



Work Experience Strategy

2025/26

Academic Year

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Department Area	Quality & Curriculum
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	STRATEGY Work Experience Strategy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	1 of 5
		Version	1

Introduction:

This document is designed to provide structure and guidance for work experience at The Sandwell Colleges. Aided by our college values and strategic priorities listed below, this strategy helps create a pathway towards our vision of delivering ‘exceptional’.

The Sandwell Colleges Values (We CARE):

- Connect and Collaborate
- Ambitious
- Respect
- Empower

Strategic Pillars:

- Always ambitious for our learners
- Future focused careers and skills
- Powerful partnerships
- Empower our people
- Financial resilience and sustainable colleges

Purpose:

The purpose of this Work Experience Strategy is to establish a clear and consistent approach to the planning, delivery, and evaluation of work experience across all areas of further education provision. Work experience forms an essential part of the learner journey, enabling individuals to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts while developing the practical skills, professional behaviours, and confidence required for sustained employment and lifelong success.

This strategy sets out how the organisation will deliver high-quality and meaningful work experience opportunities that promote personal and professional growth, meet employer and industry needs, and contribute to local and regional economic priorities.

Through close collaboration with employers, curriculum teams, and support services, the strategy aims to embed employability across all study programmes and ensure that every learner has access to purposeful, inclusive, and well-supported placements. It also aligns with national priorities for technical and vocational education.

Ultimately, the purpose of this strategy is to provide a coherent framework that enhances learners’ readiness for work, strengthens partnerships with industry, and drives continuous improvement in the quality and impact of work experience across the curriculum.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	09/2025							

	STRATEGY Work Experience Strategy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	2 of 5
		Version	1

The Sandwell Colleges is committed to delivering high-quality, meaningful work experience opportunities that prepare learners for successful transitions into employment, apprenticeships, or further study. This strategy outlines our approach for 2025/26, ensuring compliance with:

- **Study Programme Guidance:** Emphasizing tailored work experience as a core component of 16–19 education.
- **Gatsby Benchmarks (2025):** Linking curriculum learning to careers (benchmark 4), Encounters with employers and employees (benchmark 5), Experiences of workplaces (benchmark 6)
- **Ofsted Learner Experience Guidance:** Highlighting the importance of purposeful placements, learner voice, and progression outcomes.

Our aim is to embed work experience as a transformative element of every learner's journey, fostering employability, confidence, and career clarity. Work experience is integral within the Colleges Strategic Plan, *'Your Future Our Focus'* (2025-28) and is linked to key outputs identified within Sandwell Colleges Accountability Statement (2025-26).

Strategic Objectives:

- **Universal Access:** Ensure every learner has access to meaningful work experience, tailored to their level and programme.
- **Quality Assurance:** Establish robust systems to monitor placement quality, learner safety, and employer engagement.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Embed work experience into curriculum planning, tutorial frameworks, and progression pathways.
- **Employer Partnerships:** Strengthen relationships with local and regional employers to diversify placement opportunities.
- **Learner-Centred Design:** Personalise placements to reflect learners' aspirations, support needs, and career goals.
- **Inclusion and Equity:** Promote an inclusive WEX programme that actively supports disadvantaged learners and those with additional needs, ensuring equity of access, tailored support, and positive outcomes in line with Ofsted expectations and the college's widening participation priorities.

Work Experience Plan:

Programme Level	Work Experience Requirements
Level 1	Experience of work up to 30 hours
Level 2	30 hours of work experience
Level 3 – Vocational	Minimum of 30 hours of work experience per academic year
Level 3 – A Levels	Minimum of 20 hours of work experience 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

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	09/2025							

	STRATEGY Work Experience Strategy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	3 of 5
		Version	1

Work Experience/ Experience of Work:

Definition (traditional / formal):

A structured, supervised placement with an employer where a student undertakes real work tasks over a set period — usually days or weeks.

Definition (broader / progressive concept):

A wider range of employer encounters and work-related learning experiences that help students understand the world of work, without necessarily being a formal placement.

Experience of work = learning about work (broader, exploratory, encounters).

Work experience = learning through work (hands-on, structured, applied).

In Policy Terms:

In the 16–19 Study Programmes (DfE 2025/26), “work experience” remains a core, mandatory element of study programmes for most learners. It must be purposeful and relevant to the study area or career aims. T Levels have a statutory Industry Placement, which is a specific, extended form of work experience.

In the updated 2025 Gatsby Benchmarks, Benchmark 6 has shifted focus to ensure every student has at least one “meaningful experience of a workplace.” This broader definition includes different formats, not just placements, if it meets the “meaningful” criteria (purposeful, interactive, with reflection). “Experience of work” helps prepare students before they undertake a formal work experience placement — building awareness and confidence progressively.

