

Work experience in the NHS

January 2024

About us

NHS Employers is the employers' organisation for the NHS in England. We support workforce leaders and represent employers to develop a sustainable workforce and be the best employers they can be. We also manage the relationships with NHS trade unions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Introduction

This collection of good practice aims to support NHS employers with their work experience activity. It highlights examples, top tips, and useful resources to equip employers to set up work experience opportunities and establish buy-in from senior leaders and supervisors.

A key resource for this work is NHS England's [More than Photocopying Work Experience - A Toolkit for the NHS](#). This comprehensive toolkit defines the different types of work experience, and their benefits, and includes editable templates to help set up placements.

Benefits of work experience

- Promotes your organisation as a good employer in your community.
- Engage, inspire, and inform young people about working life in healthcare.
- Positive work experience placements can help future employees make informed career choices.
- Supports members of the community, with the opportunity to practice work-related skills in preparation for employment.
- Allows staff to develop new skills in supervision and mentoring as part of their continuing professional development.
- It can help the transition into T levels, apprenticeships, and higher education. Read more about how work placements can mark the beginning of an NHS career.
- Supports the implementation of the Government's careers strategy to educate young people on the range of opportunities available in the NHS, learn new skills and get first-hand experiences in the workplace.

Placing students first at United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS

This video shows the importance of student experience in the work experience journey. Ensuring the work experience offer aligns with the students' needs and expectation can increase uptake and spark an interest in a career in the NHS. A standardised process for matching students with work experience is the fairest way of ensuring parity of access for students, rather than allowing them to rely on their own knowledge or contacts. The trust facilitates this through a locally developed work experience platform, with a standard application form, widening participation and reducing administrative burden.

Re-establishing work experience

Due to the pandemic, work experience opportunities across the NHS were put on hold, but now many organisations are resuming their programmes. Check out the best practices below for trusts that are restarting their activities.

[Find out how Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust reimaged their work experience programme after the pandemic.](#) Their approach ensures that the programme is offered fairly, to more students than before, and places a reduced burden on staff.

Restoring work experience at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

Prior to the pandemic, the trust supported 600 young people per year to undertake work experience via a combination of individual ad-hoc placements and structured programmes. The trust was keen to reopen this popular route.

The trust focussed on the benefits work experience candidates bring to the trust to obtain internal buy-in and planned a phased approach over a year long period.

The trust has three approaches to work experience:

Ad-hoc placements - support individuals who have contacted the work experience team directly.

Taste of medicine - a weeklong programme that runs three times a year for young people interested in a career in medicine. The programme supports them to make informed career choices and bolster their university applications. Learners attend an induction session, clinical skills sessions and a presentation from the University of Manchester medical admissions team supported by current medical students. Plus, undertake shadowing placements with medical staff over the course of the week.

Taste of healthcare - this programme is run seven times a year to support up to twenty young people either currently studying a healthcare qualification (health and social care BTEC/CACHE diploma) at a local college or interested in pursuing a career in healthcare (nursing, midwifery, allied health professions). Learners are hosted by a ward or clinic for a week and undertake shadowing of various staff members and support with basic tasks in line with the trust's safe placement guidelines.

Manchester made changes to ensure their processes are aligned with NHS England's best practice guidance and [NHS Work Experience Toolkit](#) recommendations, as well as wider local strategies including [Manchester Work and Skills Strategy](#). The trust also completed this work to help gain an NHS England work experience gold [quality standard](#) accreditation.



“The work experience entailed example patients, from the patient seeking advice from the GP, all the way to the histopathologists analysing the inflammation. At the multi-disciplinary team meeting it was nice to see how the oncologist and pathologist share their knowledge and findings to reach a diagnosis.” - A young person who completed work experience at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust.

Successfully recommencing work experience at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

Following the pandemic, the trust wanted to restart work experience in departments that were experiencing less pressure and were therefore ready and best suited to the work experience programme. These departments allowed the trust to test what would work well and use the knowledge they collected to get buy in from other areas. This targeted and gradual approach contributed to the successful re-establishment of the programme.

The re-start gave the trust an opportunity to consider how an online space could help provide access to information about placements and supplement face-to-face learning. The team created a work experience web page and added a section for online learning packages.



