

Work experience - A toolkit for general practice



This toolkit provides you with a step-by-step guide for hosting a successful work experience opportunity in your GP practice.

It will provide you with ideas, suggestions and best practice for work experience for aspiring medical students, future GPs and those exploring a career within the wider practice team.

Within this toolkit you will find links to:

- Forms and templates that you can use for your work experience programme. They are designed so you can easily edit them and we encourage you to adapt them for use in your own context.
- Supplementary information that provides more detailed advice, and guidance.

Like healthcare, work experience is constantly evolving and has to react to the wider healthcare environment. Here is the **latest information about work experience**.

“Allowing aspiring medics to learn about and experience general practice is really important to the RCGP. We’re keen to do all we can to enable tomorrow’s doctors to explore the endless opportunities associated with a career as a GP. Access to high-quality experiences are vital, whether in-person through traditional work experience or online alternatives such as Observe GP. The RCGP is delighted to continue working with HEE to provide support, guidance and expertise to aspiring medics and healthcare professionals alike in the hope of inspiring the next generation.”

Professor Martin Marshall, Chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

“The NHS Constitution states that everyone counts, therefore it is right that we maximise our resources for the benefit of the whole community, and make sure nobody is excluded, discriminated against or left behind. Good quality work experience has a vital role in connecting the potential that exists in all corners of our society with organisations that will benefit from having wider diversity of perspectives and background a part of their workforce.

“Health Education England’s toolkit provides you with everything you need to support participants on their work experience journey in your setting – including resources, templates and information that you can implement, use and adapt appropriately for your scale and context.

“Thank you for making a vital contribution to a new era in healthcare, growing a diverse and flexible workforce that is representative of the community the NHS serves.”

Dr Navina Evans CBE, Chief Executive, Health Education England.

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1. What is work experience?

Work experience is an opportunity for direct experience of work within an organisational or practice setting.

Work experience helps people prepare for professional study and their future career. It allows those on placement to see what the job is really like, understand the demands of the career and find out if it is suited to them.

It gives the participants the opportunity to develop and demonstrate the values, attitudes and behaviours necessary to work in the NHS.

Work experience can help you to:

- Develop your future workforce, providing insight into general practice
- Support informed career decisions
- Create further relationships with your local community, providing an opportunity for you to engage, inspire and inform others
- Widen access to opportunities in general practice and support greater diversity and inclusion
- Develop and engage staff - it is an opportunity for all practice staff to develop their management and teaching skills
- Gain fresh insights and see your organisation through someone else's eyes.

2. Set up

Before committing to offering work experience opportunities, it is important to ensure you have the support of key practice staff, alongside the necessary framework and resources in place. This will ensure you adhere to appropriate regulations and deliver a successful programme for all involved.

2.1. When and how long?

You can hold your work experience at any point in the year. School holidays are often a good time in the year. Schools also often organise work experience placements in June and July.

The placement should be long enough for an individual to gain an understanding of working in general practice. Placements can vary in length, in most cases between one and five days.

Consider the person coming on work experience and how you can support them during the time you have available. They will need to gain an understanding of the work in your practice and of the profession to help with their future career decisions or application for further study.

Any length of experience is helpful. Participants might be able to combine placements with other providers in a different setting. The focus is not how much work experience someone undertakes but how they reflect on it and what they learn from it.

2.2. Risk and health and safety

In clinical areas, work experience should be restricted to observation and shadowing. Participants on work experience cannot get involved in any clinical activities, such as taking blood pressure or weighing a patient. We provide **examples of activities** that can be undertaken on placement.

As an employer, you have primary responsibility for the health and safety of the individual.

It is advisable prior to the placement to ask those coming on work experience to complete a **health questionnaire**, which will alert you to any conditions or needs that you need to be aware of.

It is recommended that potential risks be discussed during induction, checking that participants understand what they have been told and how to raise health and safety concerns. Your practice manager could carry this out.

Guidance from the **Health and Safety Executive** makes it clear that if you already employ people under the age of 18 years you will not need to repeat risk assessments for work experience placements. However, if you have not recently employed a young person it is advisable to review your risk assessment before the placement starts.

It is advisable to review your **risk assessment** and we have included a template that covers all the major risks within a clinical environment. Additional risks can be added for specific areas.

