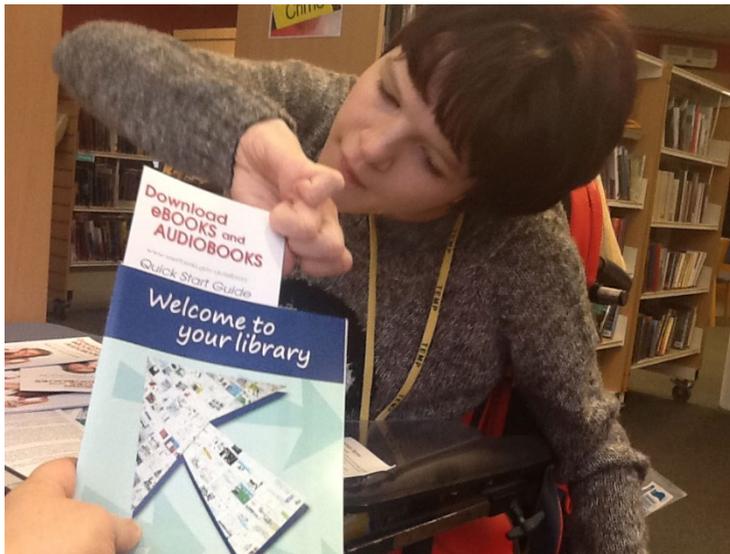


# Preparing for Adulthood



## Work experience that works

A practical guide for employers and education providers  
to support young people with SEND into meaningful work experience



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## About this guide

The employment rate for disabled people stands at 45.7% against an overall employment rate of 78%,<sup>1</sup> and yet only 6% of people with a learning disability are in work. This makes them the most excluded group from the workforce, despite over 68% of people stating that they want to work.<sup>2</sup>

This short guide aims to support employers and education providers (e.g. schools and colleges) to understand that with effective partnership working, the barriers that currently prevent young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from accessing work experience, can be broken down to ensure that lives can be changed; one experience at a time.

Work experience is an important part of any young person's journey towards employment. Evidence shows that young people who have four or more quality work experience-type activities, while still in education, are five times more likely to enter into the labour market. Young people with SEND often struggle to gain one meaningful experience of being in the workplace, and this is reflected in the current resulting employment rate statistics.

### Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all of the organisations that contributed to this guide, in particular the support from Talentino and to Castle School for their stories and photos.



<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics-Unemployment

## What is work experience?

Work experience is an opportunity to introduce young people to the world of work, and layer up the skills needed to help them get a job in the future. Typically, there are three patterns of work experience for 16-19 study programmes:

- **Experiential work experience**, where a young person accesses one or two short periods of work experience to broaden their understanding of the world of work, and to inform future study options i.e. "one or two short periods of work experience or other work-related learning to test out vocational ideas connected to future study options, such as a study visit, projects and engagement with local enterprise".
- **The vocational model**, where a young person is matched to an employer linked to their longer-term employment aspirations. With a clear development plan in place, they layer up the skills needed to do the job. This is often undertaken one or two days a week, for an extended period of time.
- **The extended model** is a part of a structured study programme, where the student is based primarily with an external employer for extended work placement, i.e. a supported internship; intended to help students obtain sustainable paid employment by equipping them with the skills for work through learning in the workplace. The internship normally lasts for a year and includes an unpaid work placement of at least 6 months.

Most work experience at schools and colleges follows the experiential model and can be important in raising aspirations. However, the vocational model can be significant in leading to real employment. Meaningful work experience for young people with SEND can be incredibly rewarding for everyone involved; where the young person, their family, and the employer all develop knowledge and learning that means they become more committed to young people with SEND working and taking part in society.

<sup>2</sup> Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, England - 2017-18

# Employers

## The benefits for employers

Work experience is a great way of introducing working with young people with SEND into your workplace. It can help you to access a wider range of talent and engage with your local community, with the potential of employing people longer term. It can add to any workforce development plans and be a great opportunity for staff development. Working with a diverse group of young people can provide fresh ideas, which can further support business development.

