



Hertfordshire: Experiences of the workplace

December 2023

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Executive Summary

An introduction

Hertfordshire Careers Hub was approached by the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) due to its very high attainment of Gatsby Benchmark 6 where 78% of schools fully meet the benchmark (compared to a national average of 64%). The CEC has asked the Hertfordshire Careers Hub to investigate how to:

- 1) Ensure the remaining schools are also able to fully meet the requirements of the benchmark.
- 2) Support schools meeting the benchmark to improve their work experience offers.

The findings of this research could then be used to share outcomes with the other Hub areas across the country.

The approach

A review of current work experience models across the county with both qualitative and quantitative research was carried out covering 4 main themes. This report sets out the findings of this research and offers ideas for new approaches that could be taken forward.

Research themes

A review of current work experience models across the county with both qualitative and quantitative research was carried out covering 4 main themes.

1. **The perceived value of work experience and the positive impact it can have on a young person's aspirations.**
2. **Models of work experience that work best for schools and employers.**
3. **Identification of barriers that might prevent schools, young people and employers from being able to provide the most impactful work experience programmes.**
4. **Suggestions for alternatives or new approaches to the delivery of meaningful work experiences.**

1. The perceived value of work experience and the positive impact it can have on a young person's aspirations.

There is no doubt that **work experience is valued by schools and by employers** in Hertfordshire. The interviews and surveys conducted with employers showed that each year, significant numbers of students in Years 10 and 12 undertake placements with local businesses. Businesses value being able to support their local schools and make significant investment in both time and resources to offer a variety of placements. For businesses that don't yet offer placements, the majority stated that they had never been asked.

Both schools and employers are clear on the many benefits that work experience can bring to a young person in preparing them for the world of work, raising aspirations, increasing their confidence and communication skills, exposing them to a variety of job roles, helping them to gain new skills and potentially connecting them with future vacancies.



1. The perceived value of work experience and the positive impact it can have on a young person's aspirations.

The research showed that systems for measuring the impact of the placement are less developed. **The focus is often on the co-ordination, rather than the impact.** Centralised evaluation activities that track and measure the impact for all parties are not consistently applied, yet all interviewed could see that increased reflection activities to review the placement and seek improvements would be useful.

The planning and selection of self-sourced placements seem to be primarily driven by the interests of the student combined with the connections of the family.

There were very few examples from schools or employers of how students can identify skills that they need to develop and how this could feed into the activities that they undertake in the workplace.



2. Models of work experience that work best for schools and employers.

The traditional model of 5-day placements is still the preferred model by schools in Hertfordshire. There will be flexibility for students that are unable to sustain a placement for the full duration, with additional activities such as work-related projects being used.

Both schools and employers voiced concerns over this model as the move to hybrid working is now impacting the resource and capacity within the workplace to host students on placement. **Both schools and employers could see the benefit of offering shorter placements for students e.g. 1 – 3 days.** However, there was a strong sense that for schools, the 5-day placement works well. It means that the activity is contained, it causes less disruption to the school timetable and staff can support with monitoring activities.



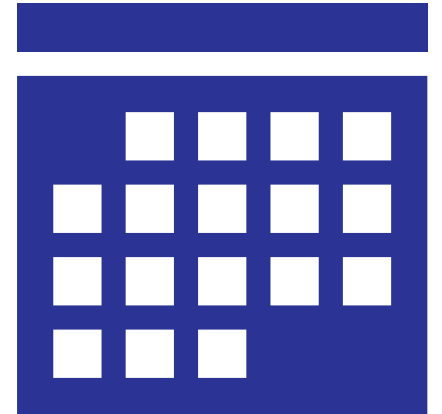
2. Models of work experience that work best for schools and employers.

Not all schools are following the traditional model of placements happening in the summer months. **Some schools have moved their work experience weeks to earlier in the year** (Feb/Mar/Apr) instead of the summer months and shared that this is working well.

Reasons for this included:

- Prioritising work experience within the core timetable so that students realise how important it is.
- Reducing competition with other schools for placements with local businesses.

Some employers will select and set their own dates for work experience based on business need and capacity.



3. Identification of barriers that might prevent schools, young people and employers from being able to provide the most impactful work experience programmes.

