

Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits.

What works?



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About this paper

This paper summarises the research literature on three forms of work-related learning: work experience placements, job shadowing and workplace visits. It draws together the available evidence on the effectiveness of these three activities and highlights lessons for good practice.

This information may be used by schools, colleges and providers of work-related learning in order to support the programmes they deliver in these areas.



In brief



There is a lot of formative evidence to suggest that participating in a work experience placement is a 'potentially effective' activity for young people to undertake (a 2 on the Early Intervention Foundation evidence scale). It has been shown to have a positive impact on employability skills, motivation in education, career-decision making and knowledge of the world of work. However, many of these outcomes are reported by participants themselves and there is a lack of robust, long-term investigations in this area.

The evidence base on job shadowing and workplace visits is far less extensive. Both activities have been shown to be 'potentially effective' for participants in just a few areas: job shadowing has been linked with an increased likelihood of continuing in education after leaving school, while workplace visits can assist in career-decision making and gaining an understanding of the world of work.

The evidence offers several lessons for how work experience may best be delivered, though there is no substantial discussion on job shadowing or workplace visits. It suggests that education providers should be committed to ensuring that students have access to a range of high-quality placement opportunities. However, providers will require appropriate training and funding to support this task. Students meanwhile should be matched to opportunities that are aligned with their career interests, and be properly prepared and debriefed in order to get the most out of the placement.

Executive summary

Work experience placements, job shadowing opportunities and workplace visits provide students with the chance to be exposed to and learn about real workplaces. The evidence suggests that work experience is a 'potentially effective' activity for young people to engage in and is associated with a range of positive outcomes. Job shadowing and workplace visits, meanwhile, have only been shown to be 'potentially effective' across a few outcome areas.

Impacts associated with participating in these activities have been found across six domains in total.

1. Student Satisfaction

Work experience:

- Enjoyable experience

2. Employability Skills

Work experience:

- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Confidence and maturity
- Team working
- Time management
- Problem solving skills

3. Personal Effectiveness

Work experience:

- Motivation to do well at school

4. Educational Outcomes

Job shadowing:

- Progression to further education

5. Career Readiness

Work experience and workplace visits:

- Decide on potential career options
- Insight into world of work

6. Career Outcomes

Work experience:

- Likelihood of being NEET
- Access to part-time work

Job shadowing:

- Wage returns
- Likelihood of being in employment



1. Education providers should be committed to ensuring access to high-quality placements

Schools and colleges should be committed to ensuring that students have access to a range of high-quality placement opportunities. Student-led approaches do not effectively challenge class and gender stereotypes, nor broaden young peoples career aspirations. Schools and colleges can improve the range of opportunities they offer by using brokerage services to strengthen their links with local employers, looking for or requesting skilled as opposed to unskilled placements for their students, and training staff to challenge stereotyping in the allocation of placements. Some providers will require additional financial resources and input from external agencies to support these actions.

2. Timing and length

Flexibility in the timing and length of work experience can help to gain the support of employers to provide placements.

3. Matching

Students should be matched to placements that are aligned with their career ambitions.

4. Preparation

Adequately preparing students for work experience is seen to contribute towards positive outcomes for both participants and employers. Employers can be dissatisfied and have negative experiences if young people are sent to them without any knowledge of what to expect or how to behave.

5. Structure

Students see placements to be of limited value if they are 'low-status' roles incorporating repetitive tasks with no scope for wider career exploration and skill development. Schools, colleges and brokerage services should consult with employers to ensure work placements have a clear and varied structure, and to identify meaningful activities that students can be involved in and learn from.

6. Feedback and debriefing

Employers should provide feedback to students. Debriefing sessions should also be held following placements in order to encourage students to reflect on what they have learnt.

Student feedback should be collected in order to support the continuous improvement of placements.

1. Introduction

Work-related learning has long been part of the careers education landscape in British secondary schools. The former Department for Children, Schools and Families defined work-related learning as:

Planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work.¹

This paper focuses on three forms of work-related learning that provide young people with the opportunity to visit and experience real workplaces:

- Work experience placements
- Job shadowing
- Workplace visits

It draws together the best evidence available on the effectiveness of these three activities and highlights lessons for good practice. The review is part of a broader process driven by The Careers & Enterprise Company to enhance our understanding of 'What Works' in careers education.² This will help schools and colleges decide what careers and enterprise activities will most benefit students and how they should be implemented. It will also assist The Careers & Enterprise Company in working to improve the quality of the evidence base in this area.

The Careers & Enterprise Company use a scale developed by the Early Intervention Foundation for judging the quality of the evidence associated with careers education activities. This scale and its associated terminology are used throughout this report when discussing these issues.

History of work-related learning

The launch of the Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in 1983 first saw the government provide funding for students in full-time compulsory education to gain experience of the workplace via a short-term placement. The aim of TVEI was to develop students' personal and social skills and help them to see the relevance of the curriculum to the world of work.³ Positive evaluations of TVEI led the government to continue funding for work experience once the initiative ended in 1997.

1. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). *The Work-related Learning Guide - First Edition*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

2. The Careers & Enterprise Company. (2016). *What Works in Careers & Enterprise?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

3. Hudson, G. (1996). Dealing with work: secondary students' work experience and the curriculum. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 48(3), 277-294.

Following the 2002 Education Act, student involvement in work-related learning increased. The Act allowed schools to create more time for work-related learning. This commonly included a work experience placement.⁴ Recognising the benefits that work-related learning could have for all pupils, from 2004, its provision became a statutory requirement for all students in Key Stage 4 (14 to 16 year olds) in England.

