

# Building a Workforce for the Future

## A HOW TO GUIDE for employers offering work experience placements



## OxLEP and work experience

Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) is a business-led partnership between local authorities, education providers and private sector businesses. OxLEP plays a central role in determining local economic priorities, undertakes activities that drive economic growth, creates jobs and increases workforce skills within the local area.

Young people are at the heart of our ambition – ensuring a suitably qualified and skilled workforce is key to achieving sustainable growth. We aim to strengthen and optimise links between employers and educators, enabling young people to become work ready, building awareness of the skills needed in local businesses and how to obtain them.

*“ It gives them a taste of what working in industry might actually be like. ”*

Dr.Mandy Harding, Head of Molecular Microbiology, Green Biologics

Meaningful work experience is crucial to this; effective in enhancing students' employability skills, motivation in education, career-decision making and knowledge of the world of work. We need more employers like you to offer a breadth and range of work experience placements for young people in Oxfordshire.

Good careers guidance and experience is now an entitlement for all young people, to raise aspirations and to enable them to capitalise on opportunities available to them. The government's careers strategy now provides a framework for this through the Gatsby Benchmarks, that provides a 'gold standard' framework to help schools improve their engagement with employers and support for young people. Benchmark 6 entitles young people to experiences of the workplace.



## Benefits to your business

**Talent pipeline:** a future Apprentice or talented employee could be recruited following a successful work experience placement and employers can use the opportunity to influence young people's training provision.

**Brand promotion:** enhancing your business's brand in the minds of parents/carers, teachers, students and the local community can lead to increased brand recognition and loyalty.

**Fresh approach:** young people often bring new ideas or skills that reflect the interests of the next generation of customers and can help businesses appeal to emerging consumer groups and markets.

**Sector promotion:** positive early introductions for young people can inspire their career choices and ultimately pursue a career in your industry, shaping their future training around this career path.

**Staff development:** your current workforce can benefit from, and enjoy the challenge of, managing and mentoring a young person during their work experience placement; helping them to discover more about their own role and develop their own skills.

**Feel-good factor:** it's the right thing to do - inspiring young people, building aspirations and building a strong workforce for the future.

## Our work experience service

OxLEP Skills work experience is offered on a not-for profit basis.

### OxLEP Skills Work Experience:

Provides opportunities for young people to experience and gain insight into real workplaces.

OxLEP Skills work with over 30 schools and over 5000 young people; usually in Years 10-12 (aged 15-18 years). We provide two levels of service: Standard and Advanced.

### Standard:

Where the young person (with parental and school support) finds their own placement. We provide access to a database for school staff to manage the placement and we liaise with employers to carry out health and safety visits and record employer liability insurance prior to placements taking place.

### Advanced:

OxLEP Skills finds the placement for the young person and school; matching the placement to the young person's interests, school information and tutor comments. We liaise with the employer prior to and post placement to ensure a successful experience for both the employer and the young person.

All new employers, regardless of the level of service, will be contacted by the OxLEP Skills team to book a short health and safety visit prior to the placement taking place. Dependent on the level of risk involved in the placement, repeat health and safety visits are carried out, either on annual, bi-annual, or 4 yearly turnarounds.

## How we support you

Offering work experience can be uncomplicated, quick and easy. The OxLEP Skills team is here to help!

**Knowledge:** We can help you get started! When first offering work experience, it can be helpful to know where to start, how to establish it, what level the student can work at or what activities to offer them.

**Time and resource:** We make this easy for you! The process of arranging work experience might seem labour-intensive, so we complete all planning and associated administration and provide expertise in completing the health and safety aspects.

**Events and information:** We organise a variety of events to support skills development for current and future workforce, such as annual pop-up events, live Q&A and guest speaker events. There is an option to receive a regular newsletter which will keep you in touch with the work of your local Skills team and opportunities for your business. We have included a Work Experience 'Employer of Choice' award in our annual Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards to celebrate and recognise the involvement and dedication of business who provide an outstanding work experience contribution.

*“ OxLEP are really good. They provide a conduit between the students and us. ”*

Professor Handa, Director of Surgical Education, University of Oxford, Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences

## TOP TIPS for offering a placement directly with a student

- If you receive a direct approach from a student, their school or college should also contact you.
- The school may ask you to complete a brief form at this stage.
- You should expect to be given information about the placement dates, duration and a named school contact. Don't hesitate to ask the student or school for these!

### Before you agree to work experience:

- ✓ Ask the pupil to send in their CV and a letter of application.
- ✗ Don't settle for a short email enquiry.
- ✗ Don't accept an application from a parent on behalf of a pupil.

