

‘Good work experience should not depend on who your parents know’

July has been designated the first national Work Experience Month to push for change and ensure that it’s not just the advantaged who get a break



Nick Chambers, chief executive of Education and Employers

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The celebrity chef Tom Kerridge, business leader Deborah Meaden and the TV presenter Steph McGovern credit their career success to doing work experience — but what is the chance that pupils in your local school will be afforded the same opportunities?

From September 2026, the government’s ambitious new “work experience guarantee” requires all state school pupils under 16 to complete ten days of workplace experience, but teachers remain concerned about its deliverability.

A new report from the charity Education and Employers suggests only 58 per cent of KS4 pupils complete any work experience, with 94 per cent of teachers finding job shadowing difficult to organise.

Barriers include a shortage of high-quality placements, competition from other schools, rising travel costs and difficulties releasing staff, meaning students who do successfully secure high-quality placements often relied on the social capital of their parents to arrange it.

Nick Chambers, chief executive of Education and Employers, says: “The government’s ambition is absolutely right. But there is a real risk that without a proper infrastructure and funding this policy will simply advantage the advantaged, widening the social mobility gap further.

“Good work experience should not depend on who your parents know or where you happen to live.”

However, getting the nation's work experience offering right would be transformative. Young people who do not experience the highest levels of employer engagement before the age of 16 are five times more likely to end up not in education, employment or training than those who do, and are less likely to have a clear post-GCSE plan. Students who experience four or more employer engagements also earn an average of 17 per cent more than peers without the same experience.

To push for change, July has been designated the first national Work Experience Month. Organised by the team behind National Careers Week, the event aims to highlight best practice nationally so schools and employers can work together effectively.



Nick Newman, the founder, says: "Meaningful work experience benefits the provider and the recipient. For young people it presents an incredible opportunity, helping them better understand what is expected of them and how different employment can be.

"For employers, it's the opportunity to send the ladder back down for the next generation and help to those that really need it. It is also a valuable opportunity to engage with their potential new workforce early and better understand the value that the new cohort can bring."

Newman is calling for improved collaboration and assistance between localised networks that bridge the gap between classrooms and the workplace, including Education and Business Partnerships and Careers Hubs, to work more tightly with groups of employers at a regional level.

It's a view backed firmly by Associate Professor Deirdre Hughes, one of the country's leading careers experts. She believes work experience is a "great opportunity for the new PM to bring about real and rapid change" but that success relies on employers and the educational establishment developing a "shared strategy and plan of action together".

Crucially, Hughes also highlights the role of school careers advisers and their vital impact on pupils, concluding: "None of this works without professionally-trained careers advisers in every school, guiding young people to make sense of these opportunities and turn them into real career pathways. Real change requires genuine buy-in from all parties."



Top tips: how your firm can offer work experience

Follow these steps from the team at wexmonth.co.uk

1. Before you plan anything, speak to your local schools and further education college. Get an understanding of what may be asked of you as this is invaluable in helping you prepare.
2. Think about what “meaningful work experience” could look like in your organisation. It is not free labour to do the jobs your team don’t like doing but should be about learning, understanding and preparation for a young person.
3. Shape your offering into a planned programme for a period of time. You will need to provide a combination of help and independent learning and observation. If you are offering it for the first time, many companies find shadowing an employee with a period of reflection afterwards can work.
4. Safety first. Work experience can be undertaken in many different environments but keeping the student safe is your first priority — they are in your care. Plan for a health and safety induction at the start of the work experience period.
5. Do not forget you also have an opportunity to learn. Think about a potential project to set your student which allows them to contribute to real projects, real problems and issues that your business faces — you may be surprised by the new and fresh thinking.

‘I learnt from their experience and feedback’

Bethan Rees from Somerset had undertaken various work experience placements, including working in a holiday park and a post office, before securing a place on Deloitte’s Summer Vacation Scheme. She is now a consultant in the firm’s UK Tax & Legal business.

Rees, 24, said: “The scheme gave me a thorough introduction into the professional services industry, allowing me to get on-the-job experience whilst learning more about the firm and future career paths.

“From day one, I was encouraged to take ownership of my work and contribute to the team, quickly establishing strong relationships. Meeting senior partners early was very helpful; I learned from their experience and feedback.”



Lauren McCafferty, early careers director at Deloitte UK, said: “Providing meaningful work experience is an investment in the future. It helps us attract and develop talented young people who may go on to build long-term careers with us and become our future leaders.”

Six from the best

As a marketing director of Groupe SEB, a French cookware manufacturer, Patrick Lucereau has worked from Colombia to southeast Asia to the Middle East, honing sales and ecommerce expertise for homeware brands. Now leading Tefal as it celebrates its 70th anniversary, here is his advice to find the right recipe for your career.

1. **Reinvent yourself before the role asks you to.** Keep reshaping your job before it changes you. Nobody else is going to redesign your career for you.
2. **Live as a consumer, every day.** Don't just talk about them in meetings. Unbox the product yourself, cook with it, read the one-star reviews, sit through the ads on your own sofa. If you're not living what they live, you're guessing.
3. **Hire people who'll argue with you and surprise you.** I'd rather a team that pushes back in the room than one that nods along and grumbles in the corridor afterwards. Give people real autonomy, or watch the good ones leave.
4. **Trust a messy dashboard over a polished opinion.** Instinct without evidence is just noise, even your own. AI has raised the bar on what a good decision looks like, and the teams checking the numbers daily, not quarterly, are quietly pulling ahead.
5. **What sells in Lyon won't sell in Leeds.** Cooking is the most local thing people do. Global scale gets you on the shelf, local nuance gets you into the basket.
6. **Pride is an underrated management tool.** Pride in the brand, the team, the work. Nothing beats the moment a consumer tells you, unprompted, that you got it right.



Working week

Pay is not enough - Salary alone is no longer enough to retain high-earning finance professionals, a new report finds. The study from the executive search firm Croft & Co shows professionals earning at least £100,000 a year are placing increasing value on work-life balance, leadership quality, meaningful career progression and long-term sustainability when deciding whether to stay with an employer or pursue a new opportunity. Alex Croft, the founder, said: "The traditional assumption that candidates will simply follow the highest salary no longer tells the full story."

Unfair dismissal trap - Employers are being urged to review their probation periods to ensure they are long enough to assess new staff, in light of the changes in the Employment Rights Act 2025. Employees whose continuous service began on or after July 1 have gained unfair dismissal rights after six months' service, not two years. Mishcon de Reya's Louise Thawley explains: "Given the removal of the unfair dismissal compensation cap, this becomes particularly acute for high earners."

A job on the side - Three in five UK workers have some form of side hustle, but two-thirds have carried out their additional job while at their main employment. One in seven admit to working on their additional source of income "regularly" during standard working hours, while two in five have not told their manager about their second job, a Kickresume poll found. Peter Duris, its chief executive, said: "One in five said that if their side hustle paid as much as their main job, they'd quit immediately."

AI advises students on careers - Only a quarter of students discuss career choices with their parents. While dedicated careers platforms and LinkedIn are the most popular choices used by two-thirds of students, under half utilise their university careers services and only a third attend careers events. However, a third are now using AI tools, the Bright Network research suggests. Kirsten Barnes, the chief executive, said: "Students want career guidance built on real employer knowledge, sector expertise and an understanding of what the graduate market actually looks like."