Wolf identifies one of the primary outcomes of work experience as being the development of employability skills.

Following the recommendations of the Wolf review, this statutory duty was removed in 2012.⁵ Education and training providers have since been encouraged to provide work experience for older students. Wolf identifies one of the primary outcomes of work experience as being the development of employability skills. Observing at the time that few young people move into full-time employment at the age of 16 (the former school leaving age), it was argued that it is more cost-effective to provide this experience when a student is closer to entering the labour market.

Current policy and practice

Schools are still free to decide whether and how work-related learning is delivered at KS4. The latest statutory guidance suggests that they should consider offering:

High quality work experience that properly reflects individuals' studies and strengths, and supports the academic curriculum.⁶

There is limited information on the current prevalence of work experience in English secondary schools. However, Archer and Moote's large-scale survey of students in Year 11 in the academic year 2014/15 showed that, less than half had undertaken some form of work experience by this time.⁷ Compared with survey work from previous years, this suggests that there has been a significant decline in provision for this age group.⁸ Archer and Moote's work also identified regional disparities in provision, with students in the north east, north west and Yorkshire significantly less likely to have participated in work experience.⁷

As highlighted, since 2012, government policy has focused on encouraging the take-up of work experience placements post-16. This has been most evident in the creation of 16-19 study programmes. All students completing these programmes are expected to undertake work experience or some form of work-related training.⁹

4. Hopkins, E. (2008) Work-related learning: hearing students' voices, *Educational Action Research*, 16(2), 209–219.

5. Wolf, A. (2011). *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, London: Department for Education.

6. Department for Education. (2015). *Careers Guidance and Inspiration in Schools: Statutory Guidance for Governing Bodies, School Leaders and School Staff*. London: Department for Education.

7. Archer, L. and Moote, J. (2016). *Aspires 2 Project Spotlight: Year 11 Students' Views of Careers Education and Work Experience*. School of Education, Communication and Society, King's College London.

8. Mann, A. (2012). *Work Experience: Impact and Delivery - Insights from the Evidence*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce.

Ofsted, in its common inspection framework for FE, sixth form and independent colleges, now assess these providers on student participation in purposeful and challenging work experience placements where appropriate to their learning programmes or future career ambitions.¹⁰

Current research evidence suggests that similar work-related learning activities, such as job shadowing, are less widespread. A recent survey issued by Mann and colleagues found that less than 10 per cent of respondents had participated in this activity in either KS4 or KS5.¹¹

There is no evidence on student participation in workplace visits that follows the reforms made to the Education Act in 2012. However, a survey of Year 11 pupils in England, conducted in 2009, suggests that they were reasonably common at this time with around 60 per cent of respondents having taken part in a visit.¹² More recent surveys of teaching staff and work experience coordinators suggests that many are familiar with and continue to provide these opportunities to students, more so than for job shadowing.^{13 14}

9. Department for Education. (2015). *Post-16 Work Experience as a part of 16 to 19 Study Programmes and Traineeships: Departmental Advice for Post-16 Education and Training Provider*. London: Department for Education.

10. Ofsted. (2016). *Further Education and Skills Inspection Handbook*. Manchester: Ofsted.

11. Mann, A., Kashefpakdel, E.T., Rehill, J. and Huddleston, P. (2016). *Contemporary Transitions: Young Britons Reflect on Life After Secondary School and College*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce.

12. Ipsos MORI. (2009). *Young People Omnibus 2009 - Wave 15. A Research Study On Work-Related Learning Among 11-16 Year Olds On Behalf Of The Qualifications And Curriculum Authority (QCA). January - April 2009*. London: Ipsos MORI.

13. NatCen Social Research and SQW (2017) *Work Experience And Related Activities In Schools And Colleges*. London: Department for Education.

14. Mann, A., Dawkins, J. and Mckeown, R. (2017) *Towards an Employer Engagement Toolkit: British Teachers' Perspectives on the Comparative Efficacy of Work-related Learning Activities*. Education and Employers Taskforce.

2. What are work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits?



This review summarises the available evidence on the effectiveness of three forms of work-related learning: work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. These activities are similar in that they directly expose students to real workplaces, providing them with an insight into a particular company and industry, and the world of work in general. In the case of work experience and job shadowing, they can also allow students to sample different occupations by observing and undertaking the same tasks as current employees, and develop some of the skills necessary for employment.

These activities differ, however, in their intensity. Workplace visits normally last a day at most, while job shadowing is not typically more than a few days in duration. Work experience placements are more intensive; in the UK, it is common for these activities to last approximately one to two weeks.

Differences in the intensity and structure of these activities mean that students will either assume the role of visitor, observer or active participant in the workplace to which they are exposed. Clearly, this will result in varying levels of insight about what it is like to work in that environment. These activities can therefore serve different roles in young people's career education, depending on their prior interest in and knowledge of a particular industry and the occupations it contains. Where these are less developed, activities of limited intensity, where students can obtain a broad overview of a particular area of

work, such as a workplace visit, can act as a useful starting point for deciding upon the career areas they would like to explore in more detail.