The majority of schools use a self-source model for work experience, where **students use their own personal networks or reach out to employers to find a placement**. Schools shared concerns that students with working parents and professional contacts often benefit from more exciting and meaningful placements, and as parents can often support travel costs, they can broaden their search to include London and even overseas.

Less advantaged students can struggle to find high quality placements. In situations where parents do not work, do not have the personal connections and/or cannot afford the travel costs, the schools will support these students to find a placement. Some will use services such as SfYP Link+ however this has budget implications. Many schools also try to keep a list of local employers with placements.

Sourcing high-quality placements for students with additional needs is a challenge that all schools share. It is felt that placements are not as well-structured or meaningful as they would like them to be and the majority are often in retail, primary schools, care homes etc.

3. Identification of barriers that might prevent schools, young people and employers from being able to provide the most impactful work experience programmes.

The interviews with employers also raised the issue of student preparation for placement. Employers would like **students to be better prepared by the school/college so that placements can be more impactful.**

They would like a more consistent approach through schools to increase preparation activities across three main areas:

- Research about the organisation – the services and products, the different job roles and sites/locations.
- Taking an interest – thinking about the different functions of the business and coming prepared with activities that encourage questions to ask and information to source.
- Employability skills – expectations of the workplace, what to wear, punctuality, behaviour and communication skills.

The ways that schools prepare students depends largely on the resource within the school. Some schools implement detailed plans involving parents and carers, form tutors and advice from previous students. Other schools may only be able to deliver a couple of assemblies, and communication is mostly via email.

4. Suggestions for alternatives or new approaches to the delivery of meaningful work experiences.

There are a number of ideas that have emerged from this research. These fall into two themes:

Practical ways to boost experiences of the workplace for young people in Hertfordshire:

- Trialling different methods and models of work experience e.g. shorter placements / group visits / rotations.
- A focus on students that do not have access to meaningful placements e.g. students with additional needs and personal/social barriers.
- Support for schools to implement work shadowing and/or 'take your child to work' days for younger year groups.
- An employer campaign to source placements for 1-3 days and ½ day visits for 10-15 students.

Ideas for collaborative working within the county:

- Facilitated best practice sessions to enable sharing of 'what works' for both schools and employers.
- Training and guidance for those co-ordinating work experience within schools and employers to look at the structure and purpose of work experience placements, covering new ideas and emerging trends.
- Planning and reflection sessions for students to better prepare for and reflect upon the placement and how it links to future goals.
- Training for schools looking to implement a work shadowing or 'take your child to work' day for younger year groups.

Introduction

The Careers and Enterprise Company has provided funding for Hertfordshire Careers Hub to develop the county's current Work Experience provision. The project aims are to:

- Ensure that all schools within Hertfordshire can provide as close to full coverage of work experience to its students.
- Explore what new models could be developed to support an expansion of work experience to incorporate more 'experiences of the workplace'.
- Identify and share best practice around work experience to all schools and other hub areas around the country.

The Hertfordshire approach to this project has been split into two phases:

- Phase 1: To conduct research on the Hertfordshire models of work experience
- Phase 2: To design and pilot some new models of Experiences of the Workplace, using the findings from phase 1.

Hertfordshire Careers Hub commissioned Amazing Apprenticeships to carry out a research project during October – December 2023 to support phase 1 of this project. The aim of this research was to ascertain from schools, work experience providers and employers a mix of qualitative and quantitative feedback covering:

- The perceived value of work experience and the positive impact it can have on a young person's aspirations.
- Models of work experience that work best for schools and employers.
- Identification of barriers that might prevent schools, young people and employers from being able to provide the most impactful work experience programmes.
- Suggestions for alternatives or new approaches to the delivery of meaningful work experiences.

Throughout November 2023, a series of interviews, roundtables and surveys were conducted with the aim of gathering insight and data to inform phase 1 of the Hertfordshire research.

The following activity took place:

- 12 individual school interviews (including an ESC, Special schools and various FSM metrics)
- 60 school participants in an online survey
- 6 school participants in a focus group (including a mix as above)
- 8 individual employer interviews
- 33 employer participants in an online survey
- 3 individual work experience provider interviews

This report provides an overview of the findings of this research and makes recommendations to take forward into phase 2.