Ensure that all information about participants is kept in accordance to your data protection regulations and are in line with all appropriate consent.

2.3. Confidentiality

There is often a misunderstanding that work experience cannot be held in general practice because of confidentiality, this is not the case if the following principles are followed.

Work experience placements should not be offered to anyone who is registered at your practice, as they are more likely to know one or more of your patients.

Confidentiality is crucial. We would suggest that it is covered in:

- **The pre-work experience information you send out**

This includes a **placement agreement form** that includes agreeing to keep all information, including the identity of the patient, confidential. It is also reinforced in the **clinical** and **non-clinical work experience guides** for participants

- **The onsite induction**

A thorough induction should stress the importance of confidentiality, check the participant's understanding and make them fully aware of confidentiality protocols. If there is time in the induction we have dedicated activities to structure your conversation about confidentiality.

We have included these in our list of **suggested activities** during the placement.

Remind the placement participant that confidentiality extends not only to the patient records, the appointment book and treatment, but also to the fact that someone is a patient of the practice.

Patients should always be consulted about the presence of people on work experience but usually are more than happy to have them around. Be sure that patients understand the status of those on placement, for example they are not a medical or healthcare student. Informing them is enough but you may wish for them to sign a **patient consent form**.

Our three point plan is to inform patients about the presence of someone on work experience when they:

1. Book their appointment
2. Arrive at reception
3. Enter the consultation

You are encouraged to put **posters** up in reception.

Everyone on work experience should have the opportunity to introduce themselves to the patient. Inform them in advance about where they should go if a patient does not consent for them to be present. Should they wait outside the room? In the staff room? Will you come back to get them?

2.4. Insurance

Individuals on work experience are covered by your existing employers' liability insurance policy, provided your insurer is a member of the Association of British Insurers.

Schools and colleges do not need to separately run a risk assessment. Your risk assessment will be more than sufficient.

The Association of British Insurers, the British Insurance Brokers Association and Lloyds of London have agreed that, as a matter of convention, individuals on work experience should be treated as employees for the purposes of insurance against bodily injury (that is, they will be covered by your employers' liability policy), where the employer is legally liable for a loss. You only need to notify your insurer of the sorts of activities that individuals on work experience will undertake if those activities are onerous or different from the normal business activities of your organisation. The work experience placements we are recommending are less than one week in length and involve no clinical or out of the ordinary activity.

For more information visit the **Association of British Insurers**.

2.5. Indemnity

Indemnity is not a barrier to providing work experience. Many indemnity organisations view the supervision of work experience placements as part of the role of being a doctor and running a practice.

Work experience participants must be given an appropriate induction that explains the risks and stresses the importance of confidentiality. At induction they should sign an **agreement** to keep all information, including the identity of patients, confidential. When interacting with patients they may only observe with appropriate consent from patients - who must understand the status of the individual undertaking the work experience (that is they are not a medical or nursing student).

Due to risks involved it is recommended that you do not include home visits during the work experience placement.

The benefits of indemnity would apply to members only and would not extend to the provision of assistance to those on work experience if a claim were made directly against them. As work experience is purely observational it is unlikely that individuals undertaking such experience would find themselves facing such an action.

“The **MDU** regards supervision of work placements as a normal part of the work of being a GP. This is included within our standard subscriptions and members who offer work experience placements do not need to tell us. If a GP member of the MDU were to encounter problems as a result of such activities they could approach us for advice or assistance. Examples of assistance that might be sought could include advice about confidentiality, supervision and/or delegation or assistance with allegations made in respect of the care provided to an individual patient when the work placement person was present.”

“**Medical Protection** takes the view that the provision of work experience opportunities is a recognised activity in many professional settings and no additional subscriptions are required by partners. We expect that those on a work experience placement will not undertake any clinical work but instead observe and shadow your professional practice. Members are welcome to contact Medical Protection to discuss any medicolegal considerations in accepting individuals for work experience, for example, issues around confidentiality and consent.”

2.6. Safeguarding

A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is not required for staff supervising children aged 16 to 17 on work experience.

A DBS check may be required for a person who supervises a young person under the age of 16. This will be required where the person providing the training or supervision to the child is unsupervised and is providing the training or supervision frequently or intensively (at least once a week or more than three or more days in a 30 day period). In these circumstances, the work is likely to be regulated activity and the education provider can request a DBS check for that supervisor.

