



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

## **Increased flexibility programme: improving work experience**

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## Introduction

1. Work experience is undertaken by 95% of Key Stage 4 pupils. It may involve a one- or two-week placement at an employer's premises or regular attendance on one or more days each week. Subject to health and safety considerations, pupils carry out similar tasks and duties as regular employees, but with the emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience.

2. Ofsted previously reported on work experience in *Work-related Aspects of the Curriculum in Secondary Schools* (Ofsted, HMI 160, 2000). This new report on work experience is based on evidence from a survey of the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) during the summer term of 2003. The survey included a special focus on work experience, which had three elements:

- nearly 50 pupils from 15 schools in 12 IFP partnerships were visited by HMI or by additional inspectors, accompanied by a guest employer in just under half of the visits
- the questionnaire was completed by more than 1,800 Year 10 pupils in 17 schools that were members of IFP partnerships. The sample included slightly more boys than girls
- over 300 inspection reports were analysed from recent section 10 inspections of secondary schools.

3. The IFP is helping partnerships of schools, colleges and training organisations to provide vocational and work-related alternatives within a diversified curriculum at Key Stage 4. HMI have been visiting IFP partnerships since the launch of the programme in 2002.

4. From September 2004 there will be a statutory requirement for schools to provide work-related learning for all Key Stage 4 pupils. They must plan activities which use the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in work, taking into account the three strands of learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills needed *for* work.

5. In readiness for the statutory changes, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has published *Work-related Learning for all at Key Stage 4: Guidance for Implementation from September 2004* (QCA, 2003). In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has recently revised its guidance. Originally published in 2002, *Vocational and work-related learning at key stage 4: Guidance for managers in schools and their partners in the community* gives advice on managing vocational and work-related learning at Key Stage 4. The new guidance is also available on the DfES website [www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk).

## Main findings

- There are many schools that have developed good practice in the organisation, management and monitoring of work experience. Most pupils feel that work experience enables them to understand the world of work and develop work-related skills. However, around two thirds of employers felt that greater value could be obtained from work experience if pupils were better briefed before they attended. There should be clear learning goals and improved links between the courses and qualifications being undertaken and the work experience activities.
- Most schools have a network of contacts for work experience and employers who willingly support them by providing work placements. Employers are committed to the broad aims of work experience, but many do not fully understand their role, the purpose of the work placement or its contribution to the pupil's programme of study.
- Placements are most effective when pupils are well prepared to get the most from the experience and where employers receive information about both the pupil and the aims of the placement. Effective organisers endeavour to provide clear placement descriptors, agreed with all parties, giving clear guidance to pupils and employers about what to expect. However, the advance organisation and management is inadequate in too many cases.
- Pupils' understanding of the host establishment, its objectives and nature of its core business, organisation and structure is generally satisfactory and often good. Nearly all pupils feel that work experience helps them to understand the world of work and how their employer's business works.
- The development of work-related skills, knowledge and concepts, and key skills is satisfactory overall and often good. The most effective work placements are carefully planned to give pupils opportunities to develop a wide range of new skills and to enhance their social skills. Pupils value the working relationships which develop.
- Work experience is usually effective in developing pupils' understanding of the workplace, supporting their social learning and developing their ability to communicate with adults and to take advice. Supportive employers and employees enable vulnerable pupils to learn a range of skills, helping their confidence and self-esteem. Extended work placements are often highly successful in improving motivation, self-esteem and attendance among pupils who are beginning to reject school.
- Most pupils make a satisfactory record of what they do and learn on work placements but many fail to reflect on or evaluate their experiences. Not all schools convince pupils of the importance of the course log or diary. Some pupils are not aware of planned follow-up activities and they consequently fail to maintain their diaries.
- In most cases, there are few discernible links between the work placement and school or college courses. Even where teachers have planned coursework or other activities that directly link with work experience, pupils'

recording of evidence for later use in courses or for assessment towards a qualification is often unsatisfactory.

- Opportunities are frequently missed to link the work placement with course assignments on vocational courses. When the placement has links with a specific course, pupils use their course diaries more effectively, though few diaries draw pupils' attention to specific learning outcomes for such courses. Other links to learning in school are underdeveloped.
- Although they explore possible career options in school, the majority of pupils on work placement are not well informed about careers within the host organisation or the associated qualifications and training.

## Recommendations

To improve the quality of work experience, schools and other agencies organising work placements should:

- ensure that employers are fully briefed about the wider work-related curriculum, the purposes of work experience, and its relationship to school and college courses and qualifications
- plan appropriate links between work experience and work for General Certificate of Education (GCSE) and other courses, including assessment and accreditation, especially for courses with a vocational element
- prepare pupils to learn as much as possible from work experience, making sure they know what and how to record and what use will be made of their evidence
- make links between careers lessons and work placements, encouraging pupils to find out about training and qualifications related to work in their host businesses and organisations
- debrief pupils at the end of the placement, helping them to reflect on what they have learned.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Recent statutory changes relevant to schools' review of their work-related curriculum are explained in the QCA publication *Work-related Learning for all at Key Stage 4: Guidance for Implementation from September 2004*.

