Work placements: a call for evidence

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Learning & Work Institute with Fair Train

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Acknowledgements

With thanks to all the individuals and organisations who contributed to the call for evidence, by taking part in a workshop and/or responding to the survey.

Executive summary

Introduction

In 2016, the Government published the Post-16 Skills Plan and outlined intentions to reform technical education in England. The availability of work placements (lasting 1-3 months) for learners on college-based technical routes will be central to the successful delivery of the reforms.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W), in partnership with Fair Train, was commissioned by Department for Education (DfE) to conduct a call for evidence to understand what effective practice in work placements looks like, how current work experience may be increased in scale, how this can be achieved, any challenges to delivery and how to overcome them.

Stakeholders were invited to contribute to the call for evidence through an online survey and three regional workshops. A total of 134 organisations contributed to the call for evidence, including further education (FE) providers, employers, local authorities, and representative and membership organisations.

Key findings

Current practice

FE providers and employers currently provide a combination of work experience opportunities and work placements, although these are not currently at the scale proposed in the Post-16 Skills Plan. The support provided to providers, employers and learners will therefore be crucial to the successful implementation of the reforms.

Contributions to the workshops and survey indicate that considerable numbers of work placements already exist where they are a mandated part of a qualification, for example in childcare, or health and social care. In contrast, in sectors such as construction, and creative industries, work placements tend to be more challenging to source as employers may be sole traders and may not have the capacity to offer a work placement, or may be more difficult for FE providers to engage with. Employers based in rural locations, for example in agriculture, also face additional challenges around safeguarding, transport and additional costs.

Benefits and motivations

Responses to the survey showed that for FE providers the most common benefits of delivering work placements are improved relationships with employers, and improved

learner motivation and destinations. Employers are most likely to be motivated to offer work placements as a way to invest in future talent pipeline and fulfilling their corporate social responsibility. In addition, employers also benefit from work placements as a way to upskill and develop existing staff, which can support them to address skills gaps.

Challenges in delivering technical education work placements

Evidence suggests there are a number of practical issues with providing work placements which need full consideration. Timetabling is already complicated for many providers and could become more so with the introduction and upscaling of work placements. Increasing the scale of work placements will also increase the need for DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks and insurance. Learners undertaking placements in construction may also require PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) or a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card.

Learner readiness for the workplace was a common challenge identified by workshop attendees. Nearly half of FE providers and a quarter of employers responding to the survey also indicated this as a challenge for delivering work placements. The development of employability skills for young people accessing work placements is important. The value of good quality information, advice and guidance was also highlighted - and that this should start as early as possible at school and engage learners, parents/carers and teachers. It was suggested that awareness raising activities would help to reach a wide audience beyond the post-16 sector.

Making implementation a success

FE providers contributing to the survey and workshops stated that they currently commit considerable resource to the coordination and management of work placements. More than four fifths of FE providers responding to the survey indicated that work placements are set up by Work Placement Coordinators who are usually based in a central team. The evidence suggests that further investment will need to be made to increase providers' capacity to successfully engage employers and boost the number and range of work placements offered to the levels described in the Skills Plan. Concerns were raised at the workshops that employers may already experience fatigue as a result of the number of requests they receive from learning providers, and that a more coordinated approach will be necessary to ensure this issue is not exacerbated.

In addition to an increase in resources, workshop attendees called for a nationally mandated set of standards and guidance for implementation, moderation and assessment of work placements. This would ensure a consistent approach across the country and ensure parity of learning for young people. Guidance would also need to support employers to understand the links and differences between technical education and other programmes, such as apprenticeships. Queries were raised in the stakeholder

events about whether employers would have the capacity to absorb learners on work placements in addition to apprentices, particularly following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy.

Considerations

Based on the evidence gathered, the following considerations are made for the successful implementation and upscaling of work placements. Due to the scope of the call for evidence, these suggestions focus on ways the Government and its agencies can facilitate and support FE providers and employers to deliver work placements. The workshops raised concerns that employers may already experience fatigue as a result of the number of requests they receive from learning providers, and that a more coordinated approach will be necessary to ensure this issue is not exacerbated. Although the majority of information received was from providers, responses gathered from employers and their representative organisations suggest a need to consider further actions necessary to support employers to provide work placements. Effective practice and delivery will of course also require the post-16 education sector, including sector bodies, to raise the profile of and engage employers in technical education.

1. Contributors to the call for evidence requested that DfE publish guidance for FE providers and employers to ensure consistency of practice in the delivery of work placements. They suggest guidance to include:

   - Structure and content of work placements.

   - Assessment of work placements (for example, regular review meetings, personal learning plans/portfolios to evidence work) with learners and employers.

   - Quality assurance standards and assessment of work placement provision.

   - Requirements of the provider and employer in the set-up and delivery of work placements.

   - Funding requirements and arrangements.

   - Case studies of good practice, providing detail of how the work placement is set up, managed and how any challenges are overcome.

2. Responses to this call for evidence suggest that national level awareness raising activities, to engage a wide audience, including schools, young people, parents/carers, employers and the FE sector would be welcomed by stakeholders. This could include case studies to highlight successes of individuals and benefits to employers. There could also be case studies of employer engagement with providers and upscaling work placement activity. While activities should aim to

raise awareness of opportunities in technical education, this should be an integral part of a wider careers strategy.

3. Evidence from the survey and workshops suggest that Government should consider increased investment in post-16 education to support FE providers to increase their resource to source, set up, manage and evaluate work placements. Additional investment could contribute towards:

- Boosting the number of staff involved in coordinating work placements.

- A provider support programme, including staff development on engaging employers in the full range of technical education programmes, including the delivery of work placements and apprenticeships.

- Digital systems to facilitate the coordination of work placements, including tracking information about employers and learner progress.

- Other costs relating to work placements, for example, DBS checks, PPE, uniform/clothing, transport.

Introduction

In 2016, the Government announced plans to reform technical education in England. The Post-16 Skills Plan[1] outlines intention to develop a framework to help support young people and adults into sustainable skilled employment. The availability of work placements (lasting 1-3 months) for learners on college-based technical routes will be central to the successful delivery of the reforms.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W), in partnership with Fair Train, was commissioned by Department for Education (DfE) to conduct a call for evidence to understand what effective practice in work placements looks like, how current work experience may be increased in scale, how this can be achieved, and the challenges to delivery. The call for evidence provided an opportunity for providers and employers to help inform and influence future policy and practice.

Stakeholders were invited to contribute to the call for evidence through an online survey and three regional workshops. The call was open to further education (FE) providers and employers with a range of experiences in delivering work placements, as well as wider stakeholders with an interest in the reforms. A total of 134 organisations contributed to the call for evidence, via the survey and workshops, including FE providers, employers, local authorities, and representative and membership organisations. This report presents the findings from the call for evidence and provides considerations for the successful implementation and upscaling of work placements.

Policy context

A report from the Independent Panel on Technical Education[2] led by Lord Sainsbury recommended reform of the skills system and technical education to ensure they are more orientated towards the needs of the labour market. On 8 July 2016, the Post-16 Skills Plan was published. This accepted each of Lord Sainsbury's recommendations, where possible within budget constraints, and outlined the government's plans to reform technical education and develop a framework to support young people and adults into sustainable skilled employment and meet the needs of the economy.

