



Work Experience Policy

2025/26

Academic Year

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	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	1 of 13
		Version	1

Work experience policy revision

Introduction

Work experience is a core part of every student's entitlement to CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance). The Work Experience Strategy at Sandwell Colleges aligns closely with Gatsby Benchmarks 4, 5, and 6 to ensure that all learners experience a coherent, careers-focused journey.

Work Experience supports **Gatsby Benchmark 6: Experiences of Workplaces**, which states:

“Every pupil should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.”
— Department for Education (2023), 16–19 Study Programmes Guidance

Work experience provides valuable insight into the world of work, encourages aspiration, and supports students in making informed decisions about their future. It helps bridge the gap between education and employment by developing practical skills, building confidence, and exposing students to real working environments.

Work experience supports **Gatsby Benchmark 4: Linking Curriculum Learning to Careers**, which states:

“All teachers should link curriculum learning with careers. STEM subject teachers should highlight the relevance of STEM subjects for a wide range of future career paths.”
— Department for Education (2023), 16–19 Study Programmes Guidance

Work experience reinforces the connection between academic learning and the practical application of skills in real workplace settings. By participating in placements relevant to their programme of study, students gain first-hand insight into how classroom knowledge translates into industry practice. Curriculum teams work closely with employers to design placements and projects that reflect sector expectations, helping students understand how their subject areas contribute to wider professional contexts and career opportunities.

Work experience also aligns with **Gatsby Benchmark 5: Encounters with Employers and Employees**, which states:

“Every pupil should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace.”
— Department for Education (2023), 16–19 Study Programmes Guidance

Through work placements, employer-led projects, and workplace mentoring, students gain valuable opportunities to engage directly with industry professionals. These experiences allow learners to explore occupational roles, understand employer expectations, and develop the employability skills essential for future success. At Sandwell Colleges, engagement with

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	2 of 13
		Version	1

employers is embedded within the work experience process to ensure that every student benefit from meaningful professional encounters that complement their studies and prepare them for employment or further progression.

All learners are entitled to an appropriate level of work experience tailored to their programme of study. Level 1 learners will undertake up to 30 hours of work-related activity; Level 2 learners will complete a minimum of 30 hours of external work placement; Level 3 vocational students will complete a minimum of 30 hours per academic year; and Level 3 A Level students will complete a minimum of 20 hours of external placement annually. T Level learners will engage in an employer-set project of 100 hours, alongside a 210-hour industry placement over two years. Foundation Learning and ESOL students will gain experience of work through supported internships, volunteering, and work-related activities.

This structured and inclusive approach ensures every learner access high-quality, safe, and meaningful placements linked to their curriculum and career aspirations. Through strong employer partnerships, robust quality assurance, and ongoing monitoring of impact and progression, Sandwell Colleges aims to embed work experience as a transformative element of education — fostering employability, confidence, and career clarity for all learners. Those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) or other additional needs are supported through close collaboration between relevant college staff and placement providers.

For the purposes of this policy, 'Work Experience' may also be referred to as 'WEX'.

Our aims

Sandwell College group's work experience programme aims to:

- Strengthen students' knowledge of the workplace
- Develop key employability skills and professional behaviours
- Provide real insight into industries, sectors, and job roles
- Support personal growth, confidence, resilience, and independence
- Encourage connections between academic learning and professional contexts
- Enhance overall CEIAG provision and progression outcomes
- Promote self-reflection and career planning

We believe work experience is a powerful way to raise aspirations and prepare students for life beyond college.

Expectations

The new FE & skills inspection toolkit (to be used from November 2025) includes, under the **Achievement** evaluation area, a specific focus on *preparation for next steps and positive destinations*.

Key points inspectors will look for, relating to progression into employment, apprenticeships or higher education, include:

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	3 of 13
		Version	1

- Learners and apprentices are **ready to progress** to their next stage (education, training, employment) and go on to destinations that reflect their interests, career goals and aspirations.
- The provider should **support learners to secure positive destinations linked to their studies** (i.e., routes that make sense given what they have studied).
- Evidence that learners are not at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).
- Learners must be supported to develop the employability skills, personal attributes, and knowledge of progression routes (including higher education, apprenticeships, further training) needed for their next steps.
- Providers should show they have **structured, tailored careers education and guidance** that aligns with learners' interests, aspirations, and realistic next steps.
- Inspectors will examine how the curriculum, and non-qualification elements, preparation and support, are designed to reduce barriers and enable transitions to further study or work.
- Providers should track and use **destination data** (where learners go after completing) and reflect on that data to improve progression support.