## Context

### Visits to pupils in work placements

6. Nearly 50 pupils from 15 schools in 12 IFP partnerships were visited by HMI and additional inspectors, accompanied by a guest employer in just under half of the visits. In assessing the quality of provision, inspectors were guided by 12 key questions, set out below:

- A. Prior to the placement, how well informed was the pupil about the work placement process and the nature of the business and work involved?
- B. How well is the level of demand/responsibility matched to the pupil's work within a course/towards a qualification?
- C. How well is the pupil developing key skills and learning about the skills, knowledge and concepts applied to the work they are engaged in (including observing/shadowing)?
- D. How effectively does the pupil record, note, evaluate and reflect on what is learnt by the experiences?
- E. How well does the pupil go about collecting and recording evidence about their work experience for use back at school/college/training organisation?
- F. How good is the pupil's understanding of the host establishment, its objectives and nature of its core business, organisation and structure?
- G. To what extent, is the pupil's social learning gaining by working with others and taking some responsibility?
- H. How well informed is the pupil about careers, and the qualifications and training associated to succeed in them, within the host organisation and beyond?
- I. Prior to the pupil arriving, how good was the organisation and management of the placement by the provider and/or Education Business Partnership (EBP), Trident or Connexions?
- J. How well is the education provider monitoring the placement?
- K. How well informed is the host employer about the purposes of the work placement and how it fits in to the pupil's current course?
- L. How well does the pupil (i) communicate with and relate to others? (ii) take responsibility for the work? (iii) respond to guidance, instruction and comment?

7. Half of the pupils were in placements with fewer than ten employees, with only one in ten joining a workforce of 50 or more. Some 60% were on a two-week placement, 20% attended a regular day (or more) of work experience each week. One pupil was effectively on full-time work experience.

8. Securing the placement had involved the pupil or the pupil's family in a third of cases. The school was involved in finding two in five placements, one in eight was organised through a college or the IFP and a quarter had input from an intermediary organisation.

9. Information was available about the courses followed by two thirds of pupils. Half of these pupils were taking at least one of the GCSEs in vocational subjects or a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course. Nearly one pupil in five was taking an NVQ course and one in eight was following a course that emphasised consolidation of basic skills.

## **Pupil questionnaire**

10. Schools involved in IFP inspections in summer 2003 were invited to administer a questionnaire to all their Year 10 pupils. The questionnaire was completed by more than 1,800 pupils in 17 IFP schools. The sample contained one boys' school, the others all being mixed. The sample therefore included slightly more boys than girls.

11. One respondent in six was attending a college or training provider for part of the week. For two thirds of pupils, the pattern of work placement was a two-week block. One in five had completed a one week block and one in twenty had attended a regular day (or more) of work experience each week.

12. Pupils were asked to indicate which GCSE subjects they were taking. Around one in forty pupils reported themselves to be taking no GCSE subjects, with another 2% reporting fewer than five GCSEs. Over 80% of pupils said they were taking seven or more GCSEs (or equivalent), with nearly one in five reporting eleven or more. Just under 40% of pupils reported themselves to be taking at least one applied GCSE in a vocational subject. One pupil in five reported working towards an NVQ or other vocational qualification.

13. More than 40% strongly agreed with the statement 'I can see how school work is useful in the world of work', and a similar number agreed to some extent. However, one in six disagreed with the statement.

## **Secondary school inspection reports**

14. Over 300 inspection reports were analysed from recent section 10 inspections of secondary schools.

15. In nearly all recently inspected schools there is at least a week of work experience in Key Stage 4. Most schools have an established network of contacts for work experience and employers willingly support schools in providing work placements.

16. An increasing number of schools are providing work placements as part of an alternative curriculum for those who find the normal curriculum too demanding or irrelevant in their eyes. Where vocational courses require work experience, it is often provided in placements relevant to the vocational area. In many schools, work experience abroad is a feature of modern foreign languages provision. Other subject-related placements are occasionally seen in physical education, English, and visual and performing arts.

## **Preparation of pupils**

17. In work placement visits, nearly two fifths of pupils were considered to be well informed about the work placement before they started, but more than a quarter of pupils had insufficient advance information. In a fair percentage of schools pupils were expected to find their own placements.

18. One in three pupils strongly agreed with the statement 'Teachers made sure I was well prepared for work experience', and nearly half tended to agree. Just over one



in five disagreed with the statement, with boys being more critical than girls. The most important factor in pupils being well informed was the quality of advance organisation and management by the school, college or work experience organiser.

19. Secondary school inspections indicate that organisation and monitoring are variable in quality, being most effective when the work placement is closely related to a comprehensive work-related learning package or a coherent programme of careers education and guidance. Inspection evidence indicates that many schools carefully prepare their pupils for work experience but are less effective at ensuring that employers fully understand their role, the purpose of the work placement and its contribution to the pupil's programme of study.

### **Features of effective placements**

- Organisers provided the employer with information about both the pupil and the aims of the placement. They endeavoured to provide clear placement descriptors, agreed with all parties, giving clear guidance to pupils and employers about what to expect.
- Pupils had benefited from good preparation sessions for several weeks at school, covering general issues like appearance, co-operation, dress and reliability and how to use the logbook.
- A good job description outlined the experience and pupils had often met the employer in advance and discussed the nature and range of the work. This helped them understand the nature and core business of the host employer.
- Linking the placement with a relevant course at school enhanced the benefit of the placement.
- Pupils had a named contact at the school in case of problems and knew who to report to at the workplace.