**Key findings from
employer and school
surveys.**

Key findings from employer survey

The majority of employers surveyed **already offer work experience (85%)**, and most **will offer more than one work experience placement each year (66%)**.

Of the employers that do not currently offer work experience, the main reason was because they **have never been asked (60%)** but have **said they would be willing to consider requests**.

Employers offering placements tend to **offer their placements to local schools (41%)** and **students with a specific interest in their sector (41%)**.

Most employers would like students to be **better prepared by the school/college (59%)**. Followed by nearly half saying they would like **more flexibility with the work experience models (47%)**.

Key findings from employer survey

When asked about how the current models could be improved, employers (both those that do and do not currently offer work experience) were generally in agreement that that would like to see:

Shorter placements e.g. 1 – 3 days

Longer placements e.g. 2 weeks +

Work experience outside of the traditional June/July time – including school holidays and weekends.

A recognition that many workplaces have now changed with hybrid / work-from-home models.

Better support with paperwork, health & safety, insurance requirements and safeguarding arrangements.

Models that better match the needs of their business.

Key findings from employer survey

1 in 4 (25%)

do not measure the success of the placement.

44%

use student feedback / surveys

25%

seek a recognition of skills learned

13%

measure success if a student applies for a position with them

Most employers offer other experiences of the workplace including:

Work shadowing (66%)

Workplace visits (62%)

Open events (50%)

Virtual work experience (38%)

'Bring your child to work days' (25%)

Key findings from school survey

60 Hertfordshire schools participated in the work experience survey.

All 60 schools offer some form of experience of the workplace, with the most common being work experience (91.67%).

