

Work placement guide for students

This checklist is designed to help students prepare for and get the most out of their work placement experience. Work placements give you an opportunity to put into practice the theory you're learning in the classroom, and to demonstrate your abilities to a potential future employer. In fact, placements are sometimes called 'long interviews' because employers often use them to assess whether students would make suitable employees. A work placement can also help you decide what areas of work you enjoy, which can help with future career and study choices.

You'll get the most out of your placement if you prepare well, put in your best effort and learn all you can while you're there.

Before the work placement

Do you have the right knowledge and skills?

It's up to your training provider to make sure you have the knowledge and skills needed for a work placement. You should have learned some theory and had the chance to practise your skills in a simulated workplace before your placement. Your training provider will assess whether you have the knowledge and skills you need, such as:

- your awareness of workplace health and safety requirements
- manual handling skills—you may still be developing these, but you should be able to work at a level that is safe for yourself and others
- infection control procedures
- communication skills – your training provider should feel confident that you have sufficient English language skills to perform in a work setting.

Have you met mandatory requirements for the workplace?

Before you're allowed into the workplace, you'll need to meet some mandatory requirements. You'll need to have all vaccinations mandated by the government and you'll also need to apply for pre-employment criminal history checks, which include one or more of the following:

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- National Police Check—to work in aged care
- NDIS Worker Screening Check—to work for registered National Disability Insurance Scheme providers
- Working with Children Check—to work for registered National Disability Insurance Scheme providers, in a risk assessed role and who work with children.

If you're under 18, parents/guardians may have to provide consent for some of these applications.

Talk to your training provider if you haven't been told about these checks or the costs involved. Costs may have been included in your student fees or they could be additional.

If you're studying on a student visa, check whether you need to provide any extra information before you can attend workplaces.

Check whether you need to hold a current driver's license for your work placement.

Do you understand your workplace obligations?

Your training provider should make you aware of your obligations while on a work placement. These include:

- medical fitness—you need to be healthy while on work placement. Turning up unwell could put vulnerable clients at risk.
- presenting to work in a fit state—you can't present to work under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including certain prescription medications)
- behaving in a professional manner—you need to comply with codes of conduct and behave professionally in the workplace
- strictly adhering to the site's workplace health and safety policies



- understanding the importance of documentation—you need to fill in documents as required by the employer and by laws and accrediting bodies
- complying with safe and reasonable directions—you need to follow all safe and reasonable directions and let staff know if you're being asked to do something that's beyond your capability
- not attempting tasks beyond your current level of learning—it's great to show initiative, but don't take on work tasks that are beyond your scope of practice
- keeping information confidential, including any information about the employer, clients, visitors, and other staff
- dealing with challenging behaviour—you should have strategies for dealing with clients' challenging behaviour and for de-escalating issues
- understanding duty of care obligations and mandatory reporting of suspected abuse—make sure you know what your obligations are and the procedure for raising concerns
- taking care not to misuse or damage property.

If you're unclear about any of your legal or ethical obligations, or how to work safely, make sure you ask your trainer for advice.

Do you have a workplace learning plan?

Your trainer should involve you in developing a workplace learning plan for your placement that includes a learning objective, the learning experiences and work tasks you'll be exposed to and how your performance will be assessed. This plan will help your training provider match you to a suitable service provider for work placement.

- Check that you fully understand your workplace learning plan, what's expected of you, the role of the supervisor and how the training provider will conduct the assessment.

Do you understand the selection process?

Your training provider is likely to send relevant information about you and your work placement learning plan to an employer for their consideration. You may be asked to attend an interview.

At an interview, the employer will want to know that:

- you're interested in learning about their work
- you have the maturity and aptitude needed to work in your selected area
- you'll cope with the complexities and challenges of a placement
- you're able to take the lead in your own learning
- you have good spoken and written communication skills.

It's a good idea to prepare for the interview and to think about how you'll demonstrate that you're suited to a placement with the organisation. Think of some questions to ask the employer. For example, you could ask for their perspective on your learning plan objectives or ask questions about the organisation.

If you're currently employed by a service provider and want to do your work placement with them, you can ask your training provider if that's possible.

Do you have a Work Placement Agreement?

Before your placement, you'll be required to sign a Work Placement Agreement that sets out the terms and conditions of the placement. Check you understand the work placement agreement and that you can comply with its requirements. If you're not sure about any aspect of the agreement, talk to your training provider.

- Check you've been given a copy of the signed agreement and any supporting documents.

Note that the employer will also sign the agreement and be given relevant information about you, such as copies of your criminal history checks and confirmation of your vaccination status.



Are you prepared for Day 1 of your placement?

The employer or your training provider should give you all the information you need to start your work placement, including instructions for the first day, such as when to arrive, where to go, who will meet you, what to wear and who to contact if you have a valid reason for not attending.

- Contact your trainer if you don't have this information.

It's normal to feel a bit nervous about your placement. It can help to do some preparation beforehand. For example, you could:

- revise relevant course material
- talk to other students about their placement experiences
- do some research about the employer by browsing their website
- find out what support is available during your work placement.

Starting your placement

On the first day, you should be given a thorough orientation and workplace induction, with information about the organisation, a tour of the site and facility and an introduction to key staff members. There'll be lots of information to take in. It's a good idea to take notes for future reference, including names of people you're introduced to and any questions you want to follow up about.

