

Modern work experience: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What does reforming work experience mean?

At its heart, reform means recognising work experience as a strategic lever for improving learner outcomes, promoting inclusion, reducing NEET risk and connecting learning to future opportunities.

Reforming work experience is about moving from isolated careers events to a coherent, inclusive and progressive journey of meaningful workplace experiences. By aligning careers education, curriculum and employer engagement around learner needs and intended outcomes, work experience becomes a tool for school improvement, skills development and positive destinations, supporting the government's ambition that every young person benefits from two weeks' worth of work experience by the end of Key Stage 4.

Reform is evident when work experience moves:

- from events to outcomes
- from compliance to strategic leadership
- from one-off placements to progressive learner journeys
- from universal activity to targeted, needs-led provision
- from counting experiences to measuring impact
- from careers-team ownership to whole-organisation responsibility
- from opportunity for some to meaningful experiences for all

2. Where do I start?

For educators:

- Implementation of the updated [Gatsby Benchmarks](#) to ensure continuous improvement of careers provision for all of learners
- Use the [Careers Impact internal leadership review](#)
- Map your current provision to the equalx [learning outcomes framework](#).
- The "[How to](#)" guide on the CEC Resource Directory is a good place to start for educators

For employers:

- [Discover resources to support delivery](#) of meaningful workplace experiences to build the knowledge, behaviours and skills required for the future workforce.

3. What does 'two weeks' worth' mean?

The intent of the work experience ambition is to start early. The statutory guidance outlines one week's worth of workplace experiences across Key Stage 3 and a further week across Key Stage 4. These can be arranged in a format appropriate to the learner and cohort, and determined by the school as part of curriculum planning. The guidance differentiates between multiple, varied employer-led activities in Key Stage 3 and meaningful, in-person, immersive placements in Key Stage 4, which can be with one or more employer. It also gives further detail on what this should look like, aligned to Gatsby Benchmark 6 and the definition of a meaningful experience.

4. What does this mean for Key Stage 5 activity?

Colleges and ITPs should ensure that every learner has had at least one experience of a workplace during their programme of study. High quality and meaningful experiences of workplaces are a funded component of [16 to 19 study programmes](#). Colleges and ITPs can take into account any part-time work a young person may have, if it genuinely offers them a meaningful experience. Part-time work can contribute to benchmark 6 in post-16 education, but should not replace the need for other meaningful experiences of workplaces.

5. Can experiences include virtual and in-school activities?

The policy intention is that experiences should be delivered in the workplace where possible to give young people as much exposure to a genuine working environment. Experiences should be in-person and immersive, where pupils undertake real tasks and benefit from two-way employer to pupil interaction. In exceptional circumstances meaningful hybrid or remote approaches may be impactful in removing barriers to access. In these circumstances, we expect best endeavours to use remote engagement alongside, but not instead of, in-person activity.

6. Can Gatsby Benchmark 5 encounters count towards two weeks' worth of work experience?

Entire careers learning journeys will include encounters and experiences, yet the definition for Benchmark 6 is applicable when planning a progressive approach to workplace experiences to meet the Government's ambition. It is useful to continue to refer to the Gatsby [definitions of meaningful](#), which provide clear guidance for encounters and experiences separately. The Careers & Enterprise equalex model is designed to ensure that the quality of experiences AND encounters is raised and that programmes are underpinned by clear learning outcomes as outlined in Gatsby Benchmark 1. Encounters and experiences remain separate activities and have clear definitions around how to ensure they are meaningful.

7. What support will be available to help us?

Careers Hubs are your local go to for support to plan for the reforming of work experience for all learners. As the national body for careers education, CEC will continue to develop and share communications, guidance, CPD opportunities and inspirational case studies. Support will be shared via Careers Hubs, [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#), Excellence Seminars and communities of improvement. Support will continue to evolve and develop and will be available to education settings, employers and providers. Employers should also visit the [Employer Standards](#) for further bespoke guidance and tools.

8. Where can we find out more about modern work experience?

[Statutory guidance for schools and colleges, published 23rd June 2026](#) sets out the policy direction including 2 weeks' worth of work experience. [Find out more about Modern Work Experience](#) and the equalex framework.

9. What about work experience for SEND learners?

As part of the equalex pilots the framework was tested in specialist settings to ensure relevance for all learners. The [equalex for SEND](#) resources help you to see what this can look like in practice.

10. How will employer pipelines be sufficient?

Careers Hubs have a critical role in helping education settings translate the new statutory guidance into consistent local practice. By acting as strategic convenors, Careers Hubs can strengthen employer partnerships, coordinate local networks, and support institutions to adopt a progressive approach to Work Experience from workplace experiences in Key Stage 3 through to high-quality placements in Key Stage 4. Through effective use of the Gatsby Benchmarks, Employer Standards, Careers Impact System and equalex framework, Careers Hubs can help ensure employer engagement is sustainable, inclusive and equitable, enabling every young person, regardless of background or setting, to benefit from meaningful workplace experiences.

11. What are the implications of the updated KCSIE regulations

We recognise that the changes introduced through the Crime and Policing Act and the updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) may raise questions for Careers Leaders, Designated Safeguarding Leads and school leaders, particularly regarding business volunteers and work experience.

As these changes are new, we are working closely with colleagues across our networks to understand the practical implications and look at where we can support schools and colleges to navigate these changes.

The Disclosure Barring Service published some additional information on 25th August to support organisations to navigate the changes. [Regulated activity with children: myth busting the September 2026 Supervision Exemption changes - GOV.UK](#)