91.67%

Offer work
experience

60%

Offer work
shadowing

50%

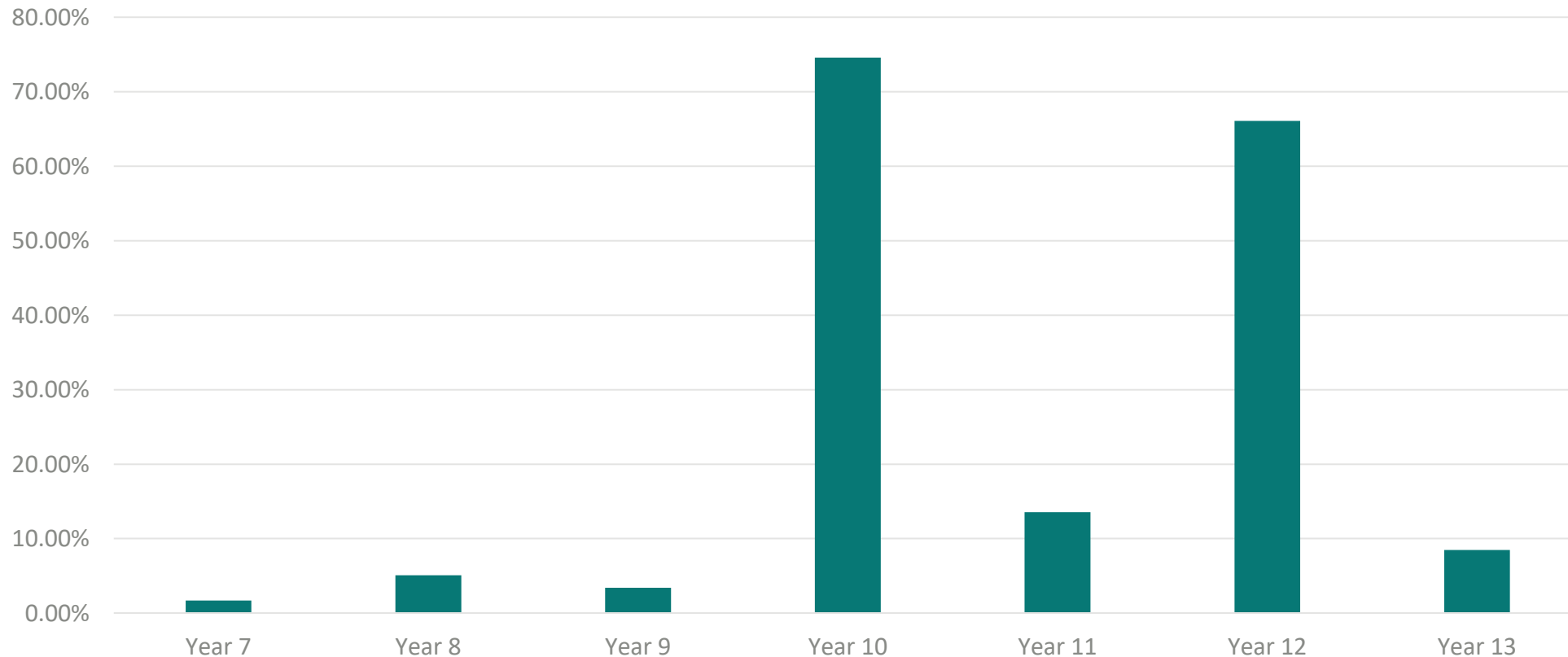
Offer work
visits

43.33%

Run virtual
work
experience

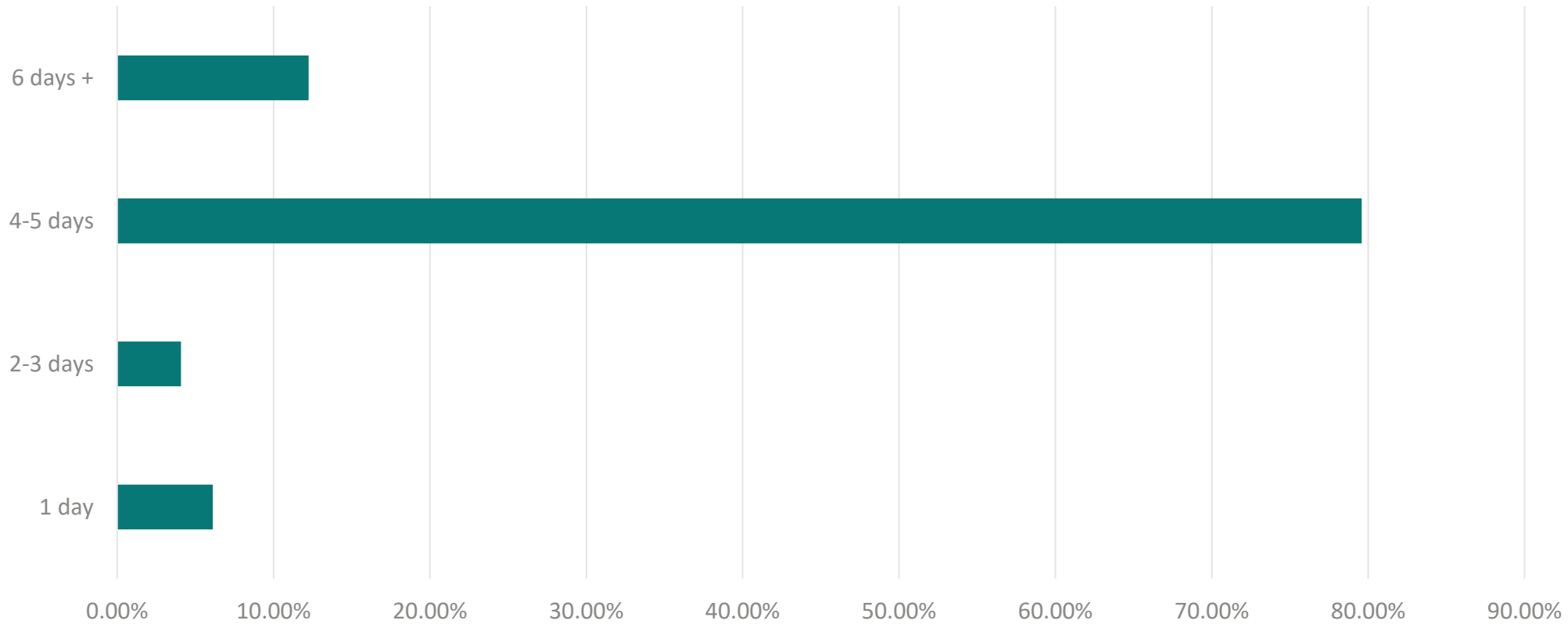
Key findings from school survey

The vast majority of activities (of which the majority will be work experience) take place for students in Years 10 or 12 as single year groups.



