

How Offering Work Experience to Students Benefits Employers

Are you an employer in a firm that offers work experience opportunities to students? Many companies work with higher education providers and colleges to offer work experience. Increasingly, companies are also offering short work experience/placement programmes to students who are already in Further Education.

If you are already well acquainted with the experience of having people come into your workplace for a short period, then you probably already know some of the advantages this can bring to your firm. If higher education work experience is not something you have thought about previously, it could be a great move for your company.

Currently, many of the United Kingdom's top companies have post-GCSE and higher education work experience programmes in place and there must be a reason for this, right? Why have they gone to the trouble of designing and implementing these opportunities for students?

Is this a strategy you could consider for your own company?

Let's first take a look at what work experience is and then some of the benefits employers see when they open their doors to students.

What Is Work Experience? What Does It Mean for Employers?

The good news is that by creating work experience opportunities for students is a win win situation for both your company and for the student undertaking your programme. For employers, work experience is about giving back to society and helping the future economy by doing your bit to help prepare students for the world of work. Employers who offer work experience give students the opportunity to work on the company premises for a few days per week over a period of time or, in some cases, an extended period of a few weeks.

Many people, once they have been educated to GCSE level and/or already have relevant experience in the workplace environment, have an idea of what they want to do as a future

career. It gives students an opportunity to be part of a different environment and to learn about what is expected of staff in the workplace from superiors and managers. It also gives them the opportunity to work alongside peers.

Creating work experience opportunities also means you are helping students make more informed choices about their next step. Depending on the sector you are working in, their time in your workplace will give learners some valuable practical experience in an industry that could be competitive. Work experience within a certain profession or industry could be a crucial stepping stone for them and, of course, they will be better equipped for the workplace once they have completed their programme.

It is said that a student that now has the hands-on experience within your industry, is more likely to remain in that field as a result of you offering work experience. Perhaps they will also ponder a university route into your field of work.

This benefits you as an employer because you have a bigger pool of talent to choose from. It is well known that the United Kingdom is currently experiencing a skills shortage, and this is acute in some industries. By creating work experience opportunities and giving students a taster of your industry, you are helping to narrow that skills gap.

Benefits Of Work Experience For Employers

So, if you do decide to create some work experience programmes and opportunities for students, they get to come into your workplace to experience your industry. A great benefit for them. But what's in it for you? How does offering work experience benefit you as an employer?

Here are six benefits for you to consider – in no particular order:

1 – Work experience benefits your other employees

When you have a student in your workplace, on a work experience programme, they need some guidance and perhaps even a mentor. As an employer, you benefit from work experience because the morale of your existing team is boosted.

Your employees develop their own supervisory skills as they look after the work experience student and, in turn, feel valued in the workplace.

So as well as staff engagement, you are also giving your team opportunities to show any leadership qualities they might have. This means you could find better ways of applying your employees' skills so that both they and the company benefit further down the line.

2 – Offering work experience opportunities doesn't cost you, financially

Another benefit to the employer for creating work experience programmes is it does not necessarily have to cost you. There is no legal requirement for you to pay the students you have in your workplace, as they are there to learn. Having said that, a lot of employers do like to help out a little by offering to cover travel expenses and perhaps lunches.

If you are offering work experience in competitive fields such as media or law, for example, lots of students are going to be willing to travel further to get to work. It can be beneficial if you could cover their travel expenses, so your company does not have a restricted pool when providing a work placement programme. You don't want to miss out on talent just because those people have no way of getting to you. You never know you might spot your next recruit.

3 – Employers benefit because work experience is good branding for the company

So, how is offering work experience programmes good branding for your company? Well, if you can sit down and create a really effective and organised programme of work that is genuinely beneficial to the learner, word will soon get around and eventually you will have lots of people looking to do work experience with your company. This means you get to choose from the best talent out there.

Offering quality and beneficial work experience can also have a follow on effect when it comes to recruitment. Your company's reputation will benefit from investing in students and so more people will want to work for your firm. People talk and word of mouth can be a powerful tool when it comes to recruitment because people will recommend your company as a good firm to work for.

4 – Employers benefit because students bring a whole new energy and perspective

Having students on work placements adds diversity to your organisation and this is a key to the continued success of companies. Having students in your workplace undertaking a work placement, even if only for a short while, or a few days a week, can contribute to (or even introduce) this diversity to your company.

Students who have little or no experience of the workplace are not a burden but can be a breath of fresh air. If you have always tackled some issues from the same angle, a student could offer a completely different perspective. They may or may not have the practical experience just yet, but they can bring a whole new dynamic and energy to your team. Let's not forget that enthusiasm is infectious.

5 – Employers benefit from offering work experience because it's a great recruitment strategy

Yes, if you are looking to attract a new workforce to your company, then offering work experience programmes is a great way to go about this. If your work placement student proves to be a great catch, why not try and keep hold of them by offering them a permanent role such as an apprenticeship or a part time role whilst they are studying? If you don't have a large recruitment budget, work experience is a good way to hook talent.

Students are like sponges and you get the opportunity to mold them into the team you want. This reduces the cost of bringing in more experienced, skilled professionals.

Employers also benefit financially in the recruitment stakes because both you and the student can see whether you are a good match for each other throughout the work experience programme. This minimises the recruitment risk of taking on the wrong candidate and then having to go through the whole time consuming and expensive recruitment process again. You have seen for yourself how the young person performs in your workplace, so you are not just relying on a CV.

6 – Offering work experience benefits your whole industry

Offering work experience opportunities to students not only promotes your company but it also promotes the whole industry you are working in. Many industries in the United Kingdom are facing a skills shortage and this is an employer's chance to help change that situation.

Some industries such as travel and tourism, for example, are much easier to promote than chemical engineering might be. Offering work experience gives students the opportunity to experience what goes on within your industry.

Also, people feel good about industries and companies that invest in students so you can also grow your customer base as well as tap into new talent.

Make Work Experience Count For Both You And The Person Doing It

As you can see, there are numerous benefits to an employer who offers work experience to students. However, in order for these benefits to manifest themselves, the work placement programme must also benefit the person undertaking it.

Work experience is not about getting students to wander around the office making cups of tea and coffee for the regular staff. It is not about employers just drafting in a few free members of staff to cover a busy period. It is not about sitting a student in the corner of the room while they merely watch what is going on around them, ignored by the rest of the staff.

Having a carefully thought out work placement programme where students can work on real projects – inclusive of some of the more mundane tasks– means they get a true picture of what it is like to work in your industry and you, as an employer, should then get to reap the benefits mentioned above.