*“Young people with disabilities are so underrepresented in the workplace; yet they bring an immense amount of skills, talent and loyalty to employers. I urge employers to stop focusing on what they can’t do, and start looking at what they can; and I guarantee you will be surprised at what these young people can achieve.”*

Richard Elliot, Senior Human Resources Manager, Manpower group

## Raising aspirations

Young people with SEND are less likely to see people they can identify with in the workplaces they visit; however, we can all work together to ensure that people have the exposure needed to understand their choices and discover their strengths.

**Top Tip:** As an employer, don’t make assumptions about what people can do and never be afraid to ask.

## 5 Key things to include

Based on the “place, train and maintain model” (which has a clear evidence base in supporting individuals with a disability into employment) any work experience programme should include the following stages:

- **Vocational profiling-** getting to know the individual really well, to understand their strengths, skills, attributes and areas of development.
- **Development planning-** helping someone to identify where they ultimately want to be, and the steps needed to help them achieve this.

- **Employer engagement-** understanding an employer’s business needs, the working environment and how partnerships can add value to all. Employers should be viewed as an equal partner in the process.
- **Job matching-** individuals should be matched to a job that supports their development and adds value to the employer.
- **In-work support-** supporting the individual and employer throughout the process; helping to layer up the individual’s skills and ensuring that the actions within the development plan are achieved.

## Less red tape...

The government has worked to cut-down red tape and make the process much easier for employers.

- Employers do not need to carry out enhanced Disclosure and Barring Services on members of staff supervising young people aged 16-17.
- Employer’s liability insurance covers work experience students, provided that insurers are members of the Association of British Insurers.
- Simplified health and safety guidance makes it clear that if organisations already employ young people, risk assessments won’t need to be repeated for work experience and employers with fewer than five employees won’t need a written risk assessment.

The education provider should support you with a risk assessment and can also help you to explain any specific risks to the young person.

## Working with education providers

If this is the first time you have offered a young person with SEND work experience, there is no expectation for you to be experts on the young person’s disabilities. The education providers will support you with this. Their work should be able to give you the following information about the young person:

- The kind of job they might like in the future.
- Their Vocational Profile to help you achieve the best job match in relation to their experience, skills, interests and abilities.
- What they’d like to achieve during the work experience, and how they can be supported to achieve this.

The education provider should also be able to support you through the whole selection process and help to match the right young person to your role.

*“The “Three-way match”, selection of candidates, and flexibility within the programme, made sure that it wasn’t only transformational for the students. Working in partnership has helped us to create a better tomorrow for all.”*

*David May, Director of Transformation and Soft Services, Sodexo.*

*Commenting on the matching process between Employer, student and learning provider.*

## Selection of candidates

For some, the recruitment process can be one of the biggest barriers and therefore it is often more effective to look at different ways of interviewing, such as:

- **Working Interviews-** a young person is given a task and observed while they complete it.
- **Work Trial-** a young person undertakes the roles over a couple of sessions, to ensure that this is a good match for both the individual and you as an employer.
- **A video CV** about themselves that the young person is supported to create and share.

## Induction

The induction will depend upon the size of the organisation and the role that the young person will be doing. This could include:

- **An introduction to the organization** - what does the company do, who are the key people they will work with?
- **A tour of the building** - including where to get food from, nearest toilets, and fire exits.
- **Demonstrations of what they will be doing** during their time with you and the tasks they will be asked to undertake.
- Setting up in-work **‘buddies or mentors’** who can remind young people when to take a break, or support them during non-working time if needed.
- **Who to speak to** if they are worried or don’t understand something.

## Creating a work plan

Although the young person may already have an educational development plan, it is good to have a specific work plan to establish what skills the young person needs to develop while they are with you, and how these can be achieved through the role they are undertaking.

**Next steps:** It is important that the education provider or job coach reviews these regularly, so they know that the young person is continuing to develop and amend if needed. Once the young person has achieved the outcomes within the plan, the education provider should be thinking about supporting the young person to gain paid employment.