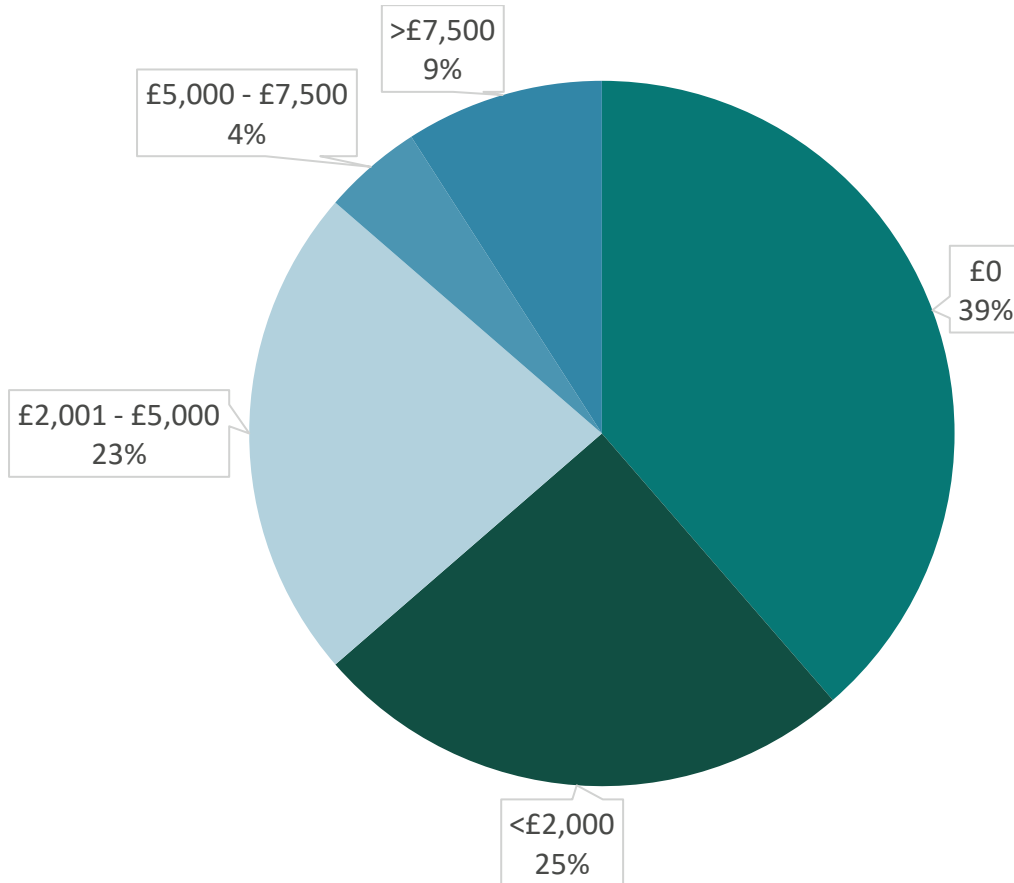
Key findings from school survey

The majority of schools run a work experience model that is 4 – 5 days.



Key findings from school survey

44/60 schools responded to the question about the budget that the school has for work experience. 16 either did not know what their budget was or preferred not to answer.



2 in 5
Schools have no budget at all for work experience

**Key findings from
employer and school
interviews and focus
groups.**

Key findings from the interviews

The following pages summarise the interviews held with schools, employers and work experience providers. The findings have been grouped into the following themes:

- Offering work experience
- Placement models
- Work experience timing
- Planning / lead-in time
- Use of technology
- Sourcing placements
- Employer engagement
- Students with additional needs
- Preparing for work experience
- Virtual work experience
- Monitoring on placement
- Measuring the impact of placements
- The benefits of work experience
- Cost and resources
- Experiences of the workplace

Offering work experience

Schools	Employers
<p>All of the schools that were interviewed are offering work experience. The majority of these are operating a 5-day model and most have an offer in place for Year 10 students and some Year 12 students. In general, schools will try to achieve 100% of students going on placement.</p> <p>One school interviewed is only able to support 30 students per year because of budgetary constraints.</p> <p>None of the mainstream schools interviewed offer work experience to students in Year 11 or 13. A few schools offer ad-hoc visits to the workplace or careers fairs if it is felt relevant to their programme or intended career destination. Feedback recognised the pressure of exams for these year groups and a reluctance to take them out of school to miss lessons.</p>	<p>The majority of employers that participated in the research offer some form of work experience.</p> <p>Of the businesses that don't currently offer work experience, the main reasons given were that they have not been asked or could not meet the requirements of the school i.e. 5 days.</p>

Schools

The majority of schools interviewed operate a 5-day placement model.