*At one school, pupils visit a careers event to prepare for the world of work. They are helped to prepare for work experience by an industry conference which covers such issues as health and safety and personal budgets. They undertake mock interviews and learn how to write curriculum vitae.*

*The careers education and guidance policy in another school is reviewed every two years and linked to other key school priorities. Some subjects build work experience into their schemes of work, for example through speaking and listening exercises in English, in the unit on 'People at Work' in business studies and in coursework in modern foreign languages. Pupils are debriefed on their work experience during citizenship lessons. Work placements are often built into vocational courses and in the best practice extend teaching and learning, the purpose and focus of the placement are clear and understood by all and staff visit the placement to monitor learning.*

## **Matching placements to pupils**

20. The level of demand and responsibility was well matched to the pupil in almost half of the placements visited, but more than a fifth of pupils were placed inappropriately. Careful matching of the pupil to the placement brought a number of dividends. Well-matched pupils had a better understanding of the host establishment and they collected and recorded evidence about their work experience more effectively. There were also benefits in terms of social learning and the extent to which pupils communicated, took responsibility and responded to guidance.

21. In some cases, inadequate procedures for matching placements to meet individual needs meant that pupils gained experience that was not well matched to their career aims or interests. It was difficult for some schools to match pupils to placements because they encouraged or even expected pupils to find their own placements. In some areas, too many schools were seeking placements at the same time.

22. School inspection reports indicate that some schools structure their work experience placements as far as possible to match the career aspirations of pupils, but others provide few opportunities for pupils to gain work experience related to their own aspirations, except in placements directly linked to vocational courses.

23. There was a significant difference in the responses of pupils who attended college for part of their timetables compared to those who did not. Pupils attending college felt more strongly that work experience had helped them understand the world of work, and told them a lot about how the employer's business works. They were also more positive about the quality of preparation and monitoring and were more likely to have tried harder at school.

## Features of effective placements

24. In their visits to placements, inspectors found that some employers offered particularly good support to pupils whose placements were tailored to aptitudes and interests. In the best practice:

- ❑ Placements involve a well-planned and supported variety of activities, providing good opportunities for pupils to work at an appropriate level and progress from basic to more sophisticated tasks.
- ❑ Employers helped pupils to understand how the business worked, how projects are managed and how responsibilities are shared.
- ❑ The level of demand and responsibility was commensurate with pupils' level of study and career ambitions. For vulnerable pupils, such as those with behavioural difficulties, work placements helped them take responsibility and improved their self-esteem.
- ❑ Pupils made connections with what they were learning in GCSE subjects. Pupils taking vocational courses are aware of the learning opportunities in the placement.
- ❑ Pupils received support tailored to their needs. For example, a pupil with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was helped to gain self-control, and a pupil learning English and new to the country was helped with language and certain key skills.
- ❑ In some cases, such as medical placements, where the nature of the work left little opportunity for pupils to take responsibility, the placement had a strong element of work shadowing.
- ❑ In one school, potential veterinary surgeons had work experience placements at a nearby farm where they had hands-on experience of lambing.
- ❑ Another school had replaced work experience by work shadowing to better focus on pupils' intended professional and other careers.

## Key skills and work skills

25. In visits to work placements, nearly half the pupils were taking good advantage of opportunities to develop key skills and learn about the skills, knowledge and concepts applied to the work they were engaged in. Many more made satisfactory use of their placement to develop such skills, but one in seven pupils did not develop these skills satisfactorily. Pupils were less likely to develop key skills and learn work skills satisfactorily if their placement was not well matched to their needs, if they did not maintain a logbook or if they had not been shown how to collect and record evidence.

26. In the questionnaire, more than one in six pupils said that one of the best things about their work placement was learning or experiencing new things, or mentioned particular aspects of work that they enjoyed. A small number wanted to be allowed to learn or help more, or to undertake particular tasks that had been prohibited.

27. School inspection reports sometimes point to the fact that work experience helps pupils develop skills in communicating with and relating to others and take increasing responsibility for their work. Such findings are more often found in the sections of inspection reports on vocational courses and alternative work-related programmes.

### **Features of effective placements**

28. In their visits to placements, inspectors noted some effective development of key skills:

- Pupils learned the importance of clear and accurate communication when asking for guidance or giving information and gained confidence in speaking.
- Examples included making phone calls in a professional manner, listening to instructions and responding to them carefully, developing the right register of speech, developing confidence in using appropriate language and adapting language to circumstances.
- Pupils experienced real applications of number such as working on a till, counting and banking money, counting and recording post. More sophisticated mathematical examples included using spreadsheets, making scale drawings of increasing sophistication and using logic.
- Pupils had hands-on experience of using computers, such as designing and producing tickets for an event. They consolidated existing learning by working on spreadsheets and other applications. Some had linked work set by their school in relation to applied GCSE courses.
- Pupils gained a range of specific work skills. They were seen as part of the team and valued the working relationships which developed. Those placed in professional practices obtained a very wide view of the work.
- Pupils understood what kind of evidence they needed to collect to provide evidence of key skills because of a comprehensive description in the logbook. Where appropriate, the employer signs off the completed key skills section.
- Health and safety issues were thoroughly covered by schools, colleges and employers.