To “demonstrate” progression, colleges are expected to:

1. Have defined progression routes (employment, apprenticeships, further/higher education) that align with their curriculum and the local/regional labour market.
2. Embed careers guidance and progression planning into programmes (tutorials, one-to-one support, employer engagement).
3. Provide support (transition, bridging, pastoral, employability) to help learners make that move.
4. Monitor, record and follow up destinations of leavers (where they go next) and use that data to improve support and strategy.
5. Show that learners are not left without support (identify those at risk of not progressing and intervene).
6. Be able to evidence how curriculum and non-qualification components prepare learners for those next steps (bridging modules, work experience, employer-linked projects, higher-level progression pathways built into programmes).
7. Demonstrate equity: that learners with SEND, disadvantaged learners etc. also achieve these positive destinations at acceptable rates or that gaps are understood and closing.

The inspection toolkit embeds these progression expectations in its core evaluation criteria under *Achievement / preparation for next steps / positive destinations*.

A succinct summary from a provider self-evaluation tool:

“Achievement focuses on the outcomes of learners, including progression, attainment, and destinations. According to the Inspection Toolkit (2025), inspectors look for evidence that learners achieve qualifications, progress to further education or employment, and destinations.”

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	4 of 13
		Version	1

2. Study Programme Guidance 2025/26 (16–19) — expectations relating to progression

Although the published guidance is labelled for earlier years, the principles still hold and likely will be carried forward.

- Every student on a 16–19 study programme must have a **core aim**, which is a substantive qualification (academic or technical) or preparation for employment.
- Study programmes must include **English and maths (if required), work experience**, and **non-qualification activities** that complement the qualification and support progression to further/higher education or employment.
- The non-qualification part is not optional: it should **support students to progress** (via enrichment, tutorial, careers work) to employment, higher education or further training.
- Providers should tailor the programme to each learner's prior attainment, needs and career goals, so the programme is relevant to the next step for that individual.
- The guidance expects that the provider works with employers, higher education institutions, and other training providers, facilitating transitions (progression agreements, pathways) for learners.
- Implicitly, the expectation is that learners will not simply finish the study programme with no onward pathway: the design of the programme should set them up to go on.

Thus, for 16–19 providers, demonstrating progression means: that the study programme is explicitly geared toward next steps, includes the right elements (work experience, non-qualification support, careers/transition work), and learners do in fact move on (tracked).

3. WMCA-funded contract (West Midlands Combined Authority) to demonstrate positive progression

For providers contracted under WMCA, there are further or more localised requirements around progression and destination reporting. Here's what I found:

- WMCA's **Destination & Progression Data** definitions (from an earlier coding guidance) define "positive destination" as movement into **sustainable paid employment**; apprenticeships are counted as progression into paid employment.
- For unemployed participants in pre-employment programmes (SWAP / Sector Gateways / Construction Gateways), a positive destination is defined as sustainable paid employment.
- For participants already employed, progression outcomes include **pay rise, new responsibilities, promotion or increased hours**.
- WMCA's **Adult Skills Fund (ASF) Funding Rules 2025/26** note that for English language acquisition, providers must be clear about what participants can progress to after completing their learning.
- The WMCA Skill Programme Coding Guidance (2025/2026) also establishes funding and coding rules that will relate to how progression/destination data is captured and reported.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	5 of 13
		Version	1

Thus, WMCA-contracted providers are expected to:

1. Use the definitions of “positive destination” that WMCA provides (employment, apprenticeships, sustained work, or higher-level education as applicable) in their reporting.
2. Collect and report destination data in line with the contract and data requirements stipulated by WMCA (tracking learners after completion to see if they go into employment, apprenticeship, further education).
3. Ensure their programmes are designed so that progression is realistic and supported (so participants can move into those positive destinations).
4. Demonstrate in contract monitoring / performance reviews how many participants achieved the positive destinations targets.
5. For employed learners, show evidence of in-work progression (promotion, increased pay/hours etc.).
6. For English language learners, clarifying before start what the next steps could be, and embedding pathways to further training or employment

Provision

Sandwell College recognises the importance of work experience in the development of skills for employment and has structured the study programmes at the College (A-Levels, T Levels and Levels 1, 2 and 3) to facilitate external meaningful work experience alongside experience of work through immersive activities with a range of employers and key stakeholders.

