



# Finding work experience in the NHS

A guide for teachers and advisors

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## WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide provides information and resources to help you find work experience opportunities within the health service.

Work experience is organised differently within individual trusts and other healthcare providers so we cannot provide you with all the answers. However, this guide will help you to understand what is on offer within the health sector, how to start to find placements for your students and the rules and requirements healthcare providers are working under.



## WHAT IS WORK EXPERIENCE?

Work experience takes place in the workplace and allows people to experience what it is like to undertake a job supervised by staff who already work in the environment.

The traditional definition of work experience, as a two-week full-time placement doesn't always work for employers or for you. Work experience can vary from 'tasters' lasting just half a day through to programmes over one or two weeks, a few months or a year. Some work experience placements offer a hands-on experience, while some provide insights, observation and work shadowing. All can provide a valuable experience for people looking to move into a career in the health sector.



## VARIETY IN THE HEALTH SERVICE

More people in England work for the NHS than any other organisation. There are over 350 different careers ranging from healthcare assistants, doctors through to administrative staff and gardeners. We realise that many people do not know of the range of opportunities that are available. For more information on the careers in the NHS in England see [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)

Work experience is crucial to bridge the gap between education or training and the world of work. At its broadest and best, work experience can open people's eyes to jobs they had never thought of, help inform career decisions, provide valuable experience for job applications and entry to further and higher education, offer a chance to prove themselves to an employer and help instill the attitudes and behaviours expected at work.

There are many different organisations within the health service, which can offer your students work experience.

The main organisations are:

- **Acute hospital trusts**

These provide medical and surgical care through hospital and outpatient treatment, and other services commissioned to meet local population needs.

- **Mental health trusts**

They provide specialist care for people with complex and severe mental health problems.

- **Ambulance trusts**

They respond to 999 calls, transport patients, and provide out-of-hours care in some areas.

- **Community trusts**

Community Trusts provide a wide range of medical, nursing and therapeutic care to prevent avoidable admission to hospital and to minimise hospital stay.

- **Primary care services**

There are a range of local primary care services provided through GP practices, NHS walk-in centres, dental practices, pharmacists and opticians.

- **Independent or voluntary healthcare providers**

These are private sector healthcare organisations that can be contracted by the NHS to provide healthcare or work privately outside of the NHS (for example nursing homes).

Most work experience placements are available in acute trusts as they employ by far the largest number of people in the NHS. However, there are increasing opportunities in the other types of organisation, which can provide very different experiences.

## ACCESSING WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE NHS

With over 300 NHS trusts and many more healthcare providers, each with their own policies and structures, there are significant differences in the provision of work experience. Within your region there will be different models of work experience offered by different healthcare providers. Some regions may have a single hub for work experience, coordinating work experience for a range of organisations, but often it will be individually managed.

Most roles within the health sector should be available for students to experience and observe. However, there may be some areas such as those involving emergency or intimate care that may not be appropriate for your students. Quality of care and patient confidentiality are paramount.

We would encourage you to contact your local healthcare providers and develop a relationship with them. Increasingly partnerships between healthcare providers and schools and colleges are becoming more common and mean that work experience placements are organised in consultation with you.

Often work experience is located in the volunteering, human resources or learning and development departments. Make sure you keep trying – many healthcare providers are very large organisations and not everyone you speak to may know if work experience is taking place. Contacts through friends and family may help your students access work experience opportunities for themselves, however, we would encourage you, where possible, to use the central work experience contact to ensure that all the standard procedures have taken place.

Also consider other opportunities for partnership. Within the NHS there are Health Ambassador schemes that provide healthcare professionals to talk to groups about the job opportunities within healthcare.

For a full list of NHS trusts in your area go to [www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/thenhs/about](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/thenhs/about)

## ACCESSING WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE NHS

Our top tips for accessing work experience:

- **Get in contact early**  
Make contact during the academic year before you want the placements to start. This gives you an opportunity to plan the placements together and for all paperwork to be completed
- **Provide some of the solutions**  
Many organisations do not provide placements as they do not have the experience or capacity. Many small organisations would love to offer placements but are put off by the thought of developing the appropriate forms and identifying the right people. You will often have the forms and information they need and can help them through the process.
- **Be flexible on timings**  
If you can offer your placements at different times of the year then do so.
- **Allow for different models of work experience**  
You know your students may need 200 hours of work experience but do these all need to be from the same placement or the same organisation. A shorter experience in the NHS, alongside other placements could be valuable to your students.
- **Provide interested and committed students**  
Put forward those individuals who you know will make the most of the opportunity and be a good ambassador for your school or college.
- **Prepare your students**  
Encourage them to prepare for the placement, to think about what they want to learn and the questions they want to ask. Make your students aware of patient confidentiality, health and safety, infection control and dress code.
- **Support the students on placement**  
Make sure they turn up on time, attend every day and debrief them.

