THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

Work experience reform in practice

A suite of resources to support meaningful achievement of Gatsby Benchmark 6 and work experience reform

If you want to...	Use...
Start strategic reflection and/or discussion about work experience reform	Work experience reform: A strategic reflection tool for Education Leaders
Understand the evidence and effective work experience practice	An Education Leader's guide to work experience reform
Plan implementation and monitor progress of work experience reform in your setting	Work experience reform: Education leadership implementation map
See examples from practice of high-quality progressive work experience	Work experience reform in practice

When to use this resource

Use this resource when you want to:

- See how schools, colleges and specialist settings have approached work experience reform in practice.
- Understand the leadership thinking, systems and decision-making behind effective workplace experiences.
- Explore how different settings have connected workplace experiences to learner need and organisational priorities.
- Learn from examples of implementation, challenges, impact and continuous improvement.
- Identify ideas and approaches that could be adapted within your own context.

Suggested users

We suggest some or all of the following use this resource: Headteachers, Principals, CEOs, Education Leaders, Trust Leaders, Governors and Careers Leaders.

What this resource will help you do

Learn from real examples of work experience reform and understand how Education Leaders have translated strategy into practice to improve learner outcomes.



Setting name	Region	Setting	Insight	What this example will show you
The King's Church of England Academy, Three Spires Trust	Staffordshire	Secondary 11-18	Embedding progressive workplace experiences across the learner journey	• Understanding work experience reform through the equalex pilot. • Aligning workplace experiences to learner needs and outcomes. • Building leadership capacity and shared responsibility. • Designing progressive and inclusive workplace experiences. • Using impact evidence to refine and strengthen provision.
Oakwood Specialist College	South West	Specialist Post-16	Using a "learner as leaver" approach to place work experience at the heart of preparation for adulthood	• Understanding how a "learner as leaver" philosophy shapes preparation for adulthood and personalised destination planning. • Positioning workplace experiences as one element of a broader approach to developing confidence, independence, communication, self-advocacy and future readiness. • Designing personalised workplace experiences aligned to learner aspirations, strengths, support needs and intended outcomes. • Building multidisciplinary approaches that bring together careers, teaching, therapy, inclusion, families and employers around shared learner goals. • Using learner voice, reflection, feedback and destination-focused planning to continuously refine provision and support successful transitions beyond education.
London Design & Engineering UTC	London	UTC 11-18	Embedding employer-led learning at the heart of curriculum, culture and progression	• Using an employer-rich curriculum to ensure every learner develops academic excellence and real-world experience. • Embedding careers, employer engagement and workplace experiences through the IndEx framework. • Building leadership capacity through employer governance, distributed accountability and strong pastoral systems. • Using employer-led projects, masterclasses, skills development and placements to create progressive workplace experiences. • Evaluating the impact of employer engagement on learner outcomes, destinations, confidence and curriculum achievement.
Youth Challenge PRU	North West	Alternative Provision	Using careers and work experience as a lever for re-engagement, aspiration and positive transition	• Positioning careers education and work experience as core mechanisms for inclusion and progression. • Using a personalised and progressive approach to prepare learners for meaningful workplace experiences and successful transitions. • Building distributed leadership across careers, SEND, pastoral, curriculum and employer-facing teams. • Embedding workplace experiences within curriculum, personal development and whole-setting improvement priorities. • Using attendance, engagement, learner voice and destination data to evaluate impact and continuously refine provision.
Waltham Forest College	London	Further Education College	Building a culture where work experience is an entitlement for all	• Understanding how leaders embedded a culture where work experience is an expectation for all learners and connected to progression, employability and local skills priorities. • Using equity of opportunity and individual learner need to shape workplace experiences, preparation and support. • Building distributed leadership across curriculum, employer engagement, work experience and support functions. • Creating a structured learner journey that combines skills development, employer engagement, curriculum learning and meaningful work experience. • Using employer feedback, learner reflection, destination data and quality assurance processes to evaluate impact and continuously improve provision.

Practice Insight

The King's Church of England Academy, Three Spires Trust (Staffordshire)

Embedding progressive workplace experiences across the learner journey

Context

Leaders identified significant socio-economic disadvantage, limited exposure to opportunities beyond the local area, restricted opportunity awareness and learners at risk of becoming disengaged or NEET. Many learners lacked exposure to professional workplaces and progression pathways beyond their immediate locality.

