



**TORMEAD ASPIRE
WORK EXPERIENCE
PROGRAMME**

A Guide to Finding Work Experience

TORMEAD CAREERS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A Guide to Finding Work Experience

The Aspire Work Experience Programme

In Activities Week at the end of June 2023, you will head out to an employer's premises for two days (Year 12) or three days (Year 11) of work experience. This is a fantastic opportunity to explore a potential career of interest, gain an insight into a professional working environment, and acquire crucial skills and experience for your CV and personal statement.

Some university courses such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, physiotherapy and law, for example, expect to see work experience undertaken to back up your claims and ambitions to study and work in that area. If you are interested in degree apprenticeships, then work experience will boost your application here too. Courses and careers in performing arts, fine art and design will also want to see evidence of your passion for the area, which can be demonstrated by gaining experience in a related field.

If you are unsure what you would like to do after school, this is a great opportunity to try something new and explore your options. Speak to our Careers Advisor, Mrs Thie, to identify potential options which might suit you.

Employers look for a range of skills, which you will have already been developing at school through your extra-curricular activities, as well as your studies. During a work experience placement, you can use and build upon these skills which will help you develop your own 'personal brand' - i.e. what you have to offer an employer. Some of the skills you will need to utilise and develop further are:

- **Communication skills** – in various forms such as written, oral and aural. Business communication will be different to communicating with your peers. How are your public speaking skills? Do you enjoy this sought-after skill or is it a work in progress? Have you dealt with customers before? What about tricky ones?

- **Working with others (a.k.a. teamwork)** - What is your role within a team, how do you contribute and make sure others' contributions are noticed and valued? Can you delegate, lead and motivate?
- **Problem solving** – how do you approach issues that arise or problems that need to be solved in the workplace? Can you keep a calm head and work methodically to find a solution? Creative thinking is a welcome partner to problem solving.
- **Analytical skills** – can be used to break down a problem and find a solution. Are you a detail orientated person or do you see the bigger picture? Do you prefer working with numbers or in a more qualitative manner?
- **Resilience** – how do you cope with rejection, failure or setbacks? Do you let it get you down or do you learn from it, get back up and try again? Are you open to feedback and do you use it to improve?

Work experience can bring a whole host of benefits including improving your confidence and ability to work with others, applying what you've learnt in school, learning something about yourself, and better understanding what you want and don't want to do as a career.

How do I find my own work experience placement?

Mrs Thie will offer a range of support in the form of one-to-one appointments, small group drop-in advice sessions, CVs and cover letter checks, a general database of work experience opportunities and advice via email. However, finding your own placement is the expectation and starting early will maximise your chances of sourcing the best opportunity for you. Here is a step-by-step guide to assist you:

STEP 1 – Identifying an opportunity

Consider your interests

Do you have any career interests, long term goals or skills you would like to develop? Perhaps you've always been interested in working in heritage (museums etc.). What about the process of marketing a product and

maximising its chances of success? Is your passion sport, fashion, making TikTok videos or vlogs? How about sustainability or charity work? Maybe you are a budding lawyer, doctor, vet or physiotherapist.

If you don't know what you're interested in, consider your strengths. Are you good with numbers or do you prefer writing? Do you enjoy liaising with people or would you prefer to work behind the scenes getting on with a piece of work or projects, perhaps in an office or a more creative environment such as backstage in a theatre? What about caring for animals or helping people?

Consider the practicalities

Do you prefer being on your feet to sitting down all day or would a combination of the two be ideal? What about the environment – maybe a smart, suited-and-booted corporate environment where meeting tight deadlines and working with demanding clients appeals? Or perhaps a more relaxed environment with flexible hours and a community focus is more your thing. If you're still unsure then do a little research on local businesses, pick a sector and give it a go.

Consider your network

Your network is all the people you know who may know other people who can help you locate an opportunity. Speak to your family and friends and ask them to ask around. There may be more opportunities much closer to home than you realise. These 'warm' contacts are more likely to make the effort to help you because either they know you, know someone who knows you or you have something in common such as school or your local sports club.

Consider the local area

Contacting a company out of the blue – a 'cold' contact – is another viable way of locating opportunities. There's a little more work involved with this method but Google is your friend. A quick search for 'marketing companies central Guildford' uncovered 18 firms all within walking distance of Tormead, all potential placement providers. Remember to research each company thoroughly and reference this research in your cover letter to let them know why you are genuinely interested in working with them.