No DBS is required for young people on work experience because they must be supervised at all times.

You have the right to refuse requests by the education provider that checks are carried out for those supervising students aged 16 to 17. For more information, visit the government's **[disclosure and barring service](#)**.

As part of your risk assessment, do consider how you can minimise those on placement coming into contact with a distressing situation. Some may have had experiences of ill or dying relatives and may be uncomfortable or upset with some of the patient's stories. You will not be able to prevent this entirely, and so consider how you will support.

3. Placement design

The goal is to provide a real insight into what working within general practice is really like.

Work experience can build knowledge and understanding in:

- **Medicine**
What it is like being a general practitioner including treating patients and their role in the community
- **Wider clinical roles in the healthcare team**
This could include the role of a physiotherapist, pharmacist, nurse practitioner or one of the many other roles at your practice
- **Medical administration**
The work that is involved in running a practice.

During the placement you should introduce the wide variety of roles in your practice. Through this participants will get a wider appreciation for all areas of general practice, including the roles and responsibilities of different members of the team and the importance of teamwork.

In clinical areas, work experience takes the form of observation and shadowing. Work experience participants cannot get involved in any clinical activities, such as taking blood pressure.

When planning your placement:

- Ensure that participants are in the company of a member of staff at all times
- Identify the main contact that participants can go to in the event of a query or concern
- Assign a 'buddy' that can help answer informal questions and help the participant reflect on their experience. If you have a medical student, foundation doctor or GP trainee, they would be ideal at fulfilling this role.

3.1. Timetable

We suggest that the placement includes:

- **Observation of different roles**

Through this participants will get a wider appreciation of the range clinical and administrative roles, the different aspects of healthcare and the importance of teamwork.

- **Opportunity to reflect each day**

It is good practice for participants to consider what they have learned. The process of filling out a workbook, either with a member of your team or on their own, gives that time to encourage self-awareness and an understanding of their skills and strengths.

We have included guides for **clinical** and **non-clinical work experience** that encourage reflection.

Alongside the clinical aspects, good timekeeping, reliability, team working and problem solving should be reinforced as part of the placement.

We have provided example work placement timetables for **clinical** and **non-clinical roles** and some **suggested activities** to make the experience enjoyable and insightful.

Before, during and after the placement, there will be opportunities for participants to carry out activities to support their experience and learning. You can use the activities for quieter moments, or when staff are busy elsewhere. If possible find a member of the team who can talk to the participant about what they have done, answer any questions they might have, and explore what they have learnt. We provide a list of **suggested activities** those on placement could do.

Where possible provide the placement timetable in advance, as it will help participants to see what they will be doing each day. A **blank timetable** for you to complete is available.

3.2. Helping them to prepare

It is important that you help those coming on placement to prepare. We suggest you send them a:

- **Welcome letter** outlining the timing of the work experience placement, who to contact and your expectations
- **Work experience placement agreement** outlining the terms of their placement, including confidentiality
- Guides for **clinical** and **non-clinical roles** that include what to expect, what to wear and how to prepare (including activities).

Make a badge for participants to wear; it will help them to introduce themselves, be known to staff and patients, feel valued, and part of the team. Include their name, the logo of your practice and their role 'work experience participant'.

3.3. Induction

Everyone should receive an induction to the workplace that will help them to integrate quickly and learn about working life. For those on work experience they may be entering the world of work for the first time and may not know how it functions and how they should behave.

It is common to underestimate the knowledge and ability of a 16-year old while also overestimating their confidence and maturity. Recognising that they have been offered an opportunity, participants may wish to impress you and not ask the questions they may need to. With simple clear instructions, participants can feel reassured and focus on observing.

The induction should include:

- **Getting to know them:**
 - What they want to gain and learn from the experience
 - Any concerns they have, including anything they may find upsetting
 - Their experience of healthcare
 - Their future plans and aspirations
 - Any needs they may have (for example prayer facilities)
 - If there is anything specific they wish to see.
- **Clarifying expectations:**
 - What they will be doing
 - Confidentiality
 - Health and safety
 - How to act in a consultation or around patients and the team
 - Who to speak to if they have any concerns or questions
 - What to do if they cannot attend
 - What to do for lunch and refreshments
 - Dress code
 - Timetable for the duration of the experience.
- **Introduction to the team and the organisation:**
 - The work of the practice and values
 - Who is part of the team and their different roles and responsibilities
 - How to access the practice
 - A tour of the facilities including
 - Where to get food outside of the building and where to eat lunch
 - The nearest toilets
 - First aid facilities
 - The fire exits and evacuation points.

