
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000¹ and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

¹ This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Response

Introduction

Overall, we feel that pupils benefit from meaningful work experience opportunities when they are able to access. Over the past decade, there has been a significant reduction in the number of schools offering universal work experience to all pupils. However, since the pandemic, there has been a noticeable upward trend in schools re-establishing work experience programmes.

The main barriers to offering appropriate work experience opportunities include time constraints due to a full curriculum, the capacity of schools and Careers Wales to organise and vet placements, funding issues, and the availability of high-quality placements, especially in rural areas. Despite these challenges, schools recognise the benefits of work experience and provide work experience, often targeting vulnerable pupils or those at risk of exclusion.

The effectiveness of work experience varies. Pupils note that they find work experience helpful to support them with careers options and curriculum choices. It also helps motivate and engage some learners, helping them to stay in school. However, the quality of placements and the motivation of pupils play a crucial role in the success of these programmes. Where there is best practices, this often includes comprehensive plans to meet career framework requirements, collaboration between schools, Careers Wales, and local businesses, and a multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable pupils.

To strengthen opportunities for work experience, we feel it would be helpful to:

- increase funding for schools and Careers Wales to support the organisation and vetting of work experience placements.
- promote close collaboration between schools, Careers Wales, and local businesses.
- implement targeted work experience programmes for vulnerable pupils and those at risk of exclusion.
- ensure high-quality work experience placements that provide valuable learning experiences and align with pupils' career interests.

- address barriers for pupils with disabilities, additional learning needs, or from disadvantaged areas to ensure equitable access to work experience opportunities.

Consultation questions

Do all schools offer sufficient meaningful work experience opportunities? If not, what are the barriers and what can be done to address them?

Learning experiences are a key aspect of Estyn's inspection framework for schools and PRUs. However, we do not routinely gather specific information about the number of schools offering and pupils accessing work experience. If Estyn were to undertake a thematic inspection about work experience in the future, we would be able to provide more specific information. In general, over the last decade there has been a reduction in the number of schools offering universal work experience to pupils. However, there is a noticeable upward trend in schools beginning to do so again since the pandemic.

The main barriers to doing so are:

- Time, schools note that many demands are put on their curriculum, including the need to offer extra curricular experiences and provide sufficient learning hours to meet exam specification requirements
- Capacity of schools to organise and vet placements and visit pupils who are on them, schools report that they are having to reduce the number of support staff to meet budget constraints
- Capacity of Careers Wales to support the process of organising and vetting work experience placements
- The availability of high quality work experience placements across Wales (especially in rural areas)

Background

- Many secondary schools used to offer a full week's work experience towards the end of the summer term (usually for Year 10 and Year 12 pupils)
- Careers Wales supported schools by identifying appropriate placements and carrying out safeguarding checks on work experience providers
- Schools also developed links with relevant businesses and other organisations in their area which might offer placements. Overall, these met the needs of a few pupils but, generally, the majority of pupils and parents had to identify suitable work experience placements themselves

- A reduction in funding for Careers Wales led to the withdrawal of support for vetting work experience placements; instead they created a database of providers who had previously been vetted and made this available to schools
- This change made it very difficult for schools to maintain work experience for all because of a lack of capacity to ensure pupils' safety; there was also an increased administrative burden on businesses (and potentially increased insurance costs if they took pupils for work experience) and this reduced the number of organisations prepared to offer placements
- Those schools who stopped providing universal work experience for all pupils cited these challenges as factors influencing their decision
- Some schools valued the impact of work experience highly enough to continue with it. In some instances, this was a decision taken by groups of schools e.g. groups of schools making a decision together in Anglesey
- Instead of universal work experience, schools, supported by Careers Wales, moved to a model of providing work experience opportunities for a few targeted pupils (typically vulnerable pupils or those at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream provision) alongside more detailed information given to pupils about careers and the world of work in lessons
- Careers Wales also reduced the amount of time its advisers spent in school as a result of reduced funding and this meant that there was a move away from careers interviews for all pupils to a targeted approach for those most in need of support (e.g. at risk of becoming NEET)
- Careers Wales promoted the idea of 'masterclasses' in specific careers. The idea was that schools could book current practitioners to provide interested pupils with an overview of what a specific career involves
- When the careers and world of work framework was first introduced, a few schools introduced discrete careers lessons in which specialist teachers taught the different elements within the framework. This approach has largely disappeared in favour of a cross-curricular one, in which aspects of careers and the world of work are taught in PSE, WBQ and a few relevant subjects
- Many schools consider weekly work placements for particularly vulnerable pupils as part of bespoke alternative curriculum arrangements
- Since the pandemic, an increasing number of schools are re-establishing work experience programmes.

