

## WORK EXPERIENCE

If you have not already had a part-time job, work experience may be the first time you visit a workplace and learn about employer expectations and the world of work.

The most important thing to learn is that you are an individual. You may enjoy doing the same things as your friends, but as you think about your future, it's important to remember that you and your friends have different abilities, strengths, weaknesses, passions and family backgrounds. You need to find what suits you best and what gives you the best chance for success and being happy.

So how do you find out what suits you? Some of your friends might know what they want to do, but it's okay if you don't know – even discovering what you don't want to do is a step in the right direction.

Choosing a career is not something that will just magically happen. No-one else can choose a career for you. You have to make it happen for yourself.

Have you ever asked yourself or thought about the following questions:

- There are too many career choices – how do I decide?
- How did other people work out what they wanted to do after school?
- If I don't know what I want to do now, how am I ever going to work it out?
- Who is going to help me start my career journey?
- How have other people discovered the career of their dreams?
- Can work really be fun?

These are just a few questions that may have started to pop into your mind when you think about what you are going to do when you leave school. It doesn't matter if you know exactly what you want to do or if you have absolutely no idea, every student will ask themselves similar questions at some point in their final years at school.

Your work experience employer will have planned some tasks for you to do. They may not be what you expected and you may not like the work, but the activities will hopefully assist you to make better informed career, course and pathways decisions.

## Benefits and expectations of work experience

Work experience should give you:

- an understanding of the work environment and what employers expect of their workers
- an opportunity to explore possible career options
- increased self-understanding, maturity, independence and self-confidence
- increased motivation to continue study and/or undertake further training
- a better understanding of how the school curriculum can help prepare young people for work
- the opportunity to include the employer's work experience evaluation in future job and course applications
- opportunities to develop work-related competencies and acquire skills
- the chance to 'try out' a workplace.<sup>1</sup>

Your work experience employer will expect you to:

- be punctual (demonstrating self-management and planning)
- be well-presented (demonstrating self-management)
- listen and pay attention (demonstrating communication skills)
- participate in particular activities, possibly as part of a team (demonstrating initiative, communication and teamwork)
- enjoy the activity and learn.

## Learning from work experience

If the work experience placement isn't what you wanted but is the only one available, or isn't what you expected, then there are still things you can learn from the experience:

- What activities did you enjoy?
- What activities were you good at? What did you find easy?
- What activities didn't you enjoy? Why?
- Did you meet anyone whose job you would like to do?
- Did you identify any strengths that you have? What are they?
- What did you learn about employer expectations?
- What training might you need to do?
- Would you like to work in the industry or job you experienced or for that employer? Why?

You change as you grow and develop and have additional experiences. Your knowledge, skills, interests, even your values and personality, can change. Because everything changes, your way of looking at yourself and at the world around you changes. You cannot expect that the decisions you make now will be appropriate throughout your life. You need to be flexible and willing to adapt to new circumstances.