Reform of the skills system presents a significant challenge. The aim is to deliver more highly skilled people who are trained effectively, in order to grow the economy and raise productivity, ensuring prosperity and security for individuals. After studying core academic subjects until at least age 16, young people will be presented with two options;

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[1] Post-16 Skills Plan
[2] Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education

academic or technical. The technical option will prepare individuals for skilled employment which requires technical knowledge and practical skills valued by industry. It will cover college-based and employment-based (apprenticeship) education, building on recent apprenticeship reforms.

A reformed technical education system will require a strong network of post-16 providers who, along with employers, will take ownership of the vision set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan. Employers will be at the heart of this system and will take the lead in setting standards. Providers and employers will work much more closely together. There will be a common framework of 15 routes across technical education, delivered in either a college or apprenticeship setting.

Essential to the delivery of these reforms is the availability of work placements for learners on college-based technical routes. Work placements offer the opportunity for learners to gain practical occupational skills and behaviours, which are difficult to learn in an educational setting.

Work placements available through technical education routes will be structured placements of up to three months, with an employer in an industry relevant to the learner's study. This will represent a major change to the current post-16 system where work placements of a significant length are not commonplace.

Methodology

The call for evidence was designed to gather information about:

- the extent to which work placements are currently delivered across the 11 college-based technical routes;
- how work placements are designed and delivered, including the roles and responsibilities of FE providers and employers;
- benefits and possible challenges of delivering work placements;
- key components of effective, high quality work placements; and
- the support that needs to be in place for implementing/upscaling[3] work placements.

The call for evidence was administered via an online survey, which was launched on 13th January and open for one month. Contributions were sought from a range of stakeholders with different levels of experience of delivering work placements, including: those who currently deliver work placements of one month or longer; those who provide work experience which could be increased in scale; those who have offered them in the past but have stopped; and those who have not offered work placements before. The call was disseminated by L&W and Fair Train through a range of channels. These included a news story on the L&W website[4], email broadcasts and e-newsletters, communications via provider and employer representative bodies, as well as Twitter and other social media.

Evidence was also gathered through three workshops held in London, Leicester and Sheffield. These half-day events provided an opportunity for stakeholders to learn more about the Post-16 Skills Plan and the role of work placements, as well as to share practice and their views on the reforms. Group discussions were structured around specific questions.

Respondent profile

A total of 101 responses were received to the online survey, with 64 from FE providers and 18 from employers. 19 responses were received from wider stakeholders, including provider and employer representative/membership organisations, local authorities, a trade union and an awarding organisation.

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[3] 'Upscaling' in this context means increasing the volume of work placements, as well as upscaling the length of shorter work experience opportunities.
[4] Story on L&W website

The majority of responses from FE providers were from general FE colleges (see Table 1 below). Other provider types included independent training providers (ITPs) (13), land-based colleges (4), local authorities (4), third sector organisations (4) and a sixth-form college. The majority of responses were submitted by senior leaders and managers of organisations, with 28 out of 64 of the responses from the CEO/Director/Principal.

Table 1: Responses by type of FE provider

Provider type	Number
General FE College	35
Independent Training Provider	13
Land-based College	4
Local Authority	4
Third Sector	4
Sixth-form College	1
Other	3

Base: all FE providers = 64

Responses were received from employers working in a range of sectors (see Table 2 below), with five employers representing health and social work. The majority (11 out of 18) responses were received from larger employers with 1,000 or more members of staff.

Table 2: Responses by employer sector

Employer sector	Number
Health and social work	5
Business services	2
Construction	2
Public administration	2
Agriculture	1
Arts and other services	1
Education	1
Electricity, gas and water	1
Hotels and restaurants	1
Transport and communications	1
Wholesale and retail	1

Base: All employers = 18

Due to the methodological approach, the participants were self-selecting and so potentially biased towards stakeholders who are most likely to be engaged with the policy reforms. The responses therefore only provide an indication of the practices and attitudes of FE providers and employers and may not be representative of the views of stakeholder views more generally.

Findings

Current practice

Provision of work placements

All respondents were provided with a definition of work placements and work experience. Background information issued to support this call for evidence, defined work placements as lasting for at least one to three months, with an employer in an industry relevant to the learner's study, and work experience, as shorter in duration, typically lasting for one to two weeks. The vast majority of FE providers (59 out of 64) and employers (16 out of 18) responding to the online survey currently deliver work experience opportunities. Of those who do, the majority indicated that these could be scaled up to meet the requirements for work placements.

Similarly, most of the FE providers (56) and employers (15) responding to the survey indicated that they currently deliver work placements (see Table 3). Only one provider and one employer reported that their organisation used to deliver work placements but had now stopped doing so. Seven providers and two employers had no experience of delivering work placements.

Table 3: Experience of delivering work placements

Experience of delivering work placements	Number of providers	Number of employers
Currently deliver work placements	56	15
Used to deliver work placements but have stopped	1	1
Not delivered work placements before but have considered it	3	2
Not delivered work placements before and have not considered it	4	0

Base: all FE providers (64) and employers (18)

Evidence gathered through the stakeholder workshops suggested that while many providers offer a mix of work experience and work placements, this is not at the scale proposed in the reforms.

Survey respondents most commonly deliver work placements as part of Childcare and Education, and Business and Administrative courses, followed by Health and Science (see Table 4 below). The results suggest that work placements are least likely to be delivered as part of Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care, or Legal, Finance and Accounting courses. Other areas where work placements are currently delivered include logistics, retail, social care, sports, and public services.

Table 4: Subject areas work placements are currently delivered in

Subject area	Number of providers	Number of employers
Childcare and Education	33	3
Business and Administrative	24	13
Health and Science	24	6
Catering and Hospitality	20	3
Construction	18	7
Engineering and Manufacturing	18	4
Creative and Design	17	4
Hair and Beauty	17	0
Digital	16	3
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care	11	0
Legal, Finance and Accounting	9	5
Other	8	3

Base: All providers (56) and employers (15) who deliver work placements.

Note: Respondents could select all that apply.

Feedback from the stakeholder workshops reflected that work placements are predominantly delivered where they are a mandated part of a course, such as Childcare or Health & Social Care. Providers find it more challenging to offer work placements in 'niche' markets, such as the creative industries, as employers tend to be sole traders and do not have the capacity to take on a learner, or there are too many obstacles around safeguarding and/or health and safety. In addition, where providers do have contacts with employers in niche areas, they may only have links with one or two, therefore meaning that the volume of placements per employer would need to be very high if all learners on the course were offered a placement.

Providers who currently deliver work placements were asked to state the number of learners who will participate in a work placement as part of their course in 2016/17 (see results in Table 5). The median number of learners is 500. The average (median) number of work placements delivered by employers each year is 23.

Just over half (30 out of 56) of providers reported that the number of work placements delivered by their institution had changed in recent years, with the majority indicating that the number of work placements had increased. The results suggest that the number of

work placements has particularly increased in Digital, and Engineering and Manufacturing.