“Providing work experience can be seen as yet another ask, but it really does produce benefits or return on the time invested. Engaging with young people creates an awareness of your department/service and when the

young person is ready to apply for jobs their experience influences their employer of choice. You are creating a pipeline of interested young people. You may ask a member of staff to manage the work experience provision, which will provide opportunities to develop management skills. Another aspect of staff development provides staff with mentoring, coaching, and skills transferrable to line management. Often the benefits to young people are thought of, but the other side is forgotten.” - Michelle Place, Apprenticeships and Widening Participation Lead, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

Work experience approaches

Each organisation approaches work experience differently, learn how these organisations successfully implemented an approach that worked for them.

Mental health, learning disabilities and neuro-rehabilitation work experience at Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

The trust aimed to educate young people about their career options within the organisation to ensure a larger workforce supply after they finish education at 18.

The trust offers nurse work experience placements on in-patient wards and in the community. The trust's education support nurses, who support a five year Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship (RNDA) programme students, developed a timetable that included experience with community mental health teams, neuro services, community services, recovery college, and a ward which offers a therapeutic environment to help with rebuilding living skills. The trust also developed an induction booklet for the programme and incorporated this into their supporting learners/work experience policy.

The trust's medical education team coordinates one-week work experience placements for students over 16 years of age who live

in the Northeast and are intending to apply to medical school.

The trust offers Project Choice placements for young adults with a learning disability, disability, mental health issue or learning difficulties, or autism to gain work experience and improve their employability and independence.



“Young people are key to our future workforce development and if we don’t support them in their learning when they’re at school or college, we can’t expect them to think of us once they are aged 18. Not everywhere will be a

suitable placement, so we concentrate on where we can achieve placements rather than where we cannot.” Gail Bayes, Deputy Director of Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust Academy Development

After being established for two years the nurse work experience programme has created a workforce supply route for the RNDA. Since launching two years ago, they have recruited 31 people onto the apprenticeship.

The trust offers three months of paid part time work experience as supernumerary staff in mental health and learning disability wards before the RNDA starts.

Two of those recruited withdrew following the work experience element having decided it wasn’t the career for them and weren’t therefore enrolled onto the apprenticeship. This has reduced the attrition on the course and made space for those who are sure this work is for them.

A new work experience offer at Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust

The trust offers work experience of up to ten days to those aged 14 and above in clinical and non-clinical settings to help students understand the impact the NHS has in their local community.

The trust provides payments throughout the organisation including nursing, IT, HR, medicine (over 18s only), administration, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and finance.

The trust also delivered an introduction to allied health professions. This is a new five-day course aiming to provide attendees with an overview of five of the allied health professions.

Applications are open for two weeks twice a year which allows the trust to manage applications and placements better.

Students are asked to provide three areas they would like to be placed in, and a choice of three dates they are available.

The students are also asked to write a supporting statement about what they hope to get out of work experience, this helps the trust select the right placement for them.

Work experience opportunities are advertised on social media, the trust website and are emailed to schools/colleges contacts. They are also promoted at careers events and internally to highlight to colleagues.



“Work experience is an interesting and important way to experience Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust, and the wider NHS. It gives young people an impression of the work that we undertake, and the difference they can make. That difference can be to the wider community, families, carers and most importantly, our patients.” Stephen Collman, Chief Executive, Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust

How Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust promoted their work experience offer

Hampshire engaged learners by running onsite work experience through their friends and family scheme which extended to individual requests from local students.

The trust developed insight days where they offered an all-day interactive experience to students in local schools and colleges who are interested in a healthcare career. This includes a myth-busting session, and a Q&A panel with current trust staff talking about their roles and career pathways. Then an afternoon of interactive workshops covering simulation technology, resuscitation techniques, and handwashing. The day ends with career guidance on both apprenticeships and UCAS applications.



“Learning the difference between clinical and non-clinical roles and how the NHS is not only made up of doctors and nurses was really interesting and something I hadn’t really thought about”. A young person who completed work experience at Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) showcase a variety of roles through their career session and ‘hands-on’ experience

NHSBT provide observational healthcare science themed work experience programmes to students in years 10 to 13. Learners spend time with blood collection teams, in specialist laboratories and processing departments, and learn about organ and tissue donation. The programme demonstrates the variety of healthcare science and other roles, both clinical and non-clinical. Students participate in a career session and gain 'hands-on' experience in a practical in a training lab and experience their virtual reality laboratory.

Provide directly recruited and hosted work experience and placement opportunities, such as their Biomedical Science sandwich placement programme. They also partner with

organisations such as Project SEARCH and Health Data Research UK.



