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International work experience practices

A rapid evidence review for Speakers for Schools



SQW

Commissioned by:



SPEAKERS
for schools

Foreword

As both a business leader and as Chair of the social mobility charity Speakers for Schools, I have been both intrigued and delighted to learn more about the international evidence of positive impacts that interventions like work experience can play in helping young people achieve their potential.

There is increasing evidence that the quality of young people's careers education directly affect their chances of securing a full-time job and the scale of their future earnings. In the UK, it sadly remains the case that those attending state schools and colleges face greater barriers to future socio-economic success and benefit from fewer opportunities like work experience than their peers who attend fee-paying schools and colleges.

Inspired by the findings of the charity's own research and wider literature that attests the value of work experience, Speakers for Schools has launched a national campaign – Work Experience For All – to further validate the role that work experience in its many forms can and should play as part of a new standard of careers education provision in the UK. This ambitious campaign aims to secure cross-party political support to ensure that in the future every young person can access free high-quality work experience regardless of their background or schooling.

This campaign report is the second in an ongoing series. It establishes exactly what should pass for best practice when it comes embedding work experience into the curriculum by looking at how other countries including Finland, France and Norway are working towards this aim.

In the pages that follow, you will find compelling examples of what makes work experience impactful for young people, what makes for effective delivery, and what would be needed to adopt and embed best practices into our own school curriculum. It is my hope that what you read here will highlight the huge potential of work experience to aid valuable skills acquisition for every young person in the UK and better equip them for adulthood and the world of work.



Andrew Law

Chair of Speakers for Schools



Contents

Executive summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. What is work experience?	4
3. What works for effective work experience and what are the challenges it faces?	9
4. What impact does work experience deliver?	14
5. Conclusion.....	21
Annex A: Methods	A-1
Annex B: Literature search protocol	B-1
Annex C: Bibliography	C-1

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Executive summary

Introduction

1. The social mobility charity Speakers for Schools believes that every young person should have the right to high-quality work experience regardless of family background and where they live. Its 'Work Experience for All' campaign seeks to secure cross-party commitments to making work experience placements an essential requirement in UK secondary schools and colleges. As part of this, Speakers for Schools commissioned SQW to undertake a rapid review of English-language evidence on international work experience practices.

What is work experience?

2. Within the international literature, work experience is commonly described as a time-limited placement undertaken on an employer's premises by a young person while still in full-time education. It is carried out with the aim of exploring the suitability of a potential career and gaining exposure to the world of work.
3. Information pertaining to work experience practices in different jurisdictions is collated into a summary table in Section 2. This table describes each programme in turn and outlines key operational and delivery details. The programmes share various commonalities, for example placements generally last for one to two weeks and are completed by students aged between 13 and 16. A point of divergence is around whether work experience is optional or mandatory, and who (the student, the school or district) finds placements.
4. In Canada (British Columbia), for example, Work Experience 12A and 12B are courses that students aged 15 to 17 can elect to take, and in doing so can gain credit towards graduation. Both courses are approximately 120 hours in duration, and encompass time spent in school (including on workplace orientation and safety briefings) as well as at least 30 hours on a placement at a 'standard worksite'. School district staff are responsible for providing access to the courses for all interested students. Conversely, the work experience programmes in France (*'Le stage de 3e'*) and Norway (placements as part of *'Utdanningsvalg'*) are mandatory, take place when a student is aged 13 to 14 and last for up to one week. Here, students are responsible for finding placements.

What works for effective work experience and what are the challenges it faces?

5. The international literature identifies several factors that help facilitate successful work experience. These include adequate preparation, support and reflection; aligning placements to students' interests; providing interactive experiences and opportunities to sample different parts of a particular profession; and having dedicated resources within schools to lead on building work experience networks.
6. This review also draws attention to factors that can make the delivery of effective work experiences more challenging. Among the most prevalent is a mismatch between schools' and

employers' needs (schools must adhere to relatively rigid timetables whilst employers need flexibility) and limited availability of placements. This culminates in students relying on their parents' social and professional networks to secure placements, which in turn exacerbates inequalities as students from more affluent backgrounds tend to have access to a wider range of networks across high status professions compared to their disadvantaged peers.

What impact does work experience deliver?

7. Work experience is associated with a wide range of benefits for students aged 11 to 16 attending school in developed economies. These benefits span short term gains in students' self-confidence, motivation toward school and career awareness. Work experience is also associated with longer-term benefits, such as improved access to higher education, and benefits for specific groups such as a reduced likelihood of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). The evidence is more mixed on the impact of work experience on young people's future employment and pay prospects, although some longitudinal analysis does find positive gains in these respects.

Recommendations

More high quality research should be undertaken into:

- The delivery models adopted internationally and the effectiveness of different approaches
- The impact of work experience placements on students, especially regarding longer-term education, employment, or personal outcomes
- How the pandemic shaped students' access to and experience of work experience, and the potential for hybrid and online placements
- The comparative benefits of work experience across age groups as young people progress through their educations.

When arranging placements, schools should:

- Clearly communicate the benefits of work experience placements to students, parents and employers
- Designate dedicated resource such as a staff member in school to lead on building work experience networks (this person might also be the Careers Leader)
- Develop (and use existing) networks of employers willing to offer placements, to supplement families' own networks
- Seek wherever possible to align placements to student's interests
- Pay particular attention to disadvantaged students to ensure they secure quality placements
- Take time to understand and address students' concerns about placements
- Help students prepare for their placements (for example, identifying what they want to learn while on the placement, what to wear, how to behave, etc.)

- Support parents to talk to their children about the placement, and about careers more generally.

After placements have taken place, schools should:

- Facilitate feedback sessions and reflection, drawing out what students have learnt while on placements, how this links to their learning, and how learning affects their views about the future
- Encourage parents to talk to their children about the placement and what they learnt on it.

To support employers, schools should:

- Provide verbal and/or written briefings to ensure employers understand the features of high-quality work experience so that placements are interactive, engaging and varied
- Provide a pen portrait about the student/s on placement, and any specific needs they have. This is especially important for disadvantaged students
- Encourage employers to provide students with feedback during and after the placement.

Employers should:

- Provide placements that are interactive, engaging and provide opportunities to sample different parts of a particular profession
- Provide participants students with constructive feedback during and after their placement.

Third sector organisations should:

- Help broker opportunities between employers and schools
- Provide targeted support to employers that address different organisations' concerns. For example, small and medium sized organisations often have different needs and concerns in comparison to larger companies
- Explore the potential for work experience to become hybrid or online, and whether there are practices adopted by schools and employers during the pandemic that could expand work experience opportunities.

