



**spark!**  
LONDON'S ORIGINAL  
EDUCATION BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

**Student Guide to Finding a Work Placement**

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## **Introduction**

By now you and your parent/carer will have signed the Work Placement and Data Agreement with Spark! Your school will have given you information on how to log in to the Spark! Learn About Work website.

In a few months' time you will be out on work experience, possibly experiencing the world of work for the first time. Work experience is a broad term which refers to any situation which involves a young person leaving the classroom and spending time within a place of work.

The guide aims to help you secure a quality work experience placement, which we hope will benefit both your learning and understanding of the world of work, whilst at the same time benefiting your host organisation. Sometimes, but not always, the placement will give you the opportunity to get a 'taste' of a specific career. Placements in businesses you may not be considering for a career will open your eyes to new industries and help develop your understanding of what the skills and talents most employers are seeking in new recruits.

Work experience should be a fantastic experience for you, but it only works with the valuable support of employers – so remember to thank them!

### **The benefits of work placements**

- Gain experience of the world of work and explore your interests.
- Develop the attitude and confidence workplace success demands.
- Meet new people and discover what their working lives involve.
- Get a chance to learn some new skills, including vital 'employability' skills such as communication, time management, team work, problem solving, IT, numeracy, creativity, and customer service, etc.
- Better understand areas of work you DO or DO NOT want to pursue after your studies.
- Strengthen your CV and personal statement when applying for college, university or employment.
- Secure a good reference to show potential future employers – dependent of course on a successful placement.

### **Top tips in finding your own placement**

- List what you like doing and what you want to try – use a website such as FastTomato to help
- Ask around about different jobs
- Actively search for organisations that you would like to contact
- Find contact details & research the organisation
- Start contacting people early
- Contact multiple companies
- Do not give up searching for a placement

If you spot opportunities for improving our ways of working and the support we offer you, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Spark! team on 020 8560 9900.

## Placement identification

High quality work experience placements are a powerful personal development activity.

Spark! (formerly Hounslow Education business Partnership) was established in 1980 through the foresight of local business and education leaders. In 2011-12 over 2500 students went on work experience placements brokered by Spark, ranging over a huge variety of sectors such as, hairdressing, police, sport, retail, admin and arts organisations.

Spark! supports 12+ schools in West London, and works with over 800 local companies and community groups who participate in the programme.

Placements are arranged for students who are:

- Pre 16 and taking GCSEs
- Post 16 taking A-Levels and vocational subjects
- Aged 14-19 and need special support in undertaking tailored work experience

Remember that whilst local work placements are easier to reach, you can travel out of their local area for work experience. Part of the experience is developing your confidence in travelling independently to work. Resources such as Transport for London's 'Journey Planner' ([www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk)) will help.

Before and during a work placement you will have the full support of Spark! Through resources such as this guide, we provide information on what you are expected to do and guidelines offering advice and help in the event of any problems arising during the placement.

### Deciding what job and career to explore

Think about what you enjoy doing – are there particular types of activities that challenge and motivate you to work?

What about activities you have never done before? Is there anything you have always wanted to try but never had the chance to?

Think about the place you would like to work in – is it inside or outside? Is it quiet or busy? Do you want to travel a short or long distance?

Try making a checklist of things you would like in your dream work placement. You can use this to discover new placement ideas online. Try searching online for terms like 'jobs involving IT' or 'jobs involving sociology.'

Remember that there are certain jobs you are not able to do whilst on work experience, due to health and safety limits. These include: collecting money or selling door to door; working on petrol forecourts; selling lottery tickets, alcohol or cigarettes; working in a cinema, bingo hall, night club or pub; delivering or selling alcohol unless in sealed containers; in amusement arcades or fairgrounds; modelling or in a commercial theatrical performance; collecting or sorting rubbish; working more than 3 metres off ground level; working in other over-18 environments such as tattoo or piercing studios; delivering fuel or oils; or in nail or tanning salons.

Talk to people. Ask your peers, parents or carers, and teachers. Not only might they tell you what certain jobs are like, but they might know people who are doing those jobs right now.

We would also recommend you use online resources such as FastTomato and CareerBox to consider the range of careers that you might enjoy. You can find a links to these and other sites in the 'Resources' section of the Spark! Learn About Work website.



Focusing your efforts on your dream career is good, but try not to limit yourself. There might be jobs out there you have never considered or heard of. Work experience is a chance to explore.

You can either find a placement: (a) on your own or (b) through Spark. We strongly encourage you to identify an 'Own found' placement. This is an important part of your personal development and will equip you with the same skills you will need to find a job in future.

### **Finding your own placement**

**Start early** – Once you have an idea of what it is that you want to do, you can start the search for an actual placement. This needs to be done early – some organisations will have work experience programmes with deadlines for applying. The earlier you begin your research the stronger your chances of securing a placement.