Table 5: Number of learners who will participate in a work placement each year

Number of learners	Number of providers	Number of employers
1 – 49	6	10
50 - 99	3	1
100-499	14	3
500-999	12	0
1,000 – 1,999	9	0
2,000 and over	7	1

Base: providers (51) and employers (15) who provide work placements

Nearly three quarters (41 out of 56) of providers delivering work placements indicated that learners complete work placements with only one employer. The length and structure of these tend to vary across providers, employers and curriculum areas (see Tables 6 and 7 overleaf). Survey responses indicated that work placements are most likely to be delivered as a single block of time towards the end of a course or by releasing learners for a limited time each week. Feedback gathered at the stakeholder workshops suggested that a day release model was most commonly adopted, and that placements delivered as one block of time were shorter in length (one to two weeks). Views were mixed as to whether day release or delivering a work placement in a single period of time are more effective for the learner. One advantage of a longer single placement is that it allows the student to engage in specific project based work.

Responses to the survey indicate that work placements of one, two and three months are currently delivered, with a small number of placements lasting longer than this. The longest placements, lasting more than three months, are most likely to be delivered as part of Childcare and Education qualifications. Other subject areas with work placements of this length include: Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care; Business and Administrative; Catering and Hospitality; Hair and Beauty; and Health and Science. The survey results suggest that the length of work placements in Construction, Creative and Design, Digital, and Engineering and Manufacturing last no more than one month.

Table 6: Structure of work placements

Work placement structure	Number of providers	Number of employers
Work placements occur in a single period of time, towards the beginning of the course	1	7
Work placements occur in a single period of time, towards the middle of the course	5	1
Work placements occur in a single period of time, towards the end of the course	8	3
Learners are released for a limited period of time each week	8	8
The structure of work placements varies across curriculum areas/occupation	31	N/A
Other	3	2

Base: All providers (56) and employers (15) who deliver work placements.

Table 7: Length of work placements

Work placement length	Number of providers	Number of employers
1 month	7	1
2 months	3	4
3 months	8	0
More than 3 months	1	2
Length of work placement varies depending on curriculum area/occupation	34	8
Don't know	3	N/A

Base: All providers (56) and employers (15) who deliver work placements.

Project-based work placements

Volleyball England offers work placements focused on specific projects in a range of roles, including sports development, business and finance, marketing, and design. The opportunities are coordinated by the Business Services Coordinator who works with an informal network of general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and universities to identify learners. In addition to this, some learners contact Volleyball England independently, who then become ambassadors for the programme and promote the opportunities through word of mouth. Around 20 work placements are delivered each year and the structure of these vary, either lasting 6 weeks completed in one block of time, or 1-2 days across 2-5 months. Learners on placement will usually work independently, but with a lot of support, which is provided through a standardised induction, a line manager who assigns and reviews work, and a buddy who provides informal support. The content of the work placement is based on organisational need and priorities at the time, so learners make a valuable contribution to the organisation's work. Volleyball England has benefited from work placements because of the value of man hours gained, which frees up management time and gives existing staff experience in supervision and/or management. Learners also bring new ideas to the organisation, for example, one learner on placement worked on the marketing of the organisation's annual awards and suggested including pen portraits of nominees in the programme, which had never been done before but was very popular with the nominees and attendees. Another young person was working on a programme aimed at engaging more children and adults to play beach volleyball. One facility worked with deaf participants so the intern researched good practice guidance on coaching deaf participants, which he was then able to share with others. Volleyball England see work placements as an investment in their talent pipeline and keep in touch with learners after the placement. The organisation overall is moving towards a project-based way of working so there is scope to potentially increase the number of work placements they offer.

Nearly three quarters (41) of providers delivering work placements reported that completion of a work placement currently contributes to learners' overall assessment. Respondents explained that for some courses, such as those in retail, customer service, health and social care, a work placement is a mandated part of the course and must be passed in order to achieve the qualification.

Approaches to delivery

Employer engagement

Just over three quarters (43 out of 56) of providers currently offering work placements have a strategy in place for doing so, the development of which usually sits at a senior level within the organisation, for example, head of department or executive officer. The

strategy is often part of a wider plan for employer engagement and/or apprenticeships, although this is not always the case. Implementation of the strategy also sits with staff at a senior level, for example a director of quality or curriculum area, the principal/CEO, and/or college governors.

Providers delivering work placements were asked how straightforward they found it to engage new employers to deliver work placements. Over half (34) find this very or quite straightforward. However, the results also indicate that nearly a third (17) of providers do not find this very straightforward, with five reporting that they do not find it at all straightforward to engage new employers. Of the providers who do not currently deliver work placements, the most common reason for this was difficulties in engaging employers who were willing/able to provide placements.

Qualitative responses to the survey show that providers employ a range of methods for engaging with new employers, including cold calling, hosting networking events and industry days, and getting involved in local employment forums. One general FE college explained that they invite employers to work with them to shape the curriculum to ensure it is fit-for-purpose. Some have dedicated teams, others rely on tutors or the students to identify opportunities. There is no standard approach to engagement and this greatly depends on the organisation, locality and existing relationships.

Providers frequently cited the need to work with employers who are engaged in apprenticeships, as they may be more amenable to accepting a work placement learner. One respondent highlighted that this would give them access to 400 employers. Once an employer has been engaged, respondents emphasised the importance of regular communication and provision of high quality support in setting up the placements.

> *'Work experience advisors and faculty teams work closely with employers to advise, guide and support them in enabling them to deliver high quality, meaningful work experience opportunities that will enable employers to potentially identify future new talent for their business. Support is given in preparing job descriptions, setting up interviews, trades tests, etc.'*
>
> (General FE College)

Responses from employers show they work with a range of provider types to deliver work placements, the most common of which is general FE colleges (12 out of 15), followed by sixth-form colleges (10) (Table 8). Employers also deliver work placements with independent training providers (9), universities (8), schools (8), local authorities (6), third sector organisations (5) and specialist designated institutions (3).

Table 8: Types of providers employers work with to deliver work placements

Provider type	Number
General FE college	12
Sixth-form college	10
Independent Training provider	9
University	8
School	8
Local Authority	6
Third Sector Organisation	5
Specialist Designated Institution	3
Other	1

Base: All employers who provide work placements = 15
Note: Respondents could select all that apply

As Table 9 below shows, the majority of employers believe that the providers they work with are effective at delivering work placements. Twelve (out of 15) employers indicated that providers are very effective at identifying the right candidate for the placements and quite or very effective at monitoring learners on placements. Eleven employers reported that providers are quite or very effective at setting up work placements, supporting learners and assessing their progress.

Table 9: Effectiveness of providers in setting up and supporting work placements

Aspect of work placement support	Very effective	Quite effective	Not very effective	Not at all effective	Not applicable
Setting up work placements	1	10	3	0	1
Identifying the right candidates for work placements	12	0	3	0	0
Supporting learners on work placements	3	8	3	1	0
Monitoring learners on work placements	2	10	2	1	0
Assessing the progress of learners on work placements	2	9	3	1	0

Base: All employers who provide work placements = 15

Supporting and monitoring work placements

More than four fifths (48) of FE providers responding to the survey indicated that work placements are set up by Work Placement Coordinators who are usually based in a central team (see Table 10). Responses suggest that providers employ an average of three coordinators[5], and ITPs were more likely to report a higher number of coordinators on average than general FE colleges. Teaching staff are also often involved in organising work placements, with two fifths (24) of providers reporting this.

Around one third (18) of providers responding to the survey said that learners are involved in setting up work placements. This is supported by the evidence gathered from the workshops, where some providers said they encourage, or rely on, their learners to self-source placements. One advantage of this approach is that learners gain a sense of ownership, which in turn can encourage them to be committed to the placement. However, providers reflected that this approach depends on the learners' contacts, which may put learners from a socially or economically deprived background at a disadvantage.