1. Introduction

About Speakers for Schools

- 1.1** The social mobility charity Speakers for Schools aims to end educational inequality by giving all young people, especially those from disadvantaged background, access to the networks available to fee-paying schools. It provides talks by influential figures and free work experience placements that link state school students to industry-leading companies. To date, Speakers for Schools has reached a third of UK secondary schools and colleges and engaged over one million students.¹

Work experience for all

- 1.2** The history of work experience policy in England is summarised in Figure 1-1.
- 1.3** The Gatsby Benchmarks were adopted in the Department for Education's Careers Strategy (December 2017). The Gatsby Benchmarks provide a framework for educators, stating that every student should have at least two workplace experiences outside of a part-time job by the age of 18.² However, in 2011 the government removed the obligation on schools to provide work-related learning including work experience at Key Stage (KS) 4. A recent survey commissioned by Speakers for Schools found that only one-third of young people aged 16 to 18 have completed a work experience placement. Students who attended fee-paying schools are more likely to have undertaken multiple placements compared to their state-school peers.³
- 1.4** Speakers for Schools believes that every young person should have the universal right to high-quality work experience regardless of family background and where they live. The charity's 'Work Experience for All' campaign seeks to secure cross-party commitments to making work experience placements an essential requirement in UK secondary schools and colleges, to ensure that every young person completes at least one work experience placement by the age of 16 and at least one between the ages of 16 to 18.⁴

This report

- 1.5** In 2022, Speakers for Schools commissioned SQW, an independent policy and economic research company, to undertake a rapid review of English-language evidence on international work experience practices for young people aged 11 to 16. SQW completed the review with support from the Centre for Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE), who ran the literature searches. The review ran between August and November 2022. This report presents our key findings and suggests next steps for work experience policy and practice.

¹ Speakers for Schools. (n.d.). *About us*. [online] Available at: <https://www.speakersforschools.org/about/> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2022].

² Gatsby.org.uk. (2019). *Good Career Guidance | Education | Gatsby*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>.

³ The research used a YouGov poll to ask 2,098 adults to recall their experiences in school and college

⁴ Speakers for Schools. (2022). *Work Experience for Everyone*. [online] Available at: <https://www.speakersforschools.org/campaign/work-experience-for-everyone/> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2022].

1.6 SQW worked with Speakers for Schools to agree the parameters for the rapid review, which addressed the following research questions:

Q1. What forms of work experience exist for young people aged 11 to 16?

Q2. What outcomes does work experience deliver for the young people participating?

Q3. How does work experience deliver these outcomes?

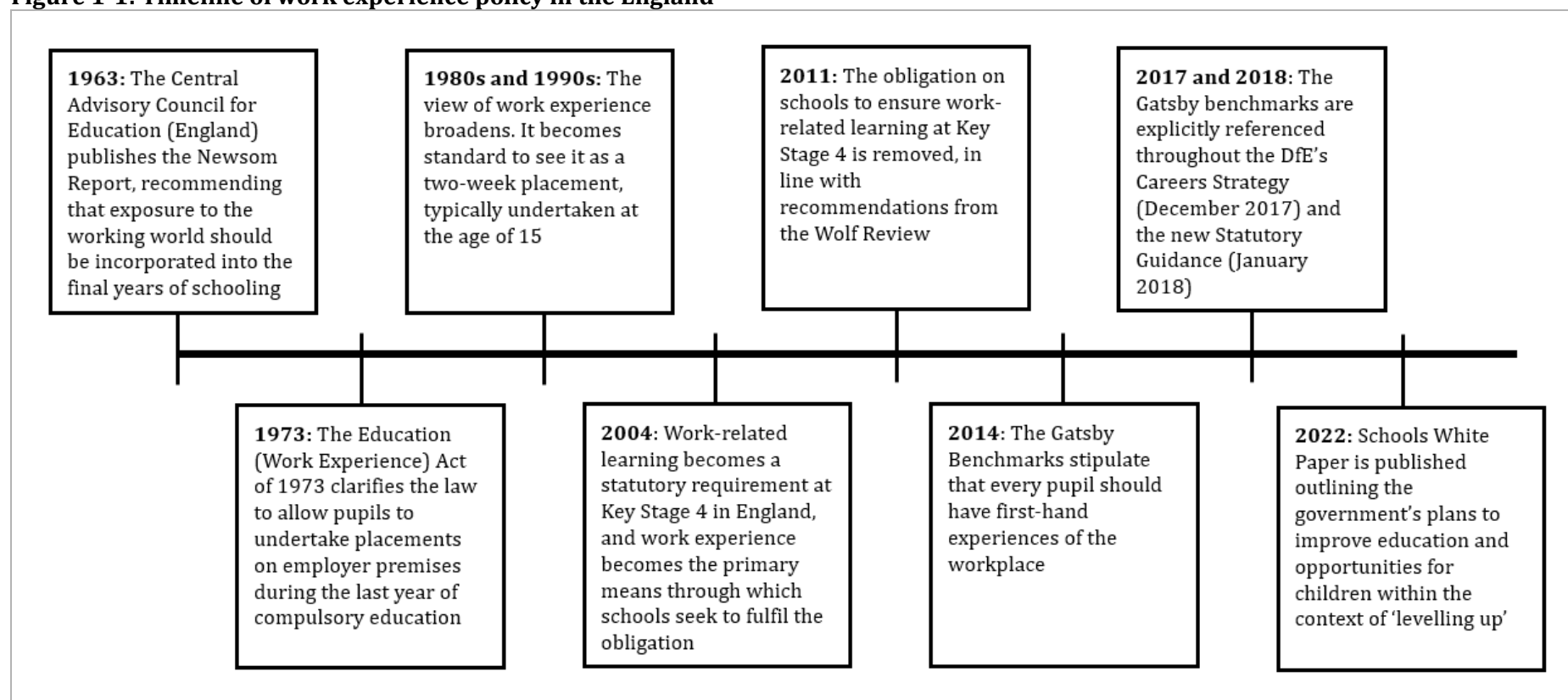
1.7 Our full approach is set out in detail in Annexes A and B.

1.8 Consultations with three academics informed the development of the literature search protocol. In total, 527 potentially relevant documents were identified during the literature search. Of these, 496 were excluded through systematic reviews of titles and abstracts. 31 documents were then reviewed in full and a structured coding framework was used to extract information pertaining to the models, mechanisms and impacts of work experience.⁵

1.9 Our analysis should be interpreted with two caveats. Firstly, although some studies focus explicitly on work experience and try to isolate its effects, in others it is examined alongside other career-related activities that students participate in throughout their education. Secondly, most studies present correlational as opposed to causal evidence. This limits the extent to which categoric judgements can be made about the impact of work experience on young people participating.

⁵ SQW completed the review with support from the Centre for Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE).

Figure 1-1: Timeline of work experience policy in the England



Sources: Jones et al (2015), Mann (2012b), British Youth Council (2018),

2. What is work experience?

2.1 This section looks at definitions of work experience and summarises work experience practices in the Home Nations, and five other high-income countries.

Defining work experience

2.2 Within the international literature, work experience is commonly characterised as a placement that is:

- On an employer's premises⁶
- Time-limited, often one to two weeks in duration⁷
- Undertaken by a young person while they are still in full-time education⁸
- Carried out with the aim of exploring the suitability of a potential career and gaining exposure to the world of work.⁹

2.3 It is important to note that work experience is not the same as:

- An internship, which tends to be paid and longer in duration
- Vocational training, a term that often describes activities more closely tied to specific qualifications, courses and training pathways
- Apprenticeships, which are paid positions.

What forms of work experience exist around the world for young people aged 11 to 16?

2.4 **Table 2-1** sets out the work experience practices in five high-income countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Norway) and the Home Nations. It includes a short description of each programme, alongside information pertaining to operation, programme duration, the ages of students that it is offered to, whether it is optional or mandatory and who is responsible for finding the placements.

⁶ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review*.

⁷ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

⁸ Hughes et al (2016) *Careers Education: International Literature Review*.

⁹ Musset, P. (2019) *Improving Work-based Learning in Schools*.

