

# HOW TO... MAKE MOST OF PLACEMENTS

**Bamidele Farinre**, Specialist Biomedical Scientist, advises on how students and employers can get the most out of work placements.



**W**ork experience has been proven many times an important benchmark for employers in recruiting prospective candidates. In a vastly competitive environment, it appears that while having a degree is an investment, it isn't sufficient for students to fast-track their careers.

In today's job market, graduates have to prove their ability to work in an active, motivating and dynamic work environment. Work experience plays a vital role in improving the employability of students and also provides other personal benefits. The additional skills and knowledge gained during a work placement can often be directly applied to studies and, if applied correctly, can potentially lead to better grades. This, in turn, will help the graduate to progress to the next stage of their career.



There are numerous ways that one can gain the experience required to prepare for a career in healthcare. Work placements are an important aspect of an individual's career development. There are many benefits to gaining work experience and it is crucial for candidates to demonstrate that they have found out about the role they are interested in and have some understanding of the work that it involves. Work placements offer the perfect opportunity to gain valuable experience while still studying.

It is advisable to gain experience in the area of health that interests you. However, any experience in healthcare can be useful, because just being in a health environment can give an insight into the work. For those considering a

career in the NHS, it is worthwhile gaining experience in an NHS or private hospital, clinic or health centre, a charity or social enterprise (such as one that supports people with long-term health conditions, disabilities or

older people, or that provide first aid, for example, St John Ambulance or the Red Cross).

## What are some of the benefits of work placement?

A profound advantage for students undertaking a placement is the ability to effectively evidence their experiences on their CV, providing documented appropriate proof for their skills and abilities, coupled with a good character reference. Placements can also provide useful examples to use in competency-based job applications or interviews. Furthermore, an employer seeing any work placements on your CV will be more likely to consider you for the position.

## As an individual, work placement helps you:

- **Gain transferable skills**, such as communicating with others, time management, reliability, teamwork and problem-solving, which you can use within a wide range of job roles.

- **Broaden your awareness** of the 350 plus careers available within the NHS.
- **Build your awareness** of NHS trusts as both employers and working cultures, and gain confidence and experience of working with a wide range of patients, visitors and staff.
- **Gain interesting experiences** to draw upon and use for your CV, applications and at interviews, to make you stand out from the crowd.
- **Have an opportunity** to chat to staff about what it is really like to work for the NHS and be trained in a particular role.
- **With future decision-making** about careers, because it aids understanding of your work likes and dislikes.
- **To network with organisations** that could prove very useful when job seeking after graduation.
- **With access to many national employers**, some of whom now recruit directly from their summer work programmes and some of whom even offer sponsorship to students for their final year.

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Biomedical scientist education and training has evolved over the years to meet pathology service demands. This has led to the introduction of integrated degrees, which involve a laboratory-based practical placement element within the degree course and allows statutory registration. Graduates of these courses may have practical experience in one or more pathology disciplines (dependent upon the duration and configuration of the placement) and will have theoretical knowledge of all disciplines.

This provides flexibility in securing employment as a registered biomedical scientist in any of the pathology disciplines and would also support any mergers and service reconfiguration involving cross-discipline working.

Placements form an important part of the efforts to build an effective biomedical workforce. Offering placements also plays a vital part in the NHS's corporate social responsibilities and distinctiveness by developing the skills of local students or those that are important to the future of the industry.

## Important benefits to employer

- Adds significant value to your business – students on placements who bring new ideas and an additional resource to a business will frequently in turn add significant value to the employing organisation.
- Supporting students to gain employability skills, whilst playing a role in building the future workforce.
- A bigger pool of young talent to choose from.
- As an employer, you benefit from work experience because the morale of your existing team may be boosted.
- Creates opportunities for employees to develop their own supervisory skills, as they look after those on placements. 

## How can you secure a work placement?

Most universities have links for work experience placements with local NHS hospitals or clinics. It is important to seek careers advisers to see if there's anything like this going on at your university. If not, you can apply yourself. You could also explore opportunities in your local area outside of hospitals, such as nursing homes, GP surgeries, physiotherapy practices and healthcare charities.

## Benefits of work placement to the employer

For employers, work experience is about giving back to society and helping the future economy by doing your bit to prepare young people for the world of work. It has become common knowledge that the UK is experiencing a skills shortage and this is acute in some sectors, such as STEM. By creating work placements and giving students and graduates a taster of the industry, you are narrowing that skills gap.

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