

A Guide to Work Experience – Questions & Answers

The Guide

HCS works with the majority of schools within Essex, Southend & Thurrock to support the co-ordination of Work Experience for around 17,000 students every year, so we understand you will have questions and want to know what you can do to help your child. Hopefully this guide will answer those questions and provide you with some ideas about how to help make the most of this opportunity.

What is Work Experience?

Work Experience is an unpaid placement normally lasting 1-2 weeks, at a place of work. The young people carry out a range of tasks similar to those of an employee but with a focus on the learning aspect of the experience. Some young people may have a placement for an extended period of time, if it is linked to a course they are studying or part of an alternative curriculum.

When will it take place?

Each school chooses individually, the most suitable time within their time table to complete their work experience programme. This will usually be during the later part of Year 10 or towards the beginning of Year 11. When the placements are linked to specific courses, the duration, timing and content are often influenced by the programme of study.

Why do Work Experience?

Work experience is an opportunity for young people to learn and practise some of the skills they need to succeed in the business world and it supports their personal growth by:

- Developing social skills, increasing confidence and promoting a sense of responsibility and independence.
- Providing valuable and realistic insight into the world of work and up to date practices.
- Providing information to help inform their decision making about the future career plans and may in some cases lead to offers of part-time employment.

Who provides the placements?

HCS provides schools with the majority of the placements but students are also encouraged to find their own placements and these are commonly known as private placements.

Who are HCS & What do they do?

HCS is recognised as the preferred provider of work experience placements within Essex, Southend & Thurrock by Essex, Southend & Thurrock County Councils who supports the school with funding. Our experience spans a number of years and is recognised by the national work experience organiser's award. Our role is to source & monitor the quality of the placements offered to young people.

Placements are vetted to ensure that the employers have effective health & safety management systems, provide relevant and realistic learning opportunities and are welcoming for the Young People.

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How are placements chosen?

Schools and the Young People can access placements via an online booking system “Webview” Your child will have a chance to make up to six choices by logging on to the on-line system. They can search for placements within a geographical area, by business category and work out their travel plans. Completing the placement selection may be done at school although many schools suggest this is done as part of homework activity which parents can be involved in.

If your child wants to go to a particular business sector and this is not available via the on line system you are more than welcome to find a placement of your choice. Many parents have contacts in business that are willing to help young people, and we recommend that you make the most of those opportunities. This type of placement is referred to as a “private placement” helping students find their own placement adds to the value of the learning experience.

What do we need to do if we want a private placement?

Once you have found the employer, you will need to:

- Obtain a Private Placement form from school
- Ask the employer to complete the form and return it to school. (There will be specific time deadlines for getting your forms handed in so please check when these are)
- Advise the employer that they will be contacted by a HCS placement visitor to arrange a mutually convenient time to visit them.

What type of placements are suitable?

All employers who offer placements will be required to meet with specific requirements including private placements. These exist to make sure your child gets the best possible opportunity to learn in a safe environment. All employers must:

- Have up to date Public Liability and Employers Liability Insurance cover up to £5 million
- Provide an opportunity for students to undertake relevant and realistic tasks that develop skills and confidence.
- Provide adequate supervision and support
- Have assessed the likely risks for the Student and have appropriate safety systems in place.

If you are not sure if the placement you have found is suitable we will be happy to advise you, particularly, if the placement is in a private residence, on a construction site or in a high risk sector. Placements with mobile workers are not usually suitable.

Who can I contact for advice?

Your first point of contact is the Work Experience Co-ordinator in your child’s school. However if having talked with them you are still unsure and need more information you can call us on 01376 574600 Please bear in mind that we are dealing with around 17,000 placements so it is difficult to be available to talk to the parents of every student but we will do our best.

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What else can I do to help?

Schools have a programme of activities to help prepare Students for going into the work place but there are a number of things that you can do to support your child to help them get the best out of their Work Experience. Here are a few ideas:-

Before the placement

- Talk to them about their choices, go on the on-line system and see what's available & encourage them to look at opportunities in different sectors.
- Help with finding or suggesting ways to find a private placement.
- Get them to look at placements in the area where you work. Placements are available to them across the whole county via the on-line system but we have links with providers outside Surrey who vet placements for us, so don't limit their choices to just the immediate vicinity of their school. Travelling to new places is an important part of the experience and can be fun.
- All placements provide a job description so you can talk to them about what they will be doing on their placement.
- Encourage them to go for a pre-placement interview, or at least call to confirm all the details such as, where to go? At what time? What to wear? Who to ask for?
- Try to complete the paperwork their school sends you on time, this helps keep things on schedule.
- Reassure them that everyone gets nervous about doing something new, talk to them about what your first day at work was like or get them to chat with siblings who might have done Work Experience.

During the placement

- Ensure the school has a contact number for you or someone else in the event of an emergency
- Encourage your child to be responsible and turn up, on time, everyday and call if they can't attend. Employers offer placements on a good will basis, they plan activities for the Young People so not turning up is both inconvenient, rude and it may put them off offering placements for others.
- Talk to your child about what they have been doing and encourage them to keep a record in the Work Experience diary, this will help when they go for job interviews in the future.

After The Placement

- Chat with your child about what they have learnt and how this can be used for the future, how it impacts on their career and further study choices.
- Congratulate & praise them on completing their placement successfully, put your comments in their diary.