Table 2-1: Work experience practices in five high-income countries and the other Home Nations

Country	Programme name	Description	Operation	Duration of WEX	Ages WEX offered	Optional or mandatory?	Who finds placements?
Australia	Work experience	Each short-term placement links “students with businesses and organisations to provide insights into the industry and the workplace in which they are located and is unpaid.” ¹⁰	Schools, led by a principal or delegated officer, have the flexibility to decide whether to implement a work experience programme and, if so, how to schedule it into the curriculum (blocks of time versus individual days). Students source their own placements or consult a school database of employers with whom the school has relationships. Once a student arranges their placement, a delegated officer has responsibilities to: communicate with the work experience provider; ensure completion of necessary documentation; prepare students for their placement; monitor placements and; conduct debriefing sessions. ¹¹	Up to 30 days per calendar year	Minimum 14, usually 15 to 16	Optional	Students, either through contacts or school database of providers
Canada (British Columbia)	WEX	“WEX [courses] give students the opportunity to participate in, observe and learn about the tasks and responsibilities related to an occupation or career... [S]tudents learn about and	Work Experience 12A (WEX12A) and 12B (WEX 12B) are elective courses, approximately 120 hours in duration each, which encompass in-school time spent on workplace orientation, safety instruction, career-related curricula, as well as at least 30 hours in a placement. ^{13,14} Most placements are unpaid and occur at a ‘standard worksite’,	Varies – schools and employers agree on duration	15 to 17	Optional, can gain credit towards graduation for participation	Students and school district staff

¹⁰ Department for Education (2022). *Work experience placements for school students procedure*. Available at: <https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/attachment/work-experience-placements-for-school-students-procedure.pdf>

¹¹ Department for Education (2022). *Work experience placements for school students procedure*. Available at: <https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/attachment/work-experience-placements-for-school-students-procedure.pdf>

¹³ British Columbia Ministry of Education (2019). *Work experience program guide*. Available at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/pdfs/curriculum/appliedskills/wex-guide.pdf>

¹⁴ Saanich Career Education (2022). *Work Experience (WEx) 12A and 12B*. Available at: <https://careered.sd63.bc.ca/course/view.php?id=5>

Country	Programme name	Description	Operation	Duration of WEX	Ages WEX offered	Optional or mandatory?	Who finds placements?
		experience the workplace and are provided with a frame of reference within which to review or revise their career-life development goals.” ¹²	although students may choose to undertake a paid placement or a ‘career simulation placement’ at a Board or Education or Independent School Authority. WEX can be undertaken twice, with WEX12A first and WEX12B second if students so choose, and participants receive four credits towards their requirements for graduation each time. School district staff are responsible for providing access to WEX courses for all interested students.				
Finland	Introduction to working life (<i>Työelämään tutustuminen</i> , or TET)	“In 8 th and 9 th grade, each student joins a local company/organisation for a week, so as to gain personal experience with working life and professions.” ¹⁵	Career education is a compulsory element in the curriculum, and each school is required to provide students in grades 7 to 9 with 76 hours of scheduled activities as well as an unpaid practical work-experience periods (TET). ¹⁶ Schools advertise ‘job offerings’. Students then apply directly to the employers for the offerings that interest them. Contracts, paperwork, practicalities and debriefing are handled by schools. ¹⁷	One week	13 to 16	Mandatory	Schools provide ‘job offerings’. Students apply directly to employers for these
France	3 rd year Internship (<i>Le stage de 3e</i>)	The programme provides “[an] opportunity to discover the world of work, share the daily life	The 3 rd year internship is compulsory for 3 rd year students. ¹⁹ It can be completed either in five consecutive days, or broken up into shorter chunks of time. The placement is	One week	14	Mandatory	Students

¹² British Columbia Ministry of Education (2019). *Work experience program guide*. Available at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/pdfs/curriculum/appliedskills/wex-guide.pdf>

¹⁵ Kettunen, J. and Vuorinen, R. (2021). *Practical work-experience period as a student entitlement in Finland*.

¹⁶ Kettunen, J. and Vuorinen, R. (2021). *Practical work-experience period as a student entitlement in Finland*.

¹⁷ Nurmijarvi (2017). *TET – Introduction to working life*. Available at: http://www.stradavesels.lv/Uploads/2017/10/12/6_Varpu_Kujala.pdf

¹⁹ Ministry of National Education and Youth (2022). *The Third year Internship*. Available at: <https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-stage-de-3e-8192>

Country	Programme name	Description	Operation	Duration of WEX	Ages WEX offered	Optional or mandatory?	Who finds placements?
		of professionals and benefit from concrete experience.” ¹⁸	preceded by in-school preparatory activities. Additionally, following their work experience, students produce a report detailing their reflections on the profession or sector to which they gained exposure. ²⁰				
Northern Ireland	Work experience	“Work experience involves going on a short-term placement with an employer, to observe and work alongside people as they go about their daily tasks.” ²¹	Students undertake work experience in Years 12, 13 or 14. Although they are required to secure their own placement, the platform ‘Connect to Success NI’, advertising opportunities from a range of employers and occupational areas can help them to identify companies of interest. ²²	One to two weeks	15 to 18	Optional	Students, using a centralised portal if required
Norway	‘Educational choice’ working week (PRYO, as part of <i>Utdanningsvalg</i> course)	This “is a compulsory subject at the lower-secondary school from 8th to 10th grade A week of work placement and courses at the different educational programmes at the upper-secondary schools is the most common use of the subject.” ^{23,24}	In middle school, students take the compulsory ‘Educational choice’ course, which introduces them to activities in upper secondary school and working life, to help them to identify which route is best for them. ²⁵ For some students this includes a ‘work week’ (PRYO), which usually takes place in 9 th grade.	Three days to one week	13 to 14	Mandatory	Students

¹⁸ Ministry of National Education and Youth (2022). *The Third year Internship*. Available at: <https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-stage-de-3e-8192>

²⁰ Reviser Brevet (2022). *The 3rd year internship*. Available at: <https://www.reviser-brevet.fr/brevet/conseils-pour-la-3e/le-stage-de-3e/>

²¹ NI Direct (2022). *Work experience*. Available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/work-experience>

²² NI Direct (2022). *Find an opportunity*. Available at:

<https://selfservice.nidirect.gov.uk/TransactionalServices/DfE/Opportunities/Home?workType=workexperience&sortBy=Latest&workExperienceSearch=true&skip=0&take=10>

²³ Musset, P. and Kurekova, L.M. (2018). *Working it out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement*.

