

Educator Brief - Work Experience

Work experience has significant potential to impact positively upon young people's employability and career-relevant skill development with evidence to suggest it may have a beneficial impact on their academic outcomes as well. Unfortunately, for many young people access to quality work experience is variable, and its potential benefits remain largely untapped by schools and employers. Too often, young people's age, gender, ethnicity or affluence limits their access to quality work experience opportunities.

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The job situation's changing so rapidly that there's a whole plethora of jobs out there that young people have no cognisance of. ...The jobs we're doing today won't be the jobs that they'll do tomorrow, and so it's about widening [young people's] appreciation of that.

Morag McLoughlan, Service Manager For Schools,
Learning and Education at Stirling Council

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The people that don't have such strong social capital and don't know people who can help them in the jobs market tend to benefit more from employer support than others

Chris Percy, Strategy and Research Contractor,
the Careers and Enterprise Company

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While opportunities for young people to access work experience are widespread, it is not universal. Founders4Schools believe we can help educators address these barriers and provide solutions to connect educators with leaders of successful growing businesses in their community to inspire students and prepare them for the rapidly changing world of work.

How do you create the environment for successful work experience programmes?

To understand this issue better for our educators and volunteers we commissioned research into best practice work experience, this briefing is taken from the outcomes. Download the full report [*More than a Job's Worth: Making Work Experience Fit for Purpose*](#)¹

Based on this research there are **10 steps** educators should consider when organising work experience for young people. The hope is by educators putting these processes in place then the work experience will be *fit for purpose* - for all involved..

This briefing acts as a guide to educators on how to create the right environment to foster successful work experience encounters for everyone involved and highlights some best practice case studies.

2.3 What needs to happen to make work experience more effective?

Schools, employers and other organisations including government and brokerage services can take a range of steps to support effective work experience. The emphasis must be on ensuring work experience is structured so that it helps young people learn, and convenient for schools and employers.

Schools and employers should work more closely together, ensuring pupils undertake purposeful tasks that develop their understanding of the world of work and career-relevant personal, social and emotional skills. Meanwhile, work experience should be more widely available to pupils in post-16 education.

2.3.1 Recommendations for schools and colleges

From our review of the literature and primary research involving practitioners and experts, we identify ten key actions that schools should take in order to support effective work experience:

1. Match pupils with appropriately stretching opportunities;
2. Outline the benefits of hosting young people for work experience;
3. Support opportunities for work experience throughout the academic year;
4. Increase post-16 students' access to work experience;
5. Help pupils prepare for and debrief after work experience;
6. Support repeated interactions with employers;
7. Support host employers and businesses;
8. Support work experience opportunities within school and with suppliers;
9. Monitor and evaluate the quality of work experience, and;
10. Identify and address inequalities in access to work experience.

1. Match pupils with appropriately stretching opportunities

Work experience led by schools has a greater chance of reducing social inequalities than work experience led by pupils, as placements arranged by schools are not constrained by pupils' and families' social networks or social capital.^{117,118} Despite this, a large proportion of work experience placements are arranged through parents' social networks.

As section 2.2 set out, work experience can help expand young people's horizons. Schools therefore need to find a way to balance pupils' interests and existing ideas about their careers with options that help them see beyond their immediate context. Contributors to this research suggested that networks and brokerage are key to this, a point discussed in specific detail in section 2.3.3, below. Brokerage between schools and employers can reduce reliance on teachers' individual networks, ensuring pupils have access to a wider range of opportunities. Better support for employers (in the form of background checks, and information and guidance) would enable more organisations to host work experience placements. This would help more pupils to access suitably stretching placements.

Work experience is likely to be effective when young people attend workplaces that are relevant to their career aspirations (while ensuring this is not dampening their ambitions about the future), and when placements are well planned so that they make use of the young person's skills and interests.¹¹⁹ Schools can contribute to effective matching by arranging pre-visits and meetings, and involving young people in classroom research about employers. Schools can also undertake other careers-focused activities, such as careers carousels, inviting in external speakers, and mentoring.¹²⁰

Employers can play their part by preparing the equivalent of a job specification for the young person so that their role and responsibilities are clear and by helping the young person to reflect on the skills they might develop through the placement.

