

Unleashing The Potential Of Work Experience: A guide for SMEs



Work Experience
Action Group 

Acknowledgments



In 2017, UK Youth Parliament (through its Make Your Mark Campaign) asked 11-18 year olds what their priority issues were; work experience was one of the top 5 issues. Following this, the British Youth Council's Youth Select Committee led an inquiry into realising the potential of work experience, and subsequently published a report. The report recommended that guidance be developed to support businesses to provide quality placements for students. This toolkit is a response to that.

This toolkit was made by the British Youth Council's Work Experience Action Group. The Group is made up of 6 young people aged 16-25, who had a range of work experience, and a commitment to ensuring young people have access to quality work experience opportunities. The members of the Group are:

- Tolu Ayilara
- Nicole Holder
- Dominic Jones
- Max Parry
- Callum Penny
- Diana Scutelnicu

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Introduction



Who is it for?

In 2018, the British Youth Council's Youth Select Committee launched an inquiry into work experience. The Youth Select Committee heard compelling evidence which suggested Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) wanted to offer work experience placements but were not sure what quality work experience looked like, or how to go about ensuring it.

There are 5.6 million small firms in the UK, these firms account for 99.3% of all private sector businesses, as per the 2018 official government statistics. **SME's additionally make up 99.5% of businesses in every main sector industry and, are often embedded within communities.** 41% of small business employers offer work experience either as part of the recruitment process or through their community outreach, so the appetite is already there. ¹ This presents a great opportunity to equip young people with the skills they need; to provide them quality experience right where they are; and insight on how SMEs work. All of which can help young people in their life beyond education. ²

This toolkit is youth led, in that it was written by the young people in the Work Experience Action Group. With insight from the Federation of Small Businesses, the Action Group wanted this toolkit to focus on being a resource that would support SMEs to create opportunities that could be both beneficial to them, and to young people.

This resource is for SMEs who are interested in offering work experience, and want to find out what they need to consider when creating quality placements. Maybe you have taken the step of contacting a school in the community your business is in, or you know of a school and want to create opportunities? This toolkit is for you, and every SME in between.

What is work experience?

Simply put, the My World of Work website describes work experience as 'exploring the world of work first hand; the right experience should help young people develop the skills they need for the future.'³ More broadly work experience can be defined as a *temporary unpaid role, which offers young people a taster into the working conditions of a particular firm or broader career industries that can range from a simple couple of hours to several weeks.*

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) explain that experiences of the workplace are all the ways 'young people can acquire knowledge and understanding of careers options and skills via contact with employers'.⁴ It is all about bridging connections between the employer and those seeking out experience.

Ultimately, work experience is about gaining a range of experiences within the workplace. This is to help young people develop skills and make informed choices about their future. We believe that it is important that young people get to access the full range of experiences with work. It is more than just turning up to a job - it is a learning experience about the nature of work.

What is quality?

The Department for Education have suggested that the best quality work experience is “part of a structured programme of work-related activities”.⁵ We believe this looks like placements where young people are able to gain skills; leave with an understanding of that industry; and having engaged in activities that give an authentic insight into what careers in that industry look like.

Through consultation with other young people, the Work Experience Action Group developed 5 aspects that make up a quality work experience placement, for SMEs to consider. These are:

- 1 Preparation and Planning**
- 2 An Enabling and Inclusive Environment**
- 3 Skills Development and Support**
- 4 Feedback and Evaluation**
- 5 Follow-up**



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- 1 Federation of Small Businesses Report: “Small businesses Big Heart” Bringing Communities Together”, Feb 2019, p. 3
 - 2 ibid, p. 15
 - 3 <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/work-experience-0> - My world of work website [accessed 29/09/2019]
 - 4 British Youth Council - Youth Select Committee 2018, “Realising the Potential of Work Experience”, (The Careers and Enterprise Company BYC030) p.10
 - 5 BYC, Youth Select Committee Enquiry 2018, “Realising the Potential of Work Experience”, (Department of Education BYC032), p. 10

1 Preparation and Planning

Planning and preparation are key to success in development and delivery of most things, work experience is no different. Planning and preparation for work experience will help businesses know what a young person could do as part of their placement. It will also help make clear, the aims and objectives of the placement.

