

Work Experience for Secondary Students

Work experience, which first began in Victoria in the mid 1970s, involves placing secondary school students into short-term employment placements. The advantages of work experience programs are many and include: helping young people to understand the work environment and employers' expectations, exploring possible career options, enhancing opportunities for part-time work, increasing motivation for further studies and the addition to a student's portfolio of the employer's evaluation at the end of the work experience. The emphasis during work experience should be mainly on observation.

Work experience is generally undertaken by students in Year 9 or 10, although a number of schools do encourage students to take on extra work experience during Years 11 and 12. Parents and students should not forget that many schools have a careers counsellor or a work experience coordinator who will take students through their options and answer any questions they might have.

Work experience is covered by legislation that aims to protect both the student and the employer. The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.) states that work experience can only be undertaken during the official school year. This includes holidays at the end of Terms 1, 2 and 3, but does not include end-of-year holidays. It is also a legal requirement that there is a minimum of three employees in the workplace where a student is undergoing work experience.

For the protection of students who are younger than 15 years-of-age, the employer and supervisor of the student must undertake a criminal record check. For the further protection and safety of students, all students undertaking work experience must satisfactorily complete an occupational health and safety program before they commence their work.

There is a restriction on the actual working hours for work experience students. Students who are under 15 year-of-age are not permitted to work between the hours of 9pm to 6am, while students who are over the age of 15 are not legally allowed to work between the hours of 11pm to 6am.

Students are only permitted to undertake 40 days of work experience a year, with a maximum of 15 days per term. There are also special regulations covering students working in industries or trades where there is a higher than usual possibility of a work experience student being exposed to the risk of injury. When undertaking work experience in Victoria, students are covered under WorkCover by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (State of Victoria).

Work experience students are paid a minimum payment of \$5 per day, unless the student is working for a Commonwealth Department or a body established under a Commonwealth Act. This includes international students residing in Victoria, who are entitled to take part in the Work Experience Program.

Work experience students are contacted by the school during their placement in order to monitor their experience. Employers are also asked to give feedback on the performance of the students at the end of the placement.

Parents can play an important role in their child's work experience. Students often need assistance in deciding the occupations or industries that might be suitable for them. Parents should encourage their child to think about industries that they might consider working in. Planning well ahead of time is necessary as, due to the high demand for places, applications for some industries close one year before the scheduled placement.

Often, parents have contacts that may be useful in assisting students to get suitable work experience. It is felt that students benefit most from working in unfamiliar settings; even though parents can support their children by assisting them in organising and discussing the placement, it is preferable for students to not undertake work experience at their parents' place of work.

If the student is under 18 years-of-age, parents must give their consent and are required to sign the Work Experience Arrangement Form, which shows that they are giving permission for their child to take part in the program at the designated place of employment. If the work experience requires the child to stay away from home, parents need to provide the school with the contact details of the person who will be supervising the student during out-of-work hours.

Students are generally better prepared for and therefore benefit more from work experience if they have some ideas about the work environment and the expectations of a workplace before they commence their work experience. This is where the experiences of parents can be invaluable. By sharing personal experiences, parents can help prepare their child for their first days of work experience.

Most students enjoy sharing their work experiences and genuinely appreciate receiving advice from their parents on any situations of concern. Parents should try to encourage their child to reflect on their experience at the end of their work period. Discussing whether to undertake further work experiences is another important role for parents in supporting their children to explore the world of work.

For general information regarding work experience programs for students, please visit:

- [The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development](#)
- [The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations](#) (PDF)