## WHAT KIND OF WORK CAN STUDENTS DO?

Work experience in the health sector will give your students an idea of what a job in the health service is like, as well as an introduction to the structure of working life. Good timekeeping, reliability, team working and problem solving are really important work skills that will be reinforced as part of the placement.

Where possible the healthcare providers will try to set them real-life tasks that get them to think about the role and the organisation. With clinical work it will not always be possible for students to be hands-on but there is still a lot that they can do. Students who are below the age of 16 will be more limited in what they can do than those over the age of 16. In some organisations under 16s will not be part of the clinical environment. Healthcare providers may have some concerns and be unsure about what students can do, particularly if it involves contact with a patient. That's why we have worked with them to develop a set of activities that students can do (see the list below). This is not exhaustive but should provide you with broad overview. We have indicated (16+) for those that are more suited to those aged 16 years or older.

### Some ideas for activities:

- survey patients in a ward to find out what leads to a positive experience (16+)
- analysis of existing data, such as surveys
- update communication materials such as the pages of the website, leaflets or noticeboards
- reverse mentoring: get a student to help senior colleagues get to grips with social media
- analysing calls to see which issues generate complaints.

### Some ideas for clinical tasks:

- helping to make the beds
- distribute ward leaflets or information to new patients
- helping patient orientation in the ward
- shadowing a nurse or healthcare assistant as they take and record a patient's blood pressure, temperature and heart rate and completing fluid charts under direct supervision (16+)
- general tidying of bed area
- observing routine procedures or investigations or minor surgical procedures (16+)
- assisting with meals (preparing over-tables, cutting food, encouraging the patient to eat and drink) and patient feeding (16+)
- delivering and collecting items from other departments (16+)
- talking to the patients (16+)
- escorting patients (16+)
- attending team meetings (16+)

The most important thing is that if the work involves contact with patients consent must be given and students will be supervised at all times.

## CUTTING DOWN ON RED TAPE

### **There is less red tape than you think when sending your student on work experience in the health sector**

Many people are put off thinking that it will be over-bureaucratic and burdensome. Do not listen to myths and anecdotes - there is very little red tape.

We have informed healthcare providers of the rules governing work experience within the **Work Experience Toolkit**. This section summarises that information to help allay any concerns.

### **No DBS is required for supervisors**

The Disclosure and Barring Service, or DBS (formerly CRB) check is not compulsory for staff supervising young people aged 16–17. In the case of work experience, a DBS check will only be required if an employee's specific job purpose includes looking after under-16 work experience students.

For more information, visit the government's disclosure and barring service [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service).

### **No DBS is needed for the work experience placement**

It is not necessary for those on work experience to complete a DBS check as they must be supervised at all times.

However, you may have already asked for students to declare any issues. If you are working with healthcare organisations you may wish to provide them with further information.

### **Liability insurance covers work experience placements**

Individuals on work experience are covered by the employer's insurance. For more information visit the Association of British Insurers [www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk).

## CUTTING DOWN ON RED TAPE

### Health and safety has been made simple

There are very few work activities someone on work experience cannot do due to health and safety law. However, it's important to remember that the employer will have primary responsibility for the health and safety of the student and should be managing any significant risks.

There are activities that are young people are legally prohibited to do. The employer will need to consider whether the work the young person will do:

- **is beyond their physical or psychological capacity**

This doesn't have to be complicated, it could be as simple as checking a young person is capable of safely lifting weights and of remembering and following instructions.

- **involves harmful exposure to substances that are toxic, can cause cancer, can damage or harm an unborn child, or can chronically affect human health in any other way**

Be aware of substances a young person might come into contact with in their work, consider exposure levels and ensure legal limits are met.

- **involves harmful exposure to radiation**

Ensure a young person's exposure to radiation is restricted and does not exceed the allowed dose limit.

