THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

What is modern work experience?

Modern work experience.

Let's make it work.

What is modern work experience?

A quiet spark can change everything.

What feels like a small moment – a task, a conversation, a glimpse of a workplace – can be transformative for a young person. That's why the Government has set out its ambition for a new guarantee – giving every young person 10 days' worth of modern work experience during secondary school. Not one rigid block, but a series of flexible opportunities that build confidence, skills and motivation.

The Careers & Enterprise Company is here to lead this next chapter – supporting schools, helping employers, and connecting it all through Careers Hubs.

This is a new era of workplace experience – one that is fairer, more inclusive, and more useful for everyone. The next generation is standing at our door. It's time we opened it.

How is work experience changing?

We've known for a while that the old model doesn't work for all employers. Yes, there are success stories of organisations with long track records of providing rich, meaningful experiences over one or two weeks. But too often employers are unable to offer work experience during the summer term, don't have the capacity to host for two weeks and are unsure about the skills the young people need to build. Work experience is modernising to raise the quality by ensuring it develops the knowledge, skills and behaviours young people will need in the **workplace** and, crucially, to ensure equity for disadvantaged young people across England.

On 8th May 2025, the Government issued statutory guidance to schools outlining the ambition of a work experience guarantee for ALL learners.

The Government's vision for work experience moves away from the traditional 2-week block placement into 10 days' worth throughout secondary education:

- One weeks' worth of work experience activities in years 7 to 9
- One weeks' worth of work experience placement(s) in years 10 to 11

Experiences should be aspirational and inspirational, exposing young people to career opportunities early on aligned to their interest and talents, local skills needs and national growth sectors. Opportunities should go beyond the horizons of their immediate friends and family.

When implemented modern work experience will provide employers with flexibility including:

- Offering experiences in a format that reaches a greater volume of young people, with modern work experience allowing for large group engagement, small cohorts, and single person placements.
- Multiple ways to engage that match current resources – including budget, employee volunteers, access to a workplace etc.
- Opportunities for all sizes of business to engage from large global organisations to micro businesses.
- Offering experiences across the whole academic calendar, not only in the summer term.

The ambition for a work experience guarantee has flexibility at its heart. There is deep inequity in the traditional delivery model of work experience. We know that when schools are the architects of well-structured programmes, linked to the curriculum and aligned to school improvement priorities, then these inequities dissipate, and the impact of work experience is greater.

To move to a modern work experience model will take time. We need employers and educators to work together supported by CEC to learn, test, innovate and build a culture where work experience is transformative and not transactional.

What makes work experience meaningful?

Work experience has moved far beyond the days of making tea or photocopying. Today, things are different. Over the last 10 years, 4,700 schools and colleges have been working towards the Gatsby Benchmarks, a renowned framework of eight benchmarks that define world class careers provision across schools, special schools, and colleges.

Gatsby Benchmark 6 'Experiences of workplaces', has recently been updated to include a clear definition of what makes experiences meaningful for schools and colleges.

Alongside this, the CEC's Employer Standards provide a clear framework to businesses of all shapes and sizes to maximise the impact of employer engagement with young people, ensuring mutual value and long-term business success. Employers who use the self-assessment tool can access the Standard 1 resource on workplace experiences that includes guidance for employers on how to ensure any experience they offer to young people is meaningful.

While experiences will vary in intensity – from short group workplace visits to extended industry placements, the core principles for making them meaningful remain the same:

1. **Establish purpose**
   agree clear learning outcomes.

2. **Be targeted**
   understand the needs of the young people engaging in your experience, to better tailor to their needs. Appreciate that many young learners are in a completely new environment when they spend time in your business and need your patience to build confidence.

3. **Showcase diversity**
   offer the chance to meet with a diverse range of employees, ensuring they are relatable role models. Where possible, include opportunities to meet people from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences.

4. **Make it engaging**
   enable meaningful two-way interaction and include hands on learning, ideally based on real work projects.

5. **Provide feedback**
   ensure that you feedback on any work produced or presented as part of your workplace experience.

6. **Gain feedback from the young people**
   to support you to evaluate the impact of the experience.

7. **Consider pre & post work**
   work with the school, special school or college to ensure young people attending are prepared, knowing what to expect and have had enough feedback to reflect on their experience and skills gained afterwards.

When and how will work experience change?

When?

The Government announced their ambition of a work experience guarantee for all young people in May 2025. Since September 2025, schools and colleges have started working towards the updated Gatsby Benchmarks, which include updates to the definition of 'meaningful' experiences of the workplace in Gatsby Benchmark 6. It is important to remember that educators are working towards new guidance and will all be at different stages. The best place to start is connecting with a school (which you can do via Careers Hubs nationally) to see what is needed for their learners
and when.