²⁴ Ung.no (2021). *Educational choices in middle school*. Available at: https://www.ung.no/utdanning/ungds/4158_Utdanningsvalg_p%C3%A5_ungdomsskolen.html

²⁵ Utdanning.no (2022). *Subject Educational Choice*. Available at: <https://utdanning.no/utdanningsvalg?f%5B0%5D=innholdstype%3Aartikkel>

Country	Programme name	Description	Operation	Duration of WEX	Ages WEX offered	Optional or mandatory?	Who finds placements?
Scotland	Work placements	“A stand-alone, week-long experience of the workplace... Work placements should enable young people to experience a relevant, challenging, enjoyable and appropriate learning.” experience within the contemporary workplace.” ²⁶	Offering work placements is one of the ways in which schools support students to develop skills for work. Examples of current models include: multiple introductory placements (half or single day); timetabled opportunities at an agreed time each week; an introductory week-long experience, and; placements undertaken during holidays (the internship model). ²⁷ Schools and local authorities are responsible for organising placements, preparing students for these, overseeing placements, and arranging debriefs after placements.	One week	13 to 15 (Level 4)	Optional	Schools
Wales	Work experience	“Work Experience is gaining experience of what the working life is like. It is usually unpaid and short term.” ²⁸	In 2021, Careers Wales made work experience opportunities available to students in state education. ²⁹ It did so through a partnership with Speakers for Schools, which helps to make schools aware of available in-person and virtual placements for their students.	One day to one week	11 to 19	Optional	Students with some guidance from schools

²⁶ Education Scotland (2015). *Developing the Young Workforce: Work Placements Standard*. Available at: https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/DYW_WorkPlacementStandard0915.pdf?_gl=1*k5nbhv*_ga*NDY2NjI0Njc5LjE2NjMzMjEzODU.*_ga_TQYTGRNG9G*MTY2ODY5NDQ1MC4zLjEuMTY2ODY5NDQ3Ny4wLjAuMA..

²⁷ Education Scotland (2015). *Developing the Young Workforce: Work Placements Standard*. Available at: https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/DYW_WorkPlacementStandard0915.pdf?_gl=1*k5nbhv*_ga*NDY2NjI0Njc5LjE2NjMzMjEzODU.*_ga_TQYTGRNG9G*MTY2ODY5NDQ1MC4zLjEuMTY2ODY5NDQ3Ny4wLjAuMA..

²⁸ Careers Wales (2022). *Work experience*. Available at: <https://careerswales.gov.wales/getting-a-job/how-to-get-experience/work-experience>

²⁹ FE News (2021). *Every state school student in Wales to access work experience through new national partnership*. Available at: <https://www.fenews.co.uk/skills/every-state-school-student-in-wales-to-access-work-experience-through-new-national-partnership-for-immediate-release/>

3. What works for effective work experience and what are the challenges it faces?

- 3.1** This section highlights best practice for organising work experience, based on international evidence. Such guidance is important, as developing a high quality offer can enable students to gain access to opportunities aligned with their career ambitions and maximise the impact of their participation on career-related outcomes. This section also draws out factors that the literature describes as key challenges for the effective delivery of work experience.

What works

Preparation, support and reflection

- 3.2** The literature conveys the importance of **clearly establishing and communicating the focus of work experience placements**. Aligning students' and employers' understanding of placements' objectives before they begin is cited as a key success factor in two evidence reviews^{30, 31}, enabling students to generate realistic expectations and employers to undertake the preparation needed to create high-quality experiences.³²
- 3.3** **Students need to prepare properly for work experience.**³³ One study identifies a risk of employers becoming dissatisfied and less likely to re-offer placements in the future if students are not equipped with basic knowledge such as how to behave appropriately.³⁴
- 3.4** **Gaining access to careers advice from employers** is beneficial for students engaging in work experience. A National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) review of 314 publications reveals that young people place high value on learning from professionals,³⁵ even where contact is short in duration.³⁶ In an analysis of students' written reflections on employer engagement activities, one study finds that the personal advice received from employers is deemed by many respondents to be more credible and dependable than that obtained from other sources.³⁷
- 3.5** **Post-work experience reflection is crucial** for maximising the value of placements for young people. Feedback and debrief sessions with employers can help students to retain insights and 'make sense' of these in the context of their own career aspirations.³⁸ Debriefing can also take place when students are back in school.³⁹ For example, end-of-placement interviews, formal

³⁰ Chandler, N., Ringsell, L. and Lindop, E. (2007). *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*.

³¹ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence*.

³² British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

³³ British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

³⁴ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

³⁵ Mann, A. (2012). *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults*.

³⁶ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review*.

³⁷ Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The 'Employer Engagement Cycle' in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults*.

³⁸ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

³⁹ Chandler, N., Ringsell, L. and Lindop, E. (2007). *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*.

presentations, or discussion sessions allow students to reflect on their placements. In day-to-day teaching, teachers should also refer back to the placements and the competencies students developed on them.

Placement choice and design

- 3.6** Two evidence reviews suggest that **the impact of work experience placements can be enhanced where these placements relate to students' interests.**⁴⁰ One study warns of the dangers of organising 'placements for placements' sake', as students undertaking work experience in an area of little to no interest can become disengaged from learning about the world of work.⁴¹
- 3.7** Evidence from research with young people demonstrates the importance of offering **well-designed and well-structured placements.** This amounts to more than students simply watching other employees work.⁴² One study highlights how students enjoy the responsibility associated with being treated as a business' employee.⁴³ An analysis of 32 students' questionnaire responses found that placements that are interactive and provide opportunities to sample different parts of a particular profession positively influence students' decisions to go into that profession or sector.⁴⁴

Staffing and networks

- 3.8** **Having a staff member dedicated to the oversight of work experience in schools** can improve programme success. One review finds that having a coordinator who developed contracts and set out expectations between employers and students was a key feature of effective delivery.⁴⁵ What is more, 44% of 712 school and college staff survey respondents said having a team member dedicated to work experience coordination is the most important factor in setting up work-related activities.⁴⁶
- 3.9** **Strong relationships between schools and local employers** are another important factor. In a survey of staff from schools providing work experience in the UK, effective relationships with employers were cited by one fifth of respondents as the most important factor in setting up placements.⁴⁷ Sustained relationships as opposed to one-off contacts make arranging work

⁴⁰ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

⁴¹ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

⁴² British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience.*

⁴³ Chandler, N., Ringsell, L. and Lindop, E. (2007). *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience.*

⁴⁴ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

⁴⁵ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

⁴⁶ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges.*

⁴⁷ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges.*

experience simpler for schools and employers alike,⁴⁸ improving each other's understanding of one another's needs and encouraging flexibility in approach.^{49,50}

3.10 Parent and carer support is beneficial for organising and sustaining work experience.

Parents and carers are instrumental in preparing students for work experience,⁵¹ and especially young people with special needs, for whom additional help in navigating workplace norms (such as what to wear) and access to transport is key.⁵² That said, longitudinal analysis from the US highlights significant links between the volume of US teenagers' non-parental adult social ties and employment success as young adults. This has two implications in the context of this review: firstly, it emphasises work experience's important potential for promoting young people's professional and social networks.⁵³ Secondly, it emphasises that while parents and carers are important stakeholders, **young people should be supported to develop networks outside those that their parents can offer.**

Challenges to overcome

Student, school and employer concerns

3.11 Students' concerns can impede the take-up of work experience. Research by NatCen and SQW in 2017 identifies that students' lack of confidence, fear of the unknown and not being 'work ready' meant they did not undertake a placement available to them.⁵⁴

3.12 Some schools' concerns about exam grades put them off giving curriculum time to work experience.⁵⁵ Additionally, an inquiry into the state of work experience warns that, without dedicated funding, offering work experience and careers education more broadly could be seen by schools as a "luxury".⁵⁶

3.13 Employers also hold concerns. One set of concerns relates to **work experience being seen as too burdensome.** Another set is about **failing to see 'the business case' for working with schools.**⁵⁷ Employers express concern over becoming 'entangled in bureaucracy and paperwork', for example that tied to health and safety of participants.^{58,59} Employers sometimes hold concerns that students' ages and maturity levels can negatively impact their ability to take on important