## HOW TO GUIDE

### We can help you to run successful work experience placements

If you decide that you want to offer work experience placements, then OxLEP Skills are here to help.

#### We can:

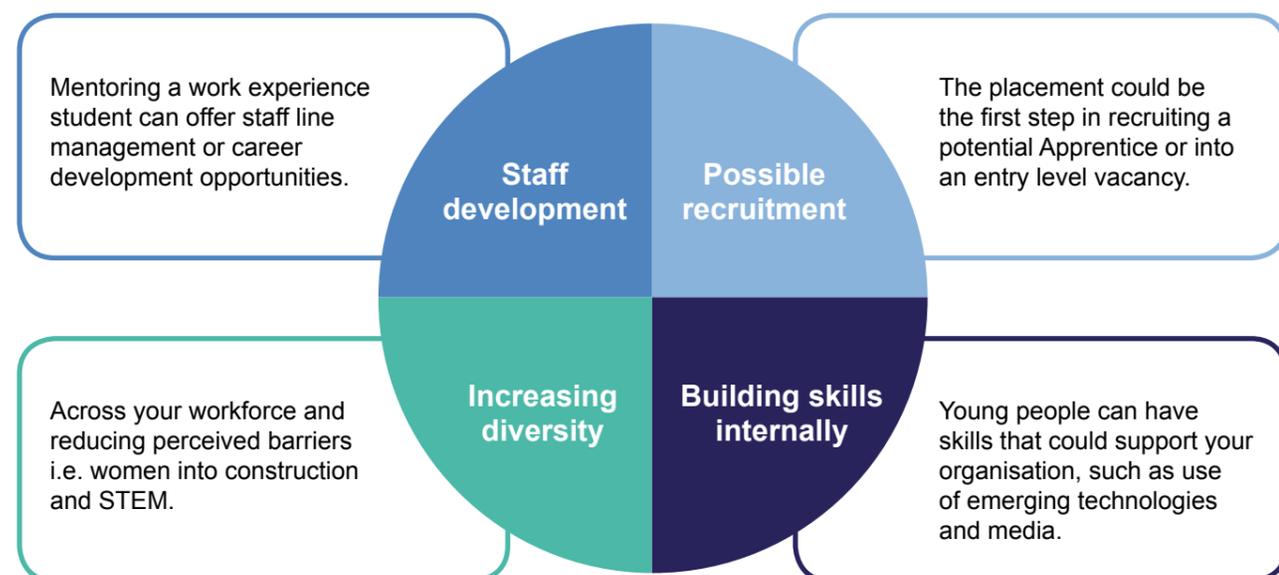
- liaise with a school/college and match your offer to a student's interests
- encourage students to contact you directly to discuss the placement students or parents/carers

#### Getting buy-in

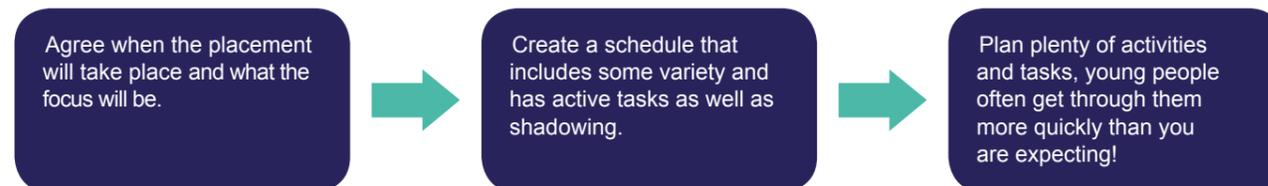
The best work experience placements have senior management 'buy-in' and include plenty of variety, working across various departments with different employees.

Begin by articulating your company's reasons for offering work experience, either with a simple set of objectives like the ones below, or over time setting out an overall policy or statement that includes relationships with specific schools, broad aims and a standard programme. This will enable you to assess the value of your efforts.

## Your objectives for work experience may include:



## Devise the programme



## Structuring your placement

Your work placement should give an accurate picture of the demands of your industry, including job-specific skills and tasks.

Consider	Include	Outline	Encourage
the existing knowledge and expectations of the student and any needs they may have.	an induction and evaluation.	what the company does, career opportunities and safety procedures and give a tour of the workplace.	the student to observe and note different employee roles, responsibilities and behaviours.
Identify	Include	Involve	Ensure
tasks or projects that the student can undertake – preferably real work tasks that make a difference, which is more satisfying for them and useful for you!	the student in normal workplace activities such as meetings. It might be routine to you, but a young person can gain a lot from observing and participating.	the student in any in-house training and development happening during their placement.	that staff responsible for your student have enough time set aside to spend with them to explain things and make sure that they have enough to do.