Leaders have adopted a progressive approach to workplace experiences, with early exposure built into the learner journey. Targeted workplace experiences are used to support learners whose needs have been identified through school data, professional judgement and safeguarding processes.

Core ambition: every learner should leave with a clear next step.

1. Understand the change

Leadership thinking

Leaders used the equalex pilot to reflect on whether existing provision was:

- **Meaningful** with clear learner outcomes.
- **Multiple** with experiences building over time.
- **Equitable** and responsive to different learner needs.

They recognised that careers activity already existed, yet was not always coherent, connected to curriculum pathways or designed as a progressive journey.

What emerged

- ✓ A structured careers learning journey from Year 7 to Year 13.
- ✓ Workplace experiences embedded throughout the learner journey rather than concentrated in Year 10.
- ✓ Experiences linked to learner outcomes and future destinations.
- ✓ Greater alignment between careers, curriculum and workplace experiences.

2. See the opportunity

Leadership thinking

Leaders identified barriers including:

- Narrow aspirations
- Limited exposure to opportunities
- Risk of becoming disengaged or NEET
- Restricted social and professional capital

Leaders positioned workplace experiences as a tool for improving wider learner outcomes.

What emerged

- ✓ Work experience became part of the school's inclusion strategy.
- ✓ Careers was positioned as a vehicle for delivering the school's values of Aspire, Belong and Care.
- ✓ Workplace experiences were used to support aspiration, belonging, engagement and positive destinations.
- ✓ Success was increasingly measured through learner progression and destinations.

The King's Church of England Academy, Three Spires Trust (Staffordshire)

3. Build capacity

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that workplace experiences would only have impact if they were informed by a robust understanding of learner need and supported by the right leadership structures.

To identify learners requiring additional support, they combined:

- Disadvantage indicators
- Attendance data
- Safeguarding intelligence
- Professional judgement from careers, safeguarding and pastoral colleagues

Leadership of careers was intentionally distributed. Key roles were aligned across careers, curriculum and RSHE, supported by administrative capacity, trust-wide careers leadership and collaboration with the Careers Hub and other partners.

What emerged

- ✓ Learners at risk of becoming NEET were identified earlier.
- ✓ Decisions about workplace experiences were informed by evidence of learner need.
- ✓ Careers became a shared responsibility across leaders, teachers and support staff.
- ✓ Greater alignment between careers, curriculum and RSHE leadership.
- ✓ Administrative support enabled greater focus on strategic planning and delivery.

4. Strengthen practice

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that a one-size-fits-all model risked widening inequality.

Every learner retained an entitlement to workplace experiences, but experiences were increasingly shaped by learner needs and intended outcomes.

Provision included:

- Curriculum-linked employer encounters
- Workplace visits
- Employer-led activities
- Immersive placements
- Supported placements

Additional workplace-based learning opportunities through the on-site Bistro, providing an authentic working environment that could support learners who would benefit from developing confidence and skills before accessing external placements, as well as offering a flexible internal alternative where this best met individual learner needs.

Crucially, leaders did not treat participation in work experience as something learners needed to be ready for. Instead, workplace experiences were used to **build** readiness, confidence and aspiration.

What emerged

- ✓ A differentiated model of workplace experiences.
- ✓ Earlier and additional support for disadvantaged learners, SEND learners and those at risk of becoming NEET.
- ✓ Workplace experiences became more closely connected to curriculum learning, learner aspirations and progression pathways, supported by a place-based approach and employer collaboration through a CEO Futures Forum and development of the WMBACC gateway.
- ✓ Increased use of workplace experiences to support confidence, inclusion and reintegration.

The King's Church of England Academy, Three Spires Trust (Staffordshire)

5. Review impact

Leadership thinking

Leaders combined:

- Attendance data
- Behaviour data
- Destination data
- Learner reflections
- Employer feedback
- Staff observations
- equalex evaluation activity

Impact was reviewed at both individual and cohort level.

What emerged

- ✓ 0% NEET at Post-18.
- ✓ 2% NEET at Post-16.
- ✓ Learners reported increased confidence, communication skills, teamwork, self-awareness and understanding of future pathways.
- ✓ Staff identified improvements in engagement, attendance and motivation among learners receiving targeted workplace experiences.
- ✓ Workplace experiences became viewed as a re-engagement strategy as well as a careers intervention.