⁴⁸ European Commission (2013). *Work-based learning in Europe: Practices and Policy Pointers.*

⁴⁹ Musset, P. (2019). *Improving work-based learning in schools.*

⁵⁰ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

⁵¹ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges.*

⁵² Lee, A.L.L., Black, M.H., Tan, T., Falkmer, T., Girdler, S. (2019). *"I'm destined to ace this": Work experience placement during high school for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

⁵³ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review.*

⁵⁴ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges.*

⁵⁵ Mann, A. (2015). *Key issues in employer engagement in education: why it makes a difference how to deliver at scale.*

⁵⁶ British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience.*

⁵⁷ Mann, A. (2015). *Key issues in employer engagement in education: why it makes a difference how to deliver at scale.*

⁵⁸ Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R., Williams, J. (2000). *School work experience: Young people and the labour market.*

⁵⁹ Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R., Williams, J. (2000). *School work experience: Young people and the labour market.*

tasks.^{60,61} Two studies argue that businesses offer work experience placements primarily out of altruism⁶², and that they do not believe that they stand to benefit from these engagements.⁶³ Importantly, evidence from the DfE's Employer Perspectives survey shows that firm size influences the main types of concerns held by employers. In this survey, smaller businesses were more likely to report that they did not offer work experience because they did not have suitable roles available, or the size of their business prohibited them from taking someone on. Larger businesses were more likely to cite health and safety concerns or prohibitive company policy.⁶⁴

Placement availability

- 3.14** Another challenge for work experience is a **limited availability of placements**. In 2016, only 30% of the 18,028 businesses that responded to the DfE's Employer Perspectives survey reported participating in work experience in the preceding 12 months.⁶⁵ Because of a limited number of employers offering work experience, there is concern among schools over having to compete to secure placements⁶⁶ and having their offer constrained to what is available locally.⁶⁷ In a 2017 English study, 11% of the 543 schools offering work experience placements to students in years 10 and 11 reported that they were unable to accommodate all students due to a lack of available opportunities.⁶⁸ Furthermore, there is significant variation in the number of employers offering work experience across different industries. For example, in 2016, as little as 15% of 1,212 construction businesses offered short-term placements, while 74% of 990 employers in the education sector had done so.⁶⁹ Consequently it was more difficult for schools to take students' sector preferences into account.⁷⁰
- 3.15** Several reviews describe a landmark study of work experience in England by Hatcher and Le Gallais, which finds **class patterns in work experience placements**. The study finds that students from schools with higher average levels of disadvantage were more likely to participate in work experience in 'low status' roles and organisations. Furthermore, some employers were found to prefer hosting students from schools with lower average levels of disadvantage. What is more, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are found to engage in placements with less educational value than those of their peers.⁷¹ Other studies corroborate this, with variations in access to high quality placements tied to students' social and economic circumstances.⁷²

⁶⁰ Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R., Williams, J. (2000). *School work experience: Young people and the labour market*.

⁶¹ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁶² Mann, A. (2015). *Key issues in employer engagement in education: why it makes a difference how to deliver at scale*.

⁶³ Musset, P. (2019). *Improving work-based learning in schools*.

⁶⁴ British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

⁶⁵ British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

⁶⁶ Hillage, J., Kodz, J., Pike, G. (2001). *Pre-16 Work Experience Practice in England: An Evaluation*.

⁶⁷ Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R., Williams, J. (2000). *School work experience: Young people and the labour market*.

⁶⁸ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁶⁹ British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

⁷⁰ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁷¹ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

⁷² British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

3.16 This is exacerbated by a **reliance on students securing their own placements**. Work experience placements are often organised through family connections⁷³ and young people from families with less social capital are less likely to participate in meaningful placements.⁷⁴

Logistics

3.17 Logistics – specifically **location, timing and the increased workload tied to administrative activities** – are important challenges to overcome in delivering work experience. Location is often cited as a major concern, especially for schools in rural areas, which have to contend with a more limited number of employers, lower availability of public transport and higher costs of travelling.⁷⁵ It can be challenging for employers to provide work experience at the point in the year that schools want it.⁷⁶ Moreover, the administrative burden around short workplace placements, especially related to employers' health and safety compliance⁷⁷, can make them more difficult to deliver at scale. Finally, given the number of people involved in organising and carrying out work experience, work-based rather than school-based career learning is comparatively harder to arrange.⁷⁸

⁷³ Musset, P. (2019). *Improving work-based learning in schools*.

⁷⁴ British Youth Council (2018). *Realising the potential of work experience*.

⁷⁵ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁷⁶ Mann, A. (2015). *Key issues in employer engagement in education: why it makes a difference how to deliver at scale*.

⁷⁷ Musset, P. and Kurekova, L.M. (2018). *Working in out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement*.

⁷⁸ European Training Foundation (2013). *Work-based learning: benefits and obstacles*.

4. What impact does work experience deliver?

- 4.1** This section details the impact on students of participating in work experience. It first looks at immediate and short-term impacts, mainly around student feelings and attitudes. Next, it examines longer-term outcomes, both for students in general, and for specific groups (students at risk of becoming NEET, students with low levels of attainment, girls, students with autism spectrum disorder and disadvantaged students).
- 4.2** Our review of the international evidence reveals that there is a need for more high quality research into the impact of work experience placements on students,⁷⁹ especially regarding longer-term education, employment, or personal outcomes.

Immediate and short-term impacts

- 4.3** The evidence shows that **students gain an insight into the world of work through work experience**. In a post-placement survey of English students aged 14 to 16, 80% of 1,034 respondents agreed that work experience had given them a good insight into the world of work.⁸⁰ Similarly, 78% of 13,702 students participating in TET in Finland agreed in a survey that they gained information on working life through the programme.⁸¹ One study shows that this sentiment is shared by teachers; a survey of 712 school staff said ‘understanding the world of work’ was the most important impact of work experience.⁸²
- 4.4** **Work experience can improve young people’s employability skills**, defined as “attributes, skills and knowledge that labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace”.⁸³ In a survey of Australian students who had participated in work experience, 87% of 96 respondents reported that the placement had improved their employability skills (including problem solving, initiative, planning and organisation and self-management), with 22% stating that it improved these skills ‘a great deal’.⁸⁴ Work experience is valuable for improving communication and interpersonal skills: 97% of 712 surveyed staff from English schools and colleges said this.⁸⁵ Another English study found that students who had undertaken work experience improved their ability to work together with other adults, in comparison to students in a control group.⁸⁶
- 4.5** Several studies identify **increased self-confidence** as a major benefit of work experience participation. In a study of the impact of work experience in the UK, increased self-confidence – defined in terms of personal capabilities and the ability to think more maturely and in a wide-ranging way about future career paths – was the most common impact cited by students following

⁷⁹ Musset, P. (2019). *Improving work-based learning in schools*.

⁸⁰ Chandler, N., Ringsell, L. and Lindop, E. (2007). *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*.

⁸¹ Kettunen, J. and Vuorinen, R. (2021). *Practical work-experience period as a student entitlement in Finland*.

⁸² NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁸³ Chandler, N., Ringsell, L. and Lindop, E. (2007) *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*.

⁸⁴ Smith, E. and Green, A. (2005). *How workplace experiences while at school affect career pathways*.

