

Staff Handbook Section  
G15

Work Experience at the  
V&A

A guide for managers  
and students



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# Guide to work experience at the V&A

## Introduction

1. The following guide sets out the V&A's approach to managing work experience placements and is intended to be of benefit to managers offering placements within their teams. It covers both arrangements where the individual is undertaking work for the benefit of the Museum and "work shadowing" where the individual does not perform any work for the benefit of the Museum. It also covers unpaid student placements which form a requirement of a course of study undertaken at an educational institution.
2. The Museum encourages work experience placements and acknowledges the benefits that a work experience student can bring to the Museum, such as enthusiasm, and extra pair of hands to help to complete projects and improved ties with the local community. Similarly, a work experience student benefits from their placement with the Museum by gaining valuable career experience and enhancing their CV.
3. As voluntary workers, work experience students do not have a contract of employment or contract to perform work or provide services. The work experience agreement is binding in honour only and does not imply an employment relationship.

## **Arranging a work experience placement**

4. Museum departments will be responsible for organising work placements with schools, colleges and universities.
5. Managers will know which schools, colleges and universities have students who require work placements and may choose to contact these institutions about available placements to inform them when the work placements will be advertised on the V&A's career website.
6. Managers must contact the Human Resources department to ensure that the work placement is advertised on the Museum's career's website <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/j/jobs>
7. All applications for work experience will be channelled through the Museum's online recruitment portal, where applicants are required to complete a Work Experience Form and upload a Curriculum Vitae and Applicant's Statement.
8. Applications for unpaid student placements which form a requirement of a course of study may be sent directly to the department responsible where there is an agreement in place with a relevant education institution. In some arrangements, the educational institution may be responsible for the selection of the student.
9. Departments must ensure there is fair and equal access to placements. This may include accommodating requests for flexibly worked or part-time placements.

### **Types of placement**

10. Placements can be either:
  - A work shadowing placement of up to two week's duration, where the student observes the work undertaken by the Museum's employees but does not perform any work for the benefit of the Museum, except for doing some work for illustrative or learning purposes; or
  - A work experience placement where the student is expected to perform some work or provide some assistance to the organisation or to its employees.
11. Work experience placements for students under the age of 18 will last not longer than two weeks. The hours of school children who are of compulsory school age will be restricted to 25 hours per week, working five hours per day with one hour for lunch each day.
12. Work experience placements for students aged 18 and over may continue for up to 12 weeks.
13. Unpaid student placements that form a requirement of a course of study may extend over the course of an academic year.

### **How placements are offered**

14. The HR department will liaise with any departments that wish to offer work experience opportunities, to coordinate a list of available work experience placements that will be advertised on the Career's website. As a guide:
  - February half term placements are advertised in November.
  - Easter holiday placements are advertised in February.
  - Summer half term placements are advertised in March/April.
  - Summer holiday placements are advertised in April/May.
  - October half term placements are advertised in August.
  - Christmas and New Year holiday placements are advertised in November.
15. It will be the responsibility of each department to identify the likely commencement date and duration of each work experience placement and to notify the applicant. The duration of each work experience placement will be a matter for the department, save that no single placement will be for more than two weeks or 12 weeks in duration, dependent on the age of the individual, with the exception of placements that form a requirement of postgraduate study which may extend over the course of an academic year. Managers are encouraged to accommodate flexibly worked placements where this will enable an unpaid work experience student to undertake other paid work, so opening up access to opportunities to a diverse pool of people.
16. Once selected, the manager should contact the successful student with details of the offer, a Work Experience Agreement and pack of Starter Forms which should be signed and returned to the department. The pack of starter forms which must be completed includes:
  - Emergency Contact form.
  - Self Disclosure form and Application for Temporary Pass.
  - Guidance notes for Basic Disclosure for Security Vetting.
17. The department should retain the originals and copies of the Work Experience Agreement and other relevant forms should be sent to the

HR Department in order that the student's details can be recorded on the HR information system.

#### Visa requirements

18. The V&A is unable to provide sponsorship for visas for the purposes of volunteering and work experience. If you have a passport from a non EEA country before you apply for a work placement or an unpaid student placement you must:
  - check with the British Embassy in your country regarding visa and entry requirements (even unpaid or voluntary work is regarded as working in the UK).
  - check online at the UK Border Agency at:  
<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/> that your information is correct and up to date.
  - it is your responsibility to make all subsequent arrangements regarding work or study visas.
19. EEA or Swiss Nationals have the right to work in the UK and do not need a visa.

#### Induction

20. The department will arrange for an induction of the work experience student on the first day of the placement, during which he/she will be given essential information about the workplace. This will include the relevant health and safety procedures, such as the procedure relating to fire safety, and other practical information such as the facilities, canteen, etc

#### Health and safety

21. The department must ensure that the work experience student has the same basic training on matters of health and safety as a Museum employee.
22. The department must carry out a risk assessment on every new work experience placement, followed up by an individual assessment for anyone with particular needs.

#### Tasks

23. The supervisor should ensure that the work experience student is given work that is commensurate with their skills and abilities. The work may cover a range of tasks and may be in one department or across different departments. Should there be insufficient work available the supervisor will make reasonable efforts to find the work experience person suitable alternative work within the Museum by liaising with other line managers.

