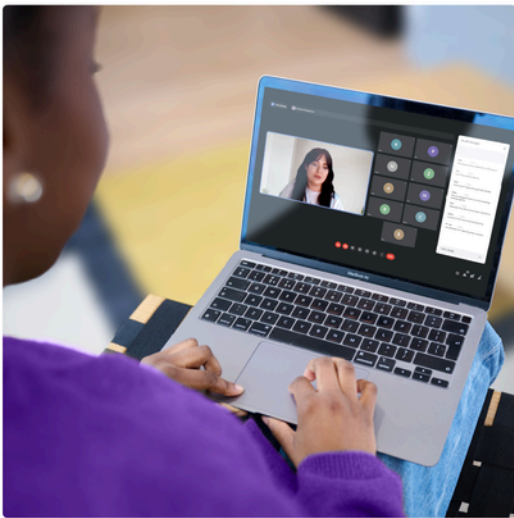


FUTURES FOR ALL



Work Experience Quality Guide

—
A framework for employers

futuresforall.org

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Planning a work experience for the first time?

This document can be used on its own or alongside our [WEX in a Box](#) guide. This toolkit includes practical checklists, example activities, and best practice guidance covering all the essentials of running a high-quality work experience programme.

If you're looking for more hands-on support or guidance, see page 5 for more details of the services we provide and how to contact us.



Futures For All: Quality Assurance Framework

Our framework recommends three core indicators of high-quality work experience an employer should meet to deliver excellent practice. These three stages are broken down further into nine key themes.

Envision (Before the placement)

- ▶ This stage focuses on planning and preparation to maximise engagement and ensure that work experience is appropriately designed for young people.

Implement (During the placement)

- ▶ How the programme is delivered, ensuring flexibility, engagement and alignment with everyone's aims.

Reflect (After the placement)

- ▶ A chance to consolidate experiences and build confidence for future development. Impact is measured for follow-up action.

Clear Aims

Aims of work experience are defined to underpin employer talent engagement strategy and to inform a clear alignment across the programme.

Engagement & Outreach

Employers connect with stakeholders to establish relationships, recruit young people and engage effectively in the run-up to the placement.

Safe, Accessible & Inclusive Practice

Safe practice is fundamental, while maintaining accessibility and inclusivity.

Opportunities for Reflection

Reflection enables young people to embed learning and consider future applications.

Recognition & Supporting Next Steps

Recognition and feedback celebrates progress and fosters professional skills.

Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

Feedback from young people benefits reflection and programme improvement.

Learning & Developmental Outcomes

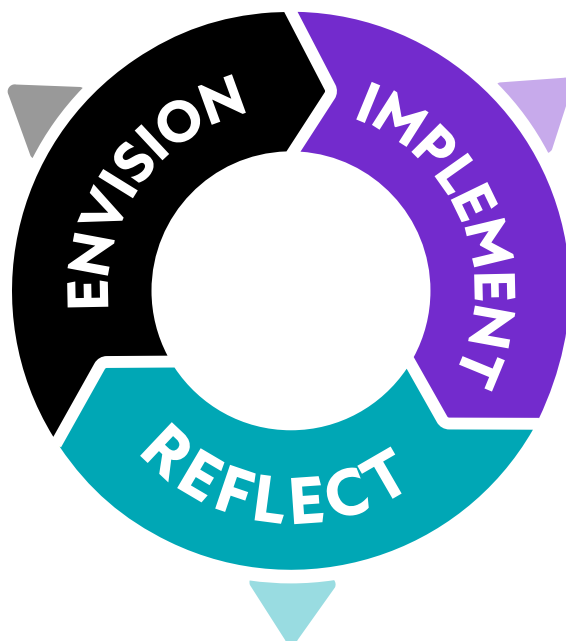
Defining learning outcomes guides content design and helps young people articulate acquired skills.

Programme Structure

The structure of the programme – the content, length, frequency and sequencing – is designed to meet aims and learning outcomes, while allowing for flexibility.

Meaningful Interactions

Frequent, meaningful interactions are critical.



Futures For All: Quality Assurance Framework



Why use this framework?

Young people deserve meaningful work experiences that build confidence, skills, and insight into the world of work. As an employer, you play a vital role in shaping those experiences.

This framework, based on our report [What Makes High-Quality Work Experience?](#), is here to help you plan, deliver, and reflect on placements that are inclusive, engaging, and impactful.