*Work experience was valuable for one pupil who felt that it helped her understand what is required for an architectural apprenticeship. The employer considered the work placement to be valuable to the pupil for future career progression.*

*The employer was impressed by the pupil's ability and initiative in learning to use the architectural computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) system in such a short time. The work she had done on the machine was professional enough to be added to the archive of drawings that were made for a particular client. They were labelled and verified by the architectural group so they could be used as assignment material for her GCSE in engineering.*

*In one school, all pupils undertake work experience in Year 10. Pupils are responsible for making their own arrangements, under the supervision of the careers team, and the experience is evaluated by the pupils themselves and by the employer.*

*At another school, there is very good use of outside agencies on health and social care courses to support both teaching and learning with this rapidly changing subject. Pupils benefit from work experience, especially from opportunities to carry out research into real activities. This helps them understand the diversity of health and social care contexts.*

## Recording and reflecting

29. Three fifths of pupils visited had kept a satisfactory record of their work placement. The higher-level skills of evaluating and reflecting on the experience were less common, with fewer than one in five pupils doing so successfully. As many as two fifths of pupils made little effort to gather information, in some cases because they were not asked to do so. In the questionnaire, only three quarters said they kept a diary, though four in five reported recording what they did on work experience.

30. Pupils who had to collect and record evidence from their work experience for a particular purpose, such as coursework or follow-up work back at school, were better at recording, evaluating and reflecting on their experience. Pupils who conscientiously collected and recorded evidence about their work experience were generally better informed about careers and qualifications.

31. Some pupils did not keep their logbooks up to date because the preparation by the school had not convinced them of its importance. Some schools needed to make pupils more aware of the importance of the course log. Few logbooks had developed sections that focused specifically on learning relevant to particular subjects or courses. Others had given too little time and thought to the debriefing of pupils at the end of the placement and needed to develop follow-up activities that would encourage pupils to record potentially valuable ideas and information.

## Features of effective placements

32. In their visits to placements, inspectors found that some pupils were well prepared to record and reflect on their experience:

- Pupils are given useful guidelines on how to complete a diary/logbook that helps them evaluate and reflect on what they have learned.
- Pupils were expected to write a reflective log of work experience as part of their English coursework.
- Logbooks allow pupils to record the events of the week to the best of their ability. These might be fairly brief for pupils receiving additional support with literacy or filled in very professionally and analytically by more able pupils.
- Vocational course pupils collect evidence for their portfolios, including photographic evidence and witness testimony forms from the work placement supervisor or mentor.
- Pupils make good use of the key skills section. One pupil used the key skills section as a guide for enquiring about the business and things to be done.
- There is effective debriefing, usually in citizenship or personal and social education lessons. Evaluation sheets completed by pupils and employers are included in record of achievement files.

*In one school, work experience is well organised in co-operation with local businesses to meet the entitlement of each pupil. During their work experience all pupils write a log and compete for the 'Best work experience' competition run by the county and open to all secondary schools. This school has won the top award two years running. It has also won the 'Environmental prize' sponsored by a major utilities company for the best logbook. Work experience logbooks are comprehensive and cover major issues such as health and safety at work. They are often used towards GCSE coursework in particular subjects.*

## Linking work experience to school work

33. Nearly a quarter of the pupils visited made a good effort to collect and record evidence from the work placement for later use in school or college courses and another quarter recorded some evidence. Most of these were among the quarter benefiting from an explicit link between their work placement and courses they were studying at school or college. Half of the pupils gathered little information for use in courses they were studying, often because they were not asked to do so. There were no obvious links with school or college courses in nearly three placements in five.

34. Only one in seven pupils questioned said they completed tasks for GCSE coursework and one in eight completed work for a school subject. While nearly three quarters of pupils recorded something about what they learnt, nearly half did not record who they worked with or how they felt about work experience.

35. Inspection reports suggest that work experience enables pupils on vocational courses to apply their knowledge in real contexts. For example, pupils studying business relate the management models learned in class to those encountered in retail and service organisations chosen for their own work experience or part-time jobs.

36. Some pupils were undertaking placements of direct relevance to a vocational course they were studying but their teachers had not linked the work placement with a course assignment. For example, one ICT pupil was given little opportunity to use computers in the workplace. Nor had he been prepared in advance to observe how computer-based systems, such as point of sale, were used in practice.

37. When asked about the possibility that pupils might gain extra value from work experience for use in school or college courses or career planning, employers were evenly divided in three groups:

- those already offering placements which allow pupils to gain extra value
- those knowing little about such possibilities and showing little interest
- those responding favourably to the idea of enhancing the experience in this way, but needing more information about the pupil and school/college courses.

### **Features of effective placements**

38. In their visits to placements, inspectors found few cases where pupils used their work experience to the fullest effect to support learning for a course followed at school or college. In the best practice:

- Pupils were motivated to collect evidence by the school or college, who made it clear that pupils would attend a work experience debrief and follow up the placement in certain subjects. For example, some pupils were expected to write a reflective log of work experience as part of their English coursework.
- Schools helped pupils to develop the study skills and recording techniques needed to collect evidence.
- Teachers of GCSEs in vocational subjects and vocational courses set assignments that capitalised on the work placement. Pupils collected a range of evidence of the placement's success (for example reports, photographic evidence, sample outcomes) often using their initiative to collect relevant leaflets, samples etc.
- Pupils on long-term placements received regular visits from teachers or assessors and also discussed their experience in weekly group sessions

at school. Visiting teachers or learning mentors helped other pupils to collect evidence, for example by taking photographs.