“Work experience provides valuable insight into the variety of roles at NHSBT and the lifesaving work of the organisation. These opportunities raise our profile as an employer of choice in their local area

supporting us to create a diverse workforce representative of those communities. Similar opportunities for NHSBT colleagues raise awareness of development and employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, ensuring as an organisation we have the right mix of knowledge and skills to meet the needs of our donors, and patients across the NHS.”
Sonja Long, Placement Manager, NHS Blood and Transplant

Virtual work experience at Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership

The project funded by Learning, Environment Assessment and Placement (LEAP) programme provides virtual work experience in a Hospice environment.

Based on a partnership between St Mary’s College and Dove House Hospice, Hull, the project supports students aged 16-19 with a virtual systematic review of health and social care values, case studies and application of care planning within a multi-disciplinary team. Plus, career specific guidance from the relevant professional with the multi-disciplinary team as well as a one hour

onsite task guided by team members. Visit [Humber and North Yorkshire LEAP Programme](#) or sign in to [HNY LEAP Future NHS platform](#) to learn more.

How University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust adapted its IT system to manage work experience applications

In 2023, University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust experienced a demand for 240 work experience placements from people of all ages. Many of the applications were from friends or family of staff members on an ad-hoc basis.

The trust wanted to manage this interest and make a fairer application process. It decided to use its Assemble onboarding system, which had previously only been utilised to manage volunteering positions.

Once set up for managing work experience and T Level placements, the trust added links to resources, a contact hub, trust policies and used the system to advertise a wide variety of opportunities.

Key benefits and outcomes

- The trust created a hub of opportunities, where all the related information was held in one place.
- The trust built good relationships with local schools and colleges and provided an easily accessible link to the system and guidance for applications.
- The system was 'live' so students could see which placements were full and which still had vacancies.

- With the new system and closer relationships with local schools, the trust has been able to increase its offer from 2 weeks to 4 weeks for year 10 students in 2024, with the aim to grow this further in the future.
- Replacing the original time-consuming administration system with has meant that the work experience team has been able to offer more placements than before and can now focus on quality as well as quantity.

[Read the full case study for details.](#)

Top tips for offering work experience



Resources

These resources have been selected to support you to launch and build your work experience programme. They include practical tips, specific advice and useful links.

NHSBT Resources

- Information on applying to [NHSBT work experience programmes](#) (aimed at school years 10-13)
- NHSBT has a [toolkit](#) to support managers in accepting direct approaches for work experience

The Prince's Trust

[The Prince's Trust health and social care pre-employment programmes](#) The charity's, 'Get Into' programme focuses on increasing the chances of young people (aged 16-30) securing entry level employment in the NHS. It lasts between four to six weeks and is a combination of class-based learning and hands-on work placements

Click on these links to read more about [widening local participation through partnering with the Prince's Trust and Business case for supporting a partnership with The Prince's Trust - a guide on the key areas to consider when presenting your business case to board members.](#)

Springpod

- Springpod online platform hosts a wide variety of [Healthcare virtual work experience opportunities](#). It aims to enable every young person to experience a university course or career before they apply. They achieve this by partnering with universities and employers to create interactive, experiential learning programmes. From work experience to university course

taster experiences, the Springpod platform enables young people to explore, interact and learn about the world of work before they apply.

- Free for every student, Springpod is monetised through university and employer partnerships and school and college premium memberships.

Useful resources

- Busting myths on recruiting under 18s into the NHS. Read our guidance on good employment practice when employing people under the age of 18 years old.
- Recruit and retain young people toolkit. A series of practical, bite-sized guides to support recruitment and retention of young people in the NHS. This toolkit contains advice, tools and resources that will help your trust to attract and recruit young people, support them to stay in their roles and become a valuable asset to your organisation and the wider health and social care workforce.
- Central NHS England website about work experience and work-related learning activity.
- The Future of Healthcare Work Experience Discovery Report. A broad review of NHS healthcare work experience. It comprises a wide range of great case studies for online learning opportunities and suitability for different age groups. It also provides an accessible summary and review of digital resources and online experiences.
- NHS England response to recommendations outlined in ‘The Future of Healthcare Work Experience: Discovery Report’ March 2022. A response paper that sets out in practical terms how NHS England are putting in place their strategy of implementation.

- [Work experience in the NHS - A toolkit for teachers and careers advisers](#)
- [Work experience - A toolkit for secondary care providers](#)
- [Online Work-Related Learning - A toolkit](#)

For further information or if you have examples you would like to share, please contact the education, skills and redesign team on WorkforceSupply@nhsemployers.org.



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