6. Plan forward

Leadership thinking

Leaders continued to:

- Prioritise learners who were uncertain about their intended next step.
- Use evaluation evidence to inform decision-making and refine provision.
- Strengthen destination-focused planning across the learner journey.
- Review impact evidence and adapt support where additional intervention was required.
- Sustain collaboration with local employers to ensure workplace experiences reflected both learner need and local opportunity structures.

What emerged

- ✓ More targeted support for learners who were uncertain about their next step, with workplace experiences used to explore options, build confidence and inform progression planning.
- ✓ Evaluation evidence routinely used to review, adapt and strengthen provision in response to learner need and outcomes.
- ✓ Continued refinement of evaluation approaches through equalex, strengthening leaders' understanding of what was making the greatest difference for learners.
- ✓ A clearer line of sight between learner need, curriculum learning, workplace experiences and intended destinations.
- ✓ A place-based approach, developed in partnership with local employers through the CEO Futures Forum and WMBACC gateway, helped ensure workplace experiences remained relevant to local opportunities and learner aspirations.

Key leadership reflection

A key leadership theme is a shift in emphasis from organising activities to designing meaningful workplace experiences with clear learner outcomes.

Leaders started with learner need, identified the barriers facing different groups of learners, and designed workplace experiences around intended learner outcomes.

As a result, workplace experiences became part of a wider strategy for inclusion, personal development and positive destinations, rather than a standalone activity.

Practice Insight

Oakwood Specialist College

Learning from a "Learner as Leaver" approach: Embedding work experience within preparation for adulthood

Context

Oakwood Specialist College is a specialist Post-16 provider operating across three campuses and supporting learners with a diverse range of strengths, aspirations and support requirements.

At the heart of Oakwood's approach is a simple but powerful principle: **learner as leaver.**

Colleagues reflect that from day one, there is a focus on understanding each learner as an individual, their aspirations, intended destination, and the young person they hope they will become when they leave college. This principle shapes curriculum design, therapeutic support, careers education, personal development and experiences of the workplace.

Within this broader preparation-for-adulthood approach, work experience is viewed as a key branch of the curriculum. It is not an additional activity or entitlement, but one of the many ways learners develop confidence, communication, independence, self-advocacy and understanding of future opportunities.

For leaders preparing for work experience reform, Oakwood's experience offers insight into how workplace experiences can be embedded within a wider preparation-for-adulthood strategy.

1. Understand the change

Leadership thinking

Oakwood's approach begins with the learner and their intended future. Every learner has a personalised progress and exit plan informed by:

- Aspirations and future goals
- EHCP outcomes
- Therapeutic assessments
- Parental insight
- Staff observations

This helps identify the knowledge, skills, experiences and support required across:

- Employment and work
- Independent living
- Community participation
- Personal growth

Work experience is embedded within this wider preparation-for-adulthood approach and is used as a mechanism through which learners can explore aspirations, develop confidence, apply learning and prepare for life beyond college.

What emerged

- ✓ A shared "learner as leaver" philosophy across the organisation.
- ✓ A preparation-for-adulthood approach provided a common framework for decision-making.
- ✓ All learners expected to access a purposeful work experience pathway.
- ✓ Decision-making centred on individual aspirations, strengths and future goals.

Oakwood Specialist College

2. See the opportunity

Why does this matter for learners and organisational priorities?

Leaders and staff view work experience as an important opportunity for learners to develop confidence, independence, communication and self-advocacy in authentic environments. Oakwood's approach demonstrates that workplace experiences can support a much wider range of outcomes than employment preparation alone.

Leaders and staff described how meaningful workplace experiences help learners:

- Develop confidence and self-belief.
- Strengthen communication and self-advocacy.
- Increase independence.
- Apply learning in authentic settings.
- Understand their preferences, interests and aspiration.s
- Make informed choices about future pathways.

What emerged

- ✓ Work experience contributes to broader preparation-for-adulthood outcomes.
- ✓ Learners are supported to explore aspirations and future possibilities.
- ✓ Communication, self-advocacy and independence are developed through authentic experiences.
- ✓ Workplace learning complements wider personal development and curriculum goals.

3. Build capacity

What will it take to make this happen?

A consistent theme at Oakwood is the importance of leadership commitment, specialist expertise, multidisciplinary working and shared ownership.

At Oakwood, "Careers and Futures" holds a strategic position within the organisation and works in partnership with colleagues across the college.

Delivery is supported through collaboration between:

- Careers and Futures leaders
- Work experience specialists
- Teachers
- Therapists
- Support staff
- SENCOs
- Employers
- Families and carers

Leaders described work experience as a shared responsibility across the organisation rather than the responsibility of a single individual or team.