Work experience

In careers education, the term work experience is generally understood to refer to a time-limited placement that a young person undertakes on an employer's premises while in full-time study.¹⁵ Even though work experience has long been offered to students in Britain as part of their secondary education, its aims have never been clearly defined. The general and varying purposes put forward by different stakeholders range from developing a young person's employability skills to assisting in their career-decisions, preparing them for the transition to employment, or increasing their motivation towards school work by seeing how it applies to the 'real world'.^{13 16}

Different types of work experience

Recent policy changes in Britain have affected the way in which schools and colleges deliver work experience. It now takes two main forms:

- Work experience in Key Stage 4. Where these are offered, placements tend to last one to two weeks, are completed in a single block of time and take place during the summer term.¹³ Research with work experience coordinators in schools show that they interpret the primary purpose of KS4 work experience as gaining an insight into the world

15. Hughes, D, Mann, A, Barnes, S-A, Baldauf, B & McKeown, R. (2016). *Careers Education: International Literature Review*. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

16. Ahier, J., Chaplain, R., Linfield, R., Moore, R. and Williams, J. (2000) School work experience: young people and the labour market, *Journal of Education and Work*, 13 (3), 273–288.

of work and developing employability skills.¹³ They may also be taken up to support vocational courses of alternative curriculum programmes.

- Work experience in Key Stage 5. In recent years, there has been a perceived increase in the number of students in KS5 undertaking work experience.¹⁷ Students may undertake work experience after the age of 16 for different reasons: as part of the newly established 16-19 study programmes and/or vocational courses, or to support their university applications, particularly for professional or vocational degree programmes.¹⁸ Survey evidence suggests that the delivery of placements at KS5 is more varied, with an equal proportion taking place throughout the academic year as in the summer term.¹³ It is also more common for placements in KS5 to be completed on separate days than in KS4.

The aim of job shadowing for those in full-time education is to develop an insight into particular job roles or occupational areas of interest.¹³

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing, sometimes known as work shadowing, involves the observation of a competent employee at work for a short period of time.^{13 15} This can either involve observing one person or several staff members carrying out different operational duties.

The aim of job shadowing for those in full-time education is to develop an insight into particular job roles or occupational areas of interest.¹³ It can form part of a work experience placement, or be considered a form of short-term placement itself. Job shadowing can be particularly helpful in highly-skilled and technical areas of work, such as those found in manufacturing or STEM-related industries, which may struggle to provide work experience placements or to get students involved in their primary work processes. This can be due to health and safety or quality control considerations.¹⁶

Workplace visits

Workplace visits are where a group of young people visit an organisation from a couple of hours to a full day. The aim is to provide the young person with a general overview of the company and wider industry, to familiarise them with its working environment and to provide them with guidance on how to gain further experience in this area.

Workplace visits can comprise of a variety of activities such as: group exercises, workshops, networking events, presentations, Q&A sessions, and site tours.

Workplace visits can also take the form of insight days. Popularised by the finance industry, these visits were initially held within the same week of the spring term for undergraduate students. They aimed to identify engaged and able undergraduates for internships the following year, though several companies now aim their insight days at pupils in KS5 as well.

17. Bimrose, J., Brown, A., Behle, H., Barnes, S.A., Hughes, D., Andrews, D., Davies, E. and Wiseman, J. (2014). *Understanding the Link Between Employers and Schools and the Role of the National Careers Service*. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

18. Mann, A., Spring, C., Evans, D. and Dawkins, J. (2011). *The Importance of Experience of the World of Work in Admissions to Russell Group Universities*. (Occasional Research Paper no.1). London: Education and Employers Taskforce.

3. What impact do work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits have?



This section of the report will first summarise the quality of the research evidence, collected for this review, for each of the work-related learning activities of interest: work experience placements, job shadowing and workplace visits.

This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of the impacts for students that are associated with participating in these activities in the research literature. The following impacts will be considered:

- Student Satisfaction
- Employability Skills
- Personal Effectiveness
- Educational Outcomes
- Career Readiness
- Career Outcomes

This section will end with a brief discussion of the impacts that can result for employers who provide these opportunities.

Work experience

The impacts associated with work experience placements are widely researched. There is a lot of formative evidence to suggest that work experience placements can be 'potentially effective' for participants (a 2 on the Early Intervention Foundation evidence scale).² Furthermore, most of these studies are focused on work experience as it is understood and practiced in the UK.

However, the evidence base has limitations that affect the certainty with which we can say that work experience will lead to positive outcomes. First of all, many of the impacts are reported by participants themselves, or by other stakeholders involved in the process of arranging or providing placements. This information is predominantly collected from surveys, interviews or focus groups with these groups. Using these methods, there is a risk that respondents will provide inaccurate information, for instance, by giving the answer that they think is expected of them. This can lead to misleading results.

The second limitation is that there are no studies identified by this review that look at the impact of work experience placements using some form of control group. This would be where the performance of a group of young people after undertaking a work experience placement (e.g. labour market outcomes) is compared with a similar group who did not participate in work experience. Studies that follow this approach are the most robust way of isolating and observing the size of the impacts that are associated with participating in a particular intervention: in this case, work experience.

Statistical techniques can also be used to 'control' for the influence of other factors and attempt to isolate the impact of participating in work experience. A few studies included in this present review use these techniques, and are examples of the highest quality research evidence that we have on the topic.^{11 19} However, relying on statistical techniques alone, it is difficult for researchers to establish the extent to which these impacts would have still occurred in the absence of the intervention.

Statistical techniques can also be used to 'control' for the influence of other factors and attempt to isolate the impact of participating in work experience.