It outlines what "good" looks like across key areas, with practical tips and clear guidance to support you, whether it's your first time offering work experience or you're refining an established programme.



Using this framework effectively

You can use this framework to:

- **Plan and improve your offer:** Whether you're designing a new placement or refining an existing one, the framework acts as a guide for each element of a high-quality experience.
- **Reflect on what's working well:** Use the *Core* and *Excellence* descriptors to identify strengths in your current offer and areas to celebrate.
- **Identify areas for further development:** The framework helps you spot where improvements could be made to better support young people or align more closely with best practice.
- **Refer back during delivery:** It's not just a planning tool - the framework can be used throughout the placement to guide delivery, check progress, and ensure alignment with your original goals.

Futures For All: Quality Assurance Framework

Need help to deliver Excellence?

Flexible support is available for your placement

While this framework can be used independently or with light-touch support, Futures For All offer a range of services to help employers deliver high-quality, inclusive placements. These services include content creation, hosting services, technical assistance, and event coordination. These enhanced services can help you work towards excellence standards.

If you are already partnered with us and would like to know more, please speak to your Account Manager. If you are not currently working with us but would like to find out more, please contact employers@futuresforall.org.



Understanding our Core and Excellence standards

Our Quality Assurance Framework outlines two levels of practice: *Core* and *Excellence*.

Core standards represent the minimum expected to ensure a safe, structured and purposeful work experience. They reflect what every placement should include as a baseline for quality.

Excellence standards go further, showcasing best practice where placements are inclusive, thoughtfully designed and aligned with progression and impact.

By understanding both levels, you can benchmark your current offer and identify opportunities to enhance the experience for young people.



Reflect, Score, Improve

At Futures For All, we use a scoring matrix to assess placements across the three stages and nine key theme. Each theme is rated on a 5-point scale, across the *Core* and *Excellence* standards from Not Met to Outstanding, helping us recognise best practice and support improvement when working with our partners.

If you're an employer using this framework independently, you can also use the scoring system to reflect on your own delivery. Where would your placement currently land? This quick self-check can help you identify strengths and spot areas to improve, whether or not you're working with us directly.

Framework Overview

The table below provides a simplified version of the framework to support quick reference. A more detailed breakdown for each theme, including examples and expanded descriptors, follows in the full framework.

	Standard	Core	Excellence
Envision	Clear Aims	Define the purpose of the placement; ensure activities reflect real work environments; set clear goals for what young people will gain.	Showcase a range of careers or entry pathways; support community or outreach goals; target underrepresented groups.
	Engagement & Outreach	Use clear, accessible language in recruitment materials; share key information (e.g. schedule, expectations) in advance.	Target outreach to underrepresented groups; offer virtual tours, school visits, or parent sessions; provide alternative application routes to support inclusion.
	Safe, Accessible & Inclusive Practice	Complete safeguarding and risk assessments; share basic safety info and practical details; consider costs, travel, and basic access needs.	Tailor support to individual needs (e.g. flexible hours, assistive tech); involve families or educators where helpful; co-design adjustments where possible.
Implement	Learning & Developmental Outcomes	Share clear learning outcomes from the start; align tasks and activities with those outcomes.	Link outcomes to real sector pathways or curriculum; use discussion, or debriefs to reinforce learning.
	Programme Structure	Provide a clear timetable and code of conduct; include induction, learning activities, and closure.	Build in time for feedback and reflection; use real-world challenges and flexible formats; support diverse needs through differentiated content.
	Meaningful Interaction	Facilitate contact between young people and professionals (e.g. Q&A, talks); support peer interaction through group tasks.	Include staff from different roles/levels; use buddy systems or structured group activities; provide a named contact for support.

Reflect	Opportunities For Reflection	Build in time for reflection (written, verbal, or group); encourage young people to identify skills gained.	Link reflections to career goals or personal development; help young people record reflections they can use (e.g. in CVs).
	Recognition & Supporting Next Steps	Give all participants a certificate of completion; provide feedback on what they achieved.	Offer personalised feedback linked to their strengths; employers meaningfully support a young person's next steps.
	Evaluation & Continuous Improvement	Use surveys to gather feedback from participants; reflect on what worked and what could improve.	Gather feedback from mentors, educators, and other stakeholders; use feedback to refine your offer and track impact over time.



Connect your placement to wider careers frameworks

Aligning the design of your placement to established benchmarks and frameworks will support schools, colleges and independent training providers with their CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance) offer and meeting the Government's "Youth Guarantee".

