

Work Experience >>



Top Tips for Students' Work Experience Placements

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Top Tips for Students: Experience of the Workplace

By the end of 2020 all students are expected to gain an experience of the workplace whilst they are at college. This may include a work place visit, shadowing an employer or employee for a day or longer, or a period of work experience. This guide will help you to identify and secure a suitable experience.

The value of a workplace experience

From a Student Perspective: Gaining an insight into a role, a specific company or a wider industry can help you identify if this an area you aspire to work in. Being able to meet various employees, find out what they actually 'do' in their role on a day to day basis and discover their career route. You will come away knowing a bit more about a new company. What do they do? What challenges and opportunities do they face? What is the team like and could you see yourself there at some point in the future?

From an Employer perspective: A work place experience will develop your soft skills and enhance your employability skills. A Student who has taken the time to undertake a workplace experience will be commercially aware and the workplace experiences help develop communication skills. Employers will give you the opportunity to meet a variety of employees during your workplace experience. You will have seen first-hand models of good workplace behaviour, such as understanding how teams communicate and work together.

Finding an experience of the workplace

Be creative and flexible: If you don't have a career path in mind use the opportunity to try something new. Approach the process of finding an experience with a positive and flexible mind-set. All experiences are worthwhile even if they help you decide what you don't want to do! You could start by thinking about businesses located near to where you live. A week spent within a particular industry may save you a lot of time in the long run applying for jobs which you later decide are not for you. You will gain understanding about how important a positive work environment is. Do the employees feel valued and appreciated? What are the entry routes and opportunities for progression? Where could you be in 5 years?

Be organised: Remember that other students at Reigate College and in your local area will also be looking for experiences so you need to be organised and start making enquiries early. Keep a record of whom you have contacted and when. For example:

Company name and contact details	Area	Initial contact	Followed up	Outcome
ABC Computers abc@computersareus.co.uk 01737 123 123	IT support	3 Feb	21 Feb	Unable to offer experience due to staffing issues
Delta Software Engineers delta@softwareisus.co.uk 01306 888 777	Software devel	10 Feb	21 Feb	Able to offer one day in Aug - e mail mid June to confirm
Creative IT Design bcreative@itdesign.co.uk 01737 123 456	Software design	10 Feb		Able to offer Mon and Tue May half term – see e mail

How to contact companies: Large companies may have an early careers department with contact details on the website. If you approach smaller companies, you may need to call to identify who is responsible for arranging work experience. You may be able to speak to someone on the phone but you may prefer to send a prepared e-mail. Have a brief CV prepared and indicate your availability when you contact them. The college has a suggested template which can be accessed here [click to access the CV template](#)

An **initial phone call** might start something like this:

“Good morning, my name is and I am a student from Reigate College. I am ringing to find out whether the company would be able to offer me a day or more’s experience of working at [company name].”

An **initial e mail** might be along the lines of:

Dear

I am e-mailing to enquire whether you would be able to offer me a day or more’s experience of working at [company name]. I am a lower sixth student at Reigate College and I am interested in pursuing a career in [area you are interested in]. I am particularly interested in finding out more about [company name] becauseI have attached my CV and I would be very grateful if you could look at it, or pass it on to the relevant member of staff.

My preferred dates would be , but I would also be available

Thank you very much in advance

Name

[your full name followed by contact details]

Have a **pen and paper ready** to write down contact details, as the person you initially contact is unlikely to be the person you actually need to speak to.

People are very busy so it is likely arranging work experience may not be a high priority. Don't be afraid to follow-up after a reasonable period of time (1-2 weeks). As long as you are polite and courteous, it is not unreasonable to expect a response.

Your **follow up e mail** might read something like:

Dear

I e mailed last month about the possibility of spending a day at [company name]. I am just following up to see if you have had a chance to look into my request.

If you are able to respond or pass my enquiry on to the relevant member of staff I would be very grateful. I have re-attached my CV to this e mail.

Thank you very much in advance,

[your full name followed by contact details]

Networking: Talk to everyone - neighbours, friends, parents. Even if they cannot help you directly to get a placement, they may be able to suggest whom you can contact within an organisation. Personal contacts can be powerful so make use of them if you are lucky enough to have them.

The College keep a database of Students proactively seeking opportunities so please contact workexperience@reigate.ac.uk stating your area/s of interest and then we can contact you if any opportunities arise. Make yourself known to us! Please remember to read the **Careers Bulletin**, which includes any work experience opportunities, which the College have arranged. The Careers Bulletin is e-mailed to Students and is also on the College website [Click here to read the current Careers Bulletin](#)

When shall I arrange my experience of the workplace? Students should arrange experiences to take place either in the holidays or on structured learning or INSET days. The College Calendar is available for you to view on the College website. [Click here to view the College Calendar](#)

If your timetable allows you may wish to undertake a regular commitment (eg a morning or afternoon for 6-8 weeks).

Do I need to notify College?

If you need to request an absence, your parent or guardian will need to e-mail enquiries@reigate.ac.uk with details of the experience and the absence requested. We would ask that you give as much notice as possible, at least 5 working days in advance.

Please remember that we will not authorise absences during internal or external exams, or days off timetable such as Get Ahead Day, Progression Day or Equality and Diversity day. We will not authorise an absence if your attendance or effort grades are a cause for concern.

All experiences of the [workplace](#) are considered unaccompanied private educational visits, for which the College is not responsible. Transportation will be the responsibility of the individual. If the visit is taking place in term time then a parental consent form will need to be completed [Click to access the work experience parental consent form](#)

You will also need to update your Unifrog account once completed adding a new Employer interaction.