## Support during the work experience

- It helps to identify a work mentor or buddy for the young person during their work experience.
- In some cases, e.g. a supported internship, a job coach will be provided by the education provider to liaise with you and support the young person within the workplace. They learn all aspects of the job and gradually withdraw support, when appropriate, to help build the young person’s independence.
- A job coach can also provide support to you on areas such as visual aids, disability awareness training, and job carving as a recruitment tool.
- Travelling to work can also be a barrier for young people and the education provider or the job coach can support with travel training to and from the work place.

**If you feel the placement is not working, it is important to make sure that the education provider is aware. Meaningful work experience should add value to both the young person and employer.**

## Next steps

- **Provide honest feedback** - as the employer, you should be given plenty of opportunities to provide feedback. However, this should not be time-consuming and can often be provided informally. It is important that you're honest, focusing on what's worked well, and any areas for development; as the ultimate goal of any work experience should be providing the right experience that leads to a paid job.
- **Provide a personalised reference** - this can have a huge impact upon the young person's future employment outcomes, as can recommending business connections that could further support the young person's development.
- **Consider the young person for a role within the organisation** – the education provider or supported employment provider should be able to support you with this and discuss the on-going relationship needed for this to be successful.

## Further information

If you would like to consider taking on a young person into work experience, the first step is to make contact with a local education provider for young people with special educational needs: <http://www.specialneedsuk.org/findaschool.asp>.

## Case Study:

### Wyne - Anthony Mullan Furniture

Wyne's granddad was a carpenter and he desperately wanted to follow in his footsteps. However, people told him that he needed to think more realistically and suggested working in a supermarket.

Wyne's school worked in partnership with a supported employment service, and was committed to securing opportunities that focus on people's abilities. A number of taster sessions were set up in a range of working environments, and this helped to build up a rich picture of his strengths, skills and areas of development needed.

Wyne made a wonderful and long-lasting impression everywhere he went due to his motivation, passion and commitment to each placement he did. Through one of these work placements, Wyne secured a part-time paid role, and he began to develop a portfolio of skills and employer endorsements that would help him in the future.

The school's job coach approached Anthony Mullen Furniture, a family-run company, and although they had no experience of working with people with a learning disability, they saw this as a potential untapped workforce and were open to the potential of work experience. They were supported through every stage of the process, and Wyne started attending one day a week as part of his study programme. A qualified job coach worked alongside him, helping to build up his skills and liaising with the employer around what he needed to achieve to be considered for a role.

Wyne undertook this work experience for two terms, and by the end was able to undertake a number of essential roles completely competently; and the employer offered him an apprenticeship. Wyne was subsequently offered a permanent paid role and when asked what job he does, he says: "I am a carpenter, just like my granddad".

**Anthony Mullan has gone on to employ another young person with a learning disability.**

# Education providers

## The wider context

Every young person, whether they have SEND or not, should have contact with employers whilst they are in education. This can be in the form of two work experiences, one by 16 and one by 18, and employer encounters (e.g. visiting speakers or employer open events) annually from Year 7 to Year 13. Work experience and employer encounters also form the basis of two of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, a framework which identifies what a good careers programme is comprised of.

Young people should have a vocational profile, which is a form of assessment to understand an individual's experience, skills, interests and abilities in relation to getting a job. This tool will enable the education provider to understand the person in-depth, and support you as the employer to ensure the best possible job match.

Access to Work can also provide financial assistance to support individuals in supported internships and traineeships to address barriers related to their disability. This could include a job coach, transport, or specialist equipment. The education provider can support the young person to make an application.

## Work experience is a critical part of learning

Work experience has always been of huge value to a young person helping them to gain important skills and confidence. It also provides a prospective employer with 'evidence' of how they have adapted and performed in a real-life working environment. Securing references from the work experience employer(s) is a tremendous asset to the young person's vocational profile/CV. Young people often take qualifications that employers do not always readily understand, but reading references from employers gives a real insight into what that young person CAN do.