- **involves risk of accidents that cannot reasonably be recognised or avoided by young people due to their insufficient attention to safety or lack of experience or training**

A young person might be unfamiliar with 'obvious' risks. You should consider the need for tailored training or closer supervision

- **has a risk to health from extreme cold, heat, noise or vibration**  
**In most cases, young people will not be at any greater risk than adults, and for workplaces that include these hazards it is likely there will already be control measures in place**

A child must never carry out such work involving these risks, whether they are permanently employed or under training such as work experience.

For more information, visit the Health and Safety Executive [www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/workexperience/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/workexperience/index.htm)

## CUTTING DOWN ON RED TAPE

### Payment and hours for young people

The individual on work experience will not be paid for their time. They may not receive any reimbursement for their travel, lunch or other refreshments. However, in some circumstances work experience providers may offer support to individuals (for example, if they are from a disadvantaged background).

Young people on work experience placements should not:

- work more than eight hours per day, with a maximum of 37.5 hours per week
- work weekends
- start work before 7.00 am
- finish work after 7.00 pm
- work overtime
- work more than five days in seven.

All young people are entitled to a break of at least half an hour where daily working time is more than 4.5 hours.



For more information about the status of those undertaking work experience placements, visit the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, national minimum wage: work experience and internships <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-work-experience-and-internships>

## CUTTING DOWN ON RED TAPE

### Young people

#### **Consent.**

All those on work experience under the age of 18 must have a parent or guardian sign for consent.

#### **Under 16 years of age.**

Children under the age of 13 are generally prohibited from any form of employment.

Many organisations make a distinction between young people aged 13-16 and those aged 16 plus and the type of activity they can participate in. This is due to Health and Safety regulations, which states that 'an employer has a responsibility to ensure that young people employed by them are not exposed to risk due to lack of experience, being unaware of existing or potential risks and/or lack of maturity'. Many healthcare organisations will offer 13-16 year olds placements in administrative and clerical areas.

### Patient safety and confidentiality

#### **Patient safety and confidentiality should not be a barrier.**

Patient dignity and confidentiality must be maintained but this does not mean that placements cannot be offered in a clinical setting. The employer should use discretion and judgment when identifying suitable areas and duties. Particular care will be taken in areas where there are vulnerable patients.

Most healthcare organisations will ask the students to sign a confidentiality form. If there is any disclosure of information they will dismiss them from the premises and, if necessary, consider further action. You may wish to consider what further action you may wish to take.

In addition to this the supervisor will ensure that those on work placement are introduced to the patients and they give verbal consent if they are allowed to observe any consultation, treatment or procedure.

## MAKING THE MOST OF WORK EXPERIENCE - HOW YOU CAN HELP

Work experience coordinators in the NHS will develop your students' skills, and provide them with a greater understanding of how the health service works and the roles and opportunities available to them.

### You can help make the experience even more rewarding by:

- **making sure the work experience links to the curriculum.**  
This will help the students to prepare and make the most of their experience.
- **involve parents.**  
Help parents to understand the aims and value of the work experience, and what they will be doing. Parents will need to be informed about where and when the programme will take place, sign consent forms and understand travel and other associated costs.
- **ensuring that the students are mature and confident**  
The students should be able to get the most out of the placement and so they will need a certain level of maturity and confidence. Talk to them beforehand about what they will feel comfortable with, for example, could they help a patient drink?
- **let them know what to expect**  
Outline some of the day-to-day things that they should expect. Let them know about the dress code, infection control and how to behave. Also let them know that if they feel uncomfortable in any way then they should say so.



- **be flexible**  
You may need a student to get eight weeks of work experience but do they need to be in the same organisations? Can the experience be in different organisations and settings? Some experience in the NHS can provide your students with an understanding of what the world of work will be like.

**We hope your students have a rich and rewarding experience**

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### **NHS Careers**

**[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)**

The information service for careers in the NHS in England.

### **Step into the NHS**

**[www.stepintothens.nhs.uk](http://www.stepintothens.nhs.uk)**

A website and communications programme for 14–19 year-olds which aims to stimulate awareness of the huge range of opportunities available within the NHS.

### **NHS Choices**

**[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**

Provides information on how the NHS works, and details of local trusts and health services.

### **Skills for Health**

**[www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk)**

The Sector Skills Council for the health sector which aims to help the whole sector to develop solutions that deliver a skilled and flexible UK workforce in order to improve healthcare.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Our thanks must go to all those who support work experience placements. Your contribution is making a real difference to people's lives and futures.**

In putting together this guide we must thank those from the health sector, schools and further education colleges who gave up their time to share their best practice and provide their thoughts and comments.

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