Alongside our own Quality Assurance Framework, depending on where you are hosting placements, you may want to consider:

- **Gatsby Benchmarks**
- **Career Development Institute**
- **The Careers and Enterprise Company**
- **DYW Scotland**
- **Careers Wales**

Certification for High-Quality Work Experience

In the 2026/27 academic year, we're launching a certification programme so employers can have great work experience formally recognised. It's built on the same Quality Assurance Framework in this guide, so everything you've been working towards here already puts you in a strong position.

Certification is awarded placement by placement, so you can build up recognition as you go rather than needing your whole offer signed off at once. Want to be one of the first to know when this opens? **Get in touch at national.standard@futuresforall.org.**



Stage One: Envision

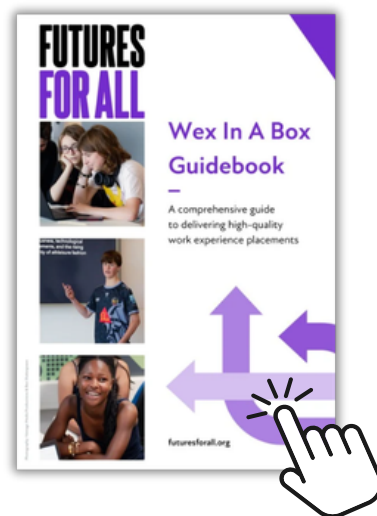
This stage focuses on planning and preparation to maximise engagement and ensure that work experience is appropriately designed for young people.



Supplementary Information

This framework will guide you through delivering a placement, but if you need more detailed information on any of the following topics, check out **pages 12–28** of our WEX in a Box guide:

- Selecting a placement format
- Setting aims
- Application processes
- Writing an advert
- Safeguarding
- Additional documents for Northern Ireland
- Risk assessments
- Insurance



Need help setting up your placement?

We can support you with content design, writing accessible adverts, the full application process, and ensuring your programme meets quality standards from the start. Talk to us about flexible support (employers@futuresforall.org)

Clear Aims

Setting clear aims for your placement

Aims of work experience should guide the programme from the outset, shaping its design, delivery, and intended outcomes. Clear, purposeful aims define the value of the placement for both the employer and young people. They inform the structure of the programme and connect directly to learning outcomes, ensuring a coherent, meaningful experience that supports progression and real-world readiness.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Setting aims	Establish clear aims for the work experience, ensuring it provides meaningful and impactful opportunities; define the programme's purpose by clearly outlining its role within your organisation and the benefits it provides for young people. As a minimum, the core aims of a work experience should include the following: • Replicate aspects of the real working world – The experience includes workplace-based tasks, professional interactions, and expectations that reflect real working environments, ensuring participants complete at least one project or work-based challenge. There should be clear evidence of planning and activity that demonstrates progress towards meeting the aims of the work experience programme.	At Excellence level, a work experience should go beyond the Core aim by meeting at least one of the additional aims listed below. • Demystify the diversity of careers in an industry/sector – Provide insight into a range of roles, ensuring participants engage with at least three different career paths or job functions. • Illustrate pathways into careers – Help participants understand at least two entry routes into the sector (e.g. apprenticeships, graduate schemes, vocational training), with clear next steps. • Support the local community – Contribute to community initiatives or partnerships (e.g. schools, charities, local businesses) offering tangible impact. • Connect with young people who may not otherwise access the industry/sector – Use targeted outreach to engage those less likely to access the sector (e.g. via social mobility organisations, bursaries, or mentoring). • Raise brand awareness and build pipeline of future workforce – Increase awareness of your organisation and sector, helping participants understand culture and career options, with at least one activity to engage them as potential future employees (e.g. talent spotting or alumni networks). The strongest employers also check in on whether these aims are actually being met, for example by asking young people for feedback or reviewing evaluation data, and use this to keep refining why they offer work experience over time.