Every education provider will have its own network of employers, different local economic challenges, and a range of students with SEND. However, the one

constant is that work experience, probably beyond any other careers activity carried out within education, can make the critical difference when it comes to employers positively considering applications. Work experience gives young people the opportunity to find out what they can achieve in the work place, raising their aspirations for the future. The impact of meaningful work experience on that young person's life cannot be underestimated.

## Raising aspirations

Education providers should be talking to students from as young as possible about work to raise their aspirations and start thinking about what job they might like in the future. Young people with SEND can come from families who face many barriers themselves, including a lack of understanding around the value of working. Schools and colleges can do much to raise aspirations of students and their families, such as:

- **Start the process early** - KS4 or earlier.
- **Bring families together** to find out more about how work experience works and involve them in the preparation stages, goal-setting and review processes of work experience.
- **Engage with employers** who are happy to meet families.
- **Offer families dedicated career development training workshops** where they can express their fears and be supported to be more aspirational on behalf of their children.
- **Signpost additional sources of information and benefits**, so families understand more about the financial implications of their child ultimately working and the impact on their benefits.

**Top Tip:** Ensure that staff understand the value of work experience and are involved in measuring its success, so they become committed to the future employment aspirations of each young person.

## 5 Key things to include

Based on the Place, Train and Maintain model (which has a clear evidence base in supporting individuals with a disability into employment) any work experience programme should include the following stages:

- **Vocational profiling**- getting to know the individual really well, to understand their strengths, skills, attributes and areas of development.
- **Development planning**- helping someone to identify where they ultimately want to be, and the steps needed to help them achieve this.
- **Employer engagement**- understanding an employer's business needs, the working environment and how partnerships can add value to all. Employers should be viewed as an equal partner in the process.
- **Job matching**- individuals should be matched to a job that supports their development and adds value to the employer.
- **In-work Support**- supporting the individual and employer throughout the process, helping to layer up the individual's skills and ensuring the actions within the development plan are achieved.

## Finding employers

Many employers continue to lack confidence around people with disabilities. Sometimes, they may feel that they need to have a high level of knowledge about the young person's special needs and disabilities. As the education provider, you are the expert and can help allay the employer's anxieties through supporting both the employer and the student during the work experience process.

**Enterprise advisors** - an employer volunteer infrastructure in England who are working with schools to help introduce local employers who are interested in providing work experience to young people with SEND. Visit <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/> to find your local advisor.

**Explore existing network of employers through parents and staff** - you can also contact your local Chamber of Commerce, Business in the Community or Eduemployers <https://www.educationandemployers.org/>

**Internal work experience** - there is some debate around whether work experience, within the school itself, is a meaningful experience. For some

students with complex needs, this can be a first step towards formal external work experiences. It also provides a way of building up skills.

## Preparation stage:

It's important to be honest about support needs and prepare:

- the **student** on an individual basis;
- the **employer** so they are fully on board and prepared for the student;
- the **family** so they are fully confident and supportive, and can help with travel arrangements if necessary;
- the **staff** who may support the student at the employer site, so they understand the workplace and what the student is required to do.

## Engaging with the employer

Visit the employer without a student and:

1. **Check the employer's liability insurance.**
2. **Carry out a risk assessment.** This can be transferred if the organisation already employs young people, as the same conditions will apply. Those with less than five employees won't need a written risk assessment.
3. **Explain any specific risks** that the employer needs to be aware of.
4. **Establish expected goals and outcomes** of the work experience.
5. **Create a work plan** to establish what skills the young person needs to develop during their work experience.

## Agree student work experience placement

The student should be taken to meet the employer by education providers, to see the working environment, be made aware of the requirements of the role required to be done before the employer and student agree a match. The education provider, parent/carer, and student should then agree the pattern *e.g. one day a week for 6 weeks, one complete week, two sessions across several weeks.*

## Create rehearsals for student for work experience

During the careers lessons or in addition to them, staff will take students through a range of preparation activities to prepare them for the working environment, for example: dress code, use of phone whilst at work, independent travel (not relevant for all students), what to call their manager, how to ask for additional support if they need it. To an extent, it will depend on the duration of the work experience, the sequencing and whether it is a first or subsequent experience.