¹¹⁷ Rolfe, H. and Crowley, T. (2008) Work-related learning for an innovation nation: Engaging with employers to improve work-related learning opportunities for young people aged 14-19, London: NESTA. Available at: <http://niesr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publications/NIESR-Nesta%20Work-relation%20Learning%20Report.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Buffeo and Cifci, 2017.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Millard et al., 2019.

2. Outline the benefits of hosting young people

Schools should ensure they keep administrative burdens on employers to a minimum although, as we suggest, there is also an important role here for government and third sector organisations here. Ofsted found that many employers were unwilling to work with schools due to the time and administrative burden involved.¹²¹

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Businesses are saying... their reluctance to take younger children is because they don't know what to do.

Dr Anne Bamford, Strategic Director for Education,
Culture and Skills, the City of London Corporation

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According to Ofsted's research, employers were most likely to be involved when there was little or no cost, and when there was a clear 'business case' for supporting work experience.¹²² For example, there is some evidence to suggest that employers may be more inclined to offer work experience if they understand both how the experience will support young people, and the school, but also if employers may benefit from:^{123, 124, 125}

- Young people's perspective on their products or services;
- Heightening young people's awareness of their products and services;
- Insight into how products or services might need to change for future customers or markets, and;
- Opportunities to identify talented young people to take part in longer-term placements or employment in the future.

This was strongly emphasised by roundtable participants and interviewees who said schools should stress benefits of hosting work experience to employers.

3. Support opportunities for work experience throughout the academic year

The majority of work experience opportunities are offered to pupils aged 15 or 16 (in years 10 and 11), and pupils aged 16 to 18 (in years 12 and 13).¹²⁶ These placements are normally arranged as single blocks of time during the summer term, often after exams have finished in June and July,¹²⁷ something experts and practitioners contributing to this research also observed:

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Schools can avoid doing work experience because it's seen as difficult and it has a price tag attached. I think they're also quite inflexible about how they think about it and tend to view work experience as only being about a two week placement [for 15- and 16-year-olds].

Tristram Hooley, Professor of Career Education, University of Derby

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¹²⁰ Millard et al., 2019.

¹²¹ Ofsted, 2016.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Workfinder and Cambridge Judge Business School (2017) Employer Survey on Work Experience, unpublished (data provided to LKMco by Founders4Schools).

¹²⁴ CIPD (2017) Employer-supported volunteering guide, London: CIPD. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/employer-supported-volunteering-guide_tcm18-27612.pdf.

¹²⁵ Rolfe and Crowley, 2008. ¹²⁶ NatCen Social Research and SQW, 2017. ¹²⁷ Ibid.

Schools are more likely than colleges to run work experience in a single block.¹²⁸ This is partly due to the pressure of covering other curriculum content.¹²⁹ However, evidence suggests that a week or fortnight of work experience at the end of the summer term is less effective than models that spread work experience through the school year. Though timetabling presents considerable challenges for schools, flexibility around the timing of placements - moving away from two-week placements on fixed dates in the school year - helps employers^{130, 131}. Furthermore, work experience conducted earlier in the year allows for repeated interactions with employers, which the literature suggests increases effectiveness in a number of domains (see point 6, below). Additionally, timing work experience shortly before the summer holiday removes the opportunity for pupils to reflect on their experiences and link them with learning in school on their return.^{132, 133}

Whilst host organisations may also prefer to offer these opportunities in the summer months (June to September), existing survey data indicates that greater flexibility from schools would open up additional placement options.^{134, 135}

Contributors to this research (and other research on this topic¹³⁶) suggested schools could potentially increase opportunities for young people to experience work and the workplace by considering a mix of:

- School-based placements (working within school);
- Short-term work experience opportunities, lasting one or two weeks;
- Extended work experience placements, for example taking one afternoon a week across a term;
- Internships and holiday placements;
- Social action and volunteering opportunities, and;
- Part-time jobs



¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Kashefpakdel et al., 2018.