Engagement & Outreach

Reaching and preparing young people

Effective placements start with thoughtful engagement. Employers should prioritise inclusive outreach, clear communications, and early relationship-building with participants, schools, and families. This helps ensure young people feel confident, prepared, and informed before the placement begins.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Exploring and applying	Adverts are clear, accessible, and written in non-technical language. They are designed to encourage applications and help participants gain experience of real-world recruitment processes. Adverts also highlight development opportunities, such as key skills that will be developed.	The employer has a targeted and strategic plan for who they are trying to reach, with the explicit aim of ensuring opportunities are equitable and reach young people who might not otherwise access them. This might include running engagement sessions with specific schools or communities, using a structured application process designed to be open and fair, or working with partners to actively recruit from underrepresented groups. The employer regularly reviews the approach with partners to ensure it remains effective and fair.
Introductory sessions, pre-placements and stakeholder engagement	Participants receive comprehensive joining instructions and a clear programme overview at least two weeks in advance. This includes preparation tips, expectations, time commitments, and available support to ensure they feel confident and informed.	Participants are further supported through at least one form of pre-placement engagement. This might include a venue pre-visit, pre-recorded virtual tour, online introductory session, drop-in, school visit, pre-placement activity, or another form of pre-placement interaction. These touchpoints help build clarity, confidence, and preparedness ahead of the placement. The format will vary depending on the nature of the placement and what is viable for both the employer and participants.

Safe, Accessible & Inclusive Practice

Creating a supportive and accessible environment

Placements must prioritise safeguarding, access, and inclusion. Meeting the core legal and practical requirements is essential - but going further means tailoring support to individual needs and removing barriers so all participants can engage fully, safely, and with confidence.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Safety	Safeguarding and health & safety policies are in place before the placement. Risk assessments are completed using sector guidance (e.g. NSPCC), and inductions cover key safety information relevant to young people. Data protection and media permissions are also considered and handled in line with organisational policies.	Employers take a proactive approach to safety and data protection by working with educators and parents/carers to gather individual needs in advance where needed. Risk assessments and permissions (including GDPR and media) are tailored, clearly explained to young people, and revisited if needed.
Inclusivity and accessibility	Barriers to participation - such as cost or additional needs - are considered early. Employers clearly communicate what support is available (e.g. lunch, travel, or accessibility adjustments), and basic adjustments are made where needed. Practical details, including accessibility and travel information, are shared in a timely manner once places are confirmed, helping to reassure applicants and support inclusive participation.	Employers provide tailored, proactive support to meet a wide range of needs. This may include funding (e.g. travel, lunch, uniform), flexible placement formats (remote, hybrid, shorter days), and support for specific needs (e.g. ramps, assistive tech). Where relevant, programmes are co-designed with input from educators to ensure accessibility is fully embedded from the outset. Employers regularly reviews what is working, using feedback from young people and partners to improve accessibility over time.

Stage Two: Implement

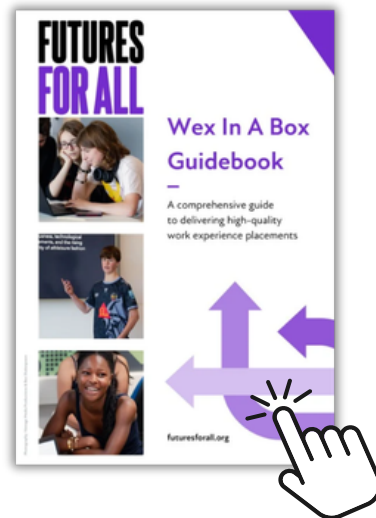
How the programme is delivered, ensuring flexibility, engagement and alignment with everyone's aims.



Supplementary Information

This framework will guide you through delivering a placement, but if you need more detailed information on any of the following topics, check out **pages 29-41** of our WEX in a Box guide:

- Setting learning outcomes
- Skills Builder Activities
- Choosing activities
- Example tasks
- Example timetables
- Staff engagement



Need help with activity planning or hosting?

We can support content creation, timetable structuring, interactive session design, and live delivery through hosting or compering. Whether your placement is virtual, hybrid or in-person, we can help you create engaging, inclusive experiences for young people. Talk to us about flexible support (employers@futuresforall.org)