**Look at a range of sectors** – If you have one organisation in mind, trying researching their competitors. Who else does the same thing? Is this organisation part of a wider "market"? You might want to apply for a placement with a drinks manufacturer, but by considering the whole food and drinks market you could find other organisations that provide a similar service and would give you just as interesting a placement. Equally look across the public, private and non-profit sectors.

**Look at a range of organisations offering the same job role** – You may be particularly interested in the idea of becoming the Finance Director for Coca Cola, but remember finance is a function that all companies will have in some form or other. You could start with a junior finance role in any company and then seek to move at a later date to Coca Cola if that is your aspiration!

**Find out which businesses are already offering placements** – Check out your school noticeboard and/or the Learn About Work website to see which businesses are already offering placements through Spark. Unless you have a personal contact at a target company it is probably better to select a Spark! found placement with the business through the Learn About Work website.

**Making new contacts** – Go back to your existing network of contacts: peers, parents or carers, and teachers. They might know people who are doing the jobs you are interested in right now and could make an initial introduction.

If that route does not work, find out the contact details of organisations that you want to apply to. Use the internet (ensuring you are following your school's safe internet usage policy) and local or national newspapers to identify target businesses. Then get the views of your parents or carers and teachers on the appropriateness of who you plan to approach before making contact.

You have the option of phoning, writing, emailing or visiting the company or organisation in person. However you decide to get in touch, make sure you check that the company or organisation looks credible or trustworthy by asking your parents/carers or teachers before making initial contact.

**Cover letter and Curriculum Vitae (CV)** – Remember to set your correspondence out appropriately, even if you are using email. You want to appear professional at all times. We provide a template letter on Spark! Learn About Work.

Also prepare a good CV to include with your letter. This should list all your skills and attributes. We recommend you use the National Careers Service website CV Builder to do this. Ask friends, family and teachers to review your cover letter and CV.

Alongside the CV you need to send the employer an 'Own found work placement' form to complete. This is also available for download from Spark! Learn About Work.

**Large organisations** – If you are applying for work experience at a larger organisation your contact may be someone in the Human Resources department or a Recruitment Manager. Therefore try to find a 'careers' or 'recruitment' contact. They can often be found in a 'careers', 'contact us' or 'about us' section on the organisation's website.

Equally effective, sometimes more so, is using the general enquiries telephone lines/ switchboard to call through to the appropriate department or person, if you have identified a name.

**Small organisations** – If you are approaching a small organisation, visiting in person can be a good idea. Find a quiet time to visit the owner or manager. Tell them that you will soon be undertaking work experience, and would like a placement with them.

**Follow-up** – If you have been in touch with someone via email or letter, and they have not responded in 10 working days/ 2 weeks, do not be afraid to phone them to follow up. Sometimes people are busy, meaning they do not always respond as fast as they would like to; reminding them of your correspondence and interest in the placement is never a bad thing.

**Don't give up!** Don't be disheartened if you do not find something straight away – not all companies have the resources to have a work experience student, nor will every company be a good fit for you. Even some of the most successful people in the world will have been turned out numerous times! Furthermore Spark! have good placements available on Learn About Work...

### **Securing a placement through Spark!**

If you do not find your own placement, on a date agreed with your school or college, Spark! will make a range of placements available on the Learn About Work website.

The Spark! Learn About Work website has a database of quality assured work placement providers from the non-profit, public and private sectors.

For more information on the website, please download the 'Student Guide to Learn About Work'.

### **Health & Safety, Insurance and Letter of Agreement**

For new 'own found' placements, Spark! will:

- Check your host employer is following Health and Safety legislation – students on work experience should be thought of as employees for the purposes of Health and Safety.
- Check your host employer has up-to-date Employers' Liability insurance, as well as Motor Vehicle insurance if the young person will be travelling in a vehicle used for business purposes, during working hours.
- Ask your host employer to sign a Letter of Agreement setting the employer and Spark's responsibilities. This is signed once your host employer has passed Spark's health and safety risk assessment and the location is considered suitable to host a young person on placement.

## **Next steps**

Once you have confirmed your placement with an employer, hand in the completed 'Own found work placement' form to your school Work Experience Co-ordinator who will pass this on to Spark! Leaving it to the last minute will mean you may not be successful in securing the placement you want.

Spark! has to visit and check out all employers to ensure that they will keep you safe and that you are appropriately insured on the placement.

Once your placement has been confirmed you and your parents will receive a confirmation pack that includes your work experience job description and advice on how to get the most out of your placement.

Show the confirmation pack and job description to your parent or carer and discuss your placement with them.









**Formerly Hounslow Education Business Partnership, Spark!  
was founded in 1980 and has been working with young  
people, schools and businesses creating new opportunities  
and igniting careers for over thirty years.**

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Spark! is the trading name of Hounslow Education Business Charity