What emerged

- ✓ Careers and Futures positioned strategically within the organisation.
- ✓ Dedicated capacity to develop employer partnerships and work experience opportunities.
- ✓ Regular collaboration between careers, therapy, teaching and inclusion teams.
- ✓ Planning informed by multiple sources of learner insight.
- ✓ Employer relationships supported through ongoing engagement and training.

Oakwood Specialist College

4. Strengthen practice

What should effective workplace experiences look like?

A key message from Oakwood is that meaningful work experience does not look the same for every learner.

Workplace experiences are personalised and informed by individual strengths, aspirations, preferences and support requirements.

Provision may include:

- Internal workplace experiences
- External workplace experiences
- Workplace tasters
- Community-based opportunities
- Longer-term pathways
- Job-coached experiences
- Graduated opportunities for increased independence

The focus is not on whether an experience has clear purpose and supports learner development. Internal and external experiences are both valued when they align with learner goals and intended outcomes.

What emerged

- ✓ Personalised pathways support a diverse range of learners.
- ✓ Internal and external experiences are valued for their contribution to learning.
- ✓ Workplace experiences are connected to wider curriculum goals.
- ✓ Experiences are regularly reviewed and adapted in response to learner development.
- ✓ Employer partnerships enable personalised opportunities.

5. Review impact

What difference is it making?

Oakwood draws on a range of evidence sources to understand the contribution workplace experiences make to learner development.

Sources include:

- Learner reflections
- Work experience records
- Employer feedback
- Support staff observations
- Destination information
- Attendance and engagement information
- Annual learner reviews

Information is reviewed regularly and used to adapt provision and support.

Evidence shared suggests positive impact for learners in areas including:

- Confidence
- Communication
- Independence
- Self-advocacy
- Motivation
- Understanding of future options

What emerged

- ✓ Workplace experiences are contributing to wider preparation-for-adulthood. outcomes.
- ✓ Learners are developing clearer understanding of their interests and preferences.
- ✓ Evidence and feedback inform ongoing adaptation of provision.
- ✓ Workplace learning supports transition planning and future decision-making.

Oakwood Specialist College

6. Plan forward

What should we do next?

Oakwood's experience suggests that strengthening work experience begins with strengthening understanding of learner need.

Key reflections:

- Start with the learner, not the placement.
- Position work experience within a broader preparation-for-adulthood approach.
- Create opportunities that reflect individual aspirations, strengths and goals.
- Bring together careers, teaching, therapy and inclusion expertise.
- Invest in long-term employer relationships.
- Use regular reflection and feedback to adapt provision.
- Value learner voice as a key source of insight.

What emerged

- ✓ Work experience appears to be most powerful when connected to a wider preparation-for-adulthood vision.
- ✓ Shared ownership supports more personalised learner experiences.
- ✓ Multidisciplinary working strengthens planning and support.
- ✓ Regular reflection and adaptation help ensure provision remains responsive to changing learner aspirations, strengths and goals.
- ✓ Meaningful workplace experiences can support confidence, independence, informed decision-making and successful transitions beyond education.



Practice Insight

London Design & Engineering University Technical College

Embedding employer-led learning at the heart of curriculum, culture and progression

Context

LD&E UTC was founded to bridge the gap between industry and education. Located in Newham, East London, leaders operate within a context of significant deprivation, high levels of disadvantage, and a large majority of learners joining the college for a fresh start following previous disengagement or exclusion.

Leaders describe a commitment to ensuring every learner leaves with two equally weighted **"golden tickets"**:

- Academic excellence
- Real-world experience

This entitlement is delivered through the four pillars:

- Inspire
- Create
- Prepare
- Experience

Core ambition: every learner should develop academic success and meaningful experience of the workplace, regardless of starting point.

1. Understand the Change

Leadership thinking

Leaders rejected the view that work experience should be limited to a placement at a transition point.

Instead, they developed a model where employer encounters and workplace experiences run from Year 9 to Year 13 and are embedded throughout learning.

The IndEx framework was intentionally designed to enable work-connected learning and ensure careers and workplace experiences could not become a bolt-on activity.

What emerged

- ✓ Multiple employer encounters and workplace experiences across Years 9-13.
- ✓ Four interconnected IndEx pillars: Inspire, Create, Prepare and Experience.
- ✓ Employer engagement embedded across the curriculum, enabling work-connected learning.
- ✓ Work experience positioned as part of a broader learner journey rather than a standalone placement.