Learning & Developmental Outcomes

Focusing on skills and progression

Learning outcomes define what young people should gain from their experience and should be clearly communicated. They translate programme aims into goals, helping structure sessions and enabling participants to track their own progress and skill development.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Clarity and communication of learning outcomes	Learning outcomes are clearly defined and communicated to participants at the start of the placement. They are focused on skills or knowledge young people will develop. Whilst learning outcomes are distinct from programme aims, there is a clear thread between them, ensuring alignment from planning through to delivery.	There is evidence that the intended learning and developmental outcomes are actually being achieved. For example, young people being able to articulate what they have gained, or impact data showing skills or confidence have developed. The employer actively reviews this evidence and uses it to refine the outcomes over time, ensuring they stay relevant and meaningful as the programme evolves.
Structure and alignment to outcomes	Activities are planned to support the delivery of learning outcomes. Outcomes are revisited during the placement through check-ins, reflective activities, or discussions to track progress.	The programme is intentionally structured around achieving learning outcomes. Tasks and sessions are sequenced to build skills progressively. Participants engage in structured reflection (e.g. journals, guided reviews) to articulate progress towards learning outcomes.
Career relevance and progression	Learning outcomes are linked to transferable skills and future career paths. Participants understand how their experience supports their employability.	Employers explicitly link learning outcomes to sector-specific pathways, future employment/training options or school curriculum. Debriefs, discussions, or mentoring are used to connect learning to real-world roles and opportunities.

Programme Structure

Designing a clear and engaging placement

A well-structured placement builds engagement and supports progression. Programmes should follow a clear schedule and incorporate induction, learning, reflection, and closure. Flexibility is key to meeting diverse needs while maintaining purpose and momentum.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Content	Participants engage in structured activities that introduce at least two entry routes into the sector. Participants also interact directly with professionals through Q&As, mentoring, or networking opportunities. They take part in practical tasks that mirror workplace activities, such as presentations, group projects, or job shadowing. Labour market information (LMI) is shared to help young people understand skills demand and future career options.	Participants contribute to meaningful, hands-on activities that offer a sense of purpose and impact, such as employer-set challenges or tasks aligned with real roles. These may not be 'live' projects, but should reflect the workplace and offer valuable experience. All activities are designed to be accessible, age-appropriate, and inclusive, with differentiation built in to support diverse needs. Employers have a contingency plan (e.g. alternative tasks or support options) and build in dedicated time for feedback and reflection.
Length, frequency and sequencing	Participants receive a clear timetable, code of conduct, and pre-placement information (e.g. surveys or expectations) to ensure clarity. Programmes are delivered at a suitable pace for young people, with clearly communicated schedules. Sessions are sequenced with an induction (e.g. health & safety, introductions), followed by learning activities, and concluding with reflection or celebration.	Programmes are designed flexibly to maintain momentum and engagement. Sessions are varied in length, with time built in for feedback, review, and personalised support. The strongest programmes explicitly design this structure around the learning and development outcomes, building skills and confidence progressively over time. They also use feedback from young people on specific content and activities to actively review and strengthen the programme between cohorts.

Meaningful Interactions

Creating meaningful interactions

High-quality placements create opportunities for meaningful interaction. Participants should connect regularly with professionals and peers, gaining insights into the workplace and practising communication and collaboration skills in real-world settings.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Employer– young person interactions	Young people have opportunities to interact with workplace staff throughout the placement, and activities are designed to facilitate conversation, questions, and participation so that young people take an active role and feel supported. This might include Q&A sessions with staff, opportunities to ask questions during tasks, or structured discussions built into the programme. Employers consider how to communicate effectively with young people, using accessible, age-appropriate language and providing clear guidance.	The employer creates a diverse range of meaningful interaction opportunities throughout the placement, giving young people the chance to engage with a mix of people, roles, or functions within the organisation, and/or to collaborate with each other. This might include group project work presented back to staff, tours led by apprentices or early careers employees, breakout sessions, or problem-solving tasks that require young people to work together and engage directly with the organisation.
Young person– young person interactions	Participants work collaboratively through group tasks or team-based activities that encourage communication, collaboration, and informal conversation.	Peer interaction is intentionally structured - such as through buddy systems, rotating group work, or breakout teams - to encourage participants to connect with new peers and practise workplace-style teamwork. Programmes include activities to build a sense of community, helping young people feel confident engaging with others they may not already know.

Stage Three:

Reflect

A chance to consolidate experiences and build confidence for future development. Impact is measured for follow-up action.



Supplementary Information

This framework will guide you through delivering a placement, but if you need more detailed information on any of the following topics, check out **pages 42-48** of our WEX in a Box guide:

- Prompts and tools for reflection
- Best practice for recognition
- Considerations for impact and feedback



Need help evaluating impact or considering next steps?

