



Could you offer
voluntary work
experience?

jobcentreplus

Department for
Work and Pensions

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Could you offer voluntary work experience?

Is your business interested in supporting young people who are looking for work? Are you committed to engaging with your community and developing local talent and skills? Could you provide young jobseekers with a positive experience of the working world? If the answer to these questions is 'yes,' you should consider becoming a work experience host.

For some young people a lack of understanding of the working world is a significant barrier to finding and sustaining employment. Jobcentre Plus wants to work with you to offer young jobseekers* the opportunity to overcome this barrier through voluntary work experience placements. For those who lack experience, the chance to undertake real work and adjust to the routines and habits of working life can significantly improve their employment prospects.

Why should you get involved?

By helping young people to gain work experience, your business can reap real benefits, such as:

- developing the supervisory and management skills of your workforce
- enhancing your public profile by supporting your local community
- accessing a pool of hidden talent – people who offer enthusiasm and a fresh perspective to your business
- promoting workforce diversity.

There is a strong social case too. We know that an extended period of unemployment, if experienced at an early age, can affect future employment prospects and lead to disadvantages, such as ill-health and poverty. The cost to society of this, both financially and socially, is huge. It is vital that Government, business and voluntary and community sector organisations work together to support young people, especially those struggling to make the transition from school to work, to prepare for, find and sustain employment.

What is voluntary work experience?

Voluntary work experience will enable young, unemployed people to volunteer for placements lasting between 2 and 8 weeks. These volunteers will be matched with suitable host employers and complete a light touch selection process. We'll continue to pay participants' benefits and also cover the costs of travel and childcare. Young people who have spent up to 8 weeks in a work experience opportunity can have their placement extended by up to 4 weeks where an employer makes an offer to take them on to an apprenticeship.

*Voluntary work experience is open to young people who are aged 16 to 24 years old and, in some cases, people aged 25 and over who don't have any recent work history.

How to get involved

Becoming a work experience host

The first step is to contact your Jobcentre Plus Group Partnership Manager (contact details can be found on page 8) or your National Account Manager. They will arrange a meeting to discuss how you can work with us to support young unemployed people.

We want you to be innovative and offer placements that provide a real insight into a working environment. We won't be prescriptive about the structure of placements or make you fill out unnecessary forms and paperwork. However, we'll ask you to:

- provide voluntary work experience placements which are suitable for young unemployed people with little or no work experience
- comply with all relevant legislation
- guarantee that placements are in addition to existing or planned vacancies and that no-one has been dismissed or made redundant so the placement can be offered
- allow participants to carry out reasonable job search activity and attend interviews with prospective employers and fortnightly job search reviews at Jobcentre Plus
- share information on participants with Jobcentre Plus
- provide participants with a reference at the end of the placement.

These requirements will be agreed between yourselves and Jobcentre Plus.

This agreement will also explain what you can expect from Jobcentre Plus. We'll provide you with a single point of contact and offer support and advice as needed.

Planning placements

We'll ask you to plan placements which are hands-on, provide opportunities for skills development and expose participants to the routines of the working environment. You will also need to consider who in your business will be responsible for supervising participants. You can find advice on planning placements and supporting participants in the next section of this guide.

To help us match suitable people to your placements, we'll ask you for some information on:

- the number of placements you can offer
- the length of the placement (which can be between 2 and 8 weeks, up to 12 weeks when linked to an apprenticeship, for between 25 to 30 hours per week)
- what the young person will be doing on their placement
- how you want us to refer people to your placement.

Selecting participants

You will need to decide on what role you want to play in the selection process. Two possible options are:

1. We can manage selection on your behalf. This makes it hassle-free for you. We'll only refer suitable, motivated participants who have demonstrated an interest in the placement you're offering.

or

2. You can interview a small number of suitable candidates we select. Most candidates will not have much, if any, interview experience and conventional interview techniques may not be appropriate. We recommend using more informal approaches to gauge the enthusiasm and commitment of candidates instead of looking at their academic credentials or past achievements. We'd ask you to provide some feedback on unsuccessful candidates to help them develop their interview technique.

Managing placements

Jobcentre Plus will prepare participants for placements before they begin. Participants will know what they can expect from you, their duties and responsibilities, and if appropriate arrangements for claiming travel and childcare costs – they should be well informed when they arrive on their first day. Nevertheless, we suggest you provide an induction to help them settle in – at a minimum, you'll need to talk to them about health and safety in your workplace. You can find tips on inductions in the next section of this guide.

A strong relationship between participants and their supervisors is vital to ensuring they get the most out of the placement. You can foster such a relationship by assigning each participant a supervisor who has sufficient time in their schedule to coach them, provide regular feedback and be a point of contact for any concerns.