A final limitation is the coverage of the research evidence. Many of the impacts identified are to do with the personal and social development of the young people that take-up work experience. This includes the short-term, perceived impact of work experience on their employability skills, motivation in education, career decision-making, and preparedness for employment. As Mann and Percy highlight, in Britain, very little has been done to track the long-term progression of young people who have participated in work experience to see how it affects their future education and employment prospects.²⁰ This is an important evidence gap, as the value of what is a fairly common careers education activity to a young person's later life-chances is in some respects unknown. This may be due to a combination of

factors: the diffuse, general and 'person-centred' aims of work experience, which the research mirrors in its focus; and its varying priority in British education policy.¹⁶

Job shadowing

The evidence base for job shadowing is far less extensive. This review identified three studies that looked at the impact of job shadowing on young people.^{11 21 22} The strength of this evidence is reasonable, however. All of these studies use statistical controls, and draw on longitudinal survey data to track educational and labour market outcomes over time. The findings show that job shadowing is also a 'potentially effective'² activity for young people to engage in with respect to their progression in education^{21 22} and what they earn when they enter employment.¹¹ However, one study showed that participating in job shadowing was associated with a lower likelihood of being in employment in later life.²¹

Workplace visits

There is a very small amount of literature on the impact of workplace visits on participants. This review identified two studies that looked at outcomes associated with visiting a workplace.^{14 23} The research findings are low-quality and are based on a descriptive analysis of survey data. However, the results were positive and showed that this activity is also 'potentially effective' for young people with respect to aiding their career-decision making and providing an insight into the world of work.²

19. Percy, C. (2010). *Exploring the Impact of Formal Work Experience and Term-Time Paid Employment using Longitudinal Data from England (2003–2007)*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce.
 20. Mann, A. and Percy, C. (2013). Employer engagement in British secondary education: wage earning outcomes experienced by young adults. *Journal of Education and Work*, 27(5), 496–523.
 21. Neumark, D. (2004). *The Effects of School-to-Career Programs on Postsecondary Enrolment and Employment*. San Francisco, California: Public Policy Institute of California.
 22. Neumark, D. and Rothstein, D. (2005). *Do School-to-Work Programs Help the "Forgotten Half"?* (Discussion paper series no. 1740). Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA).
 23. Royal Society (2010). Taking a leading role. In Mann, A., Lopez, D., and Stanley, J. (Eds.) *What Is To Be Gained Through Partnership? Exploring the Value of Education-Employer Relationships*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce.

Impacts on young people

As noted, work experience placements, job shadowing opportunities and workplace visits differ in their aims, structure and intensity. While there is a large variation in practice for each activity, in broad terms, we may expect certain impacts to be associated with each type. For instance, given that work experience can provide practical, hands-on experience of employment, this activity may contribute towards the development of some of the generic skills necessary for work (employability skills) through observation and practice. Job shadowing could also help in the development of these skills, though to a lesser extent given that students will not normally have an opportunity to apply and refine them in the workplace.

Both of these activities may also contribute towards the career-readiness of the young person by helping them to decide whether the occupations they have experienced are ones that they want to pursue further. This may also have a knock-on impact on a young person's engagement in education by making them aware of the entry requirements of particular roles and the applicability of their school work to this setting.

Workplace visits could serve a similar role, but at the industry rather than the occupational level. Further exploration of particular careers would be needed through more intensive forms of work-related learning to either confirm or reject these options.

We may also expect more intensive activities such as work experience and job shadowing to contribute towards a young person's later career and educational outcomes. Practical, first-hand experience could provide students with a competitive advantage in the labour market, or enhance their university applications, particularly for professional or vocational degree programmes. Again, the impact for workplace visits, due to its short duration, may be limited in these areas.

The findings set out below show that participating in work experience is associated with the expected range of outcomes, though there is far less on job shadowing and workplace visits. This does not necessarily indicate that work experience is the most effective activity of the three, but rather that it has received far more attention in the research literature in comparison. As a result, the following discussion largely focuses on the impacts associated with this activity, although as noted there is a small amount of evidence on the impact of job shadowing on the career and educational outcomes of young people. The review also identified a few studies that highlighted the perceived impact that workplace visits have on career readiness.

In terms of differing impacts by age, there is some comparative evidence on work experience that suggests that the development of employability skills is felt to be a more prominent outcome for those undertaking a placement over the age of 16.²⁴

24. Sims, D., Southcott, C., Lynch, S. and Wade, P. (2013). *Evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials*. London: Department for Education.

This may be expected given their close proximity to the labour market and current policy priorities.⁵ Meanwhile, the contribution of work experience towards a young person's career readiness and later career outcomes has been observed within the same studies both pre and post-16 (i.e. across Key Stages 4 and 5).^{11 25}

There is no comparative evidence on the impact of placements on young people's motivation in education (personal effectiveness) and educational outcomes. The findings presented in these areas are largely from studies focused on work experience undertaken by pupils in KS4.

Student satisfaction

Several studies have found that students who have participated in a work placement are highly satisfied and enjoyed their experience.^{26 27 28} Hillage and colleagues report that students that find their placement experience more challenging are more satisfied.²⁸ Where students are dissatisfied with their experience, this tended to be because the placement was seen as too short.²⁹

Employability skills

There is some evidence that participating in work experience contributes to the development of employability skills. These are the general, transferable skills that are required to be effective in any workplace.