3.4. Reflection

Reflection helps us to understand and learn from situations, to develop competencies and to think clearly about career choices. Reflection is a key aspect of any medical career and essential for work experience participants. The focus is not how much work experience participants undertake but what they learn from it.

To help participants get the most out of the placement, make time for them to reflect on what they have learnt and put these thoughts into a diary. There is no right or wrong way to reflect. By just describing what they did will help them consider what happened and how it made them feel.

Our guides for **clinical** and **non-clinical placements** provide worksheets that can be used to reflect.

“It allows you to take notes and makes you think about what you are observing whilst on your placement - so when you go to the GP practice you can reflect on what is going on... now it's all gone into my personal statement.”

“I wasn't sure about the value of a reflective diary... I really couldn't get my head round how writing things down all the time would help my learning. How wrong I was! I found that keeping a diary made me note how I felt at the time about an activity or event. It's so easy to forget things when you are busy, but by writing my feelings down on paper I took more in.

Keeping a regular journal has certainly helped focus my reflective reviews of learning. I found that by looking back on my thoughts and experiences (my reflective diary entries) throughout the GP placement helped me understand more about the subject matter. People skills are so important - observing how the GP behaved and spoke with different people was a real learning experience.”

Quotes from those on work experience in general practice.

4. Recruitment

4.1. Who?

We recommend that work experience be for those:

- That are interested in working within healthcare
- Who have not received any prior work experience in general practice.

We recommend that work experience in clinical areas is available to those from the age of 16 years because:

- Placements are in high demand, with often limited availability
- A certain level of understanding and maturity is required, as patient consultations can be emotionally challenging.

You may wish to offer work experience to those from the age of 14 years in non-clinical areas, for example working in practice administration.

Work experience placements should not be offered to patients registered at the practice.

We have found that the vast majority of work experience opportunities go to those who already have connections with staff in practices - we would like to change this and ensure that it is more accessible to all.

It is important that our workforce represents the population we serve. Offering and allocating work experience in a transparent and fair way can help to improve social mobility and diversity in our workforce.

We need to ensure that work experience is available to all regardless of whether they have connections or not. Many people struggle to find work experience opportunities and we would encourage you to target those most disadvantaged.

We hope that you join us in supporting work experience and providing opportunities to all those who can make a real contribution to general practice.

4.2. Finding applicants

There are two main approaches to finding work experience applicants:

- Working with another organisation to find people for you
- Dealing with applicants directly.

You will get people approaching you directly for work experience, however, in order to ensure greater diversity, we would suggest you work with others such as schools and colleges in your locality. You can, for example:

- Contact state schools outside of your catchment area that serve disadvantaged communities. You can get a sense of this by looking at the percentage of students on free school meals (available freely from the **Department for Education**).
- Speak to local universities who have medical schools. They are likely to have outreach teams who can support, alongside dedicated programmes and activities that you may be able to get involved with.

A list of medical schools in the UK is available from the **Medical Schools Council**.

- Speak to local careers advisers, who will be supporting schools and colleges in your area. The **Careers Enterprise Company** can help and put you in touch with the relevant contacts
- Work with Jobcentre Plus and the Prince's Trust who can identify people and provide free support.
- Engage with charities that are working in social mobility that can help identify individuals.
- Working with another organisation, such as a school or college, can help in many ways, they can:
 - Identify individuals outside your catchment area
 - Identify individuals who are interested, highly motivated and would value the work experience opportunity
 - Prepare individuals for the work experience placement
 - Provide support if any issues arise.

Set out the number of work experience placements you would be able to accommodate each year and establish an ongoing link. You will also need to let them know about the type of work experience on offer, any eligibility criteria, duration and time of the year, as well as your application process. Be clear that this can be part of an ongoing relationship.

Do not rely on informal networks, as you will miss out on the people who would most benefit from the opportunity.

