



Work Experience

Why do I need to do work experience?

What is work experience?

Work experience is something you can do to supplement your studies and make yourself more employable in the future. It means spending time in a real work place and working alongside other employees and learning about how businesses operate and what it may be like working in a particular sector.

What can work experience do for me?

Work experience can be a great way for you to find out what sort of jobs you might enjoy and the sorts of tasks a particular job may require. Work experience is something you can put on your CV and it shows potential employers that you know what the real world of work is like. It can give you an advantage over other applicants for a particular job and might well be the edge you need to secure the job of your dreams.



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Why should I undertake work experience or a placement?

Most employers prefer candidates to have some type of experience, it demonstrates you have the required knowledge and experience to operate effectively in an every day working environment. Not only does work experience benefit the employer, but it also allows you to demonstrate and improve your best working skills. This can be your 'soft skills' i.e. customer service, communication and team working, It can also give you the opportunity to pick up valuable industry knowledge. Having experience can make a huge difference when you start applying for full time employment and could put you in front of other candidates without these essential skills.

Different types of work experience

School work experience

Many people's first taste of work experience is at school, and this usually takes the form of a two week placement. Work experience at school is often the first taste of what working is really like that people get.

College work experience

Lots of colleges and sixth forms have some form of facility to help you get work experience, but it is not always compulsory. On the other hand some courses have a large component of work experience such as early years where placements will form a large part of your learning. Some university courses require work experience of a particular kind such as teaching, law, social work etc so this is important to bear in mind if you have a particular career route which you are considering.

University work experience

Many higher education courses feature an element of work experience. Some courses can have a whole year of work experience which is there to help you build real world knowledge and provide you with an opportunity to network in the industry.

Formal work experience as part of a university degree comes under a number of different names including:

Sandwich and industrial placements: a fixed-term period of assessed, paid work that forms part of your degree. It often lasts for a full year.

Work-based project: a specific piece of assessed work for your course, undertaken at an employers premises.

Work placement: a period of work experience, which can be paid or unpaid, and is part of a course of study. This can be arranged through your university with an employer or by yourself and is for an agreed period of time.

Internship: a phrase that is increasingly used by large companies and refers to a placement within their organisation, usually over 6-12 weeks during the summer holiday.

Informal work experience and work shadowing

It is possible to set up work experience on your own. If you have an interest in a particular job then you could contact companies and explain that you are interested in pursuing that particular career. They may let you come in and get some first hand experience of what the work is like.

Check out www.work-experience.org for more information



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Voluntary work

Yet another option would be to consider voluntary work. Volunteers usually work for non-profit making organisations such as charities and community groups. Not only will voluntary work look good on your CV but is also a chance for you to do something worthwhile and meet other people who are engaged in helping others.

What is work experience like?

Often on work experience you will be given a chance to observe the processes and procedures which occur in the day to day running of a company. You may well also get the opportunity to take part in some of the tasks which you will get to observe. You may well be asked to do some fairly menial tasks such as making the tea or filing paper work. Do not be offended! Believe it or not these are the sorts of things that people have to do in the world of work especially when they are just starting out. It should not be the only thing you do on work experience but if nothing else it is useful to gain an understanding that not everything in any job will be fun or exciting.

Other things you can get out of work experience

While on work experience you will meet new people and have the chance to impress. The people you meet while on your work experience may be able to help you get a job when you start looking for a full time position. So make sure you use the time to make friends and impress people with your hard work!

Hints and Tips on finding your ideal work experience.

- Identifying an opportunity: think about likely careers interests and long term you may have.
- Determine a broad occupational area you want to work in and any specific objectives you want to fulfil during your work experience.
- If you have no idea what you want to do, try something that involves your interests.
- Think about how much time you can spare for work in addition to your studies.
- Decide if your work experience needs to relate to your studies.
- Research and identify companies you are interested in working for.
- When contacting companies or organisations contact by phone first to try and get a contact name for the person who deals with recruitment.
- Write a letter stating you are interested in them and gaining work experience. State also what you can offer them in terms of technical skills and personal qualities.
- Prepare for any interview or meeting they offer you by viewing it from the manager's point of view: Why should they take you on? What are the benefits to them?
- Treat it seriously: work experience could make a significant difference to your career goal and the company you're working for could have an opportunity come up for you in the future.