Below is a checklist of things you should find out on your first day.

Workplace policies and procedures

It's important to know about the following workplace policies and procedures and where to find them if you need to refer to them during the placement. These include:

- workplace health and safety and emergency procedures
- confidentiality and privacy policies
- conflict of interest policies
- codes of practice
- bullying, harassment, and discrimination policies

- expectations of professional behaviour, such as protocols for observing clients and codes of conduct
- guidelines for working with particular client groups, such as clients from CALD backgrounds
- how to identify and report concerns about resident/client welfare
- protocols for report writing and guidelines for recording information
- relevant legal obligations of workers
- dress/uniform standards (where applicable)
- where to find policy and procedures manuals.

Information about the organisation and staff

- map of the workplace
- site facilities, such as carparks, shower and change facilities, lunchrooms, lockers and other amenities
- facilities nearby, such as food outlets, banks, gyms and post office
- staff lists with roles and delegations
- descriptions of roles in the organisation
- information about communication procedures, for example, using computers, internet and email, phone messages, in/out communication board.



Student information

On your first day, you should be introduced to your buddy, supervisor and other key staff. You should also be told who you can go to if you have any questions or concerns. You should be given practical information about your placement, such as when you can take mealtimes and breaks, and what tasks you'll be given.

- Check that by the end of the first day, you have:
- met your supervisor, buddy, and other key staff
- been given an orientation of the site and the organisation
- been given (or know you will be given) an induction
- IT access, an access card, personal storage facilities and access to equipment you need, such as personal protective equipment
- a roster, role description and a clear understanding of your daily tasks and work expectations.

If you don't have all of these, speak to your buddy or supervisor.

During the placement

After the first week

By the end of the first week, you should feel confident that:

- you're clear about the work tasks and learning opportunities you'll be given and that they meet your placement learning objectives
- you're getting enough day-to-day guidance and feedback from your buddy or other staff
- you're doing tasks that are within your skill level and that you can do safely
- you have access to the equipment you need, including equipment to do your assessment such as IT, and patient and organisational files
- your supervisor and RTO assessor are scheduled to meet with you regularly
- your RTO is checking in to see how you're settling into the placement
- you know how to raise any concerns you may have about the placement or about the safety of residents/clients.
- Talk to your supervisor if you're not confident about any of these aspects of your placement.

Meetings with your supervisor

The role of your workplace supervisor is to oversee your placement and meet with you regularly to:

- confirm you're being given suitable work that aligns with your workplace learning plan
- check that you're able to handle the work you're being given and that work practices align with your training
- make sure you have access to the learning experiences, equipment and documents you need
- make sure you're receiving constructive feedback and guidance
- complete sign-offs and other relevant documents
- review your written work
- help to resolve any issues that come up.

Your supervisor should give you constructive feedback that is:

- aligned with your learning goals
- focused on observed behaviours
- positive and encouraging
- based on facts and specific (not generalised)
- documented.
- They should also follow up and check how you're going in addressing feedback.

While the supervisor will collect evidence about your performance to give to the RTO, it's not their job to formally assess your performance. That will be done by the RTO assessor.

You'll get the most out of meetings with your supervisor if you come prepared. Be ready to reflect on your practice and to discuss how you've addressed any previous feedback. Have written work and required documents with you and write down any questions you have for the supervisor. Raise any issues you might be having.



What if things go wrong?

Working in the aged care and disability support sectors can be very rewarding but can also present personal challenges and expose you to some confronting, distressing and demanding situations. If a particularly difficult incident occurs during your placement, your employer should offer you a chance to debrief with someone, within 12 to 48 hours of the incident. A debrief is a formal, structured reflection about the incident and actions taken, designed to give you a safe environment to openly express your feelings. The intention is to help you positively process incidences and reflect on what could have been done differently.

Some of the challenges of a work placement will come from interactions with other workers or clients/residents. During your placement you're expected to interact in a mature and professional way and to keep smaller issues in perspective. However, if you have significant concerns about how you're being treated by a staff member or resident/client, their families or visitors, you should raise this with your supervisor. If the concern persists, you should notify your training provider.

Most issues will be able to be resolved on-site quickly with the help of your trainer or workplace supervisor. If that's not the case, the work placement agreement sets out a formal dispute resolution process, which can be used as a last resort. If you end up in a dispute with someone during your placement, remember that you should not make any disparaging remarks about the organisation or its staff, residents, and clients. This includes on social media.

After the placement

Below is a list of things that should happen at the end of or after your placement.

- You may want to thank residents/clients and their families with whom you've had regular contact, for their contribution to your learning.
 - If you enjoyed your placement and want to be considered for future work opportunities, let your supervisor know.
 - There may be aspects of your placement that you haven't enjoyed. If you want to give professional and constructive feedback to the service provider, use formal channels (not social media) such as a survey or a confidential email to the service provider and your training provider.
- Complete all relevant forms before you leave, including feedback forms, and hand back any equipment or documentation that belongs to the service provider.
 - Your supervisor should complete any outstanding sign-offs or documentation. Talk to your training provider if you don't have these within a reasonable amount of time.
 - Formally thank the staff that have helped you during your placement. This can be as simple as an email or a cup of coffee. If someone's been especially supportive, you might want to email their supervisor to let them know.

