What makes for an effective work experience placement? **Dorothy Lepkowska** looks at the findings of recent research into overcoming common barriers to placements and innovative approaches.

The active involvement of employers in preparing young people prior to sending them out on work placements enhances the whole experience for maximum effect.

A recently published report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), entitled *Innovative Approaches and Overcoming Barriers in Delivering 16-19 Study Programmes*, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), examines work experience.

Effective and valuable work placement experiences, where these form an integral and fundamental part of study programmes, are explored. In every case, the schools and colleges have developed distinctive features that meet the needs of students, as well as employers.

The report found that schools and colleges that offer the best provision for work-related activities are proactive in their response to the needs of local employers and show a willingness to establish relationships with leading firms. They have also developed structured programmes of work experience, enterprise and/or work placement activities.

One institution doing this effectively was Birmingham Metropolitan College, where every student is engaged in a World of Work programme, comprising both work experience and activities to help boost young people’s employability skills.

What makes work experience effective?

The best work experience, the NFER report said, is tailored to the needs of students and employers, and is backed up with dedicated staff or teams of staff who develop and monitor the programme across the institution to ensure the provision on offer.

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Effective regulation and monitoring of work experience was also found to be vital, as was the involvement of young people in real pieces of work or projects that were valued and used by employers, and reflected current workplace demands.

Further information

- A top-tips document for senior leaders in schools and colleges, *How to Provide Meaningful Experience of the World in Work for Young People as Part of 16 to 19 Study Programme*, can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01/DFIA01_home.cfm
- The NFER report, with full details of the case studies, can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA02/DFIA02_home.cfm
- A set of key statements defining a research-engaged school
- A downloadable chart and report of your results including suggested next steps
- Links to resources (from NFER and elsewhere) to help with your school improvement plan

To access the tool visit www.nfer.ac.uk/selfrevievtool