National Work Experience Standard

CERTIFIED BY FUTURES FOR ALL

Discover the Standards

That Measure the Quality of Certified Work Experience

Guide for Employers

What is our National Work Experience Standard?

National Work Experience Standard – Certified by Futures For All, is an independent certification for employers providing high-quality work experience.

Employers are assessed against criteria shaped by over a decade of research, direct practice with young people and schools, and the experience of employers who helped develop the Standard.

Assessment covers how work experience is planned, delivered and continuously improved. As the country's largest provider of work experience, we know what good looks like.

Certification is awarded only when an independent assessment confirms **every standard has been met**.

Some providers not only meet our quality standards but go further. We recognise and celebrate this through our Excellent practice, which acknowledges practice that goes beyond expectations.

How does our National Work Experience Standard work?

National National Work Experience Standard sets out what good work experience looks like, based on our research and more than a decade of practice with young people, schools and employers.

There are nine standards. They are grouped into three stages of the placement journey:

Before the placement: designing the programme and creating fair access
During the placement: delivering an engaging and meaningful experience
After the placement: supporting reflection, recognition and improvement over time

The purpose is twofold: to give employers a clear, independent measure of their programmes, and to raise the quality of work experience across the country by making good practice visible and expected.

What this document is (and isn't)

This document sets out our National Work Experience Standard. These Standards are universal.

It describes the nine Standards we use to assess the quality of an employer's work experience programme.

It is designed to support:

Self-assessment – for employers to evaluate their own practice against our standards
Full assessment – for employers to be comprehensively assessed against, providing associated evidence for each Standard.

This framework is not a step-by-step guide to delivering work experience. It does not include detailed examples of activities, templates, or delivery guidance. For practical resources and guides on how to design and deliver high-quality work experience, please see **futuresforall.org/programme-resources**.

Our National Work Experience Standard is designed as a universal tool to assess overall work experience quality. It is not intended to provide or evaluate specialist guidance for young people with specific additional support needs. Where adjustments are required, these should be agreed between the employer, the educator and the young person.