2. See the opportunity

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that many learners faced barriers relating to:

- Limited networks and social capital.
- Low awareness of career opportunities.
- Limited exposure to workplace norms.
- Lack of professional communication skills.
- Previous disengagement from education.

Workplace experiences were positioned as a mechanism for improving learner confidence, informed decision-making, aspirations and progression.

What emerged

- ✓ The universal entitlement was designed to address barriers including limited networks and social capital, low awareness of career options, limited exposure to workplace norms and lack of professional communication skills.
- ✓ Experiences were used to develop communication, teamwork and presentation skills.
- ✓ Learners gained detailed understanding of careers, pathways and progression routes.
- ✓ Learners were supported to make intentional and informed decisions at transition points.

London Design & Engineering University Technical College

3. Build capacity

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that achieving their vision would require careers leadership, employer partnership and pastoral support to operate as an integrated system.

Employer accountability was embedded at governance level.

To personalise support, leaders used:

- Baseline assessments
- Mindset assessments
- Attendance information
- Learner progress measures
- Pastoral intelligence
- SEND information
- Risk of NEET indicators

What emerged

✓ Employers became part of governance and accountability structures.

✓ Careers became a shared responsibility across leadership, curriculum and pastoral teams.

✓ Extensive pastoral capacity supported personalised interventions.

✓ Employers were embedded within governance, curriculum design, employer projects, skills development and workplace experiences through the four IndEx pillars. Employer partnerships became a strategic asset rather than an external add-on (employers make up 80% of the board of directors).

✓ Additional support was targeted towards vulnerable learners and those identified as at risk of becoming NEET.

4. Strengthen practice

Leadership thinking

Leaders rejected the idea that meaningful work experience must always be delivered through a traditional one-week placement.

They focused instead on creating meaningful outcomes through a range of employer-led experiences.

Provision included:

- Masterclasses
- Real-world projects
- Skills development activities
- Workplace visits
- Placements
- Employer-led curriculum delivery

Leaders intentionally identified key concepts for each subject area and collaborated with employers to deliver these. Curriculum areas were given minimum expectations, with some eventually delivering 100% of key concepts through employer led projects. Crucially, the employer does not replace the teacher who provides the expertise of the overall learner journey and learner context.

What emerged

✓ Employer-led learning embedded across curriculum areas.

✓ Real-world projects used to teach curriculum concepts.

✓ Workplace experiences ranged from employer-led projects in Year 9 to workplace placements in Years 10 and 12, with additional experiences continuing into Key stage 5.

✓ Differentiation delivered through learner roles, responsibilities and support.

✓ Leaders strategically planned daily opportunities for learners to develop presentation, communication and teamwork skills with other adults.

5. Review impact

Leadership thinking

Leaders used a combination of learner feedback, employer feedback, destination data, attendance information, assessment outcomes and project evaluation to understand the contribution workplace experiences were making to learner outcomes.

Impact evaluation focused on both:

- Learner development
- Academic outcomes
- Progression and destinations
- Employer engagement
- Curriculum impact

Leaders collected regular learner feedback and used outcome data to review the effectiveness of employer-led projects, workplace experiences and wider employer engagement activity.

What emerged

- ✓ Learners reported increased confidence, adaptability and professional communication skills.
- ✓ Leaders reported that learners had developed greater clarity about their intended next steps, drawing on a wide range of workplace experiences and employer interactions to explore, test and refine future pathways.
- ✓ Employer feedback highlighted learners' professionalism, confidence and workplace readiness.
- ✓ Work experience and employer engagement were associated with increased motivation, agency and informed decision-making.
- ✓ Employer-led projects were linked to improved understanding and application of curriculum concepts across a range of subjects.
- ✓ Strong destination outcomes remained central to evaluating success against the college's "golden ticket" ambition.
- ✓ Outcomes for disadvantaged learners remained strong, with destination and attainment data used as part of wider impact evaluation.

6. Plan forward

Leadership thinking

Leaders described an ongoing process of refinement, using impact evaluation, employer feedback and changing labour market intelligence to evolve curriculum delivery and employer engagement.

Evaluation data, employer feedback and labour market intelligence were used to:

- Evolve curriculum delivery.
- Strengthen employer engagement.
- Refine the IndEx model.
- Improve consistency across subjects and year groups.

What emerged

- ✓ Increasing proportion of curriculum delivered through employer-linked learning.
- ✓ Curriculum adaptation in response to labour market change.
- ✓ Ongoing development of the IndEx model.
- ✓ Sustained collaboration with employers, Careers Hub networks and industry partners.
- ✓ Continuous improvement informed by evidence and impact evaluation.

Key leadership reflection

A key leadership theme is the deliberate integration of employers, workplace experiences and curriculum learning.

Leaders did not treat work experience as a separate programme operating alongside learning. Instead, employer engagement, real-world projects, skills development and workplace experiences were used as mechanisms for delivering curriculum intent, developing professional behaviours and supporting progression.

As a result, workplace experiences became embedded throughout the learner journey and closely connected to academic success, career readiness and future destinations.

Practice Insight

Youth Challenge PRU

Using careers and work experience as a lever for re-engagement, aspiration and positive transition

Context

Youth Challenge PRU supports learners with complex and often overlapping needs, including permanent exclusion, disrupted education, SEND, Youth Justice involvement, challenging family circumstances and limited support networks.

Leaders recognised that many learners arrived with low confidence, limited exposure to role models, weak connections between education and future opportunities, and uncertainty about what came next.

The setting has developed a broad vocational offer including construction, hair and beauty, performing arts, catering and sport, alongside careers education, employer encounters and workplace experiences. Leaders describe an ambition to raise aspirations, broaden horizons and "show the art of the possible" for learners whose opportunities may previously have felt limited.

Core ambition: use careers education and work experience to raise aspirations, build confidence and resilience, re-engage learners with education and support successful Post-16 transitions.

1. Understand the change

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that many learners arrived with exclusion histories, disrupted education, trauma, limited role models and high levels of unmet need. Leaders recognised that many learners required preparation, skills development and employer exposure before accessing external placements.

Careers education and work experience were therefore viewed as part of a wider learner journey designed to help learners build confidence, resilience, employability skills and readiness for transition. Careers and work experience were positioned as core mechanisms for inclusion and progression rather than standalone activities.

What emerged

- ✓ Careers and work experience became central to the setting's approach to inclusion, personal development and progression.
- ✓ A progressive model was established, beginning with preparation, skills development and employer exposure before external placements.
- ✓ Careers learning was embedded across, Social Skills curriciculm and vocational pathways.
- ✓ The curriculum broadened over time to increase exposure to opportunities and future pathways.
- ✓ Work experience became part of a wider strategy intended to help learners become more confident, resilient and prepared for their next steps.

2. See the opportunity

Leadership thinking

Leaders identified that many learners had limited exposure to role models, future pathways and opportunities beyond their immediate circumstances. They believed workplace experiences could help learners develop identity, purpose and belief in their future while strengthening engagement with education.

Work experience was intentionally used to support wider priorities around aspiration, confidence, engagement and successful transition.

What emerged

- ✓ Workplace experiences were used to build confidence, resilience and self-belief.
- ✓ Careers became a mechanism for helping learners understand the relevance of education and future opportunities.
- ✓ Pathways were designed to broaden horizons and challenge historic expectations.
- ✓ Leaders used work experience to support identity formation, aspiration and progression.
- ✓ Progression into further education, apprenticeships and employment became a key success measure.
- ✓ Leaders believed all learners would benefit from workplace experiences delivered through a personalised and progressive model.

3. Build capacity

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that personalised workplace experiences required shared ownership, specialist expertise and a deep understanding of learner need.

Decisions about readiness, support and progression were informed through collaboration across careers, pastoral, SEND, curriculum and personal guidance teams, drawing on multiple sources of learner intelligence.

What emerged

- ✓ Careers leadership was positioned within the senior leadership team and supported through trust-wide leadership structures.
- ✓ Dedicated careers, work experience, SENCO, pastoral and personal guidance roles supported delivery.
- ✓ Multi-disciplinary teams used attendance, behaviour, SEND information, family context, aspirations and learner interests to inform decision-making.
- ✓ Learners were assessed collaboratively before progressing to external placements.
- ✓ Careers became a shared responsibility across leadership, curriculum, pastoral and inclusion teams.
- ✓ Strong partnerships were established with employers, the Careers Hub and external guidance services.
- ✓ Employer partnerships were developed over time to create sustained opportunities for learners.

4. Strengthen practice

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that workplace experiences needed to be personalised, purposeful and progressively sequenced. A single model would not meet the needs of all learners.