## Induction

It is important to ensure that the student has an induction at the start of their work experience, and what this looks like will depend on the size of the organisation and the role the young person will be doing. This could include:

- **An introduction to the organisation** - what does the company do, who are the key people they will work with.
- **A tour of the building** - including where to get food from, nearest toilets, fire exits.
- **A clear outline of what they will be doing** during their time and the tasks they will be asked to undertake, ensuring that they know who to speak to if they are worried or don't understand something.
- **A member of staff to shadow** on the first and perhaps subsequent days until the student is settled and everyone is happy.
- **Make sure contact details are given.**

## Support in the workplace

- Support can be provided by either **education staff or a work mentor or buddy** for the duration of the work experience and any reviews.
- For **extended work experience**, it may be appropriate to use an external Supported Employment provider/ job coach who supports the student to develop specific job-related skills.

- **The job coach** liaises directly between the education provider, employer, young person and family. Many work experience placements will not, realistically, involve a job coach, and school staff will be the key liaison person with the employer. The job coach can also provide support including: visual aids, disability awareness training and job carving as a recruitment tool.
- **Access to Work** can also provide financial assistance to support individuals in supported internships and traineeships to address barriers related to their disability. This could include job coach, transport or specialist equipment.

**If the employer or the student feels the placement is not working at any point, it is important to encourage the employer to talk to the support staff as quickly as possible, and obviously allay any fears the student has.**

## Next steps

- Secure written feedback from the employer that the young person can use in job applications in the future.
- Provide the employer with a specific format but don't tell them what to say. Perhaps discuss with the employer what they intend to write so that it is objective, and explain how important this reference will be when the young person is competing for a job / training place.
- Many students' first steps to permanent employment is a part-time job whilst still in education, so explore the possibility with the employer and discuss the on-going relationship needed for this to be successful.

**Engaging families and parents/carers.** Throughout the work experience process, it is vital to secure the understanding and support before, during, and afterwards. Ensure time and communication methods suit your families, and that they fully understand the value of work experience.

## Case study: Luke - Donnington Valley Hotel and Spa

I did my work experience at Donnington Valley Hotel and Spa, and with the support of Louisa and Nicola I managed to get a job. I really love working at a hotel. At the beginning I helped customers to check in their memberships cards. I



helped with drinks and folding towels ready for customers. I have now moved onto working in the restaurant serving customers, clearing conference rooms and dealing with room service. It makes me feel like the skills I have learned, I will be able to use in my job and in the future. What I have learned from work

experience is that working hard and doing a good job is important. I feel more confident now.

Thank you to Donnington Valley for letting me do my work experience there and giving me a job. I really enjoy working with them. Having a paid job is important to me because it makes me feel like a proper grown-up and more confident and my parents, grandparents and teachers are very proud of me.

Louisa introduced me to the supported employment service (Ways into Work) who helped with my contract and working with my family. She continued to support me in employment with the World of Work team.

Once I got the job, I had to do lots of training. I was supported on training courses about art and sculpture. Nicola and Louisa have been helping me complete my online training units which I have to complete about bar tendering, customer service, health and safety and dealing with people. They have helped me to understand the units and then I have had to do a test on my own. The World of Work team have been great, and I could not have got this job without them. My parents and family are so proud of me. I am the only person in my family with a job. In the future I think I would like to work as a waiter in a posh restaurant when I get older.

*"Luke's growth and development has been amazing, from joining us in the spa on his work placement to becoming a part time member of staff in the restaurant. His willingness to get on, and his passion for the hotel have stood him in great stead and we are pleased that he has now officially joined the team."*

**Emma Jenkins, Human Resources Director- Donnington Valley**

## Case study: James- Housing Solutions

James wanted a job more than anything, his family supported him to apply for Saturday jobs, but he didn't even get a response. James finds articulating his strengths difficult and with no experience he never made it past interview. James needed support and was helped to put together a development plan by his local Supported Employment provider, which included work experience to give him the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities and hopefully gain a reference.