- Employers were well aware of the need to collect evidence. In one case, supervisors who were involved in assessment of post-16 apprentices and applied the same principles to the Key Stage 4 pupils. In another, a pupil was allowed to print her work from an architect's CAD/CAM system to use in a GCSE engineering assignment on a house extension. Other pupils were allowed to take away examples of their work.

*One pupil was already working on a project for his assignment which included writing and partly designing a website. The work he undertook in a City Learning Centre on the production of web pages as a message board system was presented in a portfolio assignment for GCSE engineering. The supervisors at the City Learning Centre had endorsed each of the pieces of evidence and work for the GCSE portfolio. The pupil was also fortunate that he could return to the centre after the placement.*

*One employer provided individual work plans for pupils to follow a number of machine tool activities and provided verification for pupils' GCSE engineering portfolios, including photographs, drawings and material lists.*

## Understanding the business

39. School inspections indicate that pupils are generally well prepared for the work placement process but are not always adequately informed about the nature of the business and work involved.

40. Pupils achieved a better level of understanding in well-chosen placements where the employer had received information and guidance from the school and/or placement organiser. In work placement visits, four in five pupils had a satisfactory understanding of the variety of work carried out at the host establishment. Nearly a half had a good understanding but a fifth were ill-informed. For example, one GCSE leisure and tourism pupil who was working in an office at an airport was not aware that the company provided ground services for two budget airlines.

41. In the pupil questionnaire, more than half strongly agreed with the statement 'I found out a lot about how the employer's business works', and another third tended to agree. Fewer than 10% disagreed.

42. Likewise, more than half of the pupils agreed strongly with the statement 'Work experience helped me understand the world of work', with only one in twenty disagreeing. In both cases, boys showed a stronger level of agreement than girls.



## Features of effective placements

43. In their visits to placements, inspectors identified ways of helping students to understand the nature of the work and the employer. In the best practice:

- Pupils developed a good general understanding of the host establishment through a variety of experience. Employers planned opportunities such as progress chasing and job rotation that gave pupils a wider perspective.
- Employers made sure that pupils understood their expectations, the chain of command and lines of accountability. Pupils were sometimes given the same induction as used for other workers.
- Employers offered work shadowing to illustrate the range of employment opportunities and the roles and responsibilities of managers.
- Subject teachers had set relevant assignments or guided pupils on aspects to investigate, such as the impact of various marketing strategies (business, leisure and tourism) or how companies link sales to stock reordering (ICT, business).
- Pupils' understanding of the host establishment was commensurate with their prior learning and the nature of the work.
- Pupils were made aware of general issues such as health and safety, the importance of customer service and the need for confidentiality.

*Two vulnerable pupils on long-term weekly placements had learned about personal responsibility and the purpose of their jobs. Pupils in medical placements had learned about professional standards and how the practices worked. A pupil in a retail placement could explain the role of the Chamber of Commerce and another knew about sales and stock and a little about the need to interact appropriately with clients and others at work.*

*In one school, pupils in Year 10 are well prepared for their work experience and carefully debriefed. Part of the debriefing includes feedback from pupils to employers on a special work experience day.*

*In another school, health and social care pupils produced good assignment-based work placements. These showed not only a sound understanding of the work of the service they visited, but also good skills of evaluation. Visual and performing arts pupils had been well prepared for work experience at a local fair. Scrutiny of their portfolios indicated a good summary of what had been learned, extended research in the arts and effective planning for putting on performances for outside agencies.*

## Social learning

44. Pupils' social learning was very well supported in nearly a half of work placements and was good or better in four fifths of cases. Nearly a fifth of pupils said that one of the best things about their work placement was working with people, dealing with customers or helping others. Another 12% mentioned teamwork, the friendliness of co-workers or being treated as an adult.

45. To a large extent, pupils' gains in social learning depended on their attitude and were strongly correlated with how well they communicated, took responsibility and responded to guidance.

46. Many school inspection reports refer to the benefits of work experience for the development of personal and social skills. Pupils taking modern foreign languages spend time abroad on work experience placements and return not only more fluent speakers in their chosen language but far more confident and outgoing. The integration of work experience on GNVQ intermediate courses makes a major contribution to the development of learning skills and the employability of pupils. For pupils who are disaffected or losing interest in school, the provision of extended work placements are often highly successful in improving motivation, self-esteem and attendance.

47. In responding to the questionnaire, nearly three fifths of pupils strongly agreed with the statement 'My parents think the work experience was useful to me', with one in three tending to agree. Nearly one in ten disagreed. Boys showed a stronger level of agreement than girls.

## Features of effective placements: social learning

48. In their visits to placements, inspectors found that nearly all placements developed pupils' social learning:

- For some pupils, it was their sustained contact with adults in a working environment. They learnt about following instructions carefully and carrying out tasks responsibly. Their self-esteem and confidence grew visibly during the placement.
- Pupils benefited from considerable development of social skills. They gained a good understanding of the discipline of work and learned the importance of: appearing enthusiastic and positive; accepting responsibility and being prepared to take on tasks and see them through; a smart and professional attitude; courtesy and good timekeeping; and mixing well with co-workers and working in teams.
- Employers offered pupils responsibility and challenge. Pupils gained confidence from dealing directly with customers and clients and by taking on more demanding tasks.
- Employees enjoyed putting something back into education and the community and therefore gave time, effort and positive support. Employers encouraged their employees to use the placement as an opportunity to get experience of supervision.
- Pupils were thoughtful about what they had learned in most cases, and had either strengthened their career interests or been led to reconsider.