Many working in the NHS wish to support their friends and family to access placements. HEE and the RCGP do not endorse placements being allocated directly to friends and family outside of any organisational process, as these processes aim to ensure that the placements are fair, equitable and safe for all. Where friends and family arrangements are in place, we would recommend that considerations are made to address diversity and increase the availability of placements to others.

4.3. Application process

Consider your application process so that it is fair and inclusive to all potential applicants.

Often applicants feel very uncertain about the process so let everyone know:

- The type of placements available
- The number of placements available
- When the placements will take place
- The closing date for applications
- The date by which they will hear if successful.

Aim to make your application process transparent, so that anyone that is interested in applying are clear on what you are looking for, what is available, and how their application will be treated.

4.4. Application form

We would encourage you to ask everyone to complete an **application form** and an **equality monitoring assessment**. It will give you an opportunity to find out more about the person and the type of applicants you have.

Think about what you want to find out through the application form and the questions you want to ask. The template application form includes:

- **Eligibility and prioritisation criteria**
This is to help you to diversify your intake.
- **Qualifications, subjects and predicted grades**
This will help you identify those that would gain most from different types of experience. Do remember that you can access medicine with a broad range of academic qualifications and grades.
- **Space for those applying to explain why they have chosen this placement and what they wish to gain from the experience.**
This gives you an opportunity to find out more about their interests and motivation.
- **A data protection statement that outlines why you need the information and how you will safely store and use their information.**

To help applicants you can send some guidance on how to complete the application form. We have provided a **template**.

Ensure that your privacy notice reflects the information you will collect and use for work experience. We have included a **template privacy notice**, which you can adapt to reflect your organisation.

Online application forms are often more accessible, and provide ease of administration for large numbers. It can be easier as well to organise anonymised selection.

Those looking after the work experience participants will find the application form useful to see as it will give them detailed information and allow them to tailor the experience to meet an individual's interests and motivation.

No practice will be able to say yes to everyone, there is often more demand than places available. When you do have to say no, supply applicants with the **further resources document**, which has suggestions for alternative sources of experience.

4.5. Selection

Establish clear criteria on how you will select participants for placement. Bear in mind when reviewing that for many applicants this may be their first time writing an application.

Consider what information those making the selection need to see. For example, you may wish to remove names and other identifiable data to reduce any unconscious bias.

We would suggest you look at all your applicants together, as part of a gathered field.

Establishing a deadline for applications means that you do not accept the first applicants and make it accessible for those who need longer to complete it.

Respond to everyone who took the time to apply whether successful or not to inform them of the outcome. You do not need to offer feedback..

5. Evaluate

To make sure you are monitoring and improving your programme you could consider the following:

- A debrief with those involved to share what needs to be done to improve the programme
- Ask work experience participants to fill in an **evaluation questionnaire**
- Talk to the school or partner to review the programme and ask about the onward progression of the participant(s).

Consider how you quality assure your programme.

You may wish to see how it fits with your organisation's processes or follow an external standard.

6. Celebrate

It is important to recognise the achievements of all work experience participants. We would suggest you provide:

- A **letter** or **certificate of attendance**
- Brief feedback to any partner (for example a school or college).

Take a moment to thank them, if possible in front of the team.

We would also encourage you to gather promotional material, for example seek consent for:

- Short video films from the participants
- A written blog about the participant's experience
- Short insights from the supervisors.

These can be used to promote the scheme, but also inform future participants forming part of any induction.

Finally, let others know and celebrate what you are doing locally and nationally. This can be through articles, blogs, and social media.

7. Further resources

If you are unable to offer work experience or if you can only offer a short placement, then you can signpost those who approach you to other options for relevant experience:

- General caring experience at a care home
- Volunteering in a care environment
- Online work-related opportunities.

A list of **up to date opportunities** is available.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks must go to all the practices across the UK that offer work experience opportunities and make a real difference to people's lives. Thanks to the 2020/21 HEE Clinical Fellows for their contribution and feedback.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this toolkit is for general guidance purposes only. We do not accept and, to the extent permitted by law, exclude liability to any person for any loss that may arise from relying upon or otherwise using the information contained in the toolkit. Whilst every effort has been made when producing this toolkit to help the user in planning and support work experience, no liability is accepted for any error or omission. Should you have a particular query or issue which is not covered in the toolkit then we would strongly advise you to seek legal or other professional advice, rather than relying on the information in this toolkit.

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