Survey evidence suggests that work experience is seen to be important in building a young person's softer

employability skills. A recent survey of work experience coordinators by NatCen Social Research and SQW showed that the main benefits associated with this activity were better communication and interpersonal skills and increased confidence.¹³ Several other UK based studies have identified increased confidence and maturity as important outcomes of work experience placements.^{28 30 31}

Hatcher and Le Gallais found that KS4 pupils from schools with a more advantaged intake had a better awareness of the value of work placements in strengthening these softer employability skills.³² They suggest that these pupils may therefore be more knowledgeable of the general competencies they could attain as part of the placement and the value of these in the job market, regardless of whether the placement is linked to their career ambitions. Research by Mann and Percy, however, suggests that the development of employability skills at this age is unlikely to translate into a competitive advantage in the labour market in later life.²⁰

A few pieces of research have compared the views of work experience coordinators and participants in schools with those in Further Education (FE) colleges. They show that those in college settings are more likely to identify employability skills development as one of the main outcomes of work experience.^{13 17 24} This includes wider aspects of employability, such as team working, time management and problem solving skills, and acquiring a positive

25. Kennedy, V. and Belgamwar, R.B. (2014). Impact of work experience placements on school students' attitude towards mental illness. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 38(4), 159-163.

26. Chandler, N., Ringsell, L. and Lindop, E. (2007). *Time Well Spent: Embedding Employability in Work Experience*. CBI London.

27. Smith, E. and Wilson, L. (2002). *School Students' Views on their Working and Learning in the Workplace*. Leabrook, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

28. Hillage, J., Kodz, J. and Pike, G. (2001) *Pre-16 Work Experience Practice in England: An Evaluation*. Department for Education.

29. Teese, R., Davies, M., and Ryan, C. (1997). *Work Placement Experience: The Student Perspective*. Australia: Educational Outcomes Research Unit, University of Melbourne.

30. Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd with Smart Consultancy (Scotland) Ltd and Training and Employment Research Unit (2008). *Work Experience in Scotland*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow.

31. Hudson, G. (1996). Dealing with work: secondary students' work experience and the curriculum. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 48(3), 277-294.

attitude towards work. In these studies, it was more common for colleges to provide work experience opportunities to students over the age of 16 – for instance, as part of a 16-19 study and/or vocational programme – and for these to focus on improving their work readiness.

Across all educational levels, it is felt that employability skills can only be learnt by doing; specifically, by observing other staff and how they deal with colleagues and customers on placement, and replicating their behaviour.^{24 32} Exposure to employer expectations is also identified as having a positive effect on students' personal organisation and conduct (e.g. their punctuality, personal presentation and behaviour).²⁸ In some cases, this is seen to have a knock-on impact on students' attendance and motivation at school.^{17 30}

Personal effectiveness

A few studies link student participation in work experience placements with improvements in their personal effectiveness; in particular, their motivation to do well at school.

Hillage and colleagues, for example, found that KS4 pupils who had undertaken work experience felt more interested in doing well at school afterwards.²⁸ Smith and colleagues also reported increased motivation in school among Australian youth following work experience.³³ This placement was completed as part of a broader vocational training course. They note that this could be due to students having a clearer idea of their career goals

after their placement and the importance of doing well at school to achieving these.

However, it may be that students have an increased appreciation of school and want to progress further in education as a result of a negative placement experience. This was reported in Jones and colleagues' study, and was driven by a desire among participants to avoid the kind of workplaces to which they were exposed.³⁴ This response was largely restricted to those attending non-selective state schools, which according to the authors supports the idea that less educationally advantaged students may have difficulties accessing prestigious placement opportunities.

Educational outcomes

While work experience may therefore help to motivate learners to do well at school, the impact that work experience can have on a young person's educational outcomes is less clear. In Mann and colleagues survey of school teaching staff, most respondents felt that participating in work experience before the age of 16 has a positive impact on pupil attainment.¹⁴ In another paper, Mann and Dawkins suggest that the positive motivational effect that results from undertaking a work placement could be most effective at reengaging learners of low and borderline attainment levels.³⁵

On this point, the current evidence base is inconclusive. In Percy's analysis of longitudinal data on pupil attainment in England, engaging in work experience did not have a significant effect on KS4 outcomes.¹⁹

32. Hatcher, R. and Le Gallais, T. (2008). *The Work Experience Placements of Secondary School Students: Widening Horizons or Reproducing Social Inequality?* Birmingham: Faculty of Education, Birmingham City University.

33. Smith, E., Green, A. and Brennan, R. (2001). *A foot in both camps, school students and work places*. Australia: Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association.

34. Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). The 'employer engagement cycle' in secondary education: analysing the testimonies of young british adults, *Journal of Education and Work*, 29(7), 834-856.

35. Mann, A. and Dawkins, J. (2014). *Employer Engagement In Education: A Literature Review*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce.

The author suggests that work experience in Year 10 may come too late to have an observable impact on attainment just one year later. Furthermore, for very low attainers, engaging in work experience had a small but significant negative effect on the likelihood of achieving a Level 3 qualification (A-level equivalent) at a later stage. While this finding could indicate that work experience demotivates some young people, prompting them to question the value of education, it runs counter to other evidence on the topic and further research is needed to clarify these results.

The impact of work experience opportunities on student transitions to Higher Education also requires further study. Specifically, more research is needed into the effect that inequalities in accessing these opportunities has on university admissions and the quality of students' subsequent learning experiences. We know that work experience is highly valued in the admissions criteria for medical science courses at high-ranking universities.¹⁸ Further, as part of the admissions process, all applicants at undergraduate level are encouraged to emphasise relevant placements or work experience in their personal statements.³⁶ Research by Jones has shown there to be stark differences in the experiences described by applicants at this level.³⁷ For instance, students attending independent schools were able to discuss high-prestige, professionalised experiences, while those attending state schools tended to list opportunities provided through school trips or part-time work.