¹³⁰ BYC, 2018.

¹³¹ Sims et al., 2013.

¹³² Mann, 2012.

¹³³ Ofsted, 2016.

¹³⁴ Workfinder and Cambridge Judge Business School (2017).

¹³⁵ BYC, 2018.

¹³⁶ BYC, 2018.

Case study: Revising the structure of work experience placements – Stirling High School

Structure

Pupils at Stirling High School undertake work experience at the end of their fourth year, normally aged 16, during a two-week window after exams have finished, but before the summer begins. However, the school's deputy headteacher Alan Hamilton feels this model limits opportunities because:

- It reduces the number of businesses able to receive a pupil;
- More young people might want to go to a business than there are spaces, and;
- The week might clash with other schools' work experience weeks.

Currently, the school sends one group out one week, and the other group during a second week, to help mitigate some of these challenges, although Alan feels this is beneficial in terms of logistics, rather than for students' learning.

The school would like to move to a model where young people participate in work experience one day a week, aged 16 and 17, using one 'subject' as a time for going off site and gaining work experience. Alan feels this would need at least a two-hour chunk of time a week to make it worthwhile. Another alteration Alan would like to make is to make work experience selection align more closely with course choices. Alan says the points at which students select subjects could be a good point at which to identify industries in which they would like to gain work experience.

Resources and infrastructure

The school uses 'Gateway', a database of work experience opportunities (www.ceg.org.uk), though around half of students find their own options and Alan has noticed that pupils from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to find their own work experience opportunities:

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My issue is that students from more affluent backgrounds may have a better understanding of what they want to do, and those that don't have a wide family network are limited to...a database which has maybe been there for a while and has maybe not got a choice that ... they really wanted.

Alan Hamilton, Deputy Headteacher, Stirling High School

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Setting clear expectations

Alan says it has been important to set clear expectations about work experience for receiving businesses, such as:

- Outlining the skills a young person wants to develop, and;
- Identifying things the young person wants to learn about the business.

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[Businesses] ask [for more information] if we just go to them and say, 'Can you have this young person one day a week?'. That is too broad. They need a bit more structure of what you want and what we are looking for from them

Alan Hamilton, Deputy Headteacher, Stirling High School

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Getting meaningful feedback

Alan wants the feedback young people receive from the host organisation to be useful. While feedback can be hugely valuable, it is currently variable in quality, and sometimes non-existent. Alan said that it is most useful where it identifies specific actions or behaviours a young person demonstrated or developed, and could be given either verbally or in writing.

Structuring work placements as part of post-16 study – Access Creative College

Access Creative College is a Further Education provider with three thousand students at seven centres across the country, between London and York. Centres vary in size from 100 to 550 students. Mark Compton is Director of Employability, Partnerships & Adult Learning, and explained the College was involved in the DfE's T-levels work-placement pilot, which involved over twenty post-16 providers. Mark set out his vision for how work placements (whether part of T-levels, or otherwise) should be structured in order to support both employers and post-16 students.

Structure

Placements can be structured as stand-alone, larger blocks of several weeks, or shorter blocks spread over time (including day-release). However, Mark said that what is important is that decisions about the structure of placements (especially in the arts and creative industries) take into account employers' needs:

“Employers have different peaks and troughs in their business and working practices can be seasonal. For example, a festival organiser came to us and said, ‘I can offer opportunities, but it will be five days in the run-up to and including a festival and then I’ve got another five days in the run-up to and including delivery of another festival and I’d like to offer those opportunities to different people.’ Other providers said that they would prefer a day release and some said that they would like a block.”

Alan Hamilton, Depute Headteacher, Stirling High School

One way of helping students access a range of work experience opportunities could be by arranging multiple placements. This mirrors working practices in the sector where freelance practitioners have portfolio careers.