National Work Experience Standard: Overview

Before the placement: designing the programme and creating fair access

Standard 1:
Clear Aims

Standard 2:
Engagement & Outreach

Standard 3:
Safe, Accessible & Inclusive Practice

During the placement: delivering an engaging and meaningful experience

Standard 4:
Learning & Developmental Outcomes

Standard 4:
Programme Structure

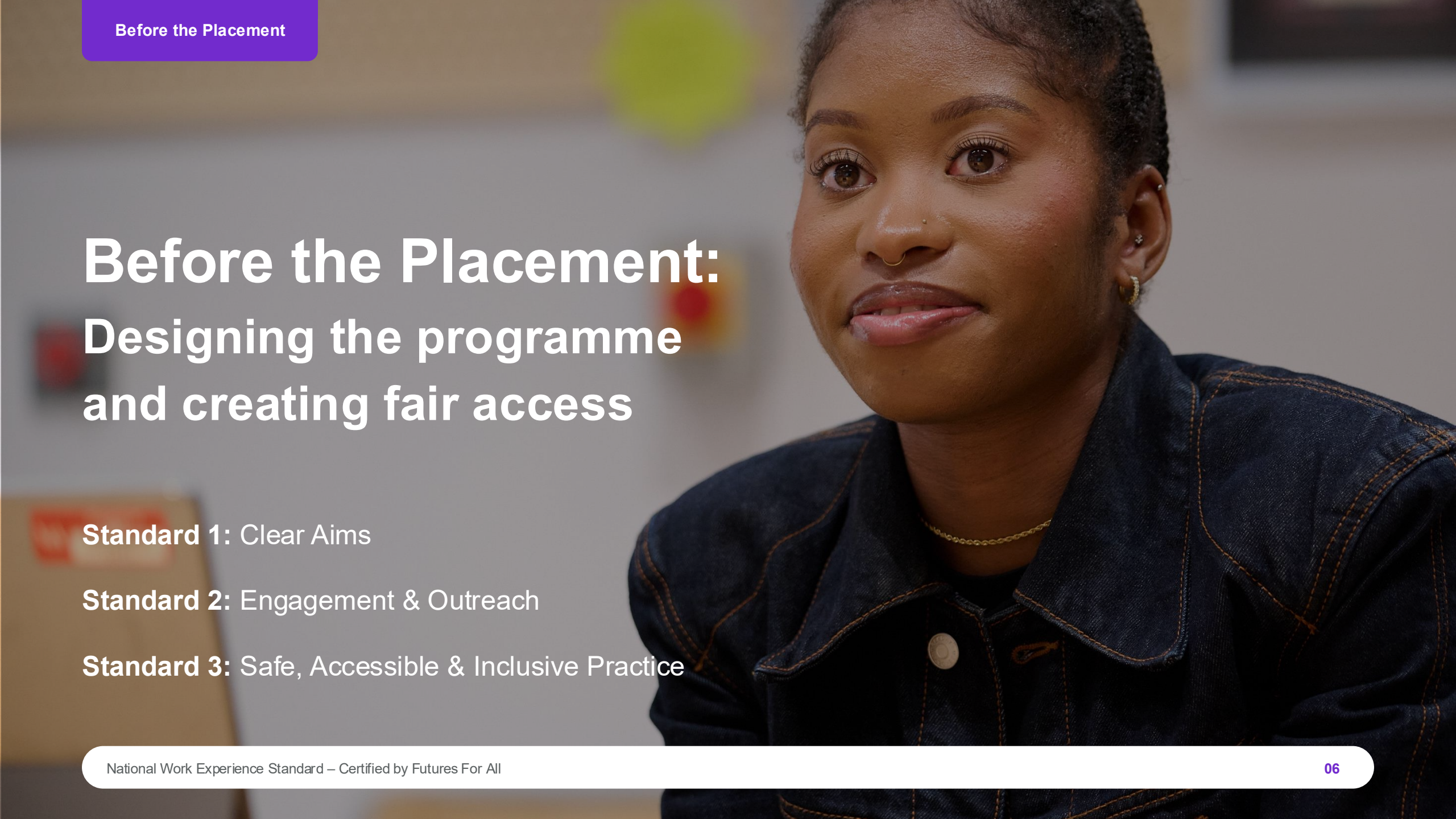
Standard 6:
Meaningful Interaction

After the placement: supporting reflection, recognition and improvement over time

Standard 7:
Opportunities for Reflection

Standard 8:
Recognition & Supporting Next Steps

Standard 9:
Evaluation & Continuous Improvement



Before the Placement:

Designing the programme and creating fair access

Standard 1: Clear Aims

Standard 2: Engagement & Outreach

Standard 3: Safe, Accessible & Inclusive Practice

01

Standard 1: Clear Aims

Good work experience starts with being clear about the purpose. Employers should be able to explain why they offer work experience and what they want young people to get out of it. Once identified, these aims should guide the whole experience - from what young people do each day, to the skills they develop, and how the placement is structured and supported (Standard 4 & 5). This means the aims need to be visible in how the placement has been designed, not just held informally. Aims might include helping young people understand different industries/sectors and roles, building confidence and motivation, contributing to social value, supporting future skills needs, improving diversity and inclusion, or broadening opportunities beyond what is typically available in school.

The strongest programmes go one step further: gathering evidence that these aims are genuinely being met - capturing the impact of the experience on young people and on their own organisation - and using this to keep refining the offer over time.

Standard	There is tangible evidence of the aims of the work experience, so that the purpose of the placement is clear and can be seen in how the work experience has been designed. This might include the aims being stated in the programme advert, visible in the timetable, or reflected in the materials shared with young people.
Excellent Practice	There is impact data that confirms the aims of the work experience are being met, and the employer uses this evidence to ