What is work experience?
Work experience is an opportunity to introduce young people to the reality of working life within a willing organisation, to help them to secure and sustain employment. The aim is to provide learning and insight into working life, for a limited period of time, by exposing the young person to a variety of tasks and experiences.

How work experience works for young people and society
Work experience can have an extremely positive impact on young people’s employability and can play a significant role in attempts to reduce youth unemployment. It can:

• break the vicious circle that many young people find themselves in, where they can’t get a job because of lack of experience and can’t get experience because they can’t find a job
• provide young people with an understanding of the structure and reality of working life, and to learn about recruitment processes
• provide feedback and coaching to enable young people to develop skills, including those required in specific jobs and sectors
• help young people to make informed choices about their futures and allow them to learn more about specific industries, organisational cultures and job roles
• allow young people to gain experience of working with people, enhancing their social and communication skills, and awareness of how to present themselves and behave in a work context
• provide a positive experience of the world of work that builds the young person’s confidence and motivation

Why get involved?
Young people are among the most disadvantaged in the labour market because they lack both the experience of the workplace and the job-specific skills that employers ask for. Many employers shy away from employing young people because they see them as a ‘risk’. Work experience can help break the cycle of ‘no experience, no job’. It can also help to challenge employer perceptions of young people’s skills and attitudes, give young people access to networks and help them to make better informed career choices.

The benefits to employers
Work experience placements enable you to access a wider range of talent and engage with your community, potentially with a view to employing more young people as part of your workforce in the longer term. Offering work experience placements can also make a useful contribution to your strategic talent management and workforce planning. Young people offer new ideas and fresh ways of thinking, reflecting the interests and needs of the next generation of customers and consumers. Furthermore, it can be an opportunity for staff development because staff can act as ‘buddies’ or mentors.

Employer Recruitment Incentives
ERIs may be available locally to help you offset the cost of employing a new employee; speak to your local Jobcentre Plus/Department of Work and Pensions or Skills Development Scotland office to find out more.

How work experience works for employers
Apart from making a real difference to someone’s working life, offering work experience is beneficial for organisations for a number of reasons:

• Recruitment opportunities: providing work experience placements can be a way to access the local labour market and explore a talent pipeline you may not have considered otherwise.
• **Staff development:** supervising and coaching young people on work experience offers an excellent opportunity to develop employees’ management capabilities.

• **A more engaged workforce:** providing work experience sends a positive message to the wider workforce about the values of your organisation, which can support efforts to build employee engagement.

• **Engagement in the local community:** work experience placements provide a valuable means of creating a positive image, in which the organisation helps to address social issues related to worklessness in the community.

• **Contribution to economic development in the local area:** by helping to tackle some of the issues around deprivation and youth unemployment.

1: Recruitment

**How should you select the candidate?**
Most candidates will not have much, if any, interview experience, and may also lack confidence therefore, a different, more supportive interview approach may help bring out their skills and attributes; such as a mock interview or a chat about the person’s employability skills, potential growth and enthusiasm rather than focusing only on academic credentials and technical requirements. However, we would still encourage explaining recruitment and selection processes to the candidate so they will have some insight into how they should go about finding and applying for a job.

**Be clear about what you want and manage expectations**
It will be useful to have a list of tasks/duties and/or a work plan for the work experience placement. Be clear on the tasks you want the young person to carry out and/or which projects you want them to contribute to. The work plan can be a standard plan, but it needs to be flexible and, while responding to your organisation’s needs, should also be tailored to the young person’s individual abilities. It is very important to manage the young person’s expectations and to ensure that they have a realistic understanding of their role in the organisation.

2: Induction

**Is it necessary to give young people on work experience a full introduction to the organisation?**
For most young people, coming to work for you on a placement will be a very new experience. Most of them have not yet been in employment and some, because of their family backgrounds and social circumstances, may not have had any insight into the world of work. When they start a placement with you, it will be very beneficial for the individual’s development for them to receive an introduction to your company and the workplace. A well-designed induction process makes the young person feel valued and offers the opportunity for them to ask questions and give feedback so the induction can be improved for future candidates. It can make the transition into the world of work a smooth and enjoyable experience, which is why we recommend taking time to think about their induction carefully.

**What should the introduction to the organisation contain?**
The induction is an opportunity to get to know the young person; this is where you can start building a good relationship, understand their previous experience, talk about the expectations on each side, identify areas for development, establish the young person’s goals and allow space for the young person to ask questions. It should also include:

- an introduction to your organisation including how the company is structured, and to key people who the young person will have contact with;
- a tour of your facilities, including work areas; this should also include health and safety information (this is a legal requirement);
- a clear outline of what your requirements and expectations of the young person are, including a discussion of the day-to-day duties and the skills or experience the young person is keen to develop;
• a plan or schedule for the individual’s first and possibly second week in the organisation, clearly outlining what they are doing each day; and
• allocating a ‘buddy’ to the young person to allow them to ask questions in a more informal setting. This role is really important to support a young person and it should be a junior member of staff keen to develop management skills and who has a friendly, supportive nature.