Content

Rather than explicitly linking placements to an area of study, Mark suggested schools, colleges and hosting organisations think more flexibly and emphasise the development of young people's transferable skills. This

would increase access to placements, allowing pupils to work in a wider range of settings (rather than somewhere directly linked to their area of study). Mark said that developing communication skills by working for a call centre, for example, could benefit the learner in their ambition to be a self-employed creative, as they will be better able to network and communicate effectively with clients. Schools, colleges and providers should work with the young person to identify the skills they could develop on the placement.

Flexibility of this kind, aimed at increasing the potential pool of host organisations, is crucial because many employers struggle to find capacity to support placements, particularly if they are SMEs or sole traders:

“Some employers would say, ‘That’s going to take me away from the income generating part of my work – there’s only me and my colleague here’, or, ‘There’s only three of us here and we need to be focused on bringing in money for this business to survive and grow’.”

Mark Compton, Director of Employability, Partnerships & Adult Learning, Access Creative College

One potential way forward is helping employers see the benefits of working with young people, learning from them, and keeping their business ‘cutting edge’. Mark suggested placements offer employers a chance to ‘try before they buy’:

“The employer might get the benefit of insight into what young people listen to, what their interests are, new skill sets that they’re developing, software applications they are using – certainly in the area of social media, young people have got a lot to offer employers. Just that breath of fresh air as much as anything else; insight into what a young person could offer their business before them taking the step of paying for an apprenticeship, which is a longer-term commitment.”

Mark Compton, Director of Employability, Partnerships & Adult Learning, Access Creative College

Mimicking self-employment

Mark said there is little preparation during a young person's education for the life skills required for self-employment, although such experience could be invaluable for students entering sectors where self-employment is the norm (such as music). Mark suggested that shadowing a professional, or working with a mentor while building professional networks, could be valuable.

Support and network-building

Mark set out two different ways his college had searched for placements. One method was more 'salesy', and involved trying to quickly secure relationships with a large number of employers. However, Mark felt the relationships he and his colleagues built more slowly with employers had a higher 'success rate', leading to more placements. Mark acknowledged, though, that building relationships in this way is time consuming and therefore costly.



5. Help pupils prepare for and debrief after work experience

'Matching' a young person with a work experience placement based on the young person's current skills and aspirations is an important success factor, as we outlined above. As such, schools that help young people prepare for work experience by providing repeated opportunities for students to clarify their career goals (through coaching, for example) increase the chances of the matching process being successful. While students are unlikely to have finalised their career choices by the age of 16, this kind of preparation can help young people find work experience that helps them crystallise ideas about careers in various sectors.¹⁴⁰ The case studies of Stirling High School and School 21's approaches to matching pupils to placements illustrate how schools and colleges can approach this.

Participants in our research explained how preparation for and debriefing after work experience could be undertaken during form time. Either way, schools need to adopt a coherent and deliberate approach:

It's about preparation and follow up. If you've got a strong careers education and guidance programme throughout the school that integrates these things well then those activities should happen naturally. It's when they're bolted on ..., then you have to start creating loads of systems to make it work.

Dr Siobhan Neary, Associate Professor and Head of
iCeGS, the University of Derby

[Pupils] will definitely learn something by going on work experience but would learn an awful lot more if [they] had spent time acquiring information about what the company does and how it works prior to [their placement], and spent time reflecting on it and talking about it with peers and educational professionals afterwards.

Tristram Hooley, Professor of Career Education, University of Derby

Debriefing after work experience is also critical, because this gives pupils a chance to reflect on what they enjoyed more and less about a placement:

Even if you had a terrible time, understanding why you didn't like it, what the employer did that was rubbish, and therefore what you need to look for in a good employer in the future [is valuable]. Even the worst experience is a learning opportunity

Chris Percy, Strategy and Research Contractor, the
Careers and Enterprise Company

The last and most crucial bit of it is the debrief, and too often, that's missed out in schools. ...That opportunity to debrief and share [learning], that's the richest part.