Impact

- The effectiveness of universal work experience is highly variable and is linked to the quality of the placement as well as the motivation and initiative of the individual pupil to make the most of the opportunity. In the best examples, it is

transformative for some pupils and leads either to a specific career choice or a much greater engagement in education to achieve a new-found goal. Conversely where it is less effective, pupils do not attend work experience at all or leave after a brief period, or they spend their time undertaking menial tasks which provide little insight into the world of work. The experience for most pupils falls between these extremes; they often enjoy the very different environment to school life and begin to gain some valuable understanding of what the world of work involves

- Alternative curriculum programmes for vulnerable pupils which incorporate an element of work experience often help to retain pupils in mainstream education who might otherwise disengage

Is there any specific best practice that should be replicated across Wales?

Best practice seen during school inspections includes:

- Comprehensive and coherent plans to meet the requirements of the careers and world of work framework (in primary and secondary schools)
- Close collaboration between schools, Careers Wales and local businesses to provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to learn about the world of work
- Careers mapping tools that provide pupils with impartial advice about different career pathways
- Careers events for pupils and parents
- A multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable pupils
- Collaboration between schools and colleges to ensure pupils are well informed before they decide on their next steps

At **Ysgol Gyfun y Strade** the ‘Strade in the Community’ programme was introduced with the aim of broadening the learning experiences of groups of learners with low levels of engagement, challenging behaviours or poor attendance.

The school works collaboratively with over 15 local services, organisations and businesses to target specific learners with appropriate interventions. For example, a group of Year 10 girls with low motivation and negative attitudes to learning attended a local care home for an afternoon a week for a period of eight weeks. They carried out basic caring tasks with support and thus developed their confidence and communication skills well. This in turn led to an improvement in behaviour back at school.

From the inspection report on Christ College Brecon:

The ‘Futures Programme’, encompassing guidance related to careers and future pathways, is well established and an integral part of this independent school’s provision

throughout senior school. All teaching staff are involved in its delivery and development, and the programme is founded on the school's ethos of personalised care for pupils. As a result, pupils have a well-developed understanding of the world of work and the breadth of opportunities and pathways available to them beyond school. The highly effective work done by the school in support of university applications results in a high proportion of Year 13 leavers progressing to their preferred destination, for example university study, apprenticeships or employment.

Maintained special schools often provide valuable learning experiences about the world of work e.g. Heronsbridge, Maes Y Coed, Hen Felin, Maes Ebbw and Woodlands High School.

The following links are to relevant case studies from the last two years:

Ysgol Llanfair Dyffryn Clywyd

[Developing outdoor activities that focus on providing pupils with experiences of vocational careers. - Estyn](#)

Mary Immaculate R.C. High School

[Reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment - Estyn](#)

Idris Davies School

[The leadership of effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils - Estyn](#)

Stanwell School

[Supporting learners to make informed choices for the future - Estyn](#)

Bridgend College

[Supported internships and work experience, leading to paid employment for young people with additional learning needs and disabilities. - Estyn](#)

The following links are to recent relevant thematic reports:

[Impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales advisers](#)

[Youth Engagement and Progression Lead Worker Review](#)

To what extent are parents or carers having to secure work experience placements due to the lack of capacity, or ability, to do so within schools?

- In schools where universal work experience has continued or been re-introduced, parents play an important role in sourcing work placements. Schools then work with the pupils whose parents have been unable to find a suitable work experience placement

- On Ynys Môn, schools work together and employ an individual whose role it is to identify and vet appropriate work experience placements
- When schools use work placements as part of a bespoke alternative curriculum for small numbers of vulnerable pupils, staff normally source and vet these opportunities

Are there any barriers for specific learners that needs to be addressed, for example learners with disabilities or additional learning needs, or from disadvantaged areas?

- Securing work experience placements can be challenging for many pupils, but for specific learners such as those with disabilities, additional learning needs (ALN), or those from disadvantaged areas, these challenges can be even more pronounced. For pupils with disabilities and ALN, there may be a more limited pool of possible work experience placements. Employers may have concerns about the accommodations required or may feel unprepared to support these learners adequately. As a result, finding suitable placements can be more challenging.
- For pupils from disadvantaged areas, there may not be the same level of parental support e.g. for finding a work experience placement if required or being able to transport a pupil to a placement if necessary. This can impact their ability to find work experience placements, as parents might not have the resources or networks to help. Additionally, transportation to placements can be a significant hurdle if parents are unable to provide this support.
- Pupils with disabilities, ALN or from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from a personalised approach, such as having a case worker to provide additional support. Work experience programmes should be tailored to meet the varied needs of pupils. Schools should consider offering a range of placements in different industries, ensuring that each pupil has access to opportunities that align with their interests and career goals. Personalised placements make work experience more relevant and engaging for pupils, especially those with ALN or from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Building strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with local businesses and organisations is key to providing meaningful work experience opportunities. Schools and PRUs can actively approach potential partners, highlighting the benefits of collaboration for both pupils and businesses. Additionally, schools should consider working collaboratively with alumni networks to create placement opportunities.