Experiences were designed around learner readiness, interests, aspirations and intended outcomes, with preparation and reflection embedded throughout the learner journey.

What emerged

- ✓ A staged learner journey developed from curriculum skills development and employer encounters through to external placements.
- ✓ Workplace experiences included encounters, workplace safaris, internal provision, block placements, extended placements and bespoke opportunities.
- ✓ Vocational learning operated in simulated workplace conditions.
- ✓ Learning outcomes were linked to careers education, employability skills and wider learner development.
- ✓ Employers worked alongside the setting to co-design placement objectives and intended outcomes.
- ✓ Reflection before, during and after placements became part of the learner journey.
- ✓ Work experience became integrated within curriculum learning, personal development and transition planning.

5. Review impact

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that participation alone did not demonstrate success. They wanted to understand the contribution workplace experiences were making to confidence, engagement, attendance, employability skills and progression.

Learner voice, employer feedback and wider organisational data were therefore used alongside destination measures to understand impact.

What emerged

- ✓ Attendance, behaviour, Skills Builder, Future Skills Questionnaire, Compass+, Unifrog reflections, employer feedback and destination information informed evaluation.
- ✓ Learner, parent and staff feedback indicated improvements in confidence, self-belief and motivation.
- ✓ Staff reported improvements in engagement, punctuality and attendance.
- ✓ Attendance improvements were associated with workplace experiences, including one learner whose attendance increased from 20% to 97%.
- ✓ Learners were increasingly able to reflect on and articulate their strengths, skills and future plans through reflection activities and employer feedback.
- ✓ Increased apprenticeship opportunities and positive transitions were reported.
- ✓ Destination data showed 74% of learners progressing into education, employment or training.
- ✓ Learners were increasingly able to articulate their skills and readiness for next steps.

Youth Challenge PRU

6. Plan forward

Leadership thinking

Leaders viewed workplace experiences as an ongoing process of refinement rather than a fixed programme. Evaluation evidence, learner progress and employer feedback were used to continually adapt pathways and support.

The focus remained on ensuring workplace experiences continued to respond to learner needs while strengthening progression and destination outcomes.

What emerged

- ✓ Data was used to review impact and refine provision.
- ✓ Individual learner pathways were adapted in response to progress and emerging needs.
- ✓ Reflection informed ongoing improvements to placements, curriculum activity and support.
- ✓ Employer relationships were sustained and expanded over time.
- ✓ Provision remained responsive to learner readiness, interests and aspirations.

Key leadership reflection

A key leadership theme is the position of careers education and work experience as core mechanisms for inclusion and progression. Leaders operated from the belief that all learners would benefit from workplace experiences, but that those experiences needed to be personalised, progressive and informed by individual need. Rather than viewing work experience as a standalone placement, they designed a broader learner journey that combined careers learning, skills development, employer encounters and workplace experiences to support confidence, engagement, aspiration and successful transition.

Leaders started with a detailed understanding of learner need and identified the outcomes they wanted to improve, including confidence, engagement, resilience and successful transition. Workplace experiences were then designed as part of a progressive learner journey, supported by strong employer partnerships, distributed leadership and continuous review.

As a result, careers education and work experience became embedded within the wider curriculum, inclusion and improvement strategy, helping learners develop purpose, confidence and readiness for their next steps.



Practice Insight

Waltham Forest College

Building a culture where work experience is an entitlement for all

Context

Waltham Forest College is a further education college in London and is a key contributor to local and regional skills priorities through its involvement in LSIP planning and engagement with employers, business leaders and local partners.

Leaders describe a culture in which "work experience is an entitlement for all", underpinned by a strategic commitment to preparing learners with the skills needed to progress into careers and meet employer needs. Over time, this has involved a significant shift in culture, moving work experience from a placement activity to a core component of progression, employability and curriculum planning.

Core ambition: every learner should have access to meaningful workplace experiences relevant to their level, stage of learning and intended progression route.

1. Understand the change

Leadership thinking

Leaders developed a vision that workplace experiences should be embedded within college culture, with an expectation that all learners participate unless exceptional circumstances related to need or readiness apply.

Workplace experiences became increasingly connected to progression, transition and the college's contribution to local and regional skills priorities. Leaders also recognised that achieving this ambition required stronger, more strategic employer relationships.