We can survey participants, design meaningful reflection activities, send certificates, and support you in reviewing each phase of your placement. We also offer tailored impact reports to help you understand what worked well and where to improve. Talk to us about flexible support (employers@futuresforall.org)

Opportunities for Reflection

Helping young people learn from experience

Once a placement is underway, young people need time and support to make sense of what they are doing and why it matters. This theme focuses on how employers help young people reflect throughout the work experience, so they can recognise what they have learned, build confidence in their strengths, and understand how the experience links to future choices.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Opportunities for Reflection	Participants complete regular written or verbal reflections (e.g. journals, self-assessment forms, group discussions) to articulate skills gained and areas for improvement. Reflection is embedded at key points (e.g. after tasks, daily debriefs, at the end of the placement) to help young people consolidate meaningful experiences. Employers provide time and prompts for reflection throughout the placement.	Young people have an opportunity not just to reflect on their experience but to apply it, translating what they have learned into something tangible. This might include acting on employer feedback to improve a piece of work or re-work a presentation during the placement, updating a CV or personal statement to capture what they have gained, or identifying and articulating their next steps in education, training, or work. Young people are supported to record reflections in digital or paper formats, making them accessible for future use.

Recognition & Supporting Next Steps

Celebrating young people's contributions

This theme focuses on employers recognising young people's efforts and helping them understand their progress, then supporting them to take their next steps. This means giving young people clear acknowledgement of their participation and contribution and then providing meaningful follow-up support to help young people build on what they've gained.

Theme	Core	Excellence
Recognition & Supporting Next Steps	All participants are awarded a certificate of completion to formally acknowledge their engagement and achievements. The end of the placement is used as a moment to reinforce learning and provide a sense of closure and accomplishment.	Feedback is meaningful, developmental, and linked to a young person's individual contribution. This may be delivered during the placement or in follow-up communications. End-of-programme events, such as presentations or networking sessions, allow young people to share their learning, celebrate successes, and engage with professionals. Following the placement, the strongest programmes provide meaningful follow-up support to help young people build on what they've gained. This might include signposting further opportunities within the organisation, directing young people to relevant external resources, events or networks, or sharing information about pathways into the industry or sector.

Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

Gathering feedback to improve

Once the placement has been designed and delivered, the final step is to understand what worked well and what could be strengthened for next time. This standard focuses on how employers gather and use feedback to improve the quality of their work experience over time

Theme	Core	Excellence
Evaluation & Continuous Improvement	The employer collects feedback from young people and reviews it after the placement, using it to inform future delivery. This might include a post-placement survey, a feedback form completed at the end of the experience, or a review conversation with a partner organisation. Both quantitative and qualitative data is collected from young people to capture rich, meaningful insight. Surveys are distributed at key points in the delivery cycle to ensure timely, relevant data collection.	There is clear evidence that the employer actively reviews feedback and makes changes where required, or — where feedback is consistently positive — can demonstrate that the programme has been reviewed and found to be working well. The employer gathers insight at multiple points and uses this to maintain and continuously improve the quality of the experience over time. This might include feedback gathered before, during, and after the placement, evidence of how the programme has evolved in response to what young people and staff have shared, or documentation showing how a stable and high-performing programme has been reviewed and validated over time.

Additional Information

Post-Work Experience Pathways

While our framework focuses on the core stages of planning (Envision), delivery (Implement) and reflection (Reflect), we also encourage employers to consider what happens after a placement ends. This is not a required part of our Quality Assurance Framework, but an optional area to explore if you have the capacity.

The end of a placement can be the beginning of a young person's next steps. Even small gestures - such as a thank-you message, signposting to further opportunities, or sharing careers resources - can help reinforce learning and support continued progression.

For employers with early careers teams or structured programmes, there may be opportunities to stay in touch safely and appropriately through alumni communications or mentoring. Any ongoing engagement must follow GDPR and safeguarding best practice.

Follow-up period	Example	Description
Short-term (0-3 months post-placement)	Personalised follow-ups	Send a thank-you email with feedback and a reference; Host a remote Q&A or networking session with recent work experience participants
	Exclusive alumni sessions	
Medium-term (3-12 months post placement)	Mentorship opportunities	Offer a structured mentoring programme or informal check-ins with company ambassadors; Provide free access to industry-relevant courses, webinars or remote learning platforms; Share details of apprenticeships, internships, or graduate roles that alumni can apply for
	Skill building resources	
	Early career pathways	
Long-term (1 year +)	Alumni talent pool	Create a talent database to offer priority consideration for future roles; Encourage previous participants to apply for internships, apprenticeships or shadowing opportunities
	Workplace return invitations	

Need support? If you'd like help designing or delivering post-placement engagement that is GDPR-compliant, we can provide this as part of our costed support offer. Speak to our team to find out more (employers@futuresforall.org)