A placement was secured in a local housing association working within the finance team and he attended with a job coach one day a week for six weeks. During this placement the job coach worked with James and his supervisor to build up his skills and he gradually took on more tasks. Everyone was pleased by his progress and could see the benefit of extending his work experience, so he could continue to build up the tasks he could complete.

James undertook a further month's work experience placement, his confidence grew, and he was able to demonstrate that he could fulfil a genuine role. At the end of the work experience, James was offered the opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship with the same organisation, where he gained further experience and a relevant qualification. James is still employed and is an employee ambassador for autism; helping to raise other team member's awareness across the organisation.

*"I am so pleased Housing Solutions gave me the chance to do some work experience. I built up my confidence and got better at tasks every day. I hope more employers can give people like me a chance, and help them to achieve their dream of having a job."* **James**

## Case study: Callum - Kevin Green Scapes, Landscaping

Callum attended Nova Training after suffering the loss of his mother, who was always his main support due to his learning disabilities and violent outbursts. He attended the construction workshop and completed a Level One award.

Callum worked with the Placement & Progression Officer (PPO) to build up his confidence and how to effectively undertake interviews. After an interview with Kevin Green Scapes, Callum secured a placement for work experience. His timekeeping and attitude were excellent, and Callum put his heart into his placement. The feedback from his manager was brilliant, and they said Callum was the first to arrive in the morning and was doing a great job. Following the work experience Callum was offered an apprenticeship. Callum now attends college once a week to ensure he obtains both his maths and English, and the remaining is undertaken within the work place. Callum is still employed, and is a valued member of the workforce.

“I am so grateful of Nova in believing in me and all the help in securing my Apprenticeship.” **Callum**

## Case study: Lyad - Poundland

Lyad started with Nova training from a home-schooled background, as he was unable to socialise within a school environment. He had social barriers due to his lack of social interactions with young people at school, and was working at an Entry 2 English and Entry 3 maths level. A placement officer and Lyad walked around the local area and identified ten potential employers, and Lyad was supported in speaking to managers of local businesses, which is something Lyad found challenging as he felt unable to communicate easily with strangers. They spoke to Michael, the manager of Poundland, and instantly Michael and Lyad hit it off. He was offered a work experience placement.

Lyad’s needs and his past experiences were discussed freely, and the manager was extremely supportive and wanted to provide support for Lyad to ensure he gained the social skills he desperately needed for his confidence. The placement officer completed a health and safety vetting with Michael and discussed both the employer’s needs and Lyad’s own needs. On Lyad’s first day, the placement

officer attended to ensure he felt happy and confident to continue, and that Michael was happy. He then returned to collect Lyad upon finishing at 4pm. Lyad had a fantastic day. After two weeks of working at Poundland, Lyad was offered a contract. He is now a respected member of the Poundland team, and progressing well with ongoing training and support from both the employer and training provider.

## Useful links:

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/employment/vocational-profile-workbook.htm>

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/supported-internships>

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

<http://www.gatsby.org.uk> and the SEND Gatsby Toolkit Guide

[https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/the\\_send\\_gatsby\\_benchmark\\_toolkit\\_v2.pdf](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/the_send_gatsby_benchmark_toolkit_v2.pdf)

## Best Practice Examples Effective Employer Relationships:

### Brookfields School, Berkshire

<https://brookfieldsschool.org/curriculum/what-we-teach/pathway-to-employment/>

### Catcote Academy, Hartlepool

<http://www.catcoteacademy.co.uk/>

### Peterborough Regional College

<https://www.ucp.ac.uk/peterborough-regional-college/>

### Nova Training

[www.novatrainng.co.uk](http://www.novatrainng.co.uk)