What emerged

- ✓ Workplace experiences became an entitlement and expectation for all learners.
- ✓ Careers, skills development and workplace experiences became embedded within strategic priorities.
- ✓ Workplace experiences became part of a wider learner journey focused on progression.
- ✓ Employer engagement developed into a strategic function supporting learner outcomes and skills priorities.
- ✓ Stronger alignment emerged between curriculum planning, employer engagement and progression.

2. See the opportunity

Leadership thinking

Leaders started from the principle that all learners need meaningful workplace experiences linked to their curriculum areas, vocational pathway and intended next steps.

Rather than prioritising specific groups, leaders focused on ensuring equitable access, while recognising that preparation, support and adjustments would vary according to individual need.

What emerged

- ✓ An expectation that all learners should access meaningful workplace experiences.
- ✓ Support tailored according to individual learner need rather than broad learner categories.
- ✓ Workplace experiences used to expose learners to employers, workplaces and opportunities they may not otherwise encounter.
- ✓ Stronger connections between curriculum learning, employer expectations and future careers.
- ✓ Workplace experiences increasingly used to support progression into employment, apprenticeships and further learning.

Waltham Forest College

3. Build capacity

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that delivering work experiences at scale required distributed leadership and shared responsibility across the college.

Curriculum teams, employer engagement functions, tutors, work experience coordinators and senior leaders all had a role in preparing learners, developing employer relationships and supporting progression.

What emerged

- ✓ Distributed leadership across curriculum and support functions.
- ✓ Four dedicated Work Experience Coordinators supporting implementation.
- ✓ Curriculum managers holding employer relationships within their sectors.
- ✓ Strong partnerships with employers, business leaders, local partners and the Careers Hub.
- ✓ Staff industry placements used to strengthen industry knowledge, networks and curriculum relevance.
- ✓ Employers increasingly involved in curriculum planning, delivery and evaluation.
- ✓ A culture focused on asking "How can we?" when addressing barriers and challenges.

4. Strengthen practice

Leadership thinking

Leaders recognised that meaningful work experiences required structured preparation, skills development, employer engagement and reflection.

Work experiences are designed as part of a broader careers learning journey rather than a standalone placement.

What emerged

- ✓ Skills assessments used to identify learner strengths and development needs.
- ✓ Skills Builder embedded across curriculum, tutorials and work experiences.
- ✓ Work experiences sequenced according to learner readiness, qualification requirements and support needs.
- ✓ Multiple employer interactions taking place before placements, including employer encounters, site visits, networking and live briefs.
- ✓ Placements aligned to curriculum pathways, learner aspirations and development needs.
- ✓ Employers contributing to curriculum delivery, feedback and assessment activities.
- ✓ Workplace learning used to strengthen the relevance and application of classroom learning.
- ✓ Learners encouraged to reflect on and apply workplace learning within their studies.

5. Review impact

Leadership thinking

Leaders viewed work experiences as part of wider quality assurance and improvement processes.

Evaluation focused on participation, learner development, employer feedback, progression and destination outcomes.

What emerged

- ✓ Evaluation embedded within wider college quality assurance processes.
- ✓ Curriculum teams expected to evidence employer engagement and workplace learning.
- ✓ Participation, satisfaction and destination information used to inform evaluation.
- ✓ Careers and work experiences subject to governance oversight and challenge.
- ✓ Learners able to articulate skills development, workplace learning and future aspirations.
- ✓ The college reported 100% participation and 96% learner satisfaction in work experiences.

Waltham Forest College

6. Plan forward

Leadership thinking

Leaders described work experiences as an evolving area of provision that must continue responding to learner need, employer demand and local skills priorities.

Ongoing evaluation is used to strengthen progression opportunities while addressing barriers affecting participation.

What emerged

- ✓ Ongoing development of employer partnerships and curriculum collaboration.
- ✓ Continued refinement informed by learner and employer feedback.
- ✓ Stronger alignment between workplace experiences, progression routes and skills priorities.
- ✓ Continued focus on equitable access and participation.
- ✓ Employer relationships increasingly supporting apprenticeships, employment and progression opportunities.
- ✓ Active consideration of barriers including travel costs, funding constraints and learner support needs.

Key leadership reflection

A key leadership theme is the development of a college-wide culture in which work experiences became an entitlement for all learners.

Rather than viewing work experiences as a standalone placement activity, leaders connected them to skills development, curriculum learning, employer engagement and progression planning. Distributed leadership, strong employer partnerships and a commitment to equity of opportunity enabled work experiences to become embedded within the learner journey, supporting progression into employment, apprenticeships and further learning.



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Our Impact **Our evidence**