## Careers and qualifications

49. When questioned at the end of Year 10, nearly two thirds of pupils said they planned to stay on at school post-16, or to go to college. Nearly a third had a job or career in mind and a similar proportion had a few ideas for jobs. One in seven did not have firm ideas for the future.

50. Less than a fifth of pupils visited on work experience had a clear idea of the careers and necessary qualifications associated with their temporary workplace, or with their own ambitions. Though a further quarter had a satisfactory amount of careers information, over half had not given enough thought to the matter or were not well enough informed.

51. Connexions personal advisers had little input prior to the selection of a work placement. In some cases the majority of careers guidance was to be offered in Year 11, a pattern ill-adapted to the needs of work experience.

52. Some problems dated back to Year 9 when pupils were choosing GCSE courses without being made aware of the implications, such the inadequacy of single science as preparation for A levels in science.

53. School inspection reports indicate that work experience placements linked to vocational courses enable pupils to become reasonably well informed regarding careers

and qualifications required in their vocational area. However, instances are noted of pupils being ill-informed about the many routes that can be followed in engineering or construction, despite following vocational courses.

### **Features of effective placements: careers and qualifications**

54. In their visits to placements, inspectors noted some good practice in providing careers guidance:

- ❑ Pupils were encouraged to find out about the qualifications and training associated with their placements, even though many had little idea of the careers they wanted to pursue.
- ❑ Pupils with clear career aims had good supporting knowledge about the qualifications and experience needed. One pupil who wanted to be a lawyer had a clear course mapped out involving GCSEs, A levels at college, a gap year doing voluntary work and a law degree.
- ❑ Pupils attending vocational courses at college had discussed options for progression with course tutors. One pupil taking hairdressing had been told of various options, including a full-time college course, a Modern Apprenticeship, and a level 2 NVQ in school.
- ❑ Employers provided pragmatic advice on careers and qualifications. When one employer explained the academic requirements for physiotherapy to a pupil interested in the subject, it highlighted the lack of guidance from her school, which allowed her to harbour ambitions of entering physiotherapy while preventing her from studying double-award science at GCSE.

*In one school an effective careers education programme develops from year 9 when pupils consider their emerging and future hopes, reflect on their own personalities, develop their self-knowledge and set targets for themselves. A well-structured programme of lessons in Year 10 leads to a good work experience placement and offers pupils relevant and good preparation for adult life and employment.*

### **Prior organisation and management**

55. The organisation and management of work experience by the school, college or work experience agency were fit for purpose in more than two thirds of placements visited, and was good in more than a quarter. However, work experience had been inadequately organised and managed in nearly a third of placements. In these, pupils had little knowledge of Connexions, Education/Business Partnerships or work placement agencies (where used). They did not know they were entitled to consult a Connexions personal adviser and few seemed to have received useful guidance.

56. The quality of advance organisation and management by the school, college or work experience organiser was the most important factor in pupils being well informed before the placement. There were also benefits in terms of social learning and the extent to which pupils communicated, took responsibility and responded to guidance.

57. Unsatisfactory prior organisation of placements led to pupils being placed inappropriately and gaining little understanding of the host establishment. When placements were set up at the last minute they sometimes by-passed the usual procedures.

58. Inspection reports suggest that in schools where work experience is better organised, pupils come to know and understand what is needed to function effectively in a working environment. An increasing number of schools are drawing closer links between the citizenship curriculum and work experience.

59. Some 5% of pupils said that nothing could have improved their work experience. More than 15% would have liked to have more to do or more variety in their work and 8% wanted a longer work experience placement.

60. More than two in five employers described predominantly altruistic motives for offering work placement. They feel that they are contributing to the community and to education. A similar proportion mentioned the potential benefits for employers, with the potential for recruitment and the opportunity for junior managers to develop skills in mentoring being most common. For one in ten employers, the main reason was apparently to gain an extra pair of hands.

61. Some employers made considerable efforts to ensure the placement was successful despite a lack of information and guidance from the school, college or agency organising the placement. Some lacked even basic documentation, such as telephone numbers and standard procedures. A significant proportion of employers would have liked more prior information from schools and guidance about how to make the work experience more valuable.

### **Features of effective placements: prior organisation and management**

62. In their visits to placements, inspectors found some effective prior organisation and management of placements:

- New placements were subject to thorough risk assessments, undertaken by schools, colleges or work placement agencies. Parents were fully informed and had given consent.
- Schools and colleges had built up good relationships with employers. Many placements are tried and tested through longstanding links between the employer and the school. Some college course co-ordinators used personal contacts to secure relevant placements, which were then subject to standard checks.
- Pupils were well informed and felt they had made appropriate choices because the nature of the work had been fully discussed beforehand.
- Parents were pro-active and supportive. Where placements were set up through family connections, schools had liaised well with the employer making clear the responsibilities and expectations during the placement.

- Considerable efforts made to allow all pupils to benefit from work experience. For some vulnerable pupils the very positive and supportive attitude of other employees as well as employers was important in raising their self-esteem by learning a range of skills and achieving success in an unfamiliar context.