For the 2025/26 academic year work experience at Sandwell Colleges has been planned below

Programme Level	Work Experience Requirement
Level 1	Experience of work up to 30 hours
Level 2	30 hours of external work placement
Level 3 – Vocational	Minimum of 30 hours of external placement per academic year
Level 3 – A Levels	Minimum of 20 hours of external placement per academic year
T Levels	100 hours employer set project alongside 210 hours industrial placement over two years
Foundation Learning	Experience of work plus plan for Supported Internships
ESOL 16-18	Experience of work plus volunteering opportunities

Final hours completed by learners maybe higher than planned based on individual circumstances, with placements in certain subjects (Early Years and Health & Social Care) requiring minimum number of external placement hours to be completed as part of a licence to practice.

Students with SEND or additional needs are supported through tailored arrangements developed in partnership with support staff, curriculum leads, and Head and Department.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

 The Sandwell Colleges	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	6 of 13
		Version	1

Management and Coordination

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for sourcing their own placements, supported by their curriculum teams and the Work Experience Team. All placements must be logged and tracked using the Colleges digital platform, which acts as the central tool for recording student engagement, placement details, safeguarding information, and employer checks.

The **Work Experience Team** are responsible for approving placements, ensuring all compliance requirements are met — including **health and safety, safeguarding, and insurance** checks. In the case of high-risk placements, the Work Experience Team will refer to the designated Health and Safety Officer, who is responsible for ensuring adequate provision is in place. The College only authorises placements that fully meet our statutory and internal safeguarding standards (see Appendix 1).

Placements may be secured through student and family networks, College-established employer partnerships, and external organisations such as The Education People, the Careers Enterprise Company, Speakers for Schools, Reed Learning, and Springpod. For T Level learners, the Work Experience Team ensures that both the employer-set project (100 hours) and industrial placement (210 hours over two years) are planned, compliant, and closely monitored to meet curriculum requirements. All placements follow relevant national legislation and guidance, including the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Department for Education’s Work Experience Guidance, to ensure every opportunity offered is safe, appropriate, and fully compliant. We follow relevant national guidance and legislation, including the **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** and the **Department for Education’s Work Experience Guidance**, to ensure that all placements are safe, appropriate, and legally compliant.

Employer-Led Projects

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) recognises the importance of flexible delivery models for work experience:

“Flexible models such as project-based learning, competitions, or employer-set challenges can offer meaningful alternatives, particularly in academic routes where placement logistics are more complex.”

— Careers & Enterprise Company (2022), *What Works: Employer Encounters and Experiences of the Workplace*

In line with this guidance, Sandwell Colleges offers external employer-led projects as a **complementary** option to traditional in-person or virtual placements. These projects are fully compliant with DfE funding requirements for work experience and reflect good practice principles associated with both work placements and high-quality social action.

Each project will include:

- Clearly defined aims and learning outcomes
- Active and sustained interaction with employers
- Meaningful, skills-focused work tasks
- Opportunities for student and employer reflection and feedback

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	7 of 13
		Version	1

Where appropriate, a supervised workplace visit for students may be included, following the college's off-site trip procedures. If a student is expected to have any **unsupervised, in-person contact** with an external employer as part of the project, then the **standard work placement compliance process** will be followed, including insurance, safeguarding, and risk assessment checks.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students

- Take responsibility for sourcing placements (with appropriate support)
- Log all work experience activity on the College Digital Platform
- Engage fully in their chosen work experience opportunity
- Follow the Student Code of Conduct and adhere to all health and safety instructions provided by the employer

Curriculum Staff

- Promote relevant and meaningful work experience opportunities to students
- Act as curriculum leads for employer-led projects where applicable
- Liaise with the Work Experience Team on student progress and engagement
- Refer any safeguarding concerns to the campus-specific Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), including concerns about unsanctioned placements not logged through College Digital Platform