## Legal guidance

Providing a work experience placement is designed to be straightforward for employers, so it doesn't generate unnecessary paperwork. Under health and safety law, work experience students are your employees. You should treat them no differently to other young people you employ.

Some schools also ask you to complete an individual risk assessment for each student. We recommend that you carry out a single risk assessment for work experience generally (a version of your general employee one), which can be re-used each time. You should send this to the student's parents. It will only need personalising in exceptional circumstances, e.g. for a disability or special need.

Health & Safety Executive guidance states 'Simply use your existing arrangements for assessments

and management of risks to young people. If you have fewer than five employees you are not required to have a written risk assessment'. For some simple advice, see [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) and in particular the cutting through the bureaucracy page:

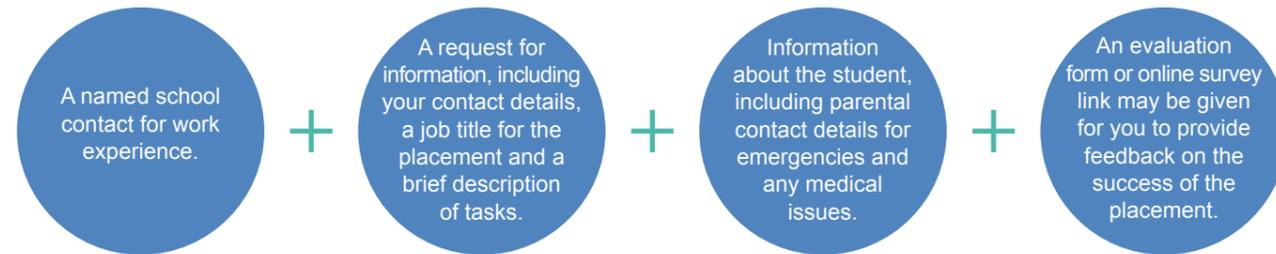
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/workexperience/cutting-bureaucracy.htm#responsibilities>

It is good practice to inform your insurers about a new placement as a matter of courtesy, but your existing employer liability insurance policy will usually cover work placements.

**Data protection:** once a young person has completed their work experience placement, you should delete any details held online and shred any paperwork.

## Forms and protocol

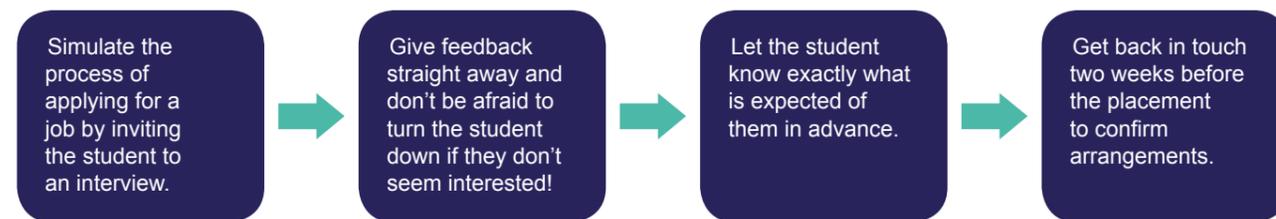
Expect to receive the following from the school:



If you do not get information about the student two months prior to placement start, you should contact the school to request it.

## Meet/interview students

The student should also contact you to find out if you would like to meet and interview them. We recommend meeting them in advance if you can – it will help you plan a placement that will be of benefit to you both. This may happen up to nine months prior to the placement.



## Making the best use of a student's skills

Students are not always aware of the skills they have and are generally not confident talking about them. Use the interview to talk about what they do in and out of school and see what skills they can bring.

### Areas to focus on could be:

**Working with others:** students are likely to have been part of a team before - emphasise the similarity to the workplace.