When employing a young person under the age of 18, whether for work or work experience, employers have the same responsibilities for their health, safety and welfare as they do for other employees. There is more information available on the HSE website.

3: Supporting the young person in the job

What tasks should they do?
If work experience is to be beneficial to both the employer and the young person, it is imperative that the young person is given as much insight into the world of work as possible. Most of these young people will have had limited exposure to working life and will have areas for skills development. The work experience is about supporting an individual in developing their skills to increase their opportunities in the labour market. Identifying some work-shadowing opportunities and, where possible, assigning them a concrete task that they could work on with supervision, but with scope to use their ideas and creativity, are ways of giving the young person a real flavour of the world of work.

Working hours
While working hours can be flexible to adapt to individual needs, they should still provide a representative experience of the world of work.

How should I devise a suitable work placement plan?
Preparing properly for a work placement is key to its success and smooth running, so it is less resource-intensive for employers and easy to manage. An effective way is to consult colleagues to find out if they have any specific projects they feel an individual could contribute to and if they have some time to supervise and mentor the young person. Having a concrete work plan will also help the young person to effectively support the team without needing constant supervision. Remember that the young person on work experience is there to learn, so it is important to keep them active and engaged throughout their placement to ensure that their motivational levels are kept up and they have a positive experience of the world of work and what it means to be part of a team.

4: Supervision and mentoring

How closely do work experience individuals need to be managed?
As young people on placements are new to the world of work, the way that they are managed is crucial. Good management and supervision will help the young person to develop more quickly, in terms of building up their confidence and demonstrating to them that they can play a positive role in the world of work.

The role of managers in making the placement work
Managers can play a key role in the management and development of young people on work experience placements, who in many cases are having their first experience of the workplace. Managers should have a personal/approachable manner and take a lead in:

• reviewing and guiding;
• providing feedback, praise and recognition;
• providing appropriate levels of autonomy and empowerment;
• taking an interest in the individual and being available to talk if an employee has a question or a problem
Do I need to appoint a mentor?
In addition to ensuring a member of staff is supervising the young person during their placement, you should consider appointing a separate mentor or buddy to the young person who can help them more informally to navigate the workplace. Try to select an employee who is naturally helpful, good with people and has the desire to help a young person in their working life. Make sure you also give them some training for this new role; this is also a development opportunity for your staff. Alternatively, a ‘buddy’ can offer valuable support to the young person. They ‘look after’ the young person during their placement, check how things are going, take them to lunch, help them with any questions and act as a person of contact more generally.

Pastoral care and support
It is important that a young person on a work experience placement is supported in their (often first) experience of the working world. A young person can fall foul of policies or standards of behaviour in the early days and it is vital that they have a support network in place to guide them through. They will not know many things you take for granted. Without this sort of support a young person on work experience placements can undermine their own success because they lack the skills, knowledge or self-awareness of how to interact with others in the workplace.

How should you review their progress?
We suggest having regular conversations with the young person, reflecting on progress and their attitude. It would also be useful to arrange a stock-take mid-way through the placement to assess the individual’s progress and consider any additional development activities.

It is important to discuss and address any issues to maximise the young person’s learning from the placement. However, all feedback should be provided sensitively and an opportunity for discussion given, so as to avoid damaging a young person’s confidence.

5: Reference and feedback

What is the best way to conclude a work experience placement?
As a work experience placement draws to a close, it is good practice to arrange a final review meeting with the young person to discuss a number of issues. During the review, the young person could be asked questions about what they have learned and how they have developed, strengths and areas for improvement/development, biggest/proudest achievements and how well they have met their objectives. You want to establish that they feel better prepared for the jobs market after completing this work experience.

Moreover, there are several things that you can relay back to the young person as part of this discussion such as how well you think they have performed (in general and/or on specific projects), their strengths and weaknesses and what areas of development you suggest that they concentrate on in future jobs. We also recommend asking them what feedback they have for your organisation in terms of how well the work experience was run and how this could be improved in future.

How can you act as a referee for the young person?
The provision of a ‘reference’ plays an important part in reassuring potential future employers about the employability of the young person. We ask employers to consider the potential importance to a young person of providing a more detailed ‘summary of experience’ to both help them focus on their own key achievements and learnings, and also to use to help promote themselves to potential employers. This might outline what the young person did during their time at the organisation and how they went about performing their tasks. This might include reference to their attitude to learning, reliability and attendance, as well as their interaction with work colleagues or customers.

Can you recruit the young person after the completion of the work experience?
If you have a vacancy and the work experience placement has been successful, you can offer the young person a job. If you don’t have an immediate vacancy but would consider them in the future, encourage the young person to stay in touch. However it is important to manage the young person’s expectations and to be clear if there are no current opportunities within the organisation.