Work Experience Placements

Introduction
1. Schools/departments within the University of Birmingham may be asked from time to time to provide young people with work experience. These guidelines provide information to help those managing the process.

2. The aim of providing work placements is to:
   - Provide young people with an understanding of the world of work
   - Assist young people in deciding what type of career they might want in the future
   - Improve the personal development of young people
   - Improve the key skills and employability of young people
   - Strengthen links between the University, schools and the local community

3. Placements are organised directly with Schools/Budget Centres, and not centrally through Human Resources.

The legal standpoint
4. People on work experience are classed as employees for the period of the placement under the Health and Safety (Training for Employment) Regulations 1990, and are therefore covered by the University’s insurance.

5. The School/Budget Centre is required by law to carry out a risk assessment to reduce the possibility of the young person having an accident. The Guidance on Work Experience Placements (intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hsu/work-placements.pdf) explains what should be included in the risk assessment, as well as guidance on whether young people are prohibited or restricted from entering certain areas, carrying out certain activities or working with certain materials or substances. The Head of School/Budget Centre must agree the risk assessment and approve the placement before the individual comes into the University. A copy of the risk assessment must be given to the young person.

6. The staff member responsible for supervising the work experience placement must be made aware of Child Protection issues and their responsibility in this regard: guidance is set out in the Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People within the University (intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/safeguarding-children.pdf), which includes advice on whether a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure would be appropriate for the supervising member of staff. If in doubt, contact Human Resources or Legal Services.

7. We recommend that you ensure the young person has an official letter of engagement before starting their placement, which should include a confidentiality clause if s/he is likely to be dealing with work of a sensitive nature. A template letter is available at intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/documents/public/work-experience-letter.doc

Practical issues
8. Don’t forget to inform colleagues/reception of the work experience participant’s arrival before his/her first day, and to set up computer login details for any programs s/he may be using.

9. The young person will have a very limited experience of working. Some may have Saturday or evening jobs, but for many this is their first experience of working – even opening and distributing post can be a new skill. Make sure you ask open questions, using ‘what, when, why, where’, when discussing the tasks. This will allow the student to give a better picture of his/her understanding.

10. Encourage the young person to ask questions whenever s/he is in doubt about anything. S/he may well be shy and reluctant to ask, which can lead to mistakes. It may be helpful to allocate a ‘buddy’ to allow them to ask questions in a more informal setting (for example about suitable clothing etc).
11. It is also useful to provide a mentor for the placement period, who will be the young person’s supervisor and coach. Check the mentor is fully briefed about the young person before they are introduced to each other.

12. Prepare a shortened version of your normal induction for staff, giving information s/he needs to get started:

- Show him/her around the work space, refreshment areas (do they need to contribute to a tea fund?), location of toilets and where to put personal items (handbags, coats etc); indicate timing of any breaks
- Give him/her a short ‘job description’ of the tasks s/he will cover during their placement – itemise the days s/he will carry out specific tasks if this is relevant
- Assess his/her knowledge of tasks (if any) and adjust the job description if necessary, eg more IT skills than anticipated.
- Go through a checklist of health and safety issues, especially fire drill, first aid and any hazardous areas eg laboratories.
- Give him/her some useful documents:
  - A map of the campus/building if s/he has to run errands from one location to another – give them a short tour if appropriate
  - A short list of contacts and telephone numbers of people s/he is likely to have to phone
  - Introduce him/her to the office manager, receptionists and other key people so (a) s/he does not feel isolated and (b) s/he is known to other staff

13. You should have regular conversations with the young person, reflecting on his/her progress and attitude. Depending on the duration of the placement, it may be worth having a mid-placement review to consider any additional tasks s/he may be able to, or may wish to, take on.

14. At the end of the placement it is good practice to arrange a final review meeting with the young person to discuss what s/he has learned and achieved and to address, in a constructive fashion, what his/her strengths and weaknesses are.

Additional information on organised work placements for young people in full-time education

1. Placements are usually arranged between the school (or agency) and the School/Budget Centre providing work placements. It should be the aim of the School/Budget Centre to provide a positive introduction to work and an organised timetable/programme for the period of the work placement.

2. Students are eligible for work experience if they are in their last two years of compulsory education or taking post-16 courses; work experience students are therefore typically aged between 15 and 17 years old.

3. Most placements last between one and two weeks, but work experience may be requested for an ‘extended’ placement to last longer than two weeks. Students will need to have their placement confirmed three months before the start date: as placements usually take place during July, confirmation is required at the beginning of April.

4. The student will often have to complete a log of his/her placement, and departments will be asked to provide a summary of the skills and performance of the student which may be used to complement his/her CV.

Human Resources
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