David Andrews, Careers Education and Guidance Consultant

Thorough preparation for and debriefing after work experience can also help teachers ensure young people's experiences in school and on work experience dovetail. For example, one roundtable participant said that young people were sometimes frustrated when they went from being treated like an adult on a work experience placement, to being treated like a pupil again on return to school:

One of the dangers is there's a real inconsistency in experience for a young person who goes and spends two weeks in a fantastic corporate, where they're treated as an adult..., and then they go back into the classroom and they're a 16-year-old (again).

Joanna Cruse, Independent Education Consultant

¹⁴⁰ Buffeo and Cifci, 2017.

Participants in our research, including case study schools, suggested the following ways to help pupils prepare for work experience:

- One-on-one mentoring or coaching sessions between the young person and their teacher (or an external careers coach), identifying the roles and sectors the young person would like to explore through work experience, and the skills they would like to develop;
- Pupils 'applying' for work experience placements by writing a letter and/or CV, and possibly interviewing with teachers internally (or, if capacity permits, with the employer). This can be beneficial because it requires the pupil to research the organisation and set out their goals. In one school we visited where pupils apply for work experience in this way, teachers explained that this made placements more prestigious:

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At the beginning I was struggling a little bit, because it was quite hard to get a place because a lot of people were trying to apply for probably the same firm and same job role. But at the end, I got a placement at an estate agency and I managed to keep working with them for a whole summer, and I still do work for them during half terms and holidays.

Pupil, AIBEAT

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- Visiting the work experience setting in advance, and meeting representatives from the hosting organisation. This can be especially beneficial for pupils with additional needs or lower confidence.
- Pupils conducting desk research before embarking on their placements, including on dedicated careers websites, researching the roles and sector they are interested in.
- Pupils undertaking peer mentoring, or group mentoring sessions during form time or in PSHE lessons, giving them the opportunity to reflect on the sorts of work experience they would find useful.

After work experience has taken place, participants suggested pupils could debrief by:

- Reflecting with an adult coach or mentor (including a teacher), or with peers, on the experience, identifying what went well, areas in which they developed new or existing skills, what they learnt about the role and/or sector, and ways in which the experience could have been improved (both through their own actions and the employer's). This process of reflection could be performed verbally and/or in writing.
- Presenting to teachers, parents, other external visitors, and/or to peers about their experience.

6. Support repeated interactions with employers

As noted earlier, work experience appears to work best as part of a series of work-related learning opportunities. 19- to 24-year-olds were more likely to feel that work experience had prepared them well for the world of work when they had taken part in multiple careers education opportunities, including work experience.¹⁴¹ The proportion that felt work experience had prepared them well increased in line with the number of times they had taken part in work-related learning.^{142, 143} Repeated interactions throughout schooling, and throughout the school year mean young people have more opportunity to reflect on the learning that took place on the work experience.

Repeated interactions with employers also mean that each placement need not provide all the possible benefits of work experience on their own. Instead, benefits can accrue cumulatively over the course of multiple opportunities.

¹⁴¹ Mann et al., 2016.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Sims et al., 2013.

7. Support host employers and businesses

Schools and brokers have an important role to play in supporting host organisations. This is crucially important, since many employers are put off from offering work experience because of factors including:¹⁴⁴

- Burdens on employees' and the organisation's time, including the administration of the placements.
- The nature of the work the organisation undertakes (possibly involving confidential or sensitive work with clients or customers).
- The legal and pastoral responsibility associated with taking on young people.

Contributors to our research suggested schools could help mitigate some of these factors by providing information about:

- The young person including any specific learning, physical or emotional needs, and his or her learning objectives.
- The young person's objectives for the placement specifically, and more broadly in school and life;
- How to deal with unforeseen situations, such as the young person arriving late, being absent, or not completing work within the allotted time.
- Legal, administrative and other bureaucratic obligations including health and safety.
- Communicating and working with young people.