*In one school, well-structured support is provided by the hearing impaired unit. Significant examples are the provision of appropriate hearing aid equipment and liaison with outside bodies such as the careers service, which ensure that pupils are able to participate in work experience and have a good understanding of the options available to them after they leave school.*

*In another case, a pupil who had entered the country as an asylum-seeker with little English had gained particular benefit from his work placement in terms of social and language skills.*

## Monitoring the placement

63. Monitoring of the placement by the school or college was good for a third of pupils but inadequate in more than a fifth. The pupil questionnaire gave similar results, with more than a third of pupils strongly agreeing and one in five disagreeing with the statement 'The school made sure my work experience was going well'. Boys were more critical than girls.

64. According to school inspection reports, some schools were not specific about their aims and objectives for work placements and did not always visit the work placement to monitor progress. Often visits only took place in crisis situations and planning to meet individual needs was reactive rather than proactive.

65. Lack of communication between employers and school or college was a regular problem. Links to learning in school were not well developed and opportunities to accredit new skills and knowledge were not captured. In some workplaces, there was a need for better collaboration and communication between the managers who agreed the work placement and supervisors who took charge of pupils. The monitoring of the placement by the school or college, through telephone calls, visits and reports on pupils was a common area for improvement.

66. The most important benefit of effective monitoring was that it encouraged pupils to collect and record evidence in their diaries and to reflect on what they were learning.

### Features of effective placements: monitoring of placements

67. In their visits to placements, inspectors found some education providers monitored students well:

- General procedures were efficient, with clear lines of communication and contact in the first week to address initial problems.

- ❑ School staff visited in the second week to discuss what the pupil was learning as well as pastoral issues. Vulnerable pupils receive an early reassuring visit from a teacher they know. Pupils are expected to show their logbooks and any evidence they have collected.
- ❑ Pupils on long-term placements were monitored by regular visits from college tutors, teachers or support staff who check pupils' progress with portfolios and assignments.
- ❑ Pupils following work-based training were clear about the relationship of the placement to the college element of the course and the NVQ assessment requirements.
- ❑ Employers monitored pupils' progress conscientiously, writing comments in their logbooks and completing a report or assessment form at the end of the placement.
- ❑ Schools made sure that there was an opportunity for pupils to speak to monitoring teachers in private.

## Host employers

68. Just over a fifth of host employers were well briefed about the purposes of work-related learning and well informed about the pupil on placement. Half were reasonably well informed, though most would have liked to know more. The remainder were not well briefed and needed significantly more information than was forthcoming. Some larger employers who took many pupils on work experience felt they had little time to devote to this area.

69. Good guidance and information for employers were strongly associated with the effectiveness of the preparation, organisation and management by the school, college or work placement agency. Some employers made considerable efforts to ensure the placement was successful despite a lack of information and guidance from the school, college or agency organising the placement.

### **Features of effective placements: employers contribution and support**

70. In their visits to placements, inspectors met with employers:

- ❑ Employers felt well informed about the purposes of work experience and knew something about school courses because of long-standing links or good advance preparation.
- ❑ For vulnerable pupils, employers added good value to social development because they had a good understanding of the aims of the placement in relation to the pupil's circumstances.
- ❑ Employers endeavoured to meet the needs of individual pupils and to supply a rounded, varied experience. Some wanted more information so they could attend to detail.

*The management of an engineering company felt that the work placements were useful but that one or two weeks was too short to produce anything of significant value. They liked putting something back into the educational system and would prefer longer placements. This would enable the company to have extended interviews with young people who may become apprentices with them at a later date. This is useful both to employers and to the pupils themselves in making decisions and choices about careers within the engineering industry. The company likes to train its own apprentices rather than employ from the outside job market.*

## **Pupils**

71. Nearly two thirds of pupils visited appeared well prepared to communicate, take responsibility and respond to guidance from others in the workplace. A further quarter demonstrated an acceptable level of such skills, but were not very pro-active. Although they were polite and co-operative, they made few suggestions to widen the experience.

72. Although the personal qualities of the pupil played a large part in their attitudes to work placement, pupils were better at building effective relationships in the workplace and taking responsibility if they were well informed about the work placement process and the nature of the business and work involved.

73. In a few placements, employers recognised areas where pupils needed to develop, but did not give them the necessary experiences for fear of upsetting customers. Ten per cent of pupils displayed attitudes that suggested that they had not understood what would be expected of them in the workplace.

### **Features of effective placements: pupil involvement**

74. In the best visits to placements, inspectors met with pupils and found:

- Pupils make good progress and participate with increasing confidence. They are willing to take on responsibility and seek and use guidance. Pupils enjoyed the experience and were anxious to be busy and make the time productive.
- Pupils learned how to conduct themselves with work colleagues and customers. Supervisors were positive and noted improvements in communication and confidence.
- Pupils were given worthwhile tasks that the firm needed to be done, learning new skills in the process. Some employers considered offering employment to a work placement pupil.
- Schools had prepared pupils to understand issues of confidentiality, trust and health and safety.
- One pupil had been persistent to persuade the employer to offer the work placement. The employer now planned to offer further placements. Another pupil had taken on responsibilities and given up time in the evening to help prepare for an event.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, most pupils are broadly positive about their work experience. They value the element of social learning, which is usually well developed. Employers are generally supportive and some make considerable efforts on their own initiative to ensure that the work placement is a rewarding experience, but they sometimes feel frustrated by the limited information they receive.