Although many schools appreciate that shorter placements could be better for both students and employers, the main concerns expressed were of the potential disruption that any other model might cause to the school timetable.

All schools talked of flexibility within the model for students that might not be able to sustain a placement for the full duration, offering students 2-3 days on placement and filling the remaining time with a different task, such as a work-related project.

Employers

The majority of employers will try to accommodate requests from schools for a 5-day placement.

However, there was feedback from a number of employers that 5-day placements are difficult to manage. This is partly as a result of hybrid working which means there is reduced staffing in the office, and it is difficult to resource full days.

All employers were interested in offering shorter placements e.g. 1-3 days as this would mean they could balance capacity and also potentially offer more placements to more students, widening their talent pipeline. They were also interested in offering shorter days e.g. 10am – 3pm. Some employers also stated that they would prefer longer placements e.g. 2 weeks+

Schools

The majority of schools operate work experience in the summer months (June / July). This is a long-standing tradition and one that fits with the rhythm of the school year after the exam period has finished.

However, some schools have recognised the value of moving their work experience to earlier in the year (February, March and April). The main reasons are:

1. To avoid competition / employer overload from other local schools seeking placements at the same time.
2. To shift the importance of work experience, so that it is seen as a core component of the curriculum by staff and students.

Employers

Most employers are responsive to the requests from the school or individual students, which means that often the summer months are the busiest for work experience. Some employers flagged the challenge that this can pose to businesses, as this is often a time when their staff may be taking annual leave and therefore, they have reduced capacity.

Some larger employers will offer dates for work experience based on business capacity and staff availability. These will usually be advertised via their website and applications will be invited from potential candidates.

Schools	Employers
<p>Many schools will start planning in the autumn term for placements that will be happening the following June / July, allowing approximately 8 months for students and parents/carers to be engaged in the activity.</p> <p>Planning activities vary between schools, but typically include providing students with an assembly, sharing information with parents, delivering pre-placement workshops/lessons and the distribution of a workbook for completion on placement.</p>	<p>Some employers will start planning almost one-year ahead of when placements are due to take place, whilst other employers can be more reactive to requests.</p> <p>Some SME employers stated that they are better equipped to plan for 2/3 days rather than the full week due to limited resources and would prefer a longer lead in time so that they can allocate staff to support the placement.</p>

Schools	Employers
<p>There is a mix of different technology being used by schools. This ranges from simple spreadsheets, through to more formal systems such as the Unifrog add-on and the Services for Young People (SfYP) database.</p> <p>The cost of systems and software is of major concern to schools, with many feeling that they could not afford to purchase a central system, and even if they did, they possibly wouldn't have the time to administer it.</p>	<p>Some employers use their own placement application systems. These are sometimes linked to the website and a more formal application process that in some cases could also include an interview.</p> <p>It is more typical that employers are responsive to requests from individual students and/or school requests. These can come in at any point in the year and in a variety of formats (email, telephone, internal requests, via brokers e.g. SfYP).</p>

Schools

The first-choice model for schools is for students to source their own work experience placements. Schools see many benefits to this approach, including the skill of researching employers, initiating contact and communicating with an employer.

Schools also shared issues with this model, including chasing' students to confirm placements, and the limitations of the students' own personal network and connections – meaning that students with working parents and professional contacts benefit from more exciting placements. They can often also support travel costs.

Schools will support students to find a placement where they cannot source their own. Some will use services such as SfYP Link+ however this has budget implications.

Employers

Employers do not generally apply any criteria to who they offer placements to, and it is often first-come, first-served. This means that placements are not ring-fenced for students of certain demographics.

Employers find it useful to know the approximate dates that schools are planning (this central list is provided by SfYP).

Schools

The approach to Employer Engagement to generate placements and opportunities for students is inconsistent. Some schools maintain a list of employers offering placements from year to year, however most will ask students to source their own placements, using the school list as back up.

Some schools are successfully using the wider school-parent body to help to source placements.