⁸⁵ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁸⁶ Hillage, J., Kodz, J., Pike, G. (2001). *Pre-16 Work Experience Practice in England: An Evaluation*.

their placements.⁸⁷ Analysis of survey data from 446 Australian students corroborates this, identifying an association between increased self-esteem and confidence in future employability.⁸⁸ Mann and colleagues suggest that this is a result of students' ability to **visualise a prospective future**, which they feel more prepared for.⁸⁹

- 4.6** Participation in work experience is shown by many studies to **foster students' positive attitudes towards school and increase motivation to do well in coursework and exams**. One evidence review identifies five UK studies that show the majority of teachers believe work experience has a positive impact on students' motivation.⁹⁰ What is more, students also experience newfound motivation for school: 89% of 15,025 students participating in a UK-wide work experience study agreed that they were more prepared to work hard in their lessons and coursework following their placement.⁹¹ The literature suggests that this effect is a result of work experience placements helping students to contextualise learning and understand how it is important to getting a job.^{92,93} However, one study notes that some students became de-motivated when they did not enjoy their work experience.⁹⁴
- 4.7** By giving them an opportunity to sample different job roles, work experience placements can help to **build students' career awareness**.⁹⁵ In a survey of 126 students undertaking work experience in Australia, roughly 44% of respondents reported that their placement made them consider employment in a new industry or sector for the first time.⁹⁶ Moreover, one UK-based study describes how young people gain a better understanding of industries that they are already familiar with and the type of jobs that are available within them.⁹⁷
- 4.8** One rapid international evidence review (which covers the UK, USA, Canada, Australia) acknowledges the **positive impact of work experience on students' career aspirations**. It identifies several studies in which work experience is found to be linked to increased aspirations, and highlights findings from research in England, which notes that this effect was particularly strong when students were exposed to a range of workplaces.⁹⁸
- 4.9** Work experience is described in the literature as a way of **addressing young people's uncertainty and unrealism around careers**. This matters, Yates and colleagues' influential research highlights, because of the association between uncertainty and unrealism with an

⁸⁷ Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The 'Employer Engagement Cycle' in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults*.

⁸⁸ Smith, P.J., Dalton, J., Dolheguy, R. (2004). *Student experiences of work placement in school-based vocational programs*.

⁸⁹ Mann, A., Dennis, V., Percy, C. (2020). *Career ready? How schools can better prepare for working life in the era of COVID-19*.

⁹⁰ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review*.

⁹¹ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review*.

⁹² NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁹³ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review*.

⁹⁴ Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R., Williams, J. (2000). *School work experience: Young people and the labour market*.

⁹⁵ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

⁹⁶ Smith, E. and Green, A. (2005). *How work experiences while at school affect career pathways*.

⁹⁷ NatCen and SQW (2017). *Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges*.

⁹⁸ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence*.

increased likelihood of becoming NEET as a young adult.⁹⁹ Two evidence reviews discuss the role of work experience in facilitating decision-making about post-school pathways, by helping students to confirm or reject potential career options¹⁰⁰, and providing them with increased agency over employment decisions.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, British research shows that students themselves found that their work experience placement helped them clarify what they want to do and make career-related decisions.¹⁰² This was true even if their experience was negative and deterred them from entering a field that they had previously been interested in.¹⁰³ Notably, one evaluation from the UK finds that fewer students completing work experience placements had ‘no idea’ of their post-16 intentions than those in a control group not undertaking such placements.¹⁰⁴

Longer term impacts

Education

- 4.10** Based on the literature, **the evidence for the impact of work experience on students’ academic attainment is inconclusive.** One study reports the findings from a UK survey, suggesting that teachers (73% of 200 respondents) feel employer engagement increases students’ academic attainment.¹⁰⁵ Beyond survey evidence, though, the evidence base is patchier. One international review identifies four studies that link work experience placements to positive educational outcomes. However, some of the reviewed research investigated programmes comprising of more than one intervention, making it unclear what specific role work experience played.¹⁰⁶ A longitudinal analysis conducted in the UK finds no significant effects of work experience on KS4 outcomes¹⁰⁷, and two reviews note that there is a shortage of high-quality literature investigating such ‘hard outcomes’.^{108,109}
- 4.11** Work experience is described in the literature as having a **generally positive impact on students’ progression to higher education.** Several studies cite surveys of young people aged 19 to 24, reflecting on whether work experience helped their progression to higher education. In one survey, 27% of 773 respondents agreed that a secondary school placement was helpful¹¹⁰, while in another, 19% of 588 respondents said the same of a placement undertaken specifically in years 10 or 11.¹¹¹ One study of students’ written reflections finds employer engagement is of

⁹⁹ Hughes, D., Mann, A., Barnes, S., Baldauf, B., McKeown, R. (2016). *Careers education: International literature review.*

¹⁰⁰ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

¹⁰¹ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review.*

¹⁰² Mann, A. (2012). *Work experience: impact and delivery – insights from the evidence.*

¹⁰³ Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The ‘Employer Engagement Cycle’ in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults.*

¹⁰⁴ Hillage, J., Kodz, J., Pike, G. (2001). *Pre-16 Work Experience Practice in England: An Evaluation.*

¹⁰⁵ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review.*

¹⁰⁶ Hughes, D., Mann, A., Barnes, S., Baldauf, B., McKeown, R. (2016). *Careers education: International literature review.*

¹⁰⁷ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

¹⁰⁸ Mann, A. (2012). *Work experience: impact and delivery – insights from the evidence.*

¹⁰⁹ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

¹¹⁰ Mann, A., Dennis, V., Percy, C. (2020). *Career ready? How schools can better prepare for working life in the era of COVID-19.*

¹¹¹ Mann, A. (2012). *Work experience: impact and delivery – insights from the evidence.*

value at three stages: selecting a degree programme, navigating the admissions process and succeeding in higher education.¹¹² An Australian study supports these findings, showing that a short work experience placement, in comparison with other types of workplace learning, is more closely associated with going to university (although this may reflect the type of students undertaking work experience more than its effects).¹¹³

Employment

4.12 There is **some limited evidence that work experience has a positive effect on labour market progression, although this tends to be based on self-assessment.** The results of several UK surveys of young people aged 19 to 24 reveal that around 20% to 30% of respondents felt that work experience placements undertaken in secondary school were useful in getting a job after completing education.^{114,115,116} Moreover, one study notes that some students experienced a clear progression from an early work experience placement to regular part-time and eventually full-time employment with the same firm.¹¹⁷ That being said, one international study of longitudinal data finds no effect of participation in short work experience placements on economic outcomes, such as the likelihood of being in full time work at age 26.¹¹⁸ What is more, two international reviews argue that there is a lack of studies robustly measuring the effects of work experience participation on young people's employment prospects.^{119,120}

4.13 The literature suggests that **engagement with employers by young people can have a positive effect on pay later in life. However, there is less evidence for this for short work experience placements specifically.** Studies from the US find that learning programmes rich in employer engagement are associated with average earnings up to 25% higher versus a control group.¹²¹ Similarly, analysis from the UK finds that each extra employer contact is significantly associated with an extra £900 per year for full-time employees¹²² and that young adults who recalled four or more work-related activities while at school earned on average 16% more than peers who did not recall any such activities.¹²³ Looking specifically at short work experience placements, however, one international review of longitudinal studies found that there was no evidence of

¹¹² Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The 'Employer Engagement Cycle' in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults.*

¹¹³ Smith, E. and Green, A. (2005). *How work experiences while at school affect career pathways.*