Table 10: People involved in setting up work placements

Groups of people	Number of providers	Median number of staff
Work placement coordinators	48	3
Teachers/tutors/trainers/lecturers	24	23
Curriculum managers	14	5
Learners	18	N/A
A contracted external organisation	6	N/A
Others	3	N/A

Base: All providers who deliver work placements = 56
Note: Respondents could select all that apply

The majority (9 out of 15) of employers stated that they work with learning providers to develop the content of work placements. Most employers (12) also reported that there are specific health and safety issues that have to be considered when setting up a placement. These are usually negotiated by carrying out a risk assessment followed by a discussion with the provider to ensure that learners only carry out tasks that are relevant and appropriate for them.

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[5] There was great variation in the number of staff given by respondents. The standard deviation for each are 6.6 for work placement coordinators; 58.7 for teaching staff; and 5.1 for curriculum managers.

Learning providers and employers are both involved in supporting and monitoring learners while they are on work placements. From the provider side, this is most commonly done by work placement coordinators, but also by teaching staff and assessors. Providers have developed approaches for monitoring work placements that meet their needs and circumstances. Methods range from more formal work placement log books, personal development plans, evaluation forms, observation visits, to informal phone calls, reflective journals and collaborative workshops. Some providers make use of electronic systems, such as ProMonitor, to track progress.

From the employer point of view, learner performance and progress is most likely to be reviewed by line managers and/or mentors. As with providers, employers cited using tools such as work placement booklets, individual learning plans, and portfolios. Employers explained that they expect ongoing support from learning providers to include regular communication and responsiveness to any issues that arise. Aligned to this, employers see value in having an agreed clear structure and goals, along with information about the learner before the placement commences.

Resources

In addition to staff time, learning providers identified a range of other tasks that incurred costs in the delivery of work placements, the most common of which included:

- Health and safety checks and training.

- DBS checks for learners to attend certain placements, and for employers to host learners under 18.

- Cost of industry requirements such as CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) cards and PPE (Personal Protective Equipment).

- Travel expenses for learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who are in rural locations.

- Travel expenses of staff undertaking learner review/assessment and employer liaison.

- Specialist services for learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), for example British Sign Language interpreter.

- Administration costs.

- Developing databases and other tools to manage information and track progress.

- Hosting and organising employer briefings and engagement sessions.

Other less common costs included childcare, clothing for interviews and lunch subsidies.

Land-based colleges also highlighted significant costs associated with supervisors carrying out employer visits. Due to the rural locations in which most employers are

based, it can often take a supervisor a full working day to carry out one site visit, which is a cost both in terms of time and mileage. One land-based college reported that they lose money offering work placements due to the resource needed for setting up and monitoring.

Evaluation of work placements

The majority of providers and employers who currently deliver work placements reported that they have evaluated the effectiveness of these. Providers explained that evaluation tends to focus on individual learners, drawing on a combination of 360-degree feedback, log books, exit interviews, self-evaluation reports, focus groups and/or online surveys. Some providers use a mix of these methods to try and gain a comprehensive insight, whilst others use one or two methods. Some responses highlighted providers that they consider the wider impact of the placements, for example by analysing destination data, calculating social return on investment (SROI), or by inviting external benchmarking. Providers use evaluation findings to refine the work placement process at a strategic level, for example increasing the capacity of an employer to host placements through fostering good relationships, or introducing new steps into the process (such as pre-screening learners). For example, one FE college explained:

> *'An annual impact report is produced. This is created by individual learner level and shows how the numbers of learners accessing placement have increased. Diaries are a valuable source of learner and employer feedback and there is evidence to support job offers as a result of work experience.'*
>
> (General FE college)

Employers suggest that they evaluate work placements in terms of the contribution to the business needs, meeting corporate social responsibilities and economic benefit. This is a more internal approach than that taken by providers and perhaps reflects the motivations of employers to engage in work placements. Employers have used evaluation to develop case studies and establish good practice for supporting future placements and selecting candidates. Evaluation can also allow a business case to be developed, which may increase the number of placements which can be provided. One employer explained:

> *'[Work placements are] evaluated by reference to the business' corporate social responsibility - putting a value on the economic benefit to the local community as well as the PR value to the business… It is about having a strong and continuous talent pipeline from which to select new recruits. This includes a demonstrably higher retention rate that comes from young people who have been through a work placement prior to being offered a permanent job after the placement has been concluded.'*
>
> (Employer)

Supporting learners with special educational needs and disabilities

Around three quarters (43) providers indicated that they deliver work placements for learners with SEND. Responses from providers of all types reflected that learners with SEND require a personalised approach – there cannot be a one size fits all approach – and this brings an additional cost in terms of finance and resource. ITPs more frequently said that they will use third sector organisations either to provide support or to provide the placement as their ethos may be more suitable to someone with additional needs. The majority of responses referenced the provision of individual support from a personal support tutor/assistant, job coach or a learning support practitioner, who helps them attend the placement. There is increased awareness of the need for specialised risk assessments, more specialised placement matching (not all employers are capable of hosting a learner with SEND) and increased monitoring throughout the placement. There may also be additional costs relating to specialised transport or specialised equipment to enable the learner to participate fully.

Work placements for learners with SEND

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust runs a range of programmes of work placements and work experience opportunities. The Trust is delivering Project SEARCH aimed at young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities transitioning from education to employment. The programme is in its fifth year and provides an average of 10 placements each year in a range of occupations, including administration, clinical support, portering and catering. Brookfields School, a Specialist SEN School, is the Licence holder for the Trust's Project SEARCH. They work in partnership with Reading College, Ways into Work, Elevate and the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to identify suitable students to take part in the programme. Roles are tailored to the individuals on placement and support is provided through a supervisor/mentor and a job coach. Individuals who complete a placement are often offered a job opportunity.

The Trust also offers wider work experience opportunities for young people and unemployed adults in the local area, overseen by the Widening Participation Officer. As well as benefiting the individuals taking part, these are viewed by the Trust as an effective way to diversify the workforce and ensure the profile of staff reflects the local community. Benefits experienced include a higher profile of the Trust as a good employer, developing the skills of existing staff, and boosting staff morale.

Benefits and motivations

Learning providers

FE providers with experience of delivering work placements were asked to indicate from a list the benefits their organisation has experienced as a result (see Table 11 below). The benefit most commonly identified was 'Improved relationships with employers' (49 out of 56), closely followed by 'Improved learner motivation' (46). In addition, the majority of respondents reported that work placements had improved learner destinations (35) and improved learner satisfaction (31). Providers were least likely to state that cost savings or efficiencies had been made as a result of delivering work placements. Only 3 organisations said that they had not experienced any benefits.

Providers who have no experience of delivering work placements were most likely to say they could be motivated by improved relationships with employers, improved employer satisfaction and improved learner destinations.