Some schools take a rounded view to employer engagement, finding touch-points throughout the year to stay in touch, which work well in developing lasting relationships with local employers.

Employers

Employers who do not provide work experience opportunities often claim that connections with local schools is the main reason. Many of these employers mentioned that they had never been approached or asked to participate in work experience programmes, but would be willing to do so if asked.

Many employers reflected on the relationships that they have with schools. Some felt that relationships can, at times, feel transactional around the work experience placement and would be interested in developing stronger connections with the school, where wider opportunities for both parties could be explored.

Students with additional needs

Schools	Employers
<p>All schools shared that the students they find it most difficult to source placements for are those students with additional needs. This could include learning differences, disabilities, neuro-divergence and behavioural issues.</p> <p>The main challenge is in finding meaningful placements that are linked to their future destinations that they will enjoy. Many schools shared concerns that they feel sometimes these placements are not as well-structured or meaningful as they would like them to be. Placements often include retail, primary schools, care homes etc.</p>	<p>Employers were happy to consider requests to support students with additional needs. However, they felt that more time should be given to preparing both the student and the employer to undertake the placement.</p> <p>Very few employers provide a dedicated programme for vulnerable and disadvantaged students, or those with additional needs. Most shared that they would just consider this as part of their wider offering and in 1:1 discussions with the school.</p>

Schools

The ways that schools prepare students for work experience placements depends largely on the resource and time allocation within the school.

Some schools are able to implement quite detailed preparation plans that run for months in the lead up to the placement, involving parents and carers, form tutors and advice from students that have previously been on placement. Other schools might only be able to deliver a couple of assemblies in the lead up and communication is mostly via email.

Some schools use self-directed lessons provided through systems such as Unifrog. Others may use students from previous year groups to present on how to prepare / what to expect.

Employers

Employers would like students to be better prepared for undertaking placements within their organisation. They would like a more consistent approach through schools to increase preparation activities, including:

- Research about the organisation
- Consideration of the different functions of the business and questions to ask.
- Employability skills: What to wear, punctuality, behaviour in the workplace.

Schools

Schools are steering away from virtual work experience, preferring to return to an in-work model, where students can experience a real workplace.

Some schools use virtual work experience to supplement where students are unable to undertake a full or partial placement.

Some schools provide access to virtual work experience as part of extra-curricular / home learning activities. This is often optional and therefore not tracked.

Employers

There was a sense that Employers in Hertfordshire are moving away from offering virtual work experience, with many employers stating that they prefer to bring staff together with students in the real workplace.

Although they could see the benefit that virtual work experience can bring in terms of resourcing and capacity, they felt that it was less impactful than the in-person model.

Monitoring on placement

Schools	Employers
<p>There are different models of monitoring in place, and this often depends on the age of the students, with greater focus being put on Year 10 students for example.</p> <p>Monitoring activities might include emails, phone calls and workplace visits by teachers.</p> <p>Some schools have a system of contacting the employer on the first day, a mid-point and at the end of the placement to monitor. Other schools were less systematic in this approach.</p>	<p>There were mixed responses to the monitoring of students on placement. The majority of employers had implemented their own formal / informal processes of monitoring with line managers and supervisors.</p> <p>Some employers spoke of their surprise of lack of involvement from the school, with some feeling that they were 'left to it' to organise the week and had no contact from the school, either until the end, or the following year where the school wanted to set up another placement.</p>

Measuring the impact of placements

Schools	Employers
<p>The systems being used to gather feedback from student and employers about the impact and value of the placement are inconsistent.</p> <p>Some schools use placement booklets with students, others may use online systems. It is often down to the form teacher to oversee the feedback once the students return to school.</p> <p>Some schools write to the employer to thank them, and many ask the students to send an email. There was a sense that employers wouldn't want to fill in another form to provide their feedback.</p> <p>Some employers offer jobs as a result of placements.</p>	<p>Most employers measure the impact of their placements informally through discussion with the students.</p> <p>The majority of employers interviewed are keen to offer their feedback to schools and would like to be able to let the school know about how the placement went.</p> <p>Linking work placements to future applications was not always a high priority for employers. Often work experience was seen as a separate activity to recruitment activity.</p>