¹¹⁴ Mann, A., Dennis, V., Percy, C. (2020). *Career ready? How schools can better prepare for working life in the era of COVID-19.*

¹¹⁵ Mann, A. (2012). *Work experience: impact and delivery – insights from the evidence.*

¹¹⁶ Mann, A. (2012). *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults.*

¹¹⁷ Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The 'Employer Engagement Cycle' in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults.*

¹¹⁸ Covacevich, C., Mann, A., Santos, C. and Champaud, J. (2021). *Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries.*

¹¹⁹ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

¹²⁰ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

¹²¹ Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The 'Employer Engagement Cycle' in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults.*

¹²² Mann, A. and Percy, C. (2013). *Employer engagement in British secondary education: wage earning outcomes experienced by young adults.*

¹²³ Mann, A. (2012). *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults.*

impact of participating in a short one- to two-week work experience placement on full-time earnings in the USA, Germany, Australia and the UK.¹²⁴

- 4.14 Both employer engagement generally and work experience specifically are shown in the literature to be linked to a reduced likelihood of being NEET in later life.** Analysis of UK survey data from 850 respondents reveals that higher volumes of teenage school-mediated employer contacts were statistically significantly associated with a reduced likelihood (up to 20 percentage points) of becoming NEET¹²⁵, while young adults who recalled four or more such activities at school were five times less likely to become NEET than peers who recalled no such contact.¹²⁶ One UK study of survey data from 1,744 British adults aged 19 to 24 found an association between work experience undertaken while in secondary school with a 45% reduction in the likelihood of becoming NEET.¹²⁷ This result is echoed by longitudinal analysis from Germany, finding that individuals participating in an internship by age 18 are 24% less likely to be NEET at ages 23 to 25.¹²⁸

Personal

- 4.15** In addition to the short-term impact of work experience on young people's short-term confidence and self-esteem, there is some evidence to suggest that **participating in work experience is associated with higher life satisfaction.** An OECD report highlights analysis of longitudinal data from the British Cohort Study, which finds that participation in work experience placements before the age of 16 is significantly and positively associated with higher life satisfaction at the age of 26.¹²⁹

Outcomes for specific groups

- 4.16** Although work experience has been shown to reduce the overall likelihood of young people becoming NEET, the **evidence on the impact of work experience on young people most at risk of becoming NEET is inconclusive.** There is some research from the US suggesting that interventions that have work experience as a component yield positive outcomes. For instance, one study finds that Career Academies, 'schools within schools' organised around one occupation with a specially designed curriculum that includes work experience, have the most consistently positive impact for students most at risk of dropping out of education.¹³⁰ School-to-work (STW) programmes' are found by one study to boost employment and decrease idleness after leaving

¹²⁴ Covacevich, C., Mann, A., Santos, C. and Champaud, J. (2021). *Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries.*

¹²⁵ Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). *The 'Employer Engagement Cycle' in Secondary Education: analysing the testimonies of young British adults.*

¹²⁶ Mann, A. (2012). *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults.*

¹²⁷ Mann, A., Dennis, V., Percy, C. (2020). *Career ready? How schools can better prepare for working life in the era of COVID-19.*

¹²⁸ Covacevich, C., Mann, A., Santos, C. and Champaud, J. (2021). *Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries.*

¹²⁹ OECD, (2021). *Experiencing the workplace: the importance and benefits for teenagers.*

¹³⁰ Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

school for those least likely to go to college.¹³¹ However, the literature identifies a lack of evidence on whether employer engagement helps young people susceptible to becoming NEET progress into education, employment or training.¹³² That said, a participant from a qualitative study argues that employer engagement is the difference between disengaged students' "achieving nothing and beginning to achieve".¹³³

- 4.17** There is **mixed evidence on how participation in work experience brings about outcomes for young people with low levels of attainment.** Findings from a survey show that there is a perception among teachers that placements are effective in increasing the chances that borderline students can successfully achieve five GCSEs at grades A* to C (about 50% of teachers)¹³⁴. This can be due to a potentially positive motivational effect of work experience in reengaging disillusioned learners.¹³⁵ However, outcomes are often unequal. One study finds that work experience is associated with increases in students' personal and social development and motivation in schools with higher GCSE attainment rates.¹³⁶ Concerningly, another study finds that engaging in work experience had a small but statistically significant negative effect on the likelihood of very low attainers achieving a Level 3 qualification.¹³⁷
- 4.18** Some literature suggests that **girls stand to gain from participating in work experience placements.** An international review highlights evidence from the UK, which shows that women, specifically those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, were 5.4% more likely to be in full-time work at 26 if they had undertaken a work placement in their teenage years; this figure rises to 8% for those who had not done any part-time work while in school.¹³⁸ In the US, female students are found to have significantly better labour market outcomes if they had undertaken a work experience placement while in secondary school.¹³⁹ Concerningly, however, a study from Australia found that on average girls spend around half the number of days on placements as boys, and that they are less likely to report feeling that their placements were effective in developing skills and experience for employment. Moreover, the evidence finds that **girls often pick work experience opportunities which reinforce gender-stereotypical trajectories.**¹⁴⁰ This finding is echoed by a study showing that the gender split of participants in work experience in the UK differs depending on the sector. Males are more likely to pursue work experience in sectors like engineering, construction, and information technology; and females are more likely to pursue sports and leisure and health and beauty.¹⁴¹

¹³¹ Mann, A., Rehill, J. and Kashefpakdel, E.T. (2018). *Employer engagement in education: Insights from international evidence for effective practice and future research.*

¹³² Burge, B., Wilson, R. and Smith-Crallan, K. (2012). *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence.*

¹³³ Mann, A. (2012). *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults.*

¹³⁴ Mann, A. (2012). *Work experience: Impact and delivery - insights from the evidence.*

¹³⁵ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

¹³⁶ Hillage, J., Kodz, J., Pike, G. (2001). *Pre-16 Work Experience Practice in England: An Evaluation.*

¹³⁷ Buzzeo, J. and Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?*

¹³⁸ Mann, A., Dennis, V., Percy, C. (2020). *Career ready? How schools can better prepare for working life in the era of COVID-19.*

¹³⁹ Musset, P. (2019). *Improving work-based learning in schools.*

¹⁴⁰ Musset, P. and Kurekova, L.M. (2018). *Working in out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement.*

¹⁴¹ Mann, A. (2012). *Work experience: Impact and delivery - insights from the evidence.*

- 4.19** One study finds that, **through short-term placements, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) gained insight into the workplace and employment** and that their supervisor noted improvements to their communication and social interaction.¹⁴²
- 4.20** Although **work experience has the potential to be especially beneficial for disadvantaged students for reasons explored throughout this report¹⁴³, in practice it is still their non-disadvantaged peers who currently benefit more.** One study reported that there is notable and statistically significant variation in students' perception of value of their placement, with independent school students valuing work experiences placements more highly than students attending non-selective state schools.¹⁴⁴ Another study highlights the results of a survey, which shows that 42% of 79 young adults attending independent schools agreed that their work experience placement was of value to university admission, compared to around a quarter of 530 respondents from non-selective state schools.¹⁴⁵ Finally, one review cites analysis from the US, revealing that students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds stand to gain more from 'informal mentoring' (such as that delivered through work experience) than their more disadvantaged peers, in terms of increased odds of employment in young adulthood.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Lee, A.L.L., Black, M.H., Tan, T., Falkmer, T., Girdler, S. (2019). *"I'm destined to ace this": Work experience placement during high school for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

