

# Developing speaking and listening skills on work experience: guidance for employers

Work experience provides young people with real experiences of the workplace and the opportunity to test their motivation for a particular career. It also provides a rich opportunity to practise and develop employability skills, including those of speaking and listening. As an employer, you have a vital role in helping young people to learn the importance of these skills by providing opportunities for them to practise and develop them as part of their work experience programme.

This guidance aims to help you plan work experience in ways that support students to develop their speaking and listening skills. Careful planning can maximise students' learning and ensure they develop these key communication skills.

## Preparing for the placement

Ensure that everyone who will work with any student knows that development of speaking and listening skills is one reason why the placement is taking place. It is important that both managers and supervisors know about the skills and are able to show how they are important at work.

Consider tasks you can set that will enable the student to practise speaking and listening. The student's teacher or local work experience organiser can provide advice.

Examples of tasks offering speaking and listening skills' development include:

- having an induction and being asked to say what they've understood
- listening to instructions from a supervisor
- talking on the telephone and taking messages
- asking questions and listening to a co-worker or manager
- attending meetings
- taking part in a team discussion
- listening and talking to customers or clients
- interviewing workers
- making a presentation to an individual or group
- talking one-to-one with a work colleague
- work shadowing an employee
- discussing the day's work with co-worker or supervisor

## During the placement

In addition to providing tasks, you can encourage managers and supervisors to **ask questions** that encourage the student to speak and help to maximise their learning on the placement.

By asking the right questions, you can help them *reflect, understand* and *apply* their learning.

### *Reflection*

Helping students to reflect on their experiences at work involves asking them to describe what happened.

Here are some examples:

- What did you do today?
- What skills did you practise today?
- Who did you speak to today?
- When did you have to listen carefully to instructions?
- Describe your induction to the workplace.
- What do you find most interesting/useful/important/boring/difficult about being here?
- Who did you enjoy working with?
- What were the highs and lows of your placement?
- What key incidents happened during your time here?
- Give me a list of any health and safety signs you've seen?
- How did you get on with your work colleagues?
- How did the reality match your expectations?

### *Understanding*

Questions that help students understand what they have learned include asking them to analyse, interpret and explain their experiences.

Here are some examples:

- What did you learn about working in the kind of work environment you experienced here?
- What did you learn about health and safety?
- What did you conclude about your readiness to join the workforce?
- Which personal skills or qualities do you need to work here?
- What did you learn about the importance of listening skills?
- What did your supervisor and work colleagues try to put across to you?
- What have you learnt about being a good team player at work?
- What makes a good employee and a good employer?
- What did you learn about how to talk to customers?
- What makes for good technique when talking on the telephone?

### *Applying*

You can help students to apply what they've learnt while they are on the placement. For example, if a student has an opportunity to speak to a customer at reception, they can reflect on that experience, consider how they can improve the way they spoke and apply that learning with another customer. It is also helpful for students to consider how they might apply their learning in the future in education and work.

Questions that help students think how they might apply what they've learnt on work experience include:

- What will you do differently the next time you are listening to instructions?
- What are you going to do to further develop your communication skills?
- How are you going to try to change as a result of your work experience?
- What would you include in a do's and don'ts checklist for students going on work experience?

### **After the placement**

Students really value the input of employers, both during a work placement and also afterwards. There are several ways in which you may be able to help students after their placement. For example, you could attend the school or college and help with a debriefing session, in which you explain the importance of speaking and listening skills at work. You may offer to be in the audience at school when students speak about their work placements. You may also be able to run a training workshop on speaking and listening skills, or take part in mock interviews.