

The importance of work experience

The Graduate Market in 2017, a recent survey by Highfliers, clearly illustrates the importance employers place on work experience. From one hundred of the UK's best known and most successful employers, over a third warned that graduates who have had no previous work experience at all, have little or no chance of receiving a job offer for their graduate programmes. Employers increasingly expect job applicants to have relevant experience as well as good qualifications.

From around Year 10 onwards young people should take any opportunity they can to start to build up a portfolio of work experience

Why do work experience?

Spending as little as one day with an employer, doing simple tasks or merely work shadowing (watching an experienced employee at work) can be hugely beneficial for your son or daughter. Reasons for doing work experience include:

- developing transferable skills, such as communication and teamworking
- understanding how organisations work or bringing a job they have read about to life
- building confidence in interacting with adults
- confirming interest in a career or (equally useful!) deciding it is not for them
- a foot in the door - if they impress the employer they may be asked back on a more formal arrangement such as an internship or encouraged to apply when vacancies arise.
- providing valuable content for a UCAS personal statement to give evidence of an interest in a particular subject/occupation

For some sectors, such as media production, the most usual route in is through work experience before landing a junior position.

How to find work experience

Through school/college

Although no-longer a compulsory part of the curriculum, your son or daughter's school may offer a work placement of a week or more from Year 10 onwards. Some schools will have

existing relationships with employers or use an outside agency, such as an Education Business Partnership, to offer a range of work experience opportunities. Alternatively, as a parent you may be asked if you have any contacts that could provide a way into sourcing a placement. You may feel this is an opt-out by a school, but it can be an effective way for both parties to secure good relevant opportunities. Colleges may also offer part-time work on site or run volunteer schemes – all ways to access relevant experience.

Speculative enquiry

Your son or daughter can approach employers directly for possible placements. They will need to send a brief CV and a covering letter clearly stating the experience they are looking for and their availability. Again consider your network of relatives and friends; if you have a named contact within a company to approach this will be a lot easier.

Employer website

Large employers sometimes offer work experience schemes suitable for 16 year olds upwards. Check any age or qualification requirements. Applicants are often asked to complete an on-line application and may be asked to interview.

Undergraduate/graduate internships

90% of the UK's leading graduate employers offered paid work experience programmes for students and recent graduates during the 2016-2017 academic year (The Graduate Market in 2017). Graduate employers are increasingly using their internship schemes as a recruitment tool. Successful completion of an internship can often lead to being offered a graduate job.

Degree courses (often called sandwich degrees) with a year in industry are becoming more common and can be found in areas such as engineering, science, business, marketing, media and vocational areas, such as town planning.

You may be interested in this article which goes into more detail about internships ([link please Hilary](#))

Gap Year, seasonal work and voluntary work websites can be useful to find relevant experience in the UK and abroad

How to get the most out of the experience

Quite often the experience your son or daughter manages to secure is not directly related to what they want to study or the job they want to do. Remember all work experience is beneficial and it is how it is presented to universities/employers which maximises its value. Show the skills developed and how they relate to a chosen career. For example for potential medical students, communication skills developed in a care home can be more valuable than work experience in a hospital where contact with patients is often restricted.

Useful websites

http://graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/p!ecaaefg

www.milkround.com

www.inspiringinterns.com

www.do-it.org.uk

<http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/>

www.seasonworkers.com

www.realgap.co.uk

www.gapyear.com

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