There are many schools that have developed good practice in the organisation, management and monitoring of work experience. Most schools have a wide network of contacts for work experience. The most effective placements are well planned with clear objectives for pupils with activities which develop a wide range of new skills and enhance their social skills. Work experience is usually effective in developing pupils' understanding of the workplace and developing their ability to communicate with adults. However, there is considerable scope to make work placements a more valuable learning experience for pupils. Not all schools brief employers about the purpose of work experience and its relationship to school and college courses. In most cases, opportunities to link work placement with course assignments are frequently missed, Very few pupils reflect on the learning that has taken place as a result of their placements.

The forthcoming requirement to provide work-related learning for all pupils in Key Stage 4 provides an incentive for schools to renew the contribution made by work experience. Direct experience of the world of work through a variety of activities is at the heart of effective work-related learning programmes. However, experience of an activity alone does not guarantee that learning will occur. High-quality learning requires clear objectives, effective preparation and reflection on experience to establish what has been learned. This survey highlights the importance of good preparation and monitoring of pupils and employers and the value of debriefing exercises.

There are many schools that have developed good practice in the organisation, management and monitoring of work experience. Nevertheless, there is considerable scope to make work placements a more valuable learning experience for pupils.

The forthcoming requirement to provide work-related learning for all pupils in Key Stage 4 provides an incentive for schools to review the contribution made by work experience. This survey highlights the importance of good preparation and monitoring of pupils and employers and the value of debriefing exercises. Work placements can be enhanced by effective careers guidance and by subject planning that integrates work experience with coursework or other school activities.

## Summary table of features of effective placements

Key Question:	In effective placements:
A Prior to the placement, how well informed was the pupil about the work placement process and the nature of the business and work involved?	Pupils benefit from good preparation sessions for several weeks at school. A good job description outlines the experience and pupils meet the employer in advance. The benefit of the placement is enhanced by linking it to a relevant course at school or college.
B How well is the level of demand/responsibility matched to the pupil's work within a course/towards a qualification?	There is a well-planned and supported variety of activities. The level of demand and responsibility is commensurate with pupils' level of study and career ambitions and support is tailored to their needs. Pupils make connections between the work they do on placement and what they are learning in GCSE and other courses.
C How well is the pupil developing key skills and learning about the skills, knowledge and concepts applied to the work they are engaged in (including observing/shadowing)?	Pupils gain a range of specific work skills. They experience real applications of number and have hands-on experience of using computers. Good key skills development in communication develops pupils' confidence in speaking.
D How effectively does the pupil record, note, evaluate and reflect on what is learnt by the experiences?	Pupils complete a daily diary/logbook and evaluate and reflect on what they learn. The design of logbooks allows pupils to record the events of the week to the best of their ability.
E How well does the pupil go about collecting and recording evidence about their work experience for use back at school/college/training organisation?	Pupils are motivated to collect evidence by the school or college. Teachers of applied GCSE and vocational courses set assignments that capitalise on the work placement. Pupils on long-term placements receive regular visits from teachers or assessors
F How good – given Key Stage 4 courses and any commercial confidentiality – is the pupil's understanding of the host establishment, its objectives and nature of its 'core business', its organisation and structure?	Pupils develop a good general understanding of the host establishment through a variety of experiences. Employers make sure that pupils understand their expectations, the chain of command and lines of accountability. Pupils' understanding of the host establishment is commensurate with their prior learning and the nature of the work.
G To what extent is the pupil's social learning gaining by working with others and taking some responsibility?	Nearly all placements develop pupils' social learning. The extent of pupils' gains in social learning depends on their attitude, being strongly correlated with how well they communicate, take responsibility and respond to guidance. Pupils benefit from considerable development of social skills where employers offer them responsibility and challenge. Many employees enjoy putting something back into education by supporting work placement pupils.

<b>Key Question:</b>	<b>In effective placements:</b>
H How well informed is the pupil over careers, and the qualifications and training associated for success in them, within the host organisation and beyond?	Pupils are encouraged to find out about the qualifications and training associated with their placements. Pupils with clear career aims have good supporting knowledge about the qualifications and experience needed. Pupils attending vocational courses at college discuss options for progression with course tutors. Employers provide pragmatic advice on careers and qualifications.
I Prior to the pupil arriving, how good was the organisation and management of the placement by the provider and/or EBP, Trident or Connexions?	New placements are subject to thorough risk assessments. Schools and colleges build up good relationships with employers. Pupils are well informed and feel they make appropriate choices.
J How well is the education provider monitoring the placement?	School staff visit in the second week, having made contact in the first week to address initial problems. Pupils on long-term placements are monitored by regular visits. Employers monitor pupils' progress conscientiously.
K How well informed is the host employer about the purposes of the work placement and how it fits in to the pupil's current course?	Employers feel well informed about the purposes of work experience and they endeavour to meet the needs of individual pupils and to supply a rounded, varied experience. For vulnerable pupils, employers add good value to social development.
L How well does the pupil: i) communicate with and relate to others? ii) take responsibility for the work? iii) respond to guidance, instruction and comment?	Pupils are given worthwhile tasks that the firm needs to be done, learning new skills in the process. They make good progress and participate with increasing confidence, learning how to conduct themselves with work colleagues and customers. Schools prepare pupils to understand issues of confidentiality, trust and health and safety.