Table 11: Benefits experienced by providers

Benefits	Number
Improved relationships with employers	49
Improved learner motivation	46
Improved learner destinations	35
Improved Learner satisfaction	31
Improved employer satisfaction	25
Improved learner attendance	24
Improved retention rates	21
Improved achievement rates	21
Improved completion rates	18
Cost savings/efficiencies	2
The organisation has not experienced any benefits	3

Base: All providers who deliver work placements or used to = 57
Note: Respondents could select all that apply

Improving learner destinations

Engineering Development Trust (EDT) is a third sector provider that delivers over 40,000 STEM experiences each year for young people aged 9-21 years. Through a range of work-related learning schemes, EDT provides a mix of industrial placements, industry-led projects and taster courses. As a result of one of their industry led projects delivered with engineering companies, 77% of their alumni have secured their first job with a STEM employer (rising to over 80% amongst female alumni).

Providers identified a range of wider benefits. For example, respondents highlighted that delivering work experience opportunities and work placements has enabled them to build reputation as a reputable partner, opening up pathways for further partnership working across the provider as a whole.

> *'Our learners are better prepared to enter the industries we serve so that we build a reputation for highly skilled graduates who are ready for work.'*
>
> (Land-based college)

Some providers reported that their staff have been able to update their knowledge of different sectors by carrying out employer visits. These can provide valuable opportunities for continuing professional development and informs teaching practices. Some providers also gave examples of work placements leading to an increase in the take up of apprenticeships among learners.

Providing a route to apprenticeships

Milton Keynes College has developed and piloted a 'Pathways to Apprenticeships' programme in Engineering. This gives learners who are planning to do an apprenticeship the opportunity to participate in work experience prior to committing to a specific programme or employer. This has also proved beneficial to employers, who can select their future apprentices from those undertaking work experience with them and ensure that the match is compatible.

Employers

Just over half (8 out of 15) of employers currently delivering work placements reported that work placements are part of their business planning but not integral to it, with a further two indicating that work placements are an integral part of their business planning. Four employers said that work placements are not part of their business planning.

When asked about the main reasons for offering work placements, the vast majority (13) of employers identified 'An investment in future talent pipeline' and 'A sense of corporate social responsibility' as key motivations (Table 12). Employers were also likely to highlight the role of work placements in skills development, with nine reporting that they are motivated by the opportunity to bring new skills to the business and 10 indicating that they can provide training and development opportunities for existing staff. Nine employers said that raising their profile in the local area was a reason for providing placements and six were motivated by the opportunity to boost the number of staff during peak times. Only two providers identified the use of providers' facilities as a reason to engage with work placements.

Table 12: Main reasons business offers work placements

Reason for offering work placements	Number
An investment in our future talent pipeline	13
A sense of corporate social responsibility	13
To provide training/development opportunities for our existing staff	10
To raise the profile of our business in the local area	9
To bring new skills to the business	9
To provide us with additional staff at peak times	6
To provide us with access to providers' facilities	2

Base: All employers who deliver work placements = 15
Note: Respondents could select all that apply

Employers with experience of offering work placements were also asked to select from a list the benefits they have experienced as a result of delivering work placements. The benefit most commonly identified was that existing staff have developed their knowledge and skills (11) (Table 13 below). This was closely followed by learners bringing new skills and knowledge to the business and raising the profile of the business locally (10). Just over half (9) of employers responding indicated that work placements had increased their capacity at peak times and six said they were better able to recruit staff.

Table 13: Benefits experienced by employers

Benefits	Number
Our existing staff have developed their knowledge and skills	11
Learners on work placements have brought new skills and knowledge to the business	10
We have raised the profile of our business in the local area	10
Work placements have provided us with increased capacity at peak times	9
We are better able to recruit staff	6
We have benefited from access to providers' facilities	5
Staff morale has improved	3
Cost savings/efficiencies	3
We have not experienced any benefits	1

Base: All employers who currently deliver work placements or used to = 16
Note: Respondents could select all that apply

Other benefits of delivering work placements included building strong partnerships in their local community, including with learning providers and young people. Employers also commented on the value of using work placements as an opportunity to recruit staff, including apprentices, and to test whether a specific role might be effective as an apprenticeship. Some responses reflected that employers have been able to increase the diversity of their workforce through work placements, and that this is more successful than standard recruitment practices.

> *'We have improved working relationships with schools and providers in the local footprint and there is more awareness of our apprenticeship opportunities.'*
>
> (Employer)

> *'[The business benefits from] the richness in culture that comes from offering work placements to a more diverse group of people than would otherwise have been recruited from the more traditional recruiting policy.'*
>
> (Employer)

The survey responses are supported by the evidence gathered through the workshops. Employer motivations commonly highlighted by participants include: fulfilling corporate social responsibility obligations; attracting people into a more diverse range of careers that may not otherwise be considered; having an additional low-cost resource in the workplace; and addressing skills shortages and challenges posed by an ageing workforce. Overall, substantial work placements are seen as a better investment for

employers than short-term work experience, as they get a return over a longer period of time.

Workshop participants discussed the opportunities for employers to use work placements as trials for future employment. Participants said that, work placements can help learners to establish whether they have chosen the best career path and provide opportunities for them to apply and consolidate their learning in the workplace. Importantly, work placements also allow learners to understand the diversity of roles within an organisation, for example, the business, administration, catering and grounds keeping occupations in the NHS, in addition to healthcare professionals.

Diverse work placement opportunities

Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have been offering work placements since 2010 in a wide range of subject areas, such as administration, catering, construction, engineering and manufacturing, and health. The programme is managed by the Trust Lifelong Learning Lead, who has strategic oversight and works in partnership with 30-40 learning providers. The Trust provides an average of 300 work placements each year to a diverse range of learners, including: learners with learning disabilities and mental health problems; military personnel and veterans; adults who are long-term unemployed; young people not in employment, education or training (NEET); learners on supported internships; learners on traineeships; and young offenders. The content of work placements is tailored to individuals' aspirations and learners are encouraged to visit prior to the placement to see which roles may be of interest. Learners are often guided towards occupations where job opportunities may arise in the near future, in order that placements can lead to a job outcome where this is possible. Work placements are therefore viewed by the Trust as an investment in their future talent pipeline. They also bring new skills into the organisation and provide development opportunities for existing staff, for example, young people often bring knowledge and skills in technology. Looking ahead, the Trust plans to continue to use work placements as a way of increasing the diversity of staff and reaching disenfranchised parts of the community.

Challenges

Current challenges

Providers with experience of delivering work placements were asked to indicate from a list up to three challenges they have experienced as a result of this. The challenge most frequently identified was that the supply of work placements does not meet the demand for them (36 out of 57) (see Table 14 below). This was followed by 'Learner readiness for work placement' (27) and 'Insufficient funding' (23). Respondents who identified funding

as a challenge were asked what additional funding would be put towards, if it were available. Providers explained that the priority would be to invest in increasing staff resource for sourcing, securing and managing work placements. Some providers also said that they would use it to subsidise travel costs of learners or offer incentives to employers.

A third of providers (19) indicated 'engaging employers' as a challenge. Providers also highlighted a number of practical considerations, including: managing work placements and timetabling (16); monitoring learners on work placement (11); health and safety requirements (10); and managing work placements and exams (7). Learner motivation, attendance and retention were also identified as challenges by a minority of providers.

Table 14: Challenges experienced by providers

Challenges	Number
Supply of work placements does not meet demand	36
Learner readiness for work placement	27
Insufficient funding	23
Engaging Employers	19
Managing work placements and timetabling	16
Monitoring learners while on work placement	11
Health and safety requirements	10
Managing work placements during exam periods	7
Learner motivation	6
Learner attendance	5
Learner retention	1
The organisation has not experienced any challenges	2

Base: All providers who deliver work placements or used to = 57
Note: Respondents could select up to 3 challenges

Providers highlighted a number of other practical challenges related to delivering work placements, including:

- Difficulties placing students due to rural location or cross city nature of placements (high cost or lack of availability of public transport).