**Problem-solving:** emphasise that academic training can help solve business problems.

**Numeracy:** look at how their maths knowledge can be applied in a practical setting.

**IT skills:** suggest that this could be an area where the student could up-skill your staff.

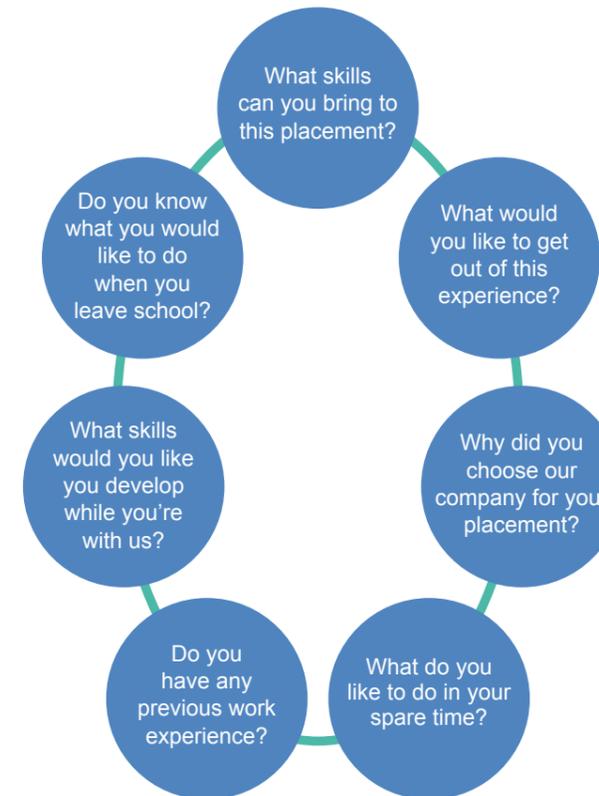
**Communication skills:** remind them to listen as well as talk and prep them for using the phone. Ask about their interest in social media and advice on how to communicate with a younger audience.

**Presentation skills:** some companies ask the student to observe a presentation, and then deliver their own to report back on their placement.



## Example interview questions

Find out what will make the placement meaningful for both you and the student:



## TIPS for smooth running

- Students can work up to eight hours a day and should expect to work a full week, but you may invite them to do shorter days to give you time to deal with any urgent business.
- Students can carry out many tasks if given instructions, training and supervision until competent. The placement will be more fruitful for all if they are doing something useful.
- If you have any concerns, particularly about behaviour, dress code or punctuality, contact the school immediately. If necessary, you can send the student back to school, as long as you inform your contact there.
- Give guidance about time expected for tasks and when the student should ask for help. Give them regular feedback, not just at the end of the placement.

### Overcoming challenges - unsuccessful placements are extremely rare

The main reason for a placement not being successful is due to poor communication between the student and employer, resulting in mismatched expectations.	Catch up with your student again just before the placement starts to check they are still on board.	Treat the student as you would any other new employee starter; they may become a permanent member of your future workforce.	Check that the student is confident with practical details such as travel, times, safety kit and dress code (school uniform can sometimes work well as an inexpensive substitute for business wear).
Give the student friendly but strict guidelines about the behaviour you expect from them.	Appoint a specific person who will be the student's main contact during the week and have them make this contact. It can be helpful for this to be a younger member of staff so that the student can connect with them easily and the staff member gains valuable experience	Ensure the student's timetable for the week is shared with everyone who may come into contact with them, especially the receptionist or office manager.	During the week the student is usually visited in the workplace by their school contact. This is an opportunity to discuss any challenges and to find solutions which work for you.

# Evaluation

At the end of the work experience placement, hold a meeting at a specified time with the young person to review how everything went. Some students may have a log or diary that they must fill in - if there's space to write a comment or feedback, offer to do so.

The school may supply a form for you to return and you may want to consider writing a case study for the school or company newsletter.

Occasionally, you may not feel you have imparted much to the young person, because they might not have opened up about the impact it has had. However, bear in mind that young people can be shy and if this is their first time in a workplace, the whole experience will have made them better prepared for the world of work - interacting with adults they did not know, getting to the placement on time etc.

**Evaluate the programme from within the business:** did you achieve your stated objectives?

- Make a note of the successes and celebrate them with your workforce and other associates.
- If there were any challenges plan for anything you would do differently next time using feedback from all staff.

*“ If we can start building a relationship from that point in time, potentially we've got a workforce for the future. ”*

Simon Howick, Managing Director,  
Oxford Direct Services

# Keeping in touch

If the student impressed you, could they make a good potential employee in future? Could you arrange a summer job or Apprenticeship? Students often benefit from work experience by using it on application forms. You may want to offer to be a referee.

*“ It's a win, win situation really. It just takes a small investment in time to work with students... and they are keen. They are really keen! ”*

Andy Severn, Owner, Oxford eBooks

With thanks to



# Get involved with support from OxLEP

Please give it a go and spread the word! Get involved and encourage others to take part in offering these meaningful opportunities to help build the future workforce.

It really is very easy to get involved. OxLEP Skills can help you to connect to your local schools and develop your programme. We are ready to answer any questions you may have about work experience, as well as inform you about which schools are looking for placements at any one time.

To offer a placement or for an informal chat please contact us on 01865 897189 or [skills@oxfordshirelep.com](mailto:skills@oxfordshirelep.com)

[www.oxfordshirelep.com/skills](http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/skills)

Find us on:    