Clear aims and objectives are key to providing structure and setting expectations for the young person. These can be shared with the young person and be used as a tool to help them articulate what they have done at the end of their placement. Induction meetings should also be considered part of the planning. Where and what time could they happen within your calendar? These types of meetings are the perfect place to share the aims and objectives.

Planning and preparation includes a mix of the following:

- Finding out if you need to have DBS checks that cover working with children.
- The name of the lead person at the school where the young person will come from.
- Making a list of project-based tasks within the business that could benefit from support.
- Making a list of any meetings that could feed into a task the placement student could undertake.
- Creating a role description.
- Creating tangible targets for the young person to achieve through project based work.
- Drafting a timeline of a proposed agenda, noting important dates and deadlines.
- Letting the young person know where they should go on their first day, who will meet them and what they should wear.

Planning never looks the same – it varies from business to business. Do what suits you, as long as there is a plan.

Please see the following in the resource bank:

- ◇ Role description template
- ◇ Induction checklist example
- ◇ Agreement form Template

Benefits of preparation and planning:

- Planning helps save time down the line! Time is important for SMEs.
- Planning and preparation mean a young person is able to follow a scheme of work and not just end up making cups of tea.

A well-constructed plan will set the tone for the work experience and could encourage their motivation.

Here are some key questions SMEs should ask themselves during the planning and preparation stage:

- Can you provide a clear and consistent routine? What work needs to be done?
- Which projects could benefit from having an extra person working on them?
- What would be helpful to get a young person's perspective on?
- What could I/we teach a young person?
- What do I wish someone told me when I was their age, that would've helped me now?
- Are there staff and resources available for delivering work experience?
- What will feedback and evaluation look like at the end?
- Are you able to accommodate for young people with additional needs?

An Enabling and Inclusive Environment

The work environment is one of the most important aspects of any job. A good working environment can cause any person to flourish.

For the purpose of this toolkit, what is meant by a good working environment is one that is both **enabling and inclusive**:

Enabling: creates a meaningful experience for a young person which allows them to fully participate as is suitable for their age and to develop. This could include clear objectives being set, ensuring the young person has all the resources they need to complete tasks and, sharing any information on the working culture/practices.

Inclusive: making reasonable adjustments for the young person's needs, and where necessary tailoring aspects of the placement to make it appropriate to their experience.

An enabling and inclusive environment includes a mix of the following:

- Having an induction meeting that sets out the aims, objectives and expectations from both sides; and who the key people are that the young person will have contact with.
- Identify and address potential risks by completing a risk assessment.
- Ensuring the young person has everything they need to complete the tasks.
- Asking if any reasonable adjustments need to be made for the young person to 'work'.

A good working environment can foster a sense of safety and security within a placement, and this can help boost the confidence of young people.

- Information on how to access all areas required to fulfil role, and having a tour of the workplace.
- Treating the placement student like a member of the team.
- Exploring what the young person wants to learn, and looking into how you might facilitate this.
- Facilitate the young person having a better understanding of their rights within the work place.

Please see the following in the resource bank:

- ◇ Risk assessment template

Benefits of creating an enabling and inclusive environment:

- Businesses can get the best of the young person, when they feel included and valued.
- Ensuring an enabling and inclusive environment sets the standard for what they can expect/ask for when they go into the world of work.

Here are some key questions SMEs should ask themselves to help foster an enabling and inclusive environment:

- Do I have all the information I need on the young person, to help make any reasonable adjustments?
- Are there any aspects of projects I have or, of the business in general that could benefit from a young person's expertise? Use of technology? Making communication more accessible?
- What information on health and safety, work place guidelines/etiquette do I need to share with the placement student?
- What resources does the placement student need to fully participate in the business and to deliver on all of their work? (From passwords to post-it notes and everything in between)



Simplified health and safety guidance makes it clear that if organisations already employ young people, risk assessments will not need to be repeated for work experience students. Employers with fewer than five employees do not need a written risk assessment.