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We should remember that for a lot of people in their workplace, they've forgotten how to communicate with young people other than maybe in their own families, and actually giving them some tips on how to connect with young people might really help [them ensure work experience is useful for the host organisation and young person].

Mary Curnock Cook OBE, Independent Educationalist

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¹⁴⁴ Workfinder and Cambridge Judge Business School, 2017.

One suggestion proffered during a roundtable was for schools to work with host organisations on a quid pro quo basis, offering organisations space rent-free or cheaply in return for providing work experience opportunities to pupils:

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On our doorstep we had a whole lot of micro-IT companies and new tech companies who were really struggling with their cash flow, who were paying rent for micro-spaces in the city that they couldn't afford. Why not bring them in the schools on an exchange: free rent, but they have to do some work around careers?

Dr Anne Bamford, Strategic Director for Education, Culture and Skills, the City of London Corporation

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Another advantage for employers of offering work experience is in securing a talent pool for the future. Employees of Stirling Council emphasised how organisations in Stirling have embraced work experience for this reason:

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What employers and particularly those in the digital industry are telling us is that, by the time a young person goes to university and studies for three or four years to obtain their degree, their knowledge base may be out-dated because technology has already moved on, even within that period of study. They (the employer) would rather employ someone and basically train them in a bespoke fashion so that they are familiar with products and processes and are therefore more effective within their particular sector.

Morag McLoughlan, Service Manager For Schools, Learning and Education at Stirling Council

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Supporting Educators

We wanted to make the process of finding meaningful work experience opportunities for young people as easy as possible. Therefore, we have partnered with **Workfinder**, an app-base service helping students find local work experience opportunities.


Workfinder's app is integrated into our Educator Dashboard so that you can easily track uptake and progress among your students.

If you would like to find out more about how **Workfinder** can help you support young people in finding meaningful work experience, email us at community@founders4schools.org.uk and we will take you through the process.



Workfinder connects young people with placements at great companies in just a few taps. At Workfinder, we inspire young people to find a future they'll love, to discover exciting career opportunities and explore the working world on their terms. Our mission is to inspire the next generation and create a pipeline of talent to drive the UK's most ambitious growth companies.

Find out more at www.workfinder.com



ARE YOUR STUDENTS LOOKING FOR WORK EXPERIENCE?

The Workfinder app lets them find meaningful work experience opportunities in their local area, and guides them through the application process.

Your students can:

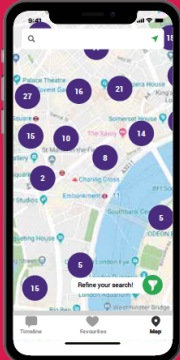
- LEARN** about different companies, industries and the roles that are available
- DO** by trying out different job roles for themselves
- GROW** by developing soft skills and improving their employability

Get Workfinder

Your students can download an iOS app, or access Workfinder using a web app on any other device.

Download on the App Store | Get it now on The Web

Find out more at: www.workfinder.com



Next Steps

- Download the **Student Briefing** on the F4S platform and hand out to all the students you would like to sign up for work experience. Visit wwwFOUNDERS4SCHOOLS.org.uk/educators/work_experience
- Ask your students to download the **Workfinder** app to their phone
- Monitor uptake and progress on your **Educator Dashboard** on the F4S platform

If you would like Founders4Schools to host a training session on Workfinder and the F4S platform, please get in touch with us at community@FOUNDERS4SCHOOLS.org.uk.

What to read more about best practice Career Education?

- Read the full report *More than a Job's Worth: Making Work Experience Fit for Purpose* and it's sister report *More than a Job's Worth: Making Career Education Age Appropriate*, both available [here](#)
- Sign up to our FutureLearn online course for career education professionals *Mapper: Navigating Digital Career Tools* [here](#)

References

1. LKMco (2019) More than a Job's Worth: Making Work Experience Fit for Purpose. Available at: https://f4s-uploads.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/documents/Making_Careers_Education_work-experience-digi_2_bBJCb6Q.pdf



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