The benefits of work experience

Schools	Employers
<p>Schools were clear that despite the administrative burden of work experience, it brings many benefits to the students, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing communication and confidence skills by reaching out to employers to source their placements.• Figuring things out in an unfamiliar environment.• Preparing them for what a real workplace is like.• Exposing them to a variety of job roles at different levels.• Potentially connecting them with future vacancies. <p>Some schools said that students had been made job offers as a result of their placements.</p>	<p>Employers also cited many benefits to offering work experience, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting local schools and the local community.• Raising awareness of their brand and the employment opportunities they have.• Spotting future talent.• Dispelling myths about the role that they have within the organisation. <p>The majority of employers do not connect their work experience to future job applications. Most said that it would not increase the success weighting of the applicant.</p>

Schools	Employers
<p>The greatest differences in the work experience placement models were in the amount of time, resource and budget placed on the programme.</p> <p>Many schools explained that their work experience offers had been scaled back over the years as budgets had been cut and staff members reduced.</p> <p>All schools felt that they could do more if they had more resource. Most felt that the two biggest tension points were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chasing students to find placements• Organising the paperwork / health & safety requirements	<p>All employers interviewed are keen to support schools and their local community. They value being able to contribute to work experience programmes and want to be involved.</p> <p>However, many employers cited that the current 5-day model no longer sits comfortably with modern workplace practices. They felt that greater consideration should be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hybrid working patterns• Working day hours / school day hours• Weekends• School holidays

Schools

Some schools offer experiences to other year groups, such as Year 8 students having a 'Take your child to work day', but this is inconsistent across the schools spoken to.

Many schools were starting to consider the reintroduction of work shadowing and take your child to work type schemes for students in Years 7, 8 and 9. They would value being provided with guidance on how to implement a scheme. There are concerns of the value of a placement where parents work from home, and also where parents either do not work or are in roles that would not allow a meaningful placement due to restrictions.

Employers

Most employers were open to providing alternative experiences of the workplace. The most common forms of these experiences were work shadowing and 'Bring your child to work days'.

Larger employers will offer workplace visits, although this may depend on the size and age of the group. Larger and younger groups are typically more difficult to host because of health & safety requirements.

Open events (for students and parents) were found to be the least commonly offered experiences among employers. Smaller businesses felt that they wouldn't have enough to show people. Some larger businesses shared that they used to do this, but it stopped since Covid.

**Interviews with work
experience brokers.**

Work experience brokers

Work experience brokerage is used by some schools across Hertfordshire to supplement with sourcing placements, assessing suitability of those placements and taking care of health & safety requirements.

As budget cuts have been implemented in schools, not all have been able to continue to purchase the services for all or some of their students.

Brokerage offers many benefits to both schools and employers, including:

- A dedicated and centralised service.
- Expertise in employer engagement.
- Access to a wider range of placements.

Some of the main challenges cited by brokerage organisations include:

- Time of year – typically schools want Year 10s in June and July, and this could be 200 students at a time.
- Hybrid working – a key point as many employers can no longer offer 5 days.
- Some schools have a mixed model so might spend money on Pupil Premium students or those with additional needs.
- Sourcing a wide range of quality placements e.g. Retail, Manual placements
- Managing issues on placement e.g. if a student does not turn up, upsetting a manager, turning up late etc.
- The preparation of the students that the school put in is crucial – the briefing and de-briefing

**Suggestions for new
approaches.**

Ideas for core delivery & support

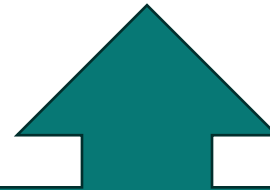
Trialling different methods and models e.g. 1-3 days, ½ day visits for groups and rotational models.

Focus on creating meaningful placements for disadvantaged students

Growth in work shadowing and/or 'take your child to work' for younger year groups.

An employer campaign to source placements for 1-3 days and ½ day visits for 10-15 students,

The development of meaningful work-related tasks that support students to develop new skills.



Facilitated best practice sessions to share 'what works' for schools and employers.

Training and guidance for schools and employers focussed on the purpose and benefits.

Training for schools looking to implement work shadowing for younger year groups.

Training and guidance for schools on building lasting relationships with local employers.

Delivery of enhanced 'planning and reflection' sessions for students to assist with impact of placement.