Employer Engagement Strategy

- **Local Employer Forums:** Quarterly meetings to co-design placements.
- **Employer Recognition Scheme:** Celebrating outstanding partners.
- **Digital Placement Portal:** Streamlining placement offers and learner applications.
- **Sector Spotlights:** Targeted campaigns in growth sectors (e.g., health, digital, construction).
- **Career Insight Days:** Employers host workplace visits or virtual sessions to showcase career pathways and workplace expectations
- **Curriculum Co-Design Panels:** Employers collaborate with teaching staff to align course content with current industry standards and skill needs.
- **Strategic Employer Partnerships:** Formal agreements with key employers to provide a pipeline of placements, projects, and progression opportunities.
- **Mock Interview and CV Workshops:** Employers participate in employability events to prepare learners for recruitment processes.
- **Employer Satisfaction Surveys:** Regular feedback to measure partnership quality and identify areas for improvement.
- **Annual Employer Conference:** Sharing best practice, celebrating success, and discussing local labour market priorities
- **Data-Informed Planning:** Using placement data and labour market intelligence to target sectors with skills gaps.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	09/2025							

	STRATEGY Work Experience Strategy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	4 of 5
		Version	1

Monitoring, Evaluation & Impact:

- **Placement Logs:** Completed by learners and verified by employers.
- **Employer Feedback Forms:** Structured evaluations completed post-placement to assess learner performance, preparedness, and overall experience.
- **Skills Development Frameworks:** Mapping learner progress against key employability skills or sector-specific competencies.
- **Learner Reflections:** Captured via surveys, focus groups and tutorials.
- **Health, Safety and Welfare Reviews:** Monitoring compliance with risk assessments and workplace safety standards throughout placements.
- **Progression Tracking:** Links between placements and destinations.
- **Post-Placement Reviews:** One-to-one sessions between learners and tutors to review outcomes and identify next steps.
- **Destination Data Analysis:** Measuring the long-term impact of placements on employment, apprenticeships, or higher study progression.
- **Internal Audits or Peer Reviews:** Periodic checks across departments to ensure consistency, compliance, and best practice sharing.
- **Annual Impact Report:** Shared with stakeholders and used to refine strategy.

Staff Development:

- **CPD Workshops:** Training on placement planning, safeguarding, and employer engagement.
- **National Conference Attendance:** Encouraging staff to attend FE and employability events to stay up to date with policy, innovation, and best practice.
- **Industry Placements for Staff:** Opportunities for teachers and support staff to spend time in industry to update their sector knowledge and bring current practices into the classroom.
- **Best Practice Sharing:** Internal showcases and external benchmarking.
- **Internal Training Champions:** Designated staff who cascade training and support colleagues in applying new approaches.
- **Performance Review Integration:** Embedding work experience and employer engagement objectives into staff appraisal processes.
- **Digital Tools:** Training on placement management systems and learner tracking.
- **Staff Recognition Schemes:** Celebrating innovation and impact in employer engagement or work experience delivery.

Interventions:

- **Early Warning Reviews:** Monthly progress meetings between curriculum leads, work experience coordinators, and quality teams to address emerging issues before they escalate
- **Action and Improvement Plans:** Require underperforming areas to produce short, focused plans outlining specific steps, timelines, and measurable outcomes.
- **Mentoring from High-Performing Areas:** Pair underperforming departments with those demonstrating strong outcomes to facilitate peer learning.
- **Case Study Analysis:** Examine successful placements to extract transferable practices.
- **Continuous Feedback Loop:** Use learner, employer, and staff feedback to adapt interventions and report progress through the Quality Improvement Plan.

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	09/2025							

	STRATEGY Work Experience Strategy 2025/2026 Academic Year	Number	
		Page	5 of 5
		Version	1

Inclusion and Equity:

- **Flexible Models:** Virtual placements, micro-experiences, and employer-led projects.
- **Barrier Reduction:** Reduce barriers to participation for all disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, ensuring equitable access to opportunities.
- **Voice & Choice:** Learner-led placement selection and feedback loops.

Associated documents

- [‘Your Future Our Focus’ – Sandwell Colleges Strategic Plan \(2025-2028\)](#)
- [Sandwell Colleges Accountability Statement \(2025-2026\)](#)
- [Sandwell Colleges Work Experience Policy \(2025-2026\)](#)
- [Guidance - 16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2025 to 2026 academic year](#)

ISSUE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DATE	09/2025							