- Ensuring that students are continually safe on site in areas such as plumbing or construction where it is often a sole trader at a different location each day.

- Difficulty sourcing placements in the creative sector as they tend to operate as sole traders which presents a problem in terms of insurance and safeguarding. To address this issue, one provider explained that they have paired learners with an employer who provides them with a project to complete on college premises, whilst maintaining contact through regular visits to the employer.

- Learners not having the evidence required to get a DBS and therefore unable to start their placement.

- Learners being required to wear a specific dress code, which can present a financial or cultural barrier.

- Sourcing placements for learners with high level needs.

- Losing full-time students to employment or apprenticeships. There is a concern that this consequently registers as a 'fail' against the provider.

- Lack of private sector incentives or will to support work placement programmes.

- Timetabling challenges with delivery and assessments of GCSE maths and English resits.

Land-based colleges reported some specific challenges that they have experienced when delivering work placements. Occupations in the land-based sector carry significant operational dangers and risks and it is generally difficult to find sufficient safe external placements that match the quality and industry standards applied to college commercial activity. This means that learners often receive a better experience via an in-house placement. In some cases, it is also necessary to use college-based commercial opportunities for high needs learners, or those who need more time to develop their technical skills. In addition, many of the employers used by land-based colleges are not on an accessible transport network, which poses an access problem for many learners. It is therefore often more straightforward to offer a college-based placement. Other measures that land-based colleges have taken to address these issues include: employing more work placement coordinators; working closely with the National Land Based College and awarding organisations; and developing policies for annual checks with employers (health & safety, safe guarding training, etc) to ensure that a bank of suitable employers is maintained.

Overcoming health and safety challenges

Asda Logistics Services (ALS) deliver around 20 work placements per year, including business and administrative placements at the Asda Academy and operational placements in depots. The programme is run by the ALS Training Team who work with a range of providers, as well as promoting opportunities at World of Learning events and speaking in schools. In the past, it has been challenging to identify the focus of the placement due to health and safety and risk assessments. To overcome this, the organisation has re-written the risk assessments so that the content of placements is not so restricted and young people can get involved in operational work.

When young people are identified for a placement, they are invited with the learning provider to a tour of the workplace. They also attend an assessment centre, as though they have applied for a job, where they undertake assessments and participate in interviews. The work placement is not dependent on the outcome of the interview or assessments but these provide an opportunity for Asda to provide feedback for future interviews and job applications. Following this, learners receive training, which includes health and safety, as well as their timetable for work. The business is motivated to deliver work placements as a way to build strong community relationships and invest in their talent pipeline. The programme also gives existing staff the opportunity to develop supervision and management skills, as well as helping them to manage their workload. Looking ahead, ALS is keen to build a bigger network of schools and FE colleges to work with across the seven regional areas they are based in. They are also exploring the potential to offer longer work placements and diversify the range of occupations that they provide opportunities in.

Employers with experience of delivering work placements were also asked to indicate up to three challenges that they have experienced as a result (see Table 15 below). Employers commonly reported challenges related to management and resources, including employers identifying staff to manage/mentor learners during their placement (6 out of 16); managing work placements alongside other business activity (4); and cost/affordability (4). A quarter (4) of employers indicated that attracting candidates and finding learners who are ready for the workplace are challenging. One employer stated that ongoing support from the provider was insufficient. Only one employer reported that they had not experienced any challenges as a result of delivering work placements.

Table 15: Challenges experienced by employers

Challenges	Number
Identifying staff who can manage/mentor learners on work placement	6
Managing work placements and ongoing business activity/with other business priorities	4
Cost/affordability	4
We have not been able to attract enough candidates	4
Learner readiness	4
We have not been able to attract appropriate candidates	3
Monitoring learners while on work placement	3
Learner motivation	3
Learner ability to carry out tasks/follow instructions	3
Health and safety requirements	2
Learner attendance	2
Insufficient ongoing support from provider	1
The business has not experienced any challenges	1

Base: all employers who currently deliver work placements or used to = 16
Note: Respondents could select up to 3 challenges

Evidence gathered from the stakeholder workshops highlight the following seven areas of current challenge:

- Employer fatigue/apathy leading to insufficient levels of placement provision. There is a concern that employers are approached to host learners from multiple programmes (including apprenticeships, traineeships, return to work schemes, school work experience, study programmes programme, etc). This risks them feeling overwhelmed by the demand, but can also cause confusion about the differences between the schemes. The post-16 sector is fragmented and one employer can be approached by several providers to host learners enrolled on the same qualification, meaning that the employer could have to manage several different approaches for the same end product.

- Engaging with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who can make up the majority of employers in some areas, particularly rural or small town locations. SMEs can often be reticent to take on a learner out of concerns that they do not have the capacity or resource to look after the learner appropriately, along with issues such as lone working and prohibitive costs of insurance.

- Learners who pose a challenge through a poor attitude, not being 'work ready', having complex or challenging personal situations, or poor maths and English skills.

- School-based careers advice does not always explore the broad range of options and progression routes open to a lerner, resulting in a learner ending up on the wrong route or programme and subsequently not completing or excelling on their course.

- Many learners also work part-time placing restrictions on availability for placements. There was a general consensus that a learner is more likely to succeed if they have supportive and engaged parents/role models who understand the requirements of the programme and will give consent to placements.

- Placement planning can already pose a challenge when having to take into consideration a range of issues, including: balancing classroom based learning with the availability of placements; the requirement of some employers to only take learners at particular points of the year; the lead-in time for engaging new employers, which can be significant and have an impact on timetabling of placements; and the support needs of learners with SEND. Some FE providers feel that they do not have adequate resource to liaise with employers, which consequently limits the pool of work placements on offer.

- Placements breaking down due to poor engagement from the learner, poor management of the placement by the employer, and/or poor communication between the provider and the employer.

- Losing learners to full-time employment as a result of their placement, resulting in a 'fail' being registered against the provider as they have not finished their course.

"As it stands we do not have enough employers able or willing to provide enough work placements for learners. We are going to be asking for more employers to offer longer placements so this is going to be extremely challenging. Obviously good relationships with providers play a role, but there needs to be a clear business benefit for the employer, a lack of bureaucracy in the scheme at the employer end, and the needs of SMEs in particular must be met".

(Trade union)

Future challenges

At the workshops, stakeholders were asked to consider and discuss the challenges that they face in implementing and/or increasing the volume of work placements. Two main areas of challenge were identified by FE providers – placement structure and engaging employers.

There was a consensus among providers that timetabling is already complicated, and will become increasingly so under the new proposals. At present, learners tend to be in the classroom for three days per week and it is considered that it will be a challenge to fit work placements and all the required classroom time into this structure. Added to this, many learners are also taking maths and English qualifications to ensure that they meet basic standards. These are often rigidly timetabled outside of the learners area of specialism, therefore creating a difficulty when it comes to arranging a placement. Providers, through their current experience, know that not all employers can be flexible about when they can take learners (especially some of the larger employers who are also the most likely to host repeat placements) and are concerned that this problem will increase due to the volume of placements they will be expected to find. Providers strongly felt that the increase in requirement for placements will result in increased workloads for their staff and that this should be reflected in funding allocations. An increase in placements means more employer engagement, learner support, and placement management and supervision.