With respect to job shadowing, Neumark and colleagues have found that participation boosts the likelihood that male students will enrol at college after leaving secondary school and can reduce idleness.^{21 22}

Career readiness

The most widely recognised impact of work experience is its role in assisting young people's career decision-making and providing an insight into the world of work.

Work experience placements provide an opportunity for participants to sample particular job roles and develop a better awareness of different industries. A number of studies have shown how placements can therefore help young people either to confirm or reject potential career options.^{27 30 34 38 39} This research focuses on the experience of pupils at both KS4 and KS5, and highlights the contribution that this activity can make towards a young person's career decision-making throughout their secondary education.

The research evidence suggests that the nature of these decisions can be influenced by the quality of the work experience placement. Kennedy and Belgamwar found that highly-structured placements – designed to be interactive, engaging and provide opportunities to sample various aspects of a particular profession – can lead to a substantial increase in participants' desire to pursue careers in challenging sectors (i.e. healthcare).²⁵

36. UCAS. (n.d.). Personal Statement Worksheet. Available from: <https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-personal-statement-worksheet.pdf> [Accessed: 18.04.2017].

37. Jones, S. (2012). *The Personal Statement: A Fair Way To Assess University Applicants?* London: Sutton Trust.

38. Francis, B., Osgood, J., Dalgety, J. and Archer, L. (2005). *Gender Equality in Work Experience Placements for Young People*. (Working Paper Series: Occupational Segregation, No. 27). Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.

39. Oxenbridge, S. and Evesson, J. (2012). *Young People Entering Work: A Review of the Research*. London: ACAS.

However, pupils' ability to access placements that provide structured learning opportunities may be affected by their social class. Research by Hatcher and Le Gallais found that it was more common for KS4 pupils from schools with a less economically advantaged intake to engage in placements that were of limited educational value. Higher proportions of pupils in these schools recalled undertaking menial tasks as part of their placement. Those attending schools with a more advantaged student body, meanwhile, were more likely to undertake responsible tasks, engage in activities such as job shadowing, and receive mentoring in a professional context. This suggests that pupils in less economically advantaged areas may have fewer opportunities to learn, in detail, about different work areas through the practice of work experience. As shown, these types of experiences can positively shape young peoples' career intentions and open up potential pathways to them.

Hatcher and Le Gallais found that the types of workplaces pupils access is also associated with their social class. For instance, pupils from more economically advantaged schools were more likely to access placements in workplaces where professional or managerial roles predominated (e.g. in law, medicine or finance). The authors highlight that it was more common for these pupils to have parents already working in the professions: contacts they were able to draw on to access more prestigious opportunities.

Further, while access to professional placements was roughly equal in terms of participants' gender, less prestigious placements were highly segregated. This suggests that the two social characteristics of class and gender interact and can further limit pupils' career aspirations.

Aside from developing insights into particular careers/industries, several studies also note the value of work experience in providing an insight into the world of work in general.^{14 40} This includes seeing how staff interact with each other in the workplace, having responsibility, being exposed to workplace pressures, and seeing how businesses operate from the inside. Ahier and colleagues describe this as being intrinsically valuable to young people, and can provide a model for how young people initially think about workplaces.¹⁶

There is also a limited amount of evidence on the value of workplace visits in assisting students in their career-decision making and gaining an understanding of the world of work. For instance, a survey by the Royal Society found that a quarter of respondents saw a visit to an engineer or scientist's place of work as a major influence on their decision to pursue a scientific career.²³ In addition, Mann and colleagues found in their survey of teaching staff working with pupils in KS3 and KS4, that workplace visits were viewed as the third most effective activity in providing an insight into the world or work, behind work experience and careers talks with business volunteers.¹⁴

Career outcomes

As mentioned previously, there is limited evidence on how work experience contributes to young people's subsequent employment outcomes. Mann has researched the topic most extensively in the UK.

Survey research with young people who have left education has shown that only a minority of participants believe that engaging in work experience while at school helped them find work.⁸ However, Mann and colleagues have found a link between engaging in work experience both pre and post-16 and a reduced likelihood of being NEET in later life.¹¹

The authors argue that these outcomes reflect the more important role that work experience plays in allowing young people to explore potential careers, rather than in enhancing their employability. Elsewhere Mann and Percy have highlighted how uncertainty surrounding young people's career aspirations or having unrealistic ambitions increases their chances of becoming NEET.²⁰ Having the opportunity to come into contact with employers and access trusted information about careers of interest, as through work experience, can therefore mitigate this risk.

There is, however, some evidence to suggest that engaging in work experience can provide a means of accessing part-time work while in education.³⁰ A small survey of 16-19 year olds found that roughly a quarter of students were offered part-time employment following a work experience placement.⁸

Participation in job shadowing has been found to have mixed effects on employment outcomes in later life. For instance, Mann and colleagues found a positive effect, reporting that pupils who engage in job shadowing before the age of 16 earn, on average, 11 per cent more than their peers when they enter full-time employment.¹¹ Only a very small proportion of pupils had engaged in this activity, which was more common in non-selective state and independent schools. This again suggests that access to effective work-related activities may be influenced by the socio-economic profile of the school young people attend.