Work Experience Officers

- Approve and oversee all placements and employer-led projects, ensuring full compliance with health, safety, safeguarding, and insurance requirements
- Maintain tracking systems and documentation for all student engagement
- Act as the first point of contact for both students and employers regarding placement queries
- Refer any safeguarding concerns in line with college policy

Operational Lead Responsibilities

The Operational Lead is responsible for the effective management and delivery of the College's Work Experience (WEX) programme. Key responsibilities include:

- Establishing and maintaining accurate records of placement compliance on Unifrog, including providing training and support to staff to ensure consistent usage.
- Monitoring and reporting progress to Heads of School (HoS) and Assistant Principals (APs) using college data systems to track completion and quality of placements.
- Line management of Work Experience Officers, providing guidance, oversight, and support to ensure operational objectives are met.
- Implementing rapid interventions where departmental or course-level work experience provision is not on plan, ensuring timely resolution of issues.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	8 of 13
		Version	1

- Reviewing and supporting the development of departmental WEX plans to align placements with curriculum objectives and learner progression.
- Collaborating with managers, teaching teams, and WEX Officers to maximise work experience opportunities across all programmes and levels.
- Presenting progress updates and key performance information at HoS and Quality, Curriculum and Enhancement (QCE) meetings to inform strategic decision-making.

This role ensures that all operational aspects of the WEX programme are effectively coordinated, monitored, and aligned with College policy, statutory requirements, and learner development objectives.

Industrial Placement Officers

- Organise and oversee high-quality work placements for 16–18-year-old learners.
- Liaise with employers, curriculum staff, parents, and learners to ensure placement suitability.
- Monitor learner progress, complete required documentation, and maintain accurate records.
- Ensure health, safety, and quality standards are met, providing pastoral support where needed.

T Level Employer Engagement Coordinator

- Develop and deliver an employer engagement strategy to secure high-quality T Level placements and industry projects.
- Build and maintain partnerships with employers, industry bodies, and networks to promote T Level opportunities.
- Support students and employers through placement preparation, reviews, and ongoing liaison.
- Collaborate with curriculum and support teams to integrate placements and projects effectively within T Level programmes.

Employers

- Provide a safe, meaningful, and structured experience for students
- For employer-led projects, co-design and deliver project content in partnership with curriculum staff
- Comply with all safeguarding and health & safety expectations, including providing adequate induction and supervision for students

Assistant Principal for Skills

- Provide strategic oversight and direction for the college's work experience programme
- Oversee the quality, equity, and impact of provision across departments and campuses
- Ensure accountability for meeting DfE and Ofsted expectations

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	9 of 13
		Version	1

Health, Safety, and Safeguarding

The College is committed to ensuring that all work experience placements are safe, appropriate, and fully compliant with national guidance.

1. Health & Safety Responsibilities

We follow the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on managing the risks associated with work experience placements. This guidance is shared with all staff and employers as part of our placement approval process. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/young-workers/employer/work-experience.htm>

Key responsibilities:

- **Employers** are responsible for the health, safety, and welfare of students on placement, who are considered employees under the *Health and Safety (Training for Employment) Regulations 1990*.
- **The College** does not carry out duplicate risk assessments but must be satisfied that employers have arrangements in place that are proportionate to the level of risk. The College's Health and Safety Officer will review high-risk placements before approval.

2. Risk Assessment and Induction

Employers must carry out appropriate risk assessments, taking into account the student's age, inexperience, and stage of development. Risk levels are managed as follows:

- **Low-risk placements** (e.g. retail, offices): standard employee procedures and induction are usually sufficient.
- **Medium-risk placements** (e.g. packing, light manufacturing): employers must provide tailored induction, supervision, and any necessary protective equipment.
- **High-risk placements** (e.g. construction, healthcare, agriculture): employers must demonstrate that all risks are identified and controlled. The College's Health and Safety Officer may request additional documentation.

All students must receive a workplace induction from the Employer, including:

- Introduction to health and safety procedures
- Identification of hazards and control measures
- Instructions on who to report concerns to

All placements must meet the College's statutory and internal safeguarding standards and are subject to the employer assessment process (see **Appendix 1: College Employer Assessment Procedure**).