Many of the challenges around engaging employers are expected to continue as the volume of work placements increases. Looking ahead, employer fatigue, engaging SMEs and securing STEM placements are all concerns. An additional concern is the need to ascertain the suitability of workplaces (for example, placements in venues where licencing laws apply and restrict the activities of those under 18).

Many of the challenges faced by employers are structural in nature, for example, concerns around insurance and supervision of young learners (those under 18 years) in the construction industry; increased resource cost of hosting a learner (recruiting a member of staff as a mentor, workspace, PPE, regulatory checks, etc); and/or being concerned about not being able to offer a job/ progression post-placement. A theme running throughout the workshops was the understanding by employers of the link between technical education and apprenticeships, including the apprenticeship levy. Key questions included:

- Will employers have reduced capacity for work placements in light of the apprenticeship levy?

- Will employers be able to use any surplus from the levy to subsidise the cost of work placements?

- Do employers understand the progression routes between technical training and apprenticeships?

Making implementation a success

Effective practice

All survey respondents were asked to describe the key elements of an effective, high quality work placement. The following eight themes were consistently identified across the range of stakeholders:

- An effective matching process to ensure that learners have the best opportunity for success. This could include a screening or pre-placement process, for example an interview or short work trial.

- Flexibility to meet the needs of the learner, employer and scheduling needs of the provider.

- Ensuring learners are prepared for the workplace, for example appropriate clothing, behaviour and expectations of the employer.

- Establishing clear goals before the placement commences, with learners being given specific tasks and objectives that contribute to the real work of the organisation. Learners should have a meaningful experience, the opportunity to apply new skills and knowledge.

- Provision of a mentor in the workplace.

- Regular and ongoing communication between the learner, employer and provider. This includes having a single point of contact at the provider and employer.

- A clear monitoring, assessment and review process, including all necessary risk assessments, which is set prior to the placement commencing and agreed by all parties.

- Promoting progression towards a secure destination, with learners engaged and inspired.

Thoughts on effective work placements include:

'Placements should be matched to meet the employer and young persons needs. Young people should be well briefed and prepared in advance, understanding the employers expectations, journey planned, etc. The employer should have a planned scheme of work for the young person to complete. Need to ensure there is an effective induction with the young person assigned a mentor for the period of work experience. Providers should have a monitoring schedule to ensure that the young person and employer are supported throughout. The placement should be evaluated by all involved and the young person should receive an exit interview so they are able to recognise their strengths and areas for development.'

(Third sector provider)

'A high quality work placement should be developed with the employer, young person, training provider and possibly with the support from parents/guardians. It should be well planned with a clear job description in place for the student so that they can see what they will contribute and establish what skills they are going to learn. High quality placements should take place over 1-3 months for the student to really maximise the opportunity. The student should be visited each month by an assessor to check that the learner is demonstrating the required skills and attributes required by the employer… Targets should be set on an individual learning plan and the learner should be clear on what they need to do to improve further. The placement should end in an interview style process with constructive feedback. This could result in actual employment, a promise of employment once study had finished or constructive feedback that allows the young person to further develop.'

(Local authority)

Support needed

All FE providers responding to the survey were asked what support they thought would be needed for providers to implement the delivery and/or increase the volume of work placements. Just over half (34 out of 64) reported that work placement would need to be coordinated at an institutional level would be needed. Around 2 out of 5 respondents indicated that they would need support developing a centralised system (26) and that regional work placement liaison officers would be beneficial (25).

Providers also suggested a range of other types of support that would be needed, the most common of which were: funding for additional staff or a general increase in funding; sector-specific analysis on the availability of work placements; and changes to study programme bandings to reflect the length of the programme.

Evidence gathered at the stakeholder workshops highlights a number of approaches or initiatives that would support the implementation or upscaling of work placements a success. Participants felt that there should be ownership at a national level of awareness raising activity, which seeks to engage schools, learners and parents about progression routes in a holistic manner. The Gatsby Benchmark project on effective Careers Education[6] was highlighted as good practice. Aligned to this, awareness raising activity on technical education should be aimed at employers, parents and learners and include significant use of social media (similar to the apprenticeships campaign, Get In Go Far[7]), as well as case studies highlighting success.

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[6] The Gatsby Benchmark project: Good Career Guidance
[7] Get in Go Far

It was also held that there should be a nationally mandated set of standards and guidance for implementation, moderation and assessment of work placements. This would ensure a consistent approach across the country and ensure parity of learning for young people. Respondents frequently cited Fair Train's Work Experience Quality Standard[8] as good practice and the Scottish Funding Council has also published guidance for colleges on their Work Placement Standard[9]. Case studies will also help employers understand better the requirements and benefits of offering work placements. One employer highlighted;

> *'Case studies are really important. I think it's important to have some external support to help drive work placements and provide examples of how they can work in practice. Often larger corporations feel that setting up a work experience offer is more hassle than it's worth, which isn't the case at all, but this perception is a massive barrier to the provision of high quality work experience.'*
>
> (Employer)

Across the workshops, participants raised concerns about whether it would be acceptable for work placements to be delivered using 'in house facilities', for example, a hairdresser or restaurant with the FE college providing the classroom based learning. If this was allowed it would offer more opportunities and flexibilities to learners, especially learners with SEND, or for those providers who are struggling to secure placements due to the local employer demographic or rural location.

There was also concern from some participants that demand for placements outweighing supply and that providers should not be penalised if they are unable to secure sufficient work placements where this is out of their control. Similarly, learners should not be disadvantaged if they are unable to obtain a work placement. This risk is perceived to be higher in rural locations and in smaller sectors. There needs to be national guidance on dealing with these scenarios. A general FE provider reflected;

> *'There is a need to take account of rurality….otherwise students' ability to follow technical training at age 16 will be severely limited by the few sectors where placements can be provided locally due to both transport and limited providers within a local economy. If students do not gain the skills across all sectors, not just those which currently dominate, then the local economy will not be in a position to diversify and grow.'*
>
> (General FE college)

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[8] Fair Train Work Experience Quality Standard
[9] Scottish Funding Council: Work Placement Standards for Colleges

At a local level, a key factor in being able to implement the reforms will be for providers to invest in a digital system that can facilitate all aspects of the work placement, including: tracking learner progress; tracking employer responsibilities (for example, insurance and DBS checks); and identifying local intelligence around employment to link placements with skills gaps. This would represent an additional cost to the reforms, but one which would be critical to the smooth management of a significant increase in work placements. This could be aligned with the development of a hub which acts as a central point for employers who are approached to host learner. For example, if a college or school identified the need for a work placement it would approach the hub for contacts and the hub would manage requests to employers. It would also act as a reference point for employers who want to engage in hosting learners by providing straightforward and clear information on the practicalities and realities of hosting a learner. This would go some way to combating employer fatigue and could act as a forum for sharing best practice. Participants also recognised the need to create better links with the apprenticeship programme to improve progression routes and potentially increase placement provision. For example, a local authority explained;

> *'FE providers will be dealing with a large number of students and will need to make sure their staff have the capacity to provide a good employer engagement service. They need to be considering building up a cross-college database of employers used for various departments to ensure the college has a united face in the business sector.'*

<div align="right">(Local authority)</div>

In practice, providers will need to develop a flexible package of work placements across the different technical strands which take into account the learning requirements, employer needs (for example, particular entry points across the calendar year, preference for block or day release placements), and learners' personal requirements (for example, reasonable adjustments, family commitments, English and maths studies). This will be extremely resource intensive and consequently require an increase in staff output, improved curriculum planning where placements are included from the start of the process, as well as continual dialogue between all parties. It will therefore be important that FE providers have clear guidance on requirements so that they can build on existing practice and resources wherever possible. An awarding organisation discussed;

> *'FE providers need clear steering and guidance on what is required from government as part of the new technical education pathways. What could make changing easier for FE providers, was if a framework of skill standards levels was provided, as opposed to 'one size fits all' structure for skills delivery. This would mean that FE providers could continue to use existing training tools and initiatives that they are used to, with a more gradual shift enabled therefore as initiatives*

from private sector and the government come into line over time.'

