

Work Placements: Parent Guidelines



If your son or daughter is currently in Transition Year or undertaking the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Cert Applied, or Leaving Cert Vocational programme, they may have the opportunity to take a work placement as part of that programme.

A work placement is one of the most important factors in shaping young peoples' perceptions of the world of work. It helps them to learn about a particular occupation, gain valuable personal skills such as independence and team work, and understand the expectations of employers. During the placement, they will actively develop the skills needed for future enterprise and employability.

The structure of work placements varies from school to school. In some cases, the work placement is for a full week, although it is also common for this to be a three day week, and occasionally, placements are organised on a day-release basis once a week.

Why your son or daughter might benefit:

- **Doing a real job of work in a real organisation**
- **Finding out what they are good at**
- **Working closely with adults**
- **Learning new skills**
- **Behaving in a safe and responsible way**

Documentation:

Participation in a work placement at an employers place of work has implications for parents, the school, and of course your son/daughter. In the normal course of events, parents will be asked to fill in a Parental Consent form, which allows your child to be absent from school for the duration of the placement.

In addition there are insurance issues which are designed to protect both the employer and your child. Most employers will take health and safety issues quite seriously, and it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that their students are fully covered by the employers Public Liability Policy.

It is likely that you will have to sign documentation from the school or the employer in order for this cover to be extended to your child. If you are involved (as opposed to the school) in obtaining a placement for your child, then you are advised to seek clarification from the employer or school as to whether your child is protected in that placement.

Types of Work Placement:

There are two common types of work placement offered in schools, **Work Experience** and **Work Shadowing**.

Work Experience

This is the most common option and involves your son or daughter participating in the daily work of their chosen area. This is a hands-on placement, and students are expected to do some work, learn some skills, and contribute in some way.

Advantages:

- ✔ Offers insight into the daily tasks and responsibilities of an active work environment
- ✔ Helps to develop and improve their personal, interpersonal and organisational skills
- ✔ Offers the opportunity to interact with new people in an adult way, and often requires dealing with customers or the public from the standpoint of a professional for the first time
- ✔ Provides experience of the typical working hours, levels of pressure and responsibilities of the position
- ✔ Students can make contacts for future work, gain experience for use in their CV, and acquire referees
- ✔ The experience of the 'real' world can help motivate students to be more responsible and ambitious on returning to school



Work Shadowing

Shadowing involves closely observing someone at work doing a particular role rather than taking on the working role itself. It can give excellent insight into what a particular job involves and the skills it requires. It is, however, unlikely that your son or daughter will develop their own skills, or have the opportunity to make any contacts which might benefit them when looking for future work. Typically, work shadowing is shorter than a work experience, generally lasting a single day.

Advantages:

- ✔ Offers opportunities to experience positions that would not normally be available to do work experience in, e.g. Law, Social Work
- ✔ May offer the opportunity to experience a number of careers as the placements are shorter
- ✔ There is normally time allocated to allow questions and discuss observations with staff, and so it provides an opportunity to develop interpersonal and communication skills
- ✔ Excellent opportunity to develop and grow listening and observation skills, and at the same time pick up a good sense of what the work is like

Sourcing work experience:

The practice of sourcing work experience placements varies from school to school. Some schools encourage students to find their own work experience placement while others have developed partnerships with local employers, and it may be the role of the Career Guidance Counsellor to assign students to the various placements available. Whatever the practice in your school, parents can be a very valuable resource to schools, suggesting possibilities, providing contacts, and in some cases providing actual placements.

Where your son/daughter has to source their own work experience you may be able to lend a hand by drawing on contacts that you may have to help source a position. However, it is important that your son/daughter should also put some effort in securing the role by still submitting an application/CV and making follow-up phone calls where necessary.

In terms of finding out what it is like to work in a new and different environment, it is usually recommended that students do not opt to work in a family business or where another family member is working. However, if you have a family business, perhaps you could offer a placement to another student in your child's school.



Understanding the role of the employer:

The co-operation of employers in providing work experience placements is pivotal to the success of the work experience programmes. When providing work experience placements, employers are asked to facilitate the placement by:

- Providing an induction/training session to the student on their first day explaining the nature of the company's business, the student's role, how the students work will be monitored and assessed, and any health and safety requirements.
- Providing the student with a supervisor/trainer/buddy who will show them around and oversee their daily work.
- Providing feedback to the student at the end of their placement – this is often done on a feedback form provided by the school to the employer.

While the school, or you as parents, cannot always guarantee that the employer will abide by these guidelines, it is normal that employers will take these matters into account. Employers are also usually well aware that these young people are likely to be inexperienced, unaware of health and safety risks and may be quite nervous about the placement.

Where feasible, the Career Guidance Counsellor or a teacher from the school may try and visit each student on site during work experience. This may not be possible in many schools due to the number of students involved and monitoring by the school may be carried out by phone calls to the employer and student. If as a parent you feel your child is experiencing any difficulty during their placement, e.g. not getting on with people or concerned about the nature of the tasks they have been assigned, you should immediately contact the school Guidance Counsellor.

How parents can help:

There is a lot that parents can do to support their student during work placements. While it is an exciting experience for most students, it can also be daunting and parental support and encouragement can contribute significantly to the potential success of the placement. Below is a list of things to consider during the course of their placement

Before the placement:

- ✓ They know where they are going and how to get there.
- ✓ They have selected appropriate clothes to wear depending on the nature of their placement.
- ✓ They have money for travel costs and lunch breaks.
- ✓ They have any documentation they are supposed to bring with them.
- ✓ They know who to ask for when they arrive.
- ✓ They know their start and finishing times as well as any break arrangements.

During the placement:

- ✓ Ensure they arrive on time.
- ✓ Make sure they get enough sleep – work days are longer than school days!
- ✓ Talk to them on a daily basis about their experiences – they won't receive a debriefing in school until the end of the placement so the opportunity to share their experiences on a daily basis and receive encouragement and reassurance is important.
- ✓ Remind them to complete any diary/logbook that may be required.
- ✓ Contact the school immediately if you feel your child is experiencing difficulties during work experience placements.

After the placement:

- ✓ Chat with them about what they learned from the experience and whether it has made them re-think any of their plans.
- ✓ Remind your child of the importance of saying thank you and prompt them to write to the work experience provider thanking them for the opportunity and experience gained.

Evaluation:

Most schools receive feedback from the employer providing some details of their experience with your son/daughter. Also, it is likely that the school will require each student to complete a personal evaluation of the placement in terms of how it has contributed to their career aspirations. In both cases it would be beneficial to take the time to discuss these and offer your observations as appropriate.

The school may undertake a further evaluation process to assess the programme success and establish whether any changes should be made for the following year's students. You may receive a questionnaire from the school seeking feedback from a parent's perspective and any insights you can give on your own experience will be invaluable to the school.