3. Student Preparation

- **Curriculum, Teaching & Training**
Work experience is carefully planned and structured to align with learners' FE and vocational modules. Clear learning objectives are established for each placement, and learners complete pre- and post-placement reflection activities to consolidate

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

 The Sandwell Colleges	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	10 of 13
		Version	1

learning. Tutors and WEX Officers ensure placements complement classroom learning and reinforce the knowledge, skills, and behaviours expected in each programme.

- **Personal Development / Participation & Engagement**

Sandwell Colleges ensures equitable access to high-quality placements for all learners. Barriers to participation are identified and addressed through preparatory support, guidance, and personalised advice. Feedback mechanisms are in place so learners can reflect on their experience and contribute to the ongoing improvement of placement provision.

- **Behaviour, Attitudes & Attendance**

Expectations for professional behaviour, workplace norms, and attendance are clearly communicated to learners and employers prior to placements. Preparatory training equips learners with the skills to succeed in a professional environment. Attendance and engagement are monitored, and support is provided where required to ensure positive learning outcomes. Employers are also informed of College expectations regarding conduct and learner supervision.

- **Achievement / Outcomes**

The College tracks and evaluates the impact of all placements, including learner progression, skills development, and the contribution of the placement to career planning. Employer feedback is collected to inform quality assurance, and data is used to demonstrate tangible outcomes rather than simply counting placement hours.

- **Leadership, Governance & Management**

Senior leaders are actively engaged in overseeing the College's work experience provision. Policies, procedures, and quality assurance frameworks ensure robust employer vetting, placement monitoring, and risk management. Regular reviews of placement quality, learner feedback, and outcomes inform strategic improvements and maintain compliance with safeguarding and health and safety requirements.

- **Safeguarding, Health & Safety / Welfare**

All employers are vetted to ensure compliance with safeguarding and health and safety standards. Clear procedures, induction, and training are provided for learners prior to placement. Welfare support is available throughout placements, and clear complaint and resolution pathways are established. Any risks, including travel and workplace hazards, are assessed and managed in line with College and statutory guidance.

- **Inclusion / Disadvantaged Learners**

The College actively supports learners who may face barriers to placement access, including transport, financial constraints, or employer hesitancy. Reasonable adjustments are made where needed, and employer partners are encouraged to promote inclusive practice. Participation is monitored across learner groups, and interventions are implemented to address any emerging gaps, ensuring equitable access to meaningful work experience opportunities.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	11 of 13
		Version	1

4. Safeguarding and DBS Checks

Work experience placements must meet the safeguarding expectations set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)*.

DBS checks:

- Not required for most placements.
- May be required for placements in “specified settings” (e.g. schools, nurseries, care homes), especially for students over 16.
- For placements in healthcare or early years, an enhanced DBS may be required. Time must be allowed for processing.

Employers will be provided with safeguarding guidance before placements begin (see Appendix 1), including how to report a concern and expectations around supervision.

In certain cases, the College may share relevant information (e.g. EHCP, care plan) to support safe placement planning. This will only be done in consultation with parents/carers and relevant internal support teams (e.g. Foundation Learning, Medical Welfare).

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	12 of 13
		Version	1

Appendix 1:

Safeguarding Guidance for Employers – Work Experience

During work experience, employers and supervisors take on a mentoring role. It is important that students are treated respectfully, supported appropriately, and that any safeguarding concerns are reported without delay.

1. Acting as a Positive Role Model

Employers and workplace supervisors should:

- Act with professionalism and integrity at all times
- Encourage and value student contributions
- Support the student to develop confidence and workplace skills
- Avoid any inappropriate language, jokes, or behaviour
- Maintain appropriate boundaries at all times

Where possible:

- Interactions with students should take place in open/shared spaces
- Conversations should remain work-related and within normal working hours
- Be cautious when discussing personal matters — avoid overly personal or intrusive questions

2. Safeguarding and Disclosures

If a student makes a disclosure or if you have concerns about their safety or wellbeing, you **must** report this immediately.

Contact:

- **Work Experience Officers:**
 - **Names**
- Or contact the College Safeguarding Leads directly:
 - **Names**

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							

	POLICY Work Experience Policy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	13 of 13
		Version	1

Glossary

CEIAG – Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance

WEX – Work Experience

DSL – Designated Safeguarding Lead

DfE – Department for Education

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

KCSIE – Keeping Children Safe in Education

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

HSE – Health and Safety Executive

CEC – Careers & Enterprise Company

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	10/2025							