In contrast, research by Neumark in the US found that those engaging in job shadowing had a lower likelihood of having been in full-time work by the age of 30.²¹

Impacts on employers

Several studies identify benefits for employers in providing work experience opportunities. Employers participating in these programmes express a desire to give something back to the local community, and encourage interest in and develop the skills necessary for pursuing a career in their sector.^{30 41} Other more immediate benefits to the employer include enhancing the organisation's local reputation and profile, developing the management skills of existing staff and increased capacity, although the latter was largely mentioned in relation to post-16 placements.^{24 30 41} Promoting social mobility and increasing workforce diversity was mentioned very rarely in the research literature.⁴¹

41. Shamash, J. and Shoesmith, K. (2011). *Transforming Work Experience into Work Inspiration – The Business Benefits: An Evaluation of Work Inspiration One Year On*. London: Business in the Community.

4. Lessons for practice



Work experience

As shown, work experience placements are implemented with different aims in mind, depending on the age and educational and career aspirations of participants. In spite of this, it is possible to identify several lessons from the research literature that should be considered in arranging and delivering work experience. These can help to ensure that all students have the opportunity to access high-quality work experiences as part of their broader career education.

Education providers should be committed to ensuring access to high-quality placements

Schools and colleges should be committed to ensuring that students have access to a range of high-quality placement opportunities, rather than leaving the process of sourcing placements to young people themselves with the support of their parents or carers.^{32 42} Student-led approaches do not effectively challenge, for instance, class and gender stereotypes, and broaden young peoples' career aspirations.³⁵ As such they can risk reproducing social inequalities. Education providers can help challenge these conceptions providing they receive the right support and training.

Improve links with local employers

Schools and colleges would like further support in establishing links with employers. The use of local brokerage services can help to provide access to a wider range of placement opportunities for students, reducing the burden on schools and colleges with this and other elements. Bimrose and colleagues suggest that existing education-business partnership organisations need to be comprehensively mapped to assist this process.¹⁷ This will help avoid duplication in services and confusion among education and training providers. They also argue that greater funding needs to be made available to allow schools and colleges to buy-in these services.

However, the personal contacts of a young person or their parent/carer should still always be capitalised on where they can provide access to opportunities that are closely aligned with young people's career interests.

Improve access to skilled placements

Morton and Collins argue that brokerage services need to be able to offer opportunities at a wide range of skill-levels, so that all young people can access a balance of craft, technical and professional placements.⁴² They propose that in order for young people to have meaningful experiences that positively impact on their career-decision making, unskilled placements should be phased out.

Challenge stereotyping

Research suggests that training in equal opportunities for work experience coordinators can be rare.³⁸ Further, when it does take place, it may just focus on one social characteristic (i.e. racial discrimination). If this experience is widespread, it should be addressed in order to effectively challenge stereotyping in the allocation of placements, particularly in schools with a low socio-economic intake. The take-up of non-traditional placements should be encouraged; Morton and Collins suggest that brokerage services should ensure that for each stereotypical placement requested an alternative non-traditional placement is offered.⁴²

Timing and length

Flexibility in the timing and length of work experience can help to gain the support of employers to provide placements.²⁴ It can also help to ensure that students have access to a broader range of opportunities, potentially at the same employer. For instance, placements can be offered at different times of the academic year, or

employers can host students on separate days (as opposed to placements being offered in a single block).

Education providers and employers should also consider whether placements that last 5 days or less are worthwhile; research has shown that students tend to be less satisfied with a very brief exposure to the workplace.²⁹

Matching

Students should be matched to placements that are aligned with their career ambitions. While this is a widely recognised requirement for older groups who are closer to entering the labour market, such as those enrolled on a 16-19 study programme²⁴ or looking to enhance their university application¹⁸, attempts should be made to enhance the relevance of placements undertaken at KS4. Supporting career exploration at this stage can help reduce student's uncertainty about what they want to do in later life and their likelihood of becoming NEET.^{11 20}

Providing several opportunities for students to clarify their career choices before making their placement choices – for instance, through careers talks and workplace visits – can support the matching process. Students who have engaged in activities like this may have a better idea of what careers they would like to explore and potentially progress into.³⁵ Informed placement choices can help ensure that work experience further contributes towards this process of careers exploration in a valuable way, beyond simply confirming that the sampled career is not something they want to pursue any further.

Preparation

Adequately preparing students for work experience is seen to contribute towards positive outcomes for both participants and employers.^{13 24} Employers can be dissatisfied and have negative experiences if young people are sent to them without any knowledge of what to expect or how to behave.

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This can be achieved through various methods including workshops, group information sessions and individual briefings prior to the start of the placement. Depending on the nature of the placement, these activities can support students to learn how to initially approach an employer, research a company/industry and to write applications. They can also be used to help students understand the purpose of the placement and to be aware of the employability skills they should be aiming to develop. This is important in helping students, particularly from less advantaged backgrounds, to see the value of the placement, even if it is not directly linked to their career aspirations.³² Students from less advantaged backgrounds may also require additional support in order to overcome any barriers they face in accessing placements. This could include the need to travel, for instance, in order to access more prestigious opportunities.

Prior to a placement, young people are seen to value the opportunity to hear from students who have previously undertaken work experience and to ask 'common sense' questions, such as what clothes are appropriate to wear.⁴³

Research has shown that young people trust and take on-board the advice of employers.³⁴ Providers should therefore also consider involving business volunteers in preparatory activities.

