

WORK PLACEMENTS - A Student's Guide to Finding a Work Placement



WORK PLACEMENTS

*Having the initiative to find your own work placement is one of the best ways to enter the world of work – and it will help your reputation as a great student and employee too. It means that you **get the experience that you really want** – which will be more satisfying for you – and employers will be impressed by your enthusiasm, motivation and maturity. Win-win!*

This short guide will be good to read through (and refer back to in the future) just so you don't miss any of the important stuff.

Checklist for finding your own placement

RESEARCH

- Thinking time for yourself: what do you want to get out of this opportunity? What skills do you want to gain and develop? What kind of organisation do you want to work for?
- Ask parents/ guardians, family and friends for contacts and ideas
- Search online, local business directories and newspapers for potential employers
- Check transport options to get you to organisations that you're interested in
- Always keep track of your research**

COMMUNICATING WITH ORGANISATIONS

- Prepare key information about you, your skills and the course you are going to do at College
- Ask to speak to the relevant person directly; the manager/someone who deals with work placements
- Prepare your CV – focus on what you have to offer the employer
- Speak to the employer in person / phone / email

Always try and see or speak to an employer rather than send an email; a direct approach is more personal and professional

- Follow-up communication, always thank them for their time

You must really try to avoid asking a parent or guardian to make contact with employers on your behalf. Research shows that employers are more likely to take a student on if the student has approached the employer themselves.

What are the steps to take?

One of the best ways to connect with a potential new employer for a work placement and for any job in your future is through a direct introduction.

Do your parents or guardians, teachers, tutors, friends, relatives or neighbours work in or have any contacts in the industry or organisation that you want to work for?

Ask everyone!

People are often really happy to give careers advice and tips and are likely to be glad to introduce you to people they know who might be able to help you. (They will also appreciate if you take time to thank them for their help and let them know how you get on down the line.)

Research

If you can't get an introduction, do as much research as possible online or locally to find the organisations that you'd be interested in; search on websites like LinkedIn, Glassdoor and local business directories; which include Yell or Thomson Local, and local newspapers.

Do a Google search for relevant organisations that are within a reasonable travelling distance from your postcode.

Also research who you would like to speak to within each organisation – it will probably be Human Resources (HR) in larger organisations, or the manager in medium sized businesses; find their contact details: address, phone number and email.

Making a list to keep track of all this can be really helpful. You can do this in an Excel spreadsheet...

Organisation Name	Contact Name	Job Title	Email	Tel No.	Address	Transport Access	Status	Next Action
ABC Ltd	Jill Jones	HR Manager	jill.jones@abc.com	07123 456789	Fairtree Business Park, M12 3YZ	40 min bus from home	Sent email with Employer Info Guide on [date]. Awaiting response.	[Date]: Follow up phone call if haven't heard back.
DEF Ltd	Anita Patel	Company Owner			20 High Street, M14 4RS	25 min walk from home	Awaiting introduction and contact details from Tutor	[Date]: Send email with Employer Info Guide, CV & arrange call
Status key:								
Identified		Identified a potential organisation						
Engaging		Contacted/ in discussions/ deciding						
Yes		Organisation wants to offer placement						
No		Organisation decided not to be involved						

Also consider...

- How will you get to your placement every day? What are the travel connections like?
- What skills would you like to develop? Will this company enable you to do that?
- What is the reputation of the company? Are they known as a good company to work for?

How do I make contact?

Approaching new people can be daunting but if you are well prepared you will feel more confident. No one will expect you to know everything about the industry already, that's why you're asking for a work placement there; to learn and develop your skills, knowledge, and behaviours in a professional working environment.

Make sure you look and sound professional, and that you show you're genuinely interested and passionate about the organisation.

Don't be offended if they ask you to come back or call back another time. Always be polite! Make sure you follow up any leads.

If you don't know the company, or you're feeling a bit too nervous to speak to someone on the phone, then send them an email. Keep it short, informative and polite. *Always try and see or speak to an employer rather than send an email, a direct approach is more personal and professional*

What should I prepare for a first meeting / phone call?

In the first conversation, give them the key information...

- Who you are and what you're studying
- When the work placement is likely to be and how long it will be for
- What you're interested in – be passionate and enthusiastic here!
- Why you want to do your placement with them
- **Offer to do a trial day so they can see you in action**

You might also have to attend an interview before being offered your work placement. This is because there may be competition for some work placement roles within certain businesses and/or employers may want to interview potential candidates to get the best match for their organisation.

Being good at interviews is also about the right mindset. It's about believing in yourself and being confident in your responses.

Identifying your skills, achievements and abilities will give you an edge during your interview. You might want to use this table as a prompt to get you thinking...

Your experiences	Your abilities	Your achievements	Transferable skills
Personal qualities	Things you've learned	Your skills	Your work values
Your career aspirations	What you're good at	What you want to do in life	Your aims and what you want to gain from the placement
What you like about the organisation and how this fits with your aspirations		What you can bring to the workplace and what you would like to learn	

Top 10 Interview Tips and Tricks

1. **Research the organisation in advance**

Aim to discover as much as you can about the products or services they provide, the organisation structure, and read up on their news, values, and vision and mission statements

2. **Practise your responses**

Read your responses out loud to yourself and/or friends and family. Remember - practice makes perfect!