(UK Commission for Employment and Skills. "Not just making tea - reinventing work experience", 2014. P. 6)



3 Skills Development and Support

Skills development is an integral part of quality work experience. The right work experience placement should help young people build skills they need for the future and SMEs present the perfect opportunity for this. **There are a wide range of skills that are at use everyday to make SMEs thrive. These skills include creativity, leadership and critical thinking - which are all noted by the World Economic Forum as skills needed for 2022 and beyond.** 6 Young people can hugely benefit from the first-hand experience of working within a SME, and support during their placement can make a world of difference.

Support and skills development includes a mix of the following:

- Having a 'buddy' during their placement.
- Identifying a 'go to person' during their placement (if there is no buddy).
- Asking the young person to think about support they may need after they have received the job description.
- Have a 'check in' at a mid-way point to find out how the young person is getting on.
- Shadowing a range of roles (including the business owner) at different points in the placement, to gain a greater overview of the business.
- The student presenting on work they have done at the end of the placement.
- Allowing the student to sit in meetings and meet new people.
- Giving the young person project based work (this means they can tangibly talk about what they have done at the end).
- What opportunities can be created that allow young people to network.
- Asking the young person to think about an issue within the business and let them present potential solutions.

Please see the following in the resource bank:

- ◇ Example learning log

Benefits of skills development and support:

- SMEs can share the wealth of knowledge with young people.
- SMEs can gain a new customer/champion of the business.
- Young people understand what it takes to run/work in a SME, thus expanding their options for the future.

Here are some key questions SMEs should ask themselves regarding skills development and support work experience placements:

- What do we do inherently from the time we open to the time we close? How could we teach a young person some of those skills?
- What skills do we wish we had before we started the business? And how can we transfer those skills to a young person?
- Does anyone have the capacity to be a 'buddy' for the placement student?
- Are there any important/external/team meetings happening, the week of the placement that student can learn from?
- Is there space in the business owners' calendar to be shadowed (for an hour, half a day, a meeting or a whole day, dependent on feasibility)?
- Are there any challenges in the SME that could benefit from fresh eyes - especially a young person?

4 Feedback and Evaluation

Feedback and evaluation are essential crucial to quality work experience; and can benefit both the young person and the SME. This should take place at the end of the placement. Feedback and evaluation ensure that the young person can truly understand what they have learned during their work experience placement. Also, what they need to focus on in order to hone in on their professional and personal growth. It brings them to a position of understanding where their assets lie and allows for them to build confidence through encouragement. It also gives them something tangible to take away and work on for further opportunities.

On the reverse side of things, SMEs can also learn about how useful their work experience was for the young person and what potential changes they can adopt to boost the quality of their placements in the future. Young people can also offer new and innovative ways to make the experience even better for future students.

Feedback and evaluation includes a mix of the following:

- A general overview of work the young person has done whilst on placement.
- Reflecting on the role description and task list, from the beginning of the placement.
- A mid-way point meeting to monitor the young person's work so far.
- A 'discussion on what went well' and 'what would be even better if' * on both sides. It would be beneficial to capture notes for the duration of the placement, so you can give specific examples, **or by using the evaluation form template in the resource bank.**

*** to ensure an enabling environment, why not do this over tea/coffee as a conversation and not a formal meeting?**



Employers' liability insurance now covers work experience students, providing insurers are members of the Association of British Insurers.

(UK Commission for Employment and Skills. "Not just making tea – reinventing work experience", 2014. P.6)

Benefits of evaluation and feedback:

- Feedback from the young person can create case studies that the business can use in the future.
- Allows the business the opportunity to see how they have empowered a young person and equipped them with skills for the future.

Here are some key questions SMEs should ask themselves regarding feedback and evaluations for work experience placements:

- Can our current approach to feedback and evaluation be adapted for a young person on placement?
- Which method would be most useful for us to receive feedback?
- What questions are useful for us to get the feedback we need?
- What is the easiest way to gather information on the young person's performance throughout?

