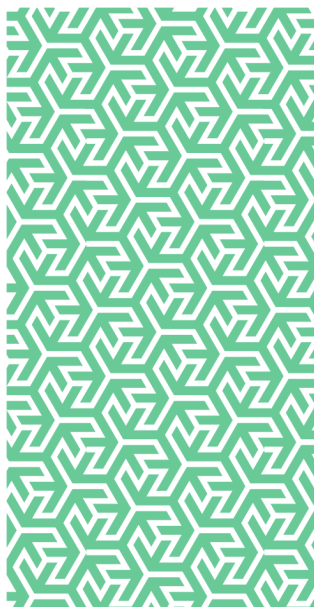


rmp

## Risk control

Children and Young  
People within a Higher  
Education Workplace



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# Children and Young People within a Higher Education workplace

## Overview

The development and promotion of work experience and apprenticeship programmes across Higher Education Institutions increases the probability of children and young people being placed within dynamic workplace environments.

Schemes such as the Apprenticeship Levy have encouraged institutions to increase the integration of young people.

Some institutions within the United Kingdom are working with people as young as 14 years of age.

These programmes undoubtedly provide exciting opportunities for young people to learn about the invaluable work that is undertaken by Higher Education Institutions and encourage them to consider a rewarding career path in these environments.

When inviting young people into the workplace, either for work experience or apprenticeship programmes, institutions need to carefully consider the health, safety, and wellbeing of the young people for the duration of their stay.

This guidance note seeks to set out some of the main risk management factors that institutions must consider when inviting young people into the workplace. These factors include:

- Health and safety – the law and managing the risk
- Safeguarding of vulnerable groups
- Insurance requirements

For the purposes of this guide, we are adopting the following definitions

- **Young person** – anyone under the age of 18
- **Child:** anyone who has not yet reached the official minimum school leaving age. (Pupils will reach the minimum school age in the school year in which they turn 16).

## Health and Safety

Under health and safety law, every employer must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all their employees, irrespective of age<sup>1</sup>. As part of this, there are certain considerations that need to be made for young people.

The term 'so far as reasonably practicable' means that institutions should strike a balance when considering the level of risk presented against the cost of control measures needed to control the risk. Cost can be calculated in terms of money, time, and resources. In general terms, institutions do not need to take action to control risk if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk presented.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999<sup>2</sup> clearly outlines the employer's responsibility to:

Ensure that young people employed by them are not exposed to risk due to:

- Lack of experience
- Being unaware of existing or potential risks and
- Lack of maturity

An employer must consider:

- The layout of the workplace
- The physical, biological, and chemical agents they will be exposed to
- How they will handle work equipment
- How the work and processes are organised
- The extent of health and safety training needed
- Risks from agents, processes, and work

## Managing the Risk

A robust and complete risk assessment is crucial to ensuring the safety of young people and compliance with the law. It is not sufficient to deliver to children and young people the same information, training, supervision, and protection as other employees within the institution.

Recognition as to their vulnerability must be highlighted and appropriate changes and additional safeguards put in place to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

It is not necessary for the employer to undertake a separate risk assessment for a child or young person, however, they must ensure that the current risk assessment appropriately considers risks for children and young people and where a young person has needs that these are appropriately assessed and met.

A robust risk assessment process should firstly acknowledge that young people may not recognise or be familiar with what can be deemed 'obvious' risks.

Furthermore, the assessment should take account of the work expected by the young person and their physical and psychological capacity to undertake such work.

Recognising that young people's physiological thresholds will be lower than that of adults, significant consideration should be given to whether the young person will be exposed to any harmful substances which may be detrimental to health. This would include radiation and carcinogens. Where the assessment identifies such risks then any person under 16 years of age (child) must never be exposed to these types of hazards irrespective of levels of supervision or controls.

People undertaking the risk assessment process must be competent to do so and ensure that control measures identified during the process are appropriate and effective.

In higher risk workplaces the burden for employers will be greater with more attention and supervision required and, in some cases, additional controls and adjustments may be necessary.

There are strict guidelines governing the number of hours children can work. In short, children under 13 years of age are prohibited from working other than in some areas such as television, theatre, and modelling. Children can only begin to work full time hours upon reaching the minimum school leaving age and then only up to a maximum of 40 hours per week.

Children below the minimum school leaving age must not be employed in industrial workplaces such as factories, construction sites etc. except when on controlled work experience placements.

Children and young people in the workplace on training schemes or work placements are deemed employees for the period of the placement. It therefore becomes the employer's responsibility to report matters arising out of their work.

Further guidance is available<sup>3</sup>.

## Safeguarding

Where volunteers will be working with children or vulnerable clients / service users, care must be taken to ensure the safeguarding responsibilities of the institution are met. The following risk control measures should be in place and included within the risk assessment process:

- Suitable references should be obtained and checked

- Suitable checks made to ensure volunteers have not been barred from work with vulnerable groups (i.e. DBS checks in England & Wales, and PVG in Scotland)
- Induction training and information provided to both volunteers and those vulnerable groups involved
- On-going and update training to maintain knowledge to current standards
- Supervision and monitoring by a competent person
- Process of active and ongoing feedback from clients/service users
- Ready access to communication channels by which concerns can be raised in confidence.

## Insurance

The work undertaken by young people directly for a Higher Education Institution will be covered by the institution's Public Liability insurance.

Insurers will however want to be notified of the number of young people employed and the type of activity in which they are engaged. Insurers should be notified of any plans to use young people in activities that could be deemed higher risk.

## Collaboration

With the increase in apprenticeships and the drive for institutions to recruit and support such schemes and the pressures for Higher Education Institutions to collaborate, it becomes highly likely that an institution could find themselves collaborating with local authorities and other institutions who may have young people on work experience placements within their workplaces.

In these circumstances, Higher Education Institutions must ensure that the young people will not be exposed to material which could adversely affect them and that proper provisions are in place to ensure that necessary checks have been conducted (see 'Safeguarding').

## Good Practice

The following provides a summary of good practice which institutions should use to measure the adequacy of arrangements for managing the risk of children and young people in the workplace.

- A child / young person policy is in place which links to the corporate health and safety, risk management policy and associated guidance
- All tasks which children and young people are expected to undertake have been risk assessed and control measures fully implemented to minimise the risk

- Any higher risk activities in which children or young people are likely to be exposed to or engaging in are notified to the insurer prior to the event
- A detailed record or register of children / young people on work experience is maintained and available to the Risk and Insurance Manager
- Documentation on work experience placements is retained for an adequate period, in-line with document retention policies applied to employees exposed to similar hazards
- All people invited to work experience placements are provided with induction, site, and job-related awareness training to ensure they are able to carry out their role competently and safely. Training should be provided to all people recognising individual needs and ensuring that proper support is available
- All children and young people must be provided with appropriate levels of support and supervision which is proportionate to the risks presented by the tasks assigned and their individual needs.
- There is regular monitoring and review of the work experience placement programme to ensure risk control measures are in place and remain effective.
- Collaborative departments that make use of work placements should be scrutinised to ensure they have the proper checks in place, are competent to deliver the service, are adequately insured and standards of service delivery are regularly monitored and reviewed.

The golden rule is that a child or young person should be afforded the level of information, training, supervision, and protection as they need.

## References

- 1 Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974: Reviewed 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024  
[Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/73)
- 2 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999: Reviewed 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024  
[The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/1663/contents/matter)
- 3 Child employment: Reviewed 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024  
[Child employment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

## Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

## Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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