3. **Prepare questions to ask at the interview**

Remember it is a conversation, so go armed with 2 or 3 questions that demonstrate you have researched the organisation and have a genuine interest in the organisation, e.g., *what challenges does your team face on a day-to-day basis? What qualities are necessary for someone to excel in this role? What are the strategic challenges you are facing as a business?*

4. **Have interviewers' contact details to hand**

It is important to remember names if you are entering a large workplace with a reception, and contact details to call if you are delayed

5. **Dress appropriately for the industry**

If in doubt, check with the employer or your course tutor, but as a rule of thumb, dressing smartly will give a good instant impression and show you are serious about the role. If you are struggling financially to purchase clothing, please speak to your course tutor.

6. **Arrive on time**

Punctuality shows you are organised and reliable. Plan your journey ahead of time and aim to arrive 5-10 minutes early. Use Google Maps to help with this.

7. **Put your phone on silent**

And make sure it is tucked away so you can focus on the interview questions.

8. **Give a good first impression**

Start the interview with a confident manner, by keeping your head up, making eye contact, having a smile on your face and offering a firm handshake (if appropriate)

9. **Be enthusiastic, energetic and smile – show a willingness to learn**

Coming across as being passionate about the industry/organisation, and using open body language leaves a lasting impression

10. **Be organised**

Have a notebook and pen ready so you can take notes during your interview if needed.

If an employer hasn't had a work placement student before, they might have some questions. You may even need to convince them that having you on a work placement is worth doing. Always be positive! Having an extra pair of hands during a busy period is always a good selling point, as well as taking this opportunity to sell yourself!

It would be a good idea to have the contact details of the College to hand. Your potential employer might want to contact us to ask some more questions...

Kingston Maurward College: enquiries@kmc.ac.uk
Main Reception: 01305 215100

They will be transferred to the most appropriate member of staff to answer their query.

IN SUMMARY...

What to have up your sleeve for an initial conversation or a follow-up email:

- Who you are and what you're studying
- Your reasons for wanting to work for the organisation and how it ties in with your course
- How long your work placement will last and what kinds of things you would hope to get out of it
- What the benefits are for the employer
- Research the organisation's website, read any news articles or social media posts about their latest activities and projects to show you're up-to-date and interested
- Prepare some questions you would like to ask about the organisation, their current projects and future direction. Even ask about work placements, have they had a work placement student before, for example
- College contact details
- Copy of your CV (*there is a CV guide on page 8*)

You may also find these online resources helpful when thinking about your CV. Many provide free online tools to help build a CV along with handy tips for cover letters and interview prep:

Accenture's Skills to Succeed Academy	Barclay's LifeSkills	BBC Bitesize Careers
Get My First Job	National Careers Service	Prince's Trust
Youth Employment Skills and Careers Hub		Bright Knowledge

Then what?

The conversation will end in one of three ways: yes, no or maybe.

If it's a **no**, thank them for their time, go back to your list and see which other organisations you'd like to try next.

Don't be disheartened, unfortunately rejections are part of working life, these experiences help to build our resilience and make us stronger individuals.

If it's a **yes**, thank them for their time and arrange a trial day if the employer has agreed to this. Also mention that when you start at College you will provide them with your tutors' contact details.

If it's a **maybe**, ask them if they have any further questions, when you should get back in touch and whether they would like you to put them in touch with the College. Follow up the phone call or meeting with an email if you can.

What if I'm struggling?

Don't give up! This is a new challenge and it can be hard at first to step outside your comfort zone talking to employers and putting yourself out there.

Have practise conversations with friends and family to work out what you are going to say to an employer and how you are going to ask for a work placement with them.

Get another pair of eyes to check any emails before you send them, get comments on your CV and practise a phone call too so you feel familiar with what you want to say.

Don't hesitate to ask for help at any stage of the process if you need it.

Remember that it is a completely normal part of life to get knocked back and there are many reasons why employers can't accept a work placement student which have nothing to do with you – don't take it personally.

Apply to lots of different organisations to maximise your chances of success.

Good luck!

CV GUIDE

It's really important that you are prepared for when you speak to an employer, make sure you have an up-to-date CV to discuss with them, perhaps use the following structure:

(Your Name) CV 2021

Contact details (make sure these are correct and you use a professional email address)

Personal Statement

This is where you highlight your skills and experience that make you suitable for completing your placement with the organisation. This should only be a few lines long.

Key Skills

This is where you write a list, with bullet points of the other skills you have that aren't mentioned in your personal statement.

You can use this bit to include any extra qualifications you have like a first aid qualification or Duke of Edinburgh Award.

If you have not had any work experience before, the next section to add is...

Education

Write the most recent school/College you attended, the dates to and from, and a bullet point list of the subjects and grades you got there. Always start with the highest grade first.

If you have had a job before, whether paid or voluntary, put your employment history before education

Employment History

(This can also include voluntary jobs)

Starting with the most recent job/work experience first, write down the employer's name, address and contact details, dates worked to and from, and a brief description of your duties and responsibilities there.

Achievements and Interests

List any certificates or awards you may have won in school/college and through taking part in extracurricular activities. Think carefully about only including what will be relevant to the organisation that you are approaching.

References

Always ask the person's permission before adding them to your CV as a reference, try and use professional references, such as a teacher or an employer. Never use your close family or relatives.

Put their name, business address and either their contact telephone number or email. If you are struggling to find a suitable reference please contact us for further advice.