOP TIP 4:

## Have a well-regulated system to record, monitor and review work experience

### Have a system to monitor work experience

At **Chichester College**, all student work experience is monitored, with hours of activity logged and an on-line Enterprise Passport for each student, where they can reflect on achievements and skills learned. These can then be used for job or Higher Education applications. Work experience was now 'more formalised and auditable, so no student can slip through the net. Staff wanted a clear policy, with no grey areas about what is approved experience. We have clarified the number of hours per student and ensure that each student has a personalised path'.

## TOP TIP 5:

- Evaluate your work experience offer to ensure it is meeting its objectives and is reviewed regularly.
- Set up a system for young people to reflect on their experiences and how they have benefitted them.

## TOP TIP 6:

Ensure that young people are engaged in relevant, current and valued work experience

- Highlight the importance of young people being involved in real pieces of work or projects that are valued and used by employers so their experience has a real purpose.
- Ensure work experience reflects current needs in terms of jobs and skills needed at present in the workplace.
- Encourage work experience to reflect practice in the workplace so young people work as employees and adopt the codes and conventions of the workplace in contrast to behaving as students in the workplace.

### Realistic and aspirational work experience placements

At **Walker sixth form in Newcastle** work experience placements are designed to mirror the 'real world of work' as far as possible to achieve maximum benefit for students and employers. This includes, for example, ensuring that the placement day starts and finishes at the same time as regular employment, not college times and the placement activities are as 'hands on' as possible, within health and safety parameters. In addition, a key provider of work experience highlighted the need to be cautious about offering placements in areas where there were not likely to be any employment or apprenticeship opportunities in the near future so as not to falsely raise expectations or set students up to fail. A member of staff observed that the: 'real world experience really helps their communication skills – being in the work environment almost forces them to improve their skills'.





## TOP TIP 7:

### Develop a dedicated team led by a senior leader

- In creating a dedicated team, aim to develop an approach to work experience which offers an extensive experience of the world of work for all young people and embed it across your whole institution.
- Ensure that the dedicated team has the active leadership of a senior leader who also has dedicated, ring fenced time allocated to the role and can provide strategic direction.

#### Developing a dedicated team

Students in the sixth form of **Pimlico Academy** largely follow an academic programme with the vast majority studying A Levels. The Academy's Raising Aspirations Programme, implemented by the academy's Raising Aspirations Team and led by the Raising Aspirations Director, aims to encourage, and support all of its students to set their sights high and broaden their ambitions. There was a general perception from the Raising Aspirations Team that the systems and processes used for work experience and employer engagement had improved over the last year largely due to having a dedicated team led by a newly appointed Raising Aspirations Director.

I interacted with customers, but I also attended meetings. I was doing a proper job, and that will be very helpful for when I apply for jobs in the future.

(Young Person, St Brendan's Sixth Form College)

It's a lot easier... because when you're actually working with an employer, a real industry client... deadlines are really important. There are real deadlines. There are no extensions. It helps you towards working with deadlines and application. I know a lot of work is like that.

(Young person, Birmingham)

The industry needs people with experience, so this type of activity helps a lot – it gives you transferable skills.

(Young person, Chichester)

This guide is based on case studies carried out as part of a qualitative project to highlight effective and innovative approaches in terms of the work experience strand of study programmes, commissioned by the Department for Education and carried out by the NFER.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01)

Published April 2015

© 2015 National Foundation for Educational Research  
Registered Charity No. 313392

ISBN 978 1 910008 62 1

**National Foundation for  
Educational Research**

The Mere, Upton Park,  
Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ

T: 01753 574123

F: 01753 691632

E: [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk)

[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)



● independent ● insights ● breadth ● connections ● outcomes