¹⁴³ Jones, S. (2014). *The role of Work Experience in the UK Higher Education admissions process.*

¹⁴⁴ Mann, A. (2012). *It's who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults.*

¹⁴⁵ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review.*

¹⁴⁶ Dawkins, J. and Mann, A. (2014). *Employer engagement in education: literature review.*

5. Conclusion

- 5.1** The look and feel of work experience in many of the countries featured in this review is similar: it generally lasts for one to two weeks and is completed by students when they are aged between 13 and 16. In some countries work experience is optional; in others it is mandatory. Work experience programmes can be found in both state and private schools, and the motivation for implementing such programmes tends to be the potential for work experience to help students learn more about possible career pathways including specific roles or sectors, develop career-relevant skills such as communication and teamwork, and build work-relevant networks.
- 5.2** There are several challenges when interpreting the evidence base. For example, work experience is one intervention that students participate in as part of a broader set of career-related activities throughout their education. Some studies attempt to isolate its effects; others examine the effect of work experience alongside other interventions. Furthermore, much of the evidence base is correlational rather than causal, limiting the extent to which categorical judgements about work experience's impact can be made. Furthermore, understanding the relative gains for young people at different ages would be illuminating, although evidence containing such comparative analysis is sparse.
- 5.3** Another challenge for this review is that there is limited evidence available post-2020, examining how the pandemic shaped students' access to and experience of work experience. The pandemic necessitated the widespread adoption of online and hybrid modes of teaching. Hybrid and online placements might help address the shortfall in work experience placements. This would be a fruitful avenue for future research to investigate.
- 5.4** That being said, and on the basis of the evidence we have reviewed, it appears work experience is associated with a wide range of benefits for students aged 11 to 16 attending school in developed economies. These benefits span short term gains in students' self-confidence, motivation towards school and career awareness. Work experience is also associated with longer-term benefits, such as improved access to higher education. The evidence is more mixed on the impact of work experience on young people's future employment and pay prospects, although some longitudinal analysis does find positive gains in these respects. Importantly, the evidence indicates that work experience can help stave off negative outcomes for young people, such as their likelihood of becoming NEET.
- 5.5** However, work experience faces strong headwinds. While our review identifies a range of factors that help enable successful work experience including adequate preparation, support and feedback, we also identify a range of barriers. Among the most prevalent barriers is a mismatch between schools' and employers' needs: the former tends to have a relatively rigid timetable; the latter needs flexibility. Furthermore, schools often struggle to locate an adequate number of placements while employers are put off providing work experience because of concerns about the resource needed.
- 5.6** This culminates in students often needing to use their parents' social and professional networks to secure work experience placements. In turn, this typically means that students from more

affluent backgrounds have – on average – access to a wider range of networks across ‘high status’ professions; their disadvantaged peers have, on average, access to smaller networks based across ‘low status’ occupations.

- 5.7** It is disadvantaged students who stand to gain disproportionately from high quality work experience. Yet the potentially liberating power of work experience is currently stymied by stubborn issues of implementation. If this bind can be broken, a far greater proportion of young people completing work experience will find it valuable, and this stands to benefit those most in need of a leg up.

Annex A: Methods

A.1 SQW worked with Speakers for Schools to agree the parameters for the rapid review, which addressed the following research questions:

Q1. What forms of work experience exist for young people aged 11 to 16?

Q2. What outcomes does work experience deliver for the young people participating?

Q3. How does work experience deliver these outcomes?

A.2 At project outset, SQW also consulted three academics – Professor Anthony Mann, Professor Tristram Hooley and Professor Siobhan Neary – on how best to define work experience and literature that might be helpful for the review. These conversations informed the development of the protocol for the literature search, which is outlined in Annex B.

Title and abstract sift

A.3 The literature search returned a total of 527 potentially relevant documents.

A.4 We reviewed the relevance of documents' titles. Documents clearly out of scope for the study were excluded. Documents were excluded where they were a duplicate, or did not focus on:

- Work experience or related activities
- Young people aged 11 to 16
- Countries in geographic Europe (including the UK) or high-income countries outside of Europe.

A.5 We reviewed the 100 most relevant article abstracts.

A.6 If an abstract indicated a document could answer one or more of the research questions, it was marked for potential inclusion in the full text review. We prioritised articles for inclusion in the full text review that had:

- References to marginalised groups (for example, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with disabilities, or who are at risk of becoming NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- A score of 2 or 3 on the NESTA Standards of Evidence¹⁴⁷ (i.e., correlational or causal evidence)
- A post-2010 publication date.

Full text review

A.7 We reviewed 31 articles in full.

¹⁴⁷ Standards of Evidence: an approach that balances the need for evidence with innovation. (n.d.). [online] Available at: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf.

A.8 A structured coding framework was used to extract information from each document using the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA. The types of information extracted during the full text review included the:

- Studies' parameters (for example, population and geography)
- Types of work experience described
- Mechanisms of work experience (how work experience works)
- Impact of work experience (in the immediate and longer term, and on specific groups)
- Enablers and barriers to realising impact
- Strength of evidence, based on the NESTA Standard of Evidence framework.

The evidence base

A.9 Table A-1 provides an overview of the evidence base in terms of authorship, year published, geography, type of activity and strength of evidence.

Table A-1: Overview of the evidence base

Characteristic	Description
Authorship	The evidence base comprised academic, peer-reviewed studies and 'grey literature' including reports by the OECD, European Commission and European Training Foundation
Year published	Most documents (17) dated from 2015 onwards, nine were published between 2010 and 2014, five were published pre-2010
Geography	We reviewed evidence covering the following countries: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Poland, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Korea, South Africa
Type of activity	Work experience was the direct focus of 13 documents. In the other documents it was discussed alongside different forms of employer engagement including apprenticeships
Strength of evidence ¹⁴⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: five documents presented narrative or theoretical evidence • Level 2: 12 studies cited correlational evidence such as interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and surveys, primarily with students, teachers and employers • Level 3: two studies involved the use of a control group • We reviewed seven literature reviews that were not classified using the NESTA framework • It was unclear what level of evidence the remaining studies were.

Source: SQW analysis of documents included in the full text review

¹⁴⁸ Based on the NESTA Standard of Evidence framework - Standards of Evidence: an approach that balances the need for evidence with innovation. (n.d.). [online] Available at: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf.

Annex B: Literature search protocol

Study title	Rapid evidence review of international work experience practices		
Research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What forms of work experience exist for young people aged 11 to 16? • What outcomes does work experience deliver for the young people participating? • How does work experience deliver these outcomes? 		
Period	1982 - present		
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK (including national, home nations) • Europe (including France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Finland) • USA, Australia, Japan, South-Korea 		
Language of publication	English		
Types of document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book • Journal article • Research report • Guidelines, guidance document 		
Databases searched	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAGE • ERIC • JSTORE • EBSCO • GOV.UK • UNICEF • OECD • EUROSTAT 		
Search terms	young people* young adults* youth* teenagers* students* adolescents* pupils* secondary school* high school*	work experience* work visits* job shadowing* business mentoring* placements* work-related learning* work-integrated learning* work-based learning* internships* apprenticeships* taster programmes* bridge programmes*	employer engagement* school-work transition* vocational education* co-ops* career academies*

Note: asterisk denotes the end of the search term

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About us

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SQW

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