In cases of unexplained absences and misconduct you can get in touch with your Jobcentre Plus contact. Your contact will be available throughout the placement to offer support and guidance.

Participants will continue to look for work during their placement. This means that you will need to release participants to attend job search reviews at Jobcentre Plus and interviews with prospective employers. If you have any concerns about this, you can talk to your Jobcentre Plus contact.

Supporting participants – best practice

The key principle for supporting participants during the placement should be to treat them as regular employees as far as possible, but recognise that, given their lack of work experience, they might need some additional coaching and supervision. Below you'll find some suggestions about things you may want to consider when planning the placement to help both you and the participant get the most from the experience.

Induction

A good induction will help participants to settle into the working environment and your business. We recommend that participants' inductions closely mirror those of new permanent employees so they get a sense of what it would be like to be a real new-starter. However, since most participants will be completely new to the world of work, you may have to provide some additional coaching e.g. how to use a photocopier, how to address customers. A model induction would cover:

- management/reporting arrangements
- an introduction to colleagues
- an overview of your business and its values
- a tour around the workplace
- guidance on using any specialist equipment
- standard workplace practices such as health and safety issues, security procedures, dress code, sick leave/absence arrangements, lunch and break times.

Regular Feedback & Exit Interviews

Constructive, honest and supportive feedback will encourage participants to reflect on their performance, value their achievements and identify areas for improvement. It may be appropriate to ask participants to keep a record of their progress to help them consolidate their learning. A discussion at the

end of the placement would provide a more formal opportunity to provide final feedback and also give you the opportunity to ask participants how future placements could be improved. We'll ask you to provide participants with a reference at the end of the placement that they can use in their future job applications.

Job Search Support

During their placement, participants will continue to look for permanent jobs - we know that they would really value any advice you could offer. This support could take many forms including:

- discussing their career aspirations and plans to realise their goals
- providing an insight into the careers of people in your business and the routes into your profession
- offering advice on completing application forms, cover letters and CVs
- helping them to prepare for interviews.

Mentoring and Buddying

Many organisations who offer work experience assign participants mentors or buddies who act as a role model and 'first friend' in the organisation. This is a particularly effective way of easing young people's transition into the working world. Mentors and buddies should be good listeners and able to relate to young people. You can find more information on mentoring [here](#).

Shadowing

It may be useful for a participant to shadow different members of staff to gain an insight into the variety of roles within your business. Shadowing should not be the only activity participants undertake during the placement - in order to gain an insight into real work, it is vital that you give participants a chance to get involved in real on-the-job activities.

Frequently asked questions

Will we have to pay participants?

No. We'll continue to pay participants' benefits and if required also cover the costs of travel and childcare. Hosts are not expected to pay participants and doing so might affect their benefit entitlement.

Do we have to offer a job or guaranteed interview?

No, but you can if you want to! Voluntary work experience isn't intended to be a recruitment tool - it's about helping young people to prepare for work by providing an insight into a real working environment. If you do have vacancies and want to test out a jobseeker before deciding whether to offer them a job, then you should consider Work Trials. Work Trials are a Jobcentre Plus service that gives you time to find out how well suited a person is to the job and your business. You can find more information on Work Trials [here](#).

Are there any restrictions on who can offer voluntary work experience?

No. Employers of all sizes in any sector can offer voluntary work experience so long as they can meet the terms and conditions set out in the agreement with Jobcentre Plus.

We are a large employer with multiple branches. Will we need to sign multiple agreements?

No. You can enter into an agreement on a national basis, covering all your branches.

Can we offer more than one placement?

Yes please. We are happy to work with employers who can offer multiple placements.

Will the young people have the right attitude?

All voluntary work experience participants will be volunteers who have demonstrated a genuine interest in gaining work experience with your business. Although they will have little or no work experience and may have low skills, you can expect them to be motivated and willing to learn.

Why do participants need to visit Jobcentre Plus during their placement?

Since participants will continue to receive their Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), they will continue to be subject to the JSA conditions. We know that regular contact with Jobcentre Plus advisers is very important to encourage jobseekers to take reasonable action to find work. Maintaining the fortnightly attendance requirement will help keep participants focused on finding work.

How can I find out more information on planning for a voluntary work experience placement?

- The [Health and Safety Executive](#) website gives more information on employers' requirements around health and welfare of young people.
- The CIPD / Jobcentre Plus '[Work Experience - Placements that Work](#)' guide gives more information on how to plan to make the most of a work experience opportunity.

Where to get further information

If you are interested in offering voluntary work experience or would like further information about the services available to support your recruitment needs and jobseekers please contact your National Account Manager or the Group Partnership Manager for your region:

East and West Midlands, East Anglia

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