#### Supervision and support

24. The department will be responsible for supervising students on work experience, and each student will have a named supervisor responsible for overseeing the placement, giving feedback, discussing progress and providing support. Where a student does work for more than one department, the person supervising will be the relevant line manager for that department.

25. Unless there is sensitive material to be discussed, where possible the student should be included in staff meetings as an opportunity to learn more about the department and Museum and to feel a part of the office environment.
26. It is important for students to feel appreciated and departments and supervisors should give them regular, appropriate thanks and acknowledgement.

#### **Feedback and reference**

27. A final evaluation and debriefing discussion should be conducted at the conclusion of the work experience placement. Students may be requested to give feedback regarding their experiences in an exit interview.
28. On completion of the placement, departments should, if requested, provide students with a reference letter detailing the work and/or projects they have undertaken, the time frame, and the skills and experience acquired.

#### **Behaviour, disputes and complaints**

29. Work experience students are expected to be courteous and respectful to staff and other students during their placement.
30. The Museum's disciplinary, grievance and capability procedures do not apply to work experience students.
31. It is the intention that work experience opportunities are enjoyable and rewarding to all parties. Any problems that may arise on either side should be resolved through informal discussion. Supervisors and other Museum staff should observe the basic principles of fairness in dealing with any issues of capability or conduct that may arise, pointing out any shortcomings in performance and giving opportunity for improvement.
32. Where, in the opinion of the relevant line manager, the capability or conduct issues are serious, advice on the matter should be sought from the HR department.
33. If the issues prove to be irreconcilable, either side has the option to terminate the arrangement with immediate effect.
34. The V&A reserves the right to terminate a placement immediately should the student be guilty of gross misconduct or any negligence resulting in loss or damage to the Museum.

#### **Confidentiality**

35. The Museum regards personal data as confidential in accordance with its Data Protection policy. Work experience students are expected to treat any information relating to the Museum, its membership and operations, to which they may have access both during and after the placement as confidential.

## Insurance

36. Work experience students carrying out their assigned tasks within the Museum premises are subject to the same arrangements with regard to insurance as Museum employees.

## Copyright

37. Work experience students will be asked to donate to the V&A the copyright to any original works they are requested to produce whilst undertaking their voluntary placement.

## Work experience students under the age of 18

38. Departments should consider the following if they are to offer a work experience placement to an individual under the age of 18:

- Young people should not be left unattended;
- It is safer, if possible, for young volunteers and work experience participants to be supervised by two or more adults;
- A risk assessment should be carried out to assess if the opportunity is suitable for a young person. Detailed health and safety advice relating to this group of students is set out [here](#)
- Parental/guardian consent is required for volunteers under the age of 16.

39. Staff supervising a work placement student should:

- Complete a Risk Assessment of the work placement outlining: the length of the placement; the type of activity the student will be undertaking; where they will be performing their duties; who they will be working with; if they will be working solely with one member of staff in a secluded area of the building for an extended period of time; and whether enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) vetting is required for any member of staff.
- If the student/pupil is aged 14 to 15, and the placement runs for 4 days or more within a 30 day period, the member of staff acting as supervisor should have an enhanced DBS check which can be organised through the HR Department.
- Ensure the department have a contact number for the student's parents/carers and for the member of staff at the school who is responsible for coordinating the placement.
- Provide the student with an induction to the site, outline any important security and safety procedures, and ensure that the student is comfortable with the proposed arrangements
- Ensure that the student has had adequate time to discuss the proposed plans with their college, school, parent or guardian as appropriate
- Brief their team on their responsibilities and involvement with the student and remind them of best practice (see below).

40. Staff working alongside, or spending time alone with a work placement student, should:

- Ensure that another staff member knows the location and the proposed activity.
- Ensure that the door is left ajar or that there is a clear view into the room/exhibit through a window.
- If travelling alone in a vehicle with a student ensure that another member of staff knows where they are going, what they are intending to do and the estimated duration of the journey.
- Be a good role model and display consistently high standards of behaviour and professionalism.

- Recognise individual's contributions and give positive, constructive feedback.
- Remember that someone else might misinterpret their words or actions, no matter how well intentioned.
- Remember that work experience students should be treated with the same respect as any other colleague in the work place.

41. Staff should never:

- Leave the student alone in a secluded space for an extended period of time.
- Use a personal electronic device (e.g. camera 'phone) to take photographs that include images of the student.
- Give out their personal contact details (e.g. mobile 'phone number, social network/email address) to the student or reply to a request to be a 'friend' through social media.
- Give lifts in their car to students or walk/escort them home.
- Take students to their home.
- Use actions or language that may cause the student to lose self-esteem or confidence.
- Allow allegations made by a student against you or another member of staff to go unrecorded or not acted upon.

42. The following health and safety advice should be followed for work experience students under the age of 18:

- The overarching rule is that young people under 18 years old must not be allowed to do work which:
  - cannot be adapted to meet any physical or mental limitations they may have;
  - exposes them to substances which are toxic or cause cancer;
  - exposes them to radiation;
  - involves extreme heat, noise or vibration.
- Young people who are over the minimum school leaving age (MSLA) can do this work under very special circumstances, which are where:
  - the work is necessary for their training;
  - the work is properly supervised by a competent person;
  - the risks are reduced to the lowest level, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Children below the MSLA must never do work involving these risks whether they are employed or receiving training such as work experience.