5

Follow-up

Quality work experience should end with acknowledging what the placement student has achieved, and what they have (if anything) contributed to the business. The process of making young people truly feel valued is cemented by follow ups, commendations and overall general support for the future. This should be verbal and written so the young person can use it in the future. Following-up is important because it could provide a gateway to subsequent opportunities, for both the young person and the SME. This is also a good place to let the young person know whether you are happy or not, to be used as a referee in the future.

Follow-up includes a mix of the following:

- Letter of recommendation.
- ◇ A certificate.
(please see the resource bank for a template)
- Offer to be a sound board for careers advice in the future.
- Sharing contact details of main contact should the young person need anything/have questions in the future.
- An acknowledgment of what the young person has achieved, in relation to the role description and beyond.

Benefits of following-up:

- SME is able to measure the impact the placement has had on the young person. This could be used to further impact the communities the SMEs are in potentially strengthening their links.
- Having come full circle, allows the SME to share best practice with other SMEs.
- Young people have tangible evidence of what they have done.
- SMEs can use this experience to further impact the communities they are in.

Here are some key questions SMEs should ask themselves regarding following-up on work experience placements:

- What is in our capacity to do regarding follow-up?
- What timelines are realistic for a follow-up?
- Is it best to contact the young person directly or through their school? Are there any limitations I should be aware of?

Summary



This toolkit is by no means a comprehensive guide, but has been developed in the hope that young people can be better equipped for life outside of education. We believe that SMEs are perfectly placed to get young people clued up on their future work prospects, and provide quality experiences. Written by young people, our biggest hope is that, this toolkit alleviates some of the stresses and struggles that Work Experience can bring – and becomes an enjoyable experience for young people and SMEs.





About the British Youth Council

The British Youth Council is the National Youth Council of the UK. AS a youth-led charity, we empower young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. We support young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.

We are young people - and our charity aims to help other young people, whatever their background or barriers they face, to make the world a better place for us all.

Our vision

A world in which every young person is empowered to create social and political change.

Our mission

As the national youth council of the UK, the British Youth Council brings young people together to find their voice and use it to improve the lives of young people. We work with others to amplify young people's voices to create an environment in which young people views are valued, sought and acted upon.

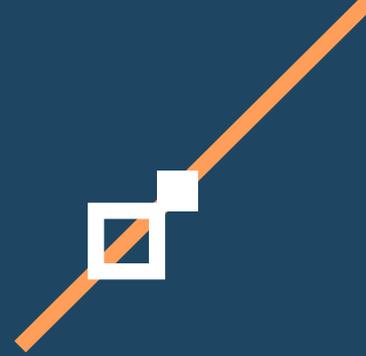
Our values

Youth led – young people are agents of change and will always be at the forefront of our work. As a youth-led charity, young people are our leadership through our governance structures. They lead and shape our work, and we support them to define their own action for change. We champion youth leadership across all sections of society, evidencing the benefits of engaging young people in decision making and delivery and supporting that to happen.

Collaborative – we actively seek to collaborate with others to make positive change happen. We seek to work with relevant partners to add value to our campaigns and activity, and to be more creative in our approach to making change happen with and for young people. And we recognise the skills, knowledge and experience of young people, volunteers, staff and partners, and strive to achieve more by maximising the opportunities that collaboration provides.

Inclusive – we respect and value diversity and act in a way that includes all. We ensure that all our activities are inclusive, recognising the needs of young people across different communities, and bring young people and partners together to learn from each other.