<div align="right">(Awarding organisation)</div>

There is also a recognition that providers need to improve the matching of employers and learners. This will require upskilling placement coordinators or investing in technology, but this should be seen as an investment as a successful placement leads to improved outcomes and opportunities not just for this learner but for subsequent learners as the employer is more likely to offer a repeat placement. Stakeholders reflected that detailed consideration needs to be given to the transition year, in particular which learners it will be appropriate for, what the goals of the transition year should be and how these might include preparing young people for work placements.

Conclusion

The call for evidence gathered evidence from a diverse range of stakeholders on current practice in the delivery of work placements, the benefits, challenges and potential solutions for the successful implementation of the reforms. Overall, the responses suggest that learning providers and employers welcome the proposals to deliver longer and more structured work placements to support the development of occupational skills that are valued by industry. However, it must also be noted that the sample of participants was self-selecting and therefore may be biased towards those who are already engaged with reforms to technical education and/or those who already effectively engage with employers. While FE providers and employers currently provide a combination of work experience opportunities and work placements, these are not currently at the scale proposed in the Post-16 Skills Plan. The support provided to providers, employers and learners will therefore be crucial to the successful implementation of the reforms.

Work placements can benefit learners, employers and providers. Responses to the survey showed that for FE providers the most common benefits of delivering work placements are improved relationships with employers, and improved learner motivation and destinations. Some respondents highlighted that successful work placements can often lead to apprenticeships and other job opportunities. Employers are most likely to be motivated to offer work placements as a way to invest in future talent pipeline and fulfilling their corporate social responsibility. In addition, employers also benefit from work placements as a way to upskill and develop existing staff, which can support them to address skills gaps.

Contributions to the workshops and survey indicate that considerable numbers of work placements already exist where they are a mandated part of a qualification, for example in childcare, or health and social care. In contrast, in sectors such as construction, and creative industries, work placements tend to be more challenging to source as employers may be sole traders and may not have the capacity to offer a work placement, or may be more difficult for FE providers to engage with. Employers based in rural locations, for example in agriculture, also face additional challenges around safeguarding, transport and additional costs.

The length and structure of work placements vary across providers, employers and curriculum areas. Current models of delivery of work placements include single blocks of time during a course and releasing learners to work with an employer for a limited time each week. Views as to which model was best were mixed, but single blocks were thought to provide greater opportunities to be involved in project-based work.

FE providers contributing to the survey and workshops stated that they currently commit considerable resource to the coordination and management of work placements. More

than four fifths of FE providers responding to the survey indicated that work placements are set up by Work Placement Coordinators who are usually based in a central team. The evidence suggests that further investment will need to be made to increase providers' capacity to successfully engage employers and boost the number and range of work placements offered to the levels described in the Skills Plan. Concerns were raised at the workshops that employers may already experience fatigue as a result of the number of requests they receive from learning providers, and that a more coordinated approach will be necessary to ensure this issue is not exacerbated.

In addition to an increase in resources, workshop attendees called for a nationally mandated set of standards and guidance for implementation, moderation and assessment of work placements. This would ensure a consistent approach across the country and ensure parity of learning for young people. Guidance would also need to support employers to understand the links and differences between technical education and other programmes, such as apprenticeships. Queries were raised in the stakeholder events about whether employers would have the capacity to absorb learners on work placements in addition to apprentices, particularly following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy.

Evidence suggests there are a number of practical issues with providing work placements which need full consideration. Timetabling is already complicated for many providers and could become more so with the introduction and upscaling of work placements. Many learners are also taking English and maths qualifications, which need to be accommodated. Other potential challenges include meeting health and safety requirements, particularly with learners under 18 years and those undertaking placements with smaller employers or at licensed venues. Increasing the scale of work placements will also increase the need for DBS checks and insurance. Learners undertaking placements in construction may also require PPE or a CSCS card.

Learner readiness for the workplace was a common challenge identified by workshop attendees. Nearly half of FE providers and a quarter of employers responding to the survey also indicated this as a challenge for delivering work placements. The development of employability skills for young people accessing work placements is important. The value of good quality information, advice and guidance was also highlighted - and that this should start as early as possible at school and engage learners, parents/carers and teachers. It was suggested that awareness raising activities would help to reach a wide audience beyond the post-16 sector.

Considerations

Based on the evidence gathered, the following considerations are made for the successful implementation and upscaling of work placements. Due to the scope of the call for evidence, these suggestions focus on ways the Government and its agencies can facilitate and support FE providers and employers to deliver work placements. The workshops raised concerns that employers may already experience fatigue as a result of the number of requests they receive from learning providers, and that a more coordinated approach will be necessary to ensure this issue is not exacerbated. Although the majority of information received was from providers, responses gathered from employers and their representative organisations suggest a need to consider further actions necessary to support employers to provide work placements. Effective practice and delivery will of course also require the post-16 education sector, including sector bodies, to raise the profile of and engage employers in technical education.

1. Contributors to the call for evidence requested that DfE publish guidance for FE providers and employers to ensure consistency of practice in the delivery of work placements. They suggest guidance to include:

   - Structure and content of work placements.

   - Assessment of work placements (for example, regular review meetings, personal learning plans/portfolios to evidence work) with learners and employers.

   - Quality assurance standards and assessment of work placement provision.

   - Requirements of the provider and employer in the set-up and delivery of work placements.

   - Funding requirements and arrangements.

   - Case studies of good practice, providing detail of how the work placement is set up, managed and how any challenges are overcome.

2. Responses to this call for evidence suggest that national level awareness raising activities, to engage a wide audience, including schools, young people, parents/carers, employers and the FE sector would be welcomed by stakeholders. This could include case studies to highlight successes of individuals and benefits to employers. There could also be case studies of employer engagement with providers and upscaling work placement activity While activities should aim to raise awareness of opportunities in technical education, this should be an integral part of a wider careers strategy.

3. Evidence from the survey and workshops suggest that Government should consider increased investment in post-16 education to support FE providers to

increase their resource to source, set up, manage and evaluate work placements. Additional investment could contribute towards:

- Boosting the number of staff involved in coordinating work placements.

- A provider support programme, including staff development on engaging employers in the full range of technical education programmes, including the delivery of work placements and apprenticeships.

- Digital systems to facilitate the coordination of work placements, including tracking information about employers and learner progress.

- Other costs relating to work placements, for example, DBS checks, PPE, uniform/clothing, transport.