How?

At The Careers & Enterprise Company we have developed support to ensure the careers system is ready for this change and can meet the updated guidance —the equalex approach.

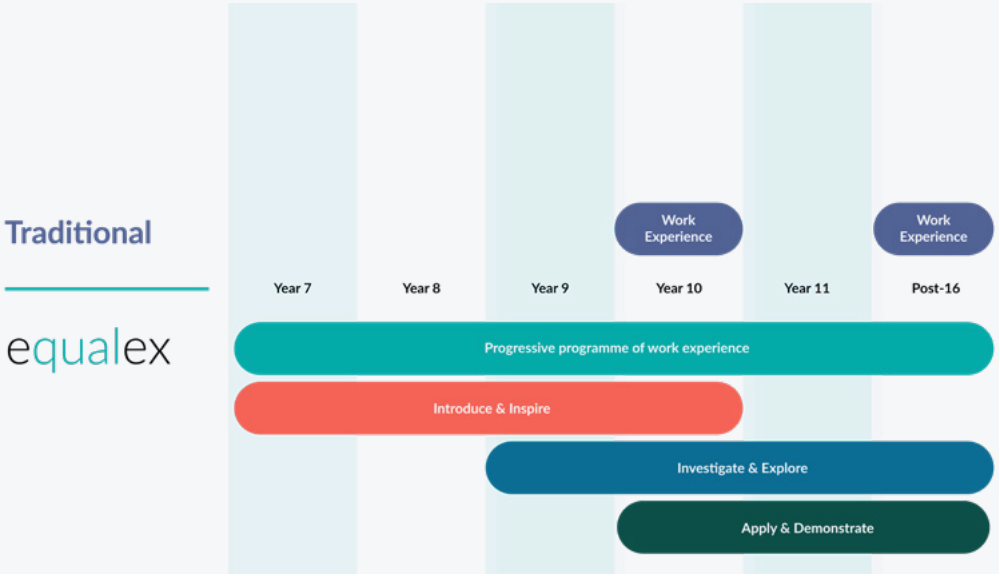
equalex provides a framework of learning outcomes and objectives to support the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours in young people.

The framework of outcomes and objectives will allow educators to embed meaningful, multi-year experiences within a progressive whole school programme.

This provides a progressive approach that starts with a higher volume of experiences at lower depth and moves to a lower volume with higher depth, across 3 key themes (see fig 1)

Fig 1: equalex themes & distribution

Fig 2: Traditional vs equalex approach



In contrast to the traditional two-week block placement, equalex focuses on providing every young person with multiple, varied experiences from Year 7. By the time they reach Year 11, they have greater awareness of sectors of interest, a clearer understanding of their career readiness, and are better informed to make active choices about their pathways and more interested in selecting an employer for a longer placement. (see Fig2) Learners could still access a meaningful longer one- or two-week placement, but the equalex approach and learning outcomes would ensure they had built the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be prepared for and get the most out of that experience.

Fig 3: equalex learning outcomes

Alongside this approach CEC have developed learning outcomes and learner level objectives to support schools to set the goals for learning, specifying the knowledge, skills and behaviours learners should be able to demonstrate after completing a particular activity/experience. The learner level objectives provide deeper direction for both learners and whoever is delivering the activity, ensuring that there are measurable outcomes against the planned intent.

Schools will be using the model, outcomes and objectives to map their current offer and identify gaps and improvements that can be made.

Once this is embedded in the system it will be much easier for schools to communicate with employers about what learners need to gain from any experience.

What can I do?

Create or review your work experience offer

If you have never offered work experience before, this flexible model of modern work experience will offer you the opportunity to get started in a way that is suitable for your resources, whether that be offering half a day, setting a project or a week-long placement. Consider the themes of equalex and where your offer might fit?

If you already have a work experience offer, take time to review it and consider if this new flexible model could allow you to make any changes to reach more young people. Check if your offer meets the meaningful guidance outlined that schools and colleges will be seeking from any experience they access.

Get support

As the Government's partner in delivering their ambition for work experience, CEC have been piloting a range of approaches and models to support the system to develop their future work experience offers. CEC will be sharing and developing a range of ongoing communications, guidance, and inspiration. For employers you can access this support via:

- CEC's modern work experience Employer pages
- Employer Standards for free bespoke guidance and resources
- Employer events, sharing best practice
- Get support from a Careers Hub: Connect to a Careers Hub
  If you want support connecting into multiple regions across the country or are a sector bodies contact: employers@careersandenterprise.co.uk

> **"The new equalex model is a really exciting step forward that will enable employers of all shapes and sizes to make a meaningful contribution to modern work experience"**
>
> **Sarah Crush,**
>
> **Social Value Manager, Thakeham**

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