Resource Bank

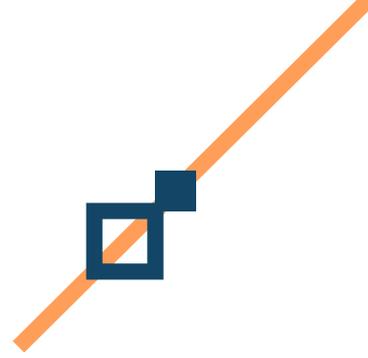


- 1** Role Description
- 2** Induction Checklist
- 3** Work Experience Agreement Form
- 4** Work Experience Risk Assessment
- 5** Learning Log
- 6** Evaluation Form
- 7** Certificate Of Work Experience



Work Experience
Action Group 

Role Description



Post:

Accountable to:

Responsible for staff: None

Responsible for budgets: None

Scope and purpose of role:

The post-holder's overall aim will be:

This role description is indicative only and does not form part of the contract of the employment of the post holder.

Key Elements of the role:

Other

Induction Checklist

Your name	
Company name	
Team member responsible for placement within placement provider	

As a new member of a team you will benefit from knowing the kinds of things illustrated in this check-list. The checklist below should be completed with the placement provider at the start of your placement.

General information about the workplace	Yes / No / N/A
Overview of the organisation structure and your role within it	
Introduction to key staff members and explanation of their roles	
Allocation of work space: desk, PC, telephone etc	
Clarification of working hours/ hours of business	
Location of toilet facilities, rest/staff room and canteen (if relevant)	
Lunch and break entitlement	
Has the organisation's <i>Health and Safety Policy</i> been explained to you and a copy provided	
Individual work plan for probation period shared, discussed and agreed with clear targets and expectations	
Overall checking-in approach shared, and schedule for reviewing progress against work plan and objectives	

Student name _____

Placement Supervisor: _____

Signed _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Date _____

Work Experience Agreement Form

Personal Details

Full Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Address _____

Email / Phone No. _____

Emergency Contact _____

Name / Phone No. _____

Education (if applies)

Name of Current institution _____

Referee Contact Details _____

Work Experience

Work experience start date: _____

Work experience end date: _____

Hours of work _____

Shift start/end times _____

- I will make sure to attend work within the hours outlined by the employer and be punctual at all times, including lunchbreaks and at the start of my work shift.
- I will familiarise myself with the policies and procedures that are in the place of the work experience site and commit to respecting them.
- I will work hard to promote the code of conduct and culture of the company.
- I will maintain a record of tasks completed during the work experience placement and log all activity including what I have learnt for evaluative purposes.
- I will be transparent at all times and communicate openly with my employer, especially if there are any concerns or adjustments to be made.
- I will try my best to fulfil all the tasks and duties given to me and ask for help if needs be.
- I will promote an environment of inclusivity, diversity and positivity.

I have read the above and pledge to comply to the terms of this agreement.

I understand that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated and could risk the termination of my work experience.

Signed _____

Date _____

Work Experience Risk Assessment

Placement Role Title _____ Assessment Date _____ Assessor: _____

Risk identified	The risks	Avoidance/reduction measures	Risk Priority low/med/high	Actions to be taken
Access to confidential information	Breach of confidentiality; data protection legislation			
Working with Chemicals	Dust, fumes and vapours which may be toxic, irritant, harmful, corrosive; chemical skin burns; injury to eyes			
Working with sharp objects	Cuts			
Machinery	Photocopiers, shredders, powered staplers, PC's, printers etc;			
Manual Handling	Pain (in back, legs etc) from handling heavy objects			
Use of display screen equipment	Neck and upper limb strains; inappropriate websites; headaches and sore eyes from work environments e.g. poor lighting, glare etc.			
Illness or injury	An existing condition worsens; young person becomes seriously ill during the placement; spilling hot drinks etc			
Risk of fire and evacuation	Smoke inhalation, burns, or effects of panic during a fire			

Signature _____

Print name _____

Date _____

Evaluation Form



This is to be completed by the young person first, and then with the employer.

	Placement Student	Employer
Time Keeping		
Enthusiasm		
Motivation		
Initiative		
Ability to learn		
Team Working		
Communication Skills		
Absence record		
Understanding of business/sector		

What has been achieved on the placement?