Before your work placement

Health and safety guidance

If you have found your own placement it is your parent/carer who is the 'work experience organiser' and they must be satisfied that you will be safe. The Health and Safety Executive provides useful guidance on how to ensure this is the case. Their full guidance can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/workexperience/index.htm>.

The key points that parents/carers should note are that

- The placement provider (employer) has primary responsibility for the health and safety of the student and businesses employing five or more staff are required to have a written risk assessment in place. Their existing employers' liability insurance policy will cover work placements provided their insurer is a member of the Association of British Insurers or Lloyds. Parents/carers should take greater care ensuring risks are suitably managed in smaller businesses.
- Parents/carers should take reasonable steps to satisfy themselves that employers are managing any significant risks. For employers who are new to taking students on work experience, parents/carers should talk through what the student will do and any relevant precautions.
- Parents/carers should ensure employers know in advance about students who might be at greater risk, for example due to health conditions or learning difficulties, so they can take these properly into account.
- Checks carried out should be in proportion to the environment in which the student will be working. In the case of any higher risk environments such as construction, agriculture or manufacturing it is important to satisfy yourself that the instruction, training and supervisory arrangements have been properly thought through.
- Parents should make sure that the student knows how to raise any health and safety concerns before they go on their placement.

Be prepared: You will feel more confident if you avoid a last minute rush in the morning and pack your bag the night before. Bring a notebook and pen which you can use to write down any instructions or make notes.

Plan your travel: Punctuality is important and you don't want to create a bad first impression so plan your journey in advance and aim to arrive 15 minutes early especially if you are relying on public transport. Check travel sites or social media on the morning for any reported problems. Find a map, get directions and take a hard copy with you in case your mobile fails on the day.

Look the part: You will feel more confident if you feel comfortable and look the part. Check the dress code (if in doubt it is better to go smarter). You need to be well presented i.e whatever you wear needs to be neat and clean. Iron your clothes and polish your shoes!

Know your contact: Make sure you have details of who your main employer contact is. You need to know who to ask for when you get there. It's also a good idea to have a phone number in case you need to get in touch in something happens and you are going to arrive late. Don't panic but do call and leave a message. It will be appreciated.

Do your research: Make sure you are familiar with the company, who they are and what they do. The majority of companies will have a website so that should be your first port of call. Some companies put biographies of key staff on the website too. Make a note of any questions or areas of interest. Consider lunchtime and whether you need to take lunch with you, whether there are facilities onsite or whether you will need to explore the local area. Make sure you have some money with you on the first day so you can buy food and drink as needed. Colleagues will be able to suggest local places to go during your lunch break.

During your work placement

Be professional: Create a good first impression. Avoid social media and personal phone calls. Turn your mobile off or on to silent to avoid disruption. Obviously not swear or use language that could cause offence. Remember you are also an ambassador for Reigate College and the excellent feedback from employers is used in references for university or employment

Be positive and enthusiastic: Small actions taken together leave a good impression - open doors, say hello and greet everyone with a smile, shake hands and introduce yourself, and remember to take your coat off at your desk and in meetings. Observe your colleagues and watch how they act. If you are shadowing someone don't be afraid to ask them about their role and how they got to where they are now – they will be flattered and you could learn something.

Pay attention in meetings: Listening skills are a key skill to develop. Make sure you are listening, ideally making a few notes and don't be tempted to day-dream. You may not be expected to participate but if you are paying attention then you can respond if someone asks you a question. Learn about business etiquette in a meeting situation - it could help you when you attend another meeting or host one in the future!

Show initiative / get involved: If you are given an opportunity to use your initiative – use it! If you have finished the task you have been given, ask what else you can do to help. When working on a complicated task try and learn when it's better to stop and ask for guidance rather than making mistakes unnecessarily. However, balance this with trying to be resourceful; a quick internet search might provide the answer. If in doubt, ask for clarification. Your manager and colleagues will be more than willing to help but try and judge when it is/isn't a good time.

Ask questions: Listen carefully to instructions and make lots of notes. Try and meet as many different people in different roles across the company. This will help you to build up a good picture of each role and how they fit into the organisation. If you are working in one department it may be possible to arrange informal chats with colleagues in other areas.

Keep a record of the competencies you have developed

Make some notes each day (or evening at home) to remind you what you've learnt and who you met. Use this to complete Unifrog entries for the employability skills you have developed. These are recorded under the following headings:

- Independence
- Leadership
- Team working
- Resilience
- Analysis
- Literacy
- Numeracy

At the end of the Work Placement

Say 'thank you': Thank people for the time they have spent with you and insight they have provided. Sending an e-mail or note to your point of contact as follow-up would also be an excellent idea. Sometimes work placements lead to future opportunities. They may give you the chance to return at a later date. If the College has assisted you in obtaining your work experience placement we would like to maintain a good relationship with your employer to benefit future students.

Take time to reflect: Look at your Unifrog entries and reflect on any feedback the employer gives you. Think about what you liked about the firm or industry and use this when planning your next placement or applying for future roles. It's also a valuable exercise to think about what you didn't like too (and why) and take into consideration when you apply for future placements/jobs.

Ask for a reference

Ask the employer if you can add them as a referee on your CV. You will have gained skills during the placement that other employer's, colleges and universities look for.

Provide feedback to College

We would love to hear from you! Please e-mail or visit Careers and speak to the Work Experience Co-ordinator. All feedback is valuable and may help improve the experience for future Students.

Good luck!

Any questions?

Please contact:

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Careers Department