Work experience guidelines for employers

What is work experience?

Work experience is the short-term placement of secondary school students with employers to provide students with insights into the industry and the workplace. Students are placed with employers primarily to observe and learn – not to undertake activities which require extensive training or experience.

What is your 'duty of care' as an employer?

You have legal obligations to provide a safe and healthy working environment for your employees and contractors. Work experience students are no different. They are owed the same duty of care, and you must take all the same steps to safeguard them during their work experience period.

You must assess your workplace to determine which activities can be safely managed. Students should be given tasks which are interesting and which will give them an understanding of your business. However, you must take care NOT to place them at risk, and you must provide supervision at all times.

NOTE: All supervisors of work experience students aged under 15 years must hold a valid Working with Children Check.

Filling out the work experience arrangement form

The school or student will provide you with the Work Experience Arrangement Form. This form must be completed and signed by all parties before the work experience commences. This is a mandatory requirement to ensure the placement is properly documented and compliant with departmental guidelines.

If the school uses the Department of Education's Work-Based Learning Application (WBL App), the form is to be completed and signed digitally via links sent to you by email. Otherwise, a paper-based form will be provided for manual completion and signatures. More information about the digital form will be shared with you via a separate information sheet.

What can you expect of the student?

Remember that young people cannot be expected to possess the judgment or maturity of older workers. You have a right to require the student to comply with workplace rules and procedures. First, though, you must explain those requirements and provide any necessary information, instruction and training. Don't assume a student will automatically know what's expected.

The importance of planning

The most rewarding work experience programs – and the safest – are those planned in advance. It's useful to draw up a timetable for students before they arrive, setting out proposed activities for each day and identifying the people who will supervise them at different times.

Even though your timetable may have to change, a planned program enables supervisors to prepare meaningful activities, and reduces the chances of exposing the student to risks resulting from unplanned activity.

Safe systems of work

Your safe systems of work should already be built on knowing your hazards, assessing the risks they present and taking steps to control those risks.

Your employees will know the risk controls, but your work experience student will not. It's important to take time to explain to the student what the hazards are, why the risk controls are in place and how they are put into practice.

The following are the 'must do' elements when introducing a student to your workplace:

Induction and supervision

Students will not be familiar with the workplace, or the way things are done. Like any new starter, it will take them a few days to remember names and find their way around.

The first thing you must do – on their first day with you – is induct the student. This should be done by the employer or the nominated supervisor – don't assume that induction will happen if you have not given someone specific responsibility for it.

Take it slowly, and reinforce key information (e.g. supervisory arrangements, no-go areas and excluded activities).

Introductions and responsibilities

The student may be supervised directly by more than one person during the week. Introduce those who are available and make a note of people the student will need to catch up with later.

Inform the student that their health and safety is your most important concern during their stay. Explain your legal duty of care for them, and that in turn they must observe any requirements you have established to safeguard employees and others.

If there is a Health and Safety Representative at the workplace, arrange a time for them to discuss their function with the student.

Explain supervisory arrangements

Students must report directly to their supervisor when entering, leaving and returning to the work location. Consider the skills and experience of people nominated as supervisor(s) – will they be able to answer questions and provide the right information and instruction to ensure the student understands the tasks they are given and can undertake them safely?

Explain during induction what the student should do if their supervisor is not present at any time – and who they will report to.

Explain arrangements for first aid and emergencies

Tell the student who their first aider is, and what to do if they need first aid.

Explain emergency arrangements and point out the evacuation plan and assembly points. In an emergency, the student must follow direction from identified wardens.

Explain health and safety reporting requirements

Incidents and accidents must be reported to the supervisor without delay. Incidents include near misses, even if no one was injured. Accidents – including even minor cuts and scrapes requiring only a Band-Aid – must be reported and recorded.

Explain to the student how this is done and encourage them to raise any health or safety concerns with their supervisor. If the student feels there might be risk in any activity, they must understand that they should not continue with the task.

Provide an orientation tour of the workplace

If the student will be located in more than one area through the week, show them 'home base' first. It's a good idea to return to that work location from different areas each time, to assist the student to build a mental picture of the workplace layout.

You should explain what happens in each part of the workplace and point out locations where the student may be working during the week.

Explain why certain areas may be deemed 'no-go' for the student. If hazardous operations mean an area is restricted, you may want to observe the activity from a safe vantage point and describe the operations. If personal protective equipment is necessary to enter the area, this must be provided, and you must explain how to use it.

Workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination

You must explain your workplace policy regarding bullying, harassment and/or discrimination. Encourage the student to report any concern directly to the employer or their supervisor or to their teacher.

Confirm student's medical information

Check that you have necessary medical information. Does the student have any condition (e.g. asthma or epilepsy) that could require treatment? Are they taking any medication? (This information must be kept confidential and should only be disclosed to another party if treatment is required for a known medical condition or in the case of a medical emergency).