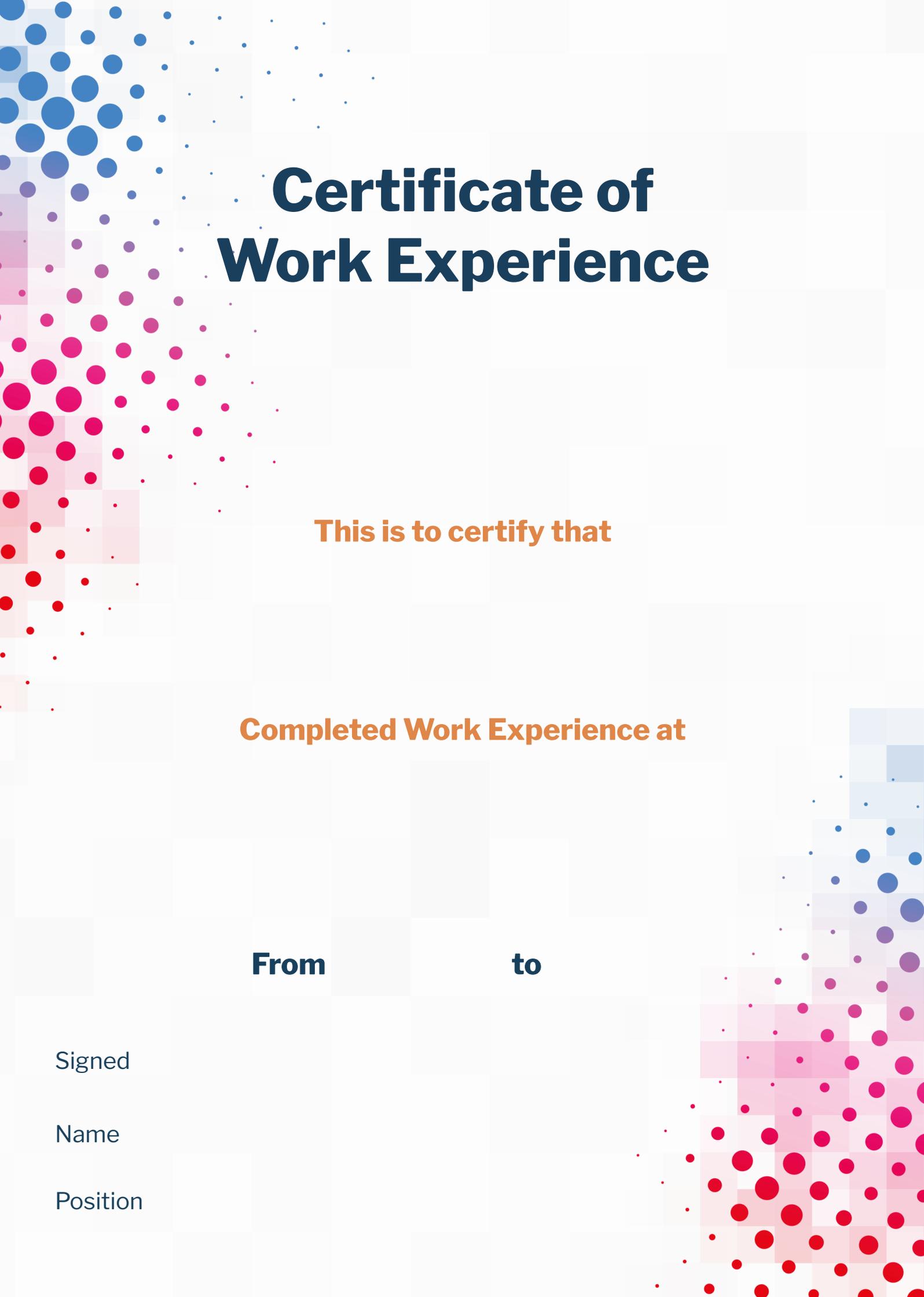
Placement Student	Employer

What went well?

Placement Student	Employer

It could have been even better if:

Placement Student	Employer



Certificate of Work Experience

This is to certify that

Completed Work Experience at

From

to

Signed

Name

Position



Work Experience
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