

Supporting Work Experience for Learners in Alternative Provision: Employer Guide

Why your involvement matters

Work experience can be life changing for learners in alternative provision (AP). For many young people, it is their first opportunity to experience the workplace, build confidence and see themselves as capable and valued. Even short, supported experiences can have a lasting positive impact.

You do not need to be an expert to take part, your willingness to offer time, exposure and encouragement makes a real difference

What is alternative provision?

Alternative provision supports children and young people who are unable to attend mainstream school, either temporarily or permanently. This may be due to exclusion, anxiety, health needs, special educational needs, or other personal circumstances.

AP settings are highly personalised and relationship-led, helping learners re-engage with education, develop confidence and prepare for future education, employment and training.

Who are AP learners?

They may have experienced disrupted education or reduced confidence, but they also bring strengths, interests and aspirations that can flourish when given the right opportunities.

Many AP learners are:

- resilient and adaptable.
- motivated by practical, real world learning.
- quick to respond to trust and positive relationships.

Work experience helps these strengths emerge.

Different types of alternative provision

Alternative provision is not a single model. Learners may attend different types of settings, depending on their needs and circumstances. This can affect how work experience is planned and delivered.

Common types of alternative provision include:

› AP schools or academies

Registered settings offering full time or part time education, often for learners who are temporarily or permanently out of mainstream school.

› PRUs (Pupil Referral Units)

Local authority maintained provision for learners who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion.

› Specialist or therapeutic provision

Settings supporting learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and/or Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, often with smaller groups and high levels of adult support.

› Hospital schools and health-based provision

Education provided to learners who are unable to attend school due to medical or mental health needs, often delivered alongside treatment and focused on continuity of learning and wellbeing.

Secure settings (e.g. secure children's homes, youth custody)

Provision for young people in secure environments, where education is combined with care, safeguarding, and rehabilitation. Access to work experience may be adapted or delivered through simulated or on-site opportunities.

› Independent or community based provision

Small organisations or training providers offering personalised, vocational, or re engagement programmes.

› Blended or part time arrangements

Some learners attend AP alongside mainstream school, college, or other services.

Regardless of the setting, work experience placements are planned collaboratively and tailored to the individual learner, with flexibility around hours, tasks, and support to ensure a positive experience for everyone involved.

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What makes work experience in AP different?

Work experience for AP learners is designed to be flexible, supportive, and proportionate. It may include:

- shorter placements or reduced hours.
- gradual build up of time in the workplace.
- additional preparation or check ins.
- a focus on employability skills, confidence, and routines.

Success is about engagement and progress, not perfection.

What you can expect during a visit or placement

Some learners may:

- feel nervous at first.
- need clear instructions and routines.
- benefit from reassurance and consistency.

This is normal. Small actions, being welcoming, patient, and clear, can make a significant difference.

You are not expected to manage behaviour or provide pastoral support. Education and careers teams remain responsible for the learner and will stay closely involved.

What we ask of employers (and what we don't)

We ask you to:

- Provide a safe, supportive environment.
- Offer simple, appropriate tasks.
- Treat learners with respect and encouragement.

We don't expect you to:

- Be experts in education, SEND, or mental health.
- "Fix" challenges or take on a teaching role.
- Offer long hours or complex responsibilities.

Your role is to offer experience, exposure, and encouragement.

Support you will receive

You will not be doing this alone. You will be supported by the education and careers team within the alternative provision setting and the local Careers Hub. Together, they will:

- › Prepare the learner before the placement.
- › Agree suitable hours and activities with you.
- › Stay in touch throughout the placement.
- › Respond quickly if adjustments are needed.
- › Share insight into the learner's strengths, needs and any support required.
- › Provide guidance and coordinate support to help placements run smoothly.

Education and careers teams understand their learners well and will collaborate with you to shape an experience that is appropriate, manageable and meaningful.

Flexible ways to get involved

Work experience for AP learners can include:

- part day or part week placements.
- work shadowing.
- internal or supported roles.
- project based tasks.
- blended in person and virtual activities.

Many employers begin with smaller activities such as workplace visits, project work or work shadowing before offering longer placements.

By offering work experience to a learner in alternative provision, you are helping widen opportunity. Even small, supported experiences can build confidence, skills, and belief in what is possible.