Structure

As highlighted, students see placements to be of limited educational value if they are 'low-status' roles incorporating repetitive tasks with no scope for wider career exploration and skill development.³⁹ Even in highly skilled sectors, students can be restricted to routine, back office functions due to health and safety and quality control considerations.¹⁶

In the research literature, high-quality placements are marked by the inclusion of a range of work-related processes (e.g. induction, company briefing, assignment of mentor) and activities (e.g. a chance to observe or speak to different employees about their roles, customer interaction, developing a specific project).^{25 30 44} Schools, colleges and brokerage services should consult with employers to ensure work placements have a clear and varied structure, and to identify meaningful activities that students can be involved in and learn from. Even general administrative placements in high-tech companies, for instance, could be enhanced through staff interviews, a discreet task or project, or a tour of the facilities.⁴²

43. Jeffers, G. (2006). School guidance counsellors learning through work experience placements. *Reflective Practice*, 7(3), 409–422.

44. Taylor, A. and Servage, L. (2012). Perpetuating education-jobs mismatch in a high school internship programme: an ecological model. *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(2), 163–183.

Feedback and debriefing

Employers should provide feedback to students in order to encourage them to reflect on what they have learnt. Jeffers suggests that schools and colleges can further enhance this process of reflection by holding collective debriefing sessions.⁴³ This helps students to retain key insights, and also to locate this learning in context by comparing and evaluating their experiences with those of their peers.

Student feedback should also be collected immediately following a placement in order to support continuous improvement and ensure they are of high quality.

Job shadowing and workplace visits

Given its limited attention, there is no substantive discussion within the literature about how job shadowing and workplace visits can best be delivered. However, as shown, these activities can support the matching process by providing brief but helpful insights into particular careers/ industries, which can subsequently inform students' placement choices. They can also form part of the work experience placement itself and broaden students' learning opportunities by allowing them to explore various occupational roles that they may not be able to practice first-hand.

5. How should the evidence base be developed?



Work experience

The evidence base on work experience placements shows that these opportunities can be 'potentially effective' for young people. However, this is largely based on self-reported outcomes and the perceptions of participants. High-quality evaluations of work experience placements are therefore required. Ideally, these would incorporate a control group, and track participant outcomes over time. This will provide a more robust insight into what impacts are closely associated with participating in work experience, the size of these effects and the groups it works best for. It will further assist practitioners in schools and colleges in deciding how work experience should be incorporated into the careers education of different young people.

As well as an overall improvement in the quality of the evidence base on this topic, there are several aspects of work experience that would benefit from further study. These include research exploring the following issues:

- The impact of undertaking work experience on labour market and educational outcomes. While a link has been established between the number of school-mediated encounters that young people have while in education and their subsequent earnings, it is not clear how far engaging in work experience contributes towards these gains.²⁰ Furthermore, with a growing emphasis

in schools on providing work experience to students in KS5, it is necessary to see whether and how this affects the quality of their later transitions. For instance, further research is needed into whether students who undertake work experience have a competitive advantage in accessing university places.³⁷

- It has been suggested that the positive motivational effect that work experience has on students can help to improve their attainment, particularly for those who are struggling at school.³⁵ Further studies are needed to establish whether there is a positive association between work experience and attainment, or whether these opportunities are provided too late in a young person's academic career to have an impact.
- More research is needed into how qualitative differences in placement experiences affect outcomes. Broadly, we know that structured placements with varied, engaging activities are enjoyed by participants and can have a positive impact on their subsequent career decisions.²⁵ However, it is important to determine what mix of work process and activities help young people get the most out of the experience. These insights could be used to inform the design of future, high-quality opportunities.

- The interacting effect of students' social characteristics (e.g. gender, social class, and ethnicity) on their ability to access work experience opportunities requires further study. Research by Hatcher and Le Gallais³² as well as Francis and colleagues³⁸ briefly touches on these connections, though a more in-depth examination is needed. This would help work experience coordinators, teaching staff and external brokerage services to be better aware of and prepared to challenge these interlocking social inequalities. Further survey work is also needed among these groups to see how prevalent formal training in equal opportunities is, and which characteristics it focuses on.

Job shadowing and workplace visits

More research is needed that focuses on the role of job shadowing and workplace visits in young people's careers education. At present, there is an insufficient amount of evidence on how widespread these activities are, the various impacts that each activity can have, and how they may be effectively implemented.

Future research should thereby focus on establishing how prevalent their use is in schools and colleges throughout the UK, why these activities are utilized, and staff and student views on the impact they can have. At this stage, the evidence base would benefit from insights derived using lower-quality evaluation techniques in order to increase our knowledge in these areas. The findings from this research can then be used to direct further, high-quality evaluations.

Conclusion

Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits provide opportunities for young people to experience and gain an insight into real workplaces. Work experience in particular has been shown to be potentially effective in enhancing student's employability skills, motivation in education, career-decision making and knowledge of the world of work. Job shadowing and workplace visits, meanwhile, have only been shown to be 'potentially effective' in a couple of areas: in supporting progression to further education and in developing a better awareness of particular careers, respectively.

The evidence offers several lessons for how work experience may best be delivered, though it is less informative on job shadowing and workplace visits. It suggests that education providers should be committed to ensuring that students have access to a range of high-quality placement opportunities. However, providers will require appropriate training and funding to support this task. Students meanwhile should be matched to opportunities that are aligned with their career interests, and be properly prepared and debriefed in order to get the most out of the placement.

Further research is needed to substantiate and expand on these findings. For work experience, more high quality evaluations are required that track participant outcomes over time. At the moment, many outcomes are reported by participants themselves and have not been confirmed using objective measurements. For job shadowing and workplace visits, we need to focus on expanding our knowledge of current practices in UK schools and colleges, and the perceived impact that these activities can have. This can be through lower quality evaluation techniques, which can then inform an agenda for further, high quality studies.

This information would assist practitioners in careers education to decide which mix of work-related learning activities will be most effective for the young people they support.

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