STEP 2 – Making contact

Your CV and cover letter

Alongside your research, you will need to produce a winning CV and cover letter that shows off your skills and convinces an employer to create space for you for two/three days. For tips on how to do this effectively, see our **CV and Cover Letter Guide**, attend a drop-in lunchtime advice session and book a one-to-one check with Mrs Thie (once you have reached final draft stage).

A named contact

Ideally you want to address your letter and email to a named contact. This is to maximise the chances of it being read and positive action being taken. If you are contacting a company you have identified via research, look for the HR person, the head of the department you are interested in or the Director, if it is a small company. Their website may also have a 'Careers' section where you might find helpful contact details. You could ring Reception and ask who to send a work experience request to. Remember that when writing your letter or email, 'Dear Sir/Madam' ends with 'Yours faithfully' and 'Dear named person' ends with 'Yours sincerely'.

If you contact a company but don't hear back after two weeks, send them another email or give them a call. It is likely to have dropped down the to do list. However, a proactive prompt will often elicit a positive response as it demonstrates your motivation and initiative.

STEP 3 – Preparing for a call or interview

It is a big commitment taking on a work experience student. By requesting to see or speak with you, the employer is already considering going ahead with it. Think about what the employer might want to find out before they make their final decision:

- Why should they offer you a placement? What sort of person are you? Enthusiastic, willing, able to work with initiative and independently, hopefully!
- What are the benefits to them? What skills could you offer? Think of your IT skills, social media skills and research skills.

- What are your strengths and weaknesses? What are you good at and what areas might you need more support in?
- What do you know about the company and sector of work? What research have you done, are you genuinely interested in what they do and what do you know already?
- Have you successfully completed a project before? Provide examples, including the size and scope of project, who else was involved, timescales and outcomes.
- Have you dealt with difficult clients/customers/team-mates before? Working in a company can be challenging at times.

Research your journey in the days before, arrive a little early on the day and dress smartly and appropriately. Be positive and friendly to everyone from the moment you enter the premises. Feel prepared by practising interview questions beforehand with family, friends and Mrs Thie.

STEP 4 – What to ask when offered a role

When you receive a call or email offering you work experience, always reply positively and enthusiastically if you want to accept. If for whatever reason you need to turn the offer down, be grateful, polite and express interest in being in touch again in the future.

If this information is not covered in interview or the offer call or email, you want to find out:

- Start and finish times
- Dress code
- Who you will be reporting to

Either before you start or on your first day, make sure you know what is expected of you during the placement, i.e. the objectives:

- What work are they giving you?
- When do they want you do complete it by?
- If you have questions, who should you ask?
- Who will be giving you feedback at the end of the placement?

Think about what you want to get out of the placement. If an opportunity is not immediately offered which you would like to experience, for example sitting in on a meeting with a client, don't be shy about asking if it is possible. It demonstrates initiative, interest and commitment. And the worst they can say is no!

Make sure you take a pen and pad with you and write notes to make sure you don't forget tasks, names of colleagues and other important information, such as what time lunch is!

STEP 5 – What to do next to secure your placement

To ensure your placement goes ahead, you need to upload the placement details on Unifrog. Click on the 'Placements' tile on your dashboard in Unifrog to access the form you are required to fill in. Enter the information and click complete. The employer will now be sent a form they have to fill in, with instructions on how to supply proof of insurance, risk assessment and safeguarding requirements. If the employer doesn't complete this form, then your placement cannot go ahead. Remember businesses are very busy so they need as much notice as possible. The deadline is therefore **30 April 2023** for uploading your placement onto Unifrog.

STEP 6 – Before, during and after your placement

You will need to complete the Placements Journal, which Mrs Thie will provide. It usefully reminds you what details you need to find out before you start. You will need to think about and capture what you hope to get out of your placement, what you do and who you meet on your first day. Ideally you need to have a careers information interview with two colleagues to learn about what they do. The final part involves reflecting on your experience and what you have gained from it. This is an important part of the process and will need to be submitted after your placement.

Final words

Mrs Thie is here to support you at every step so please email **ftie@tormeadschool.org.uk** to book a one-to-one appointment or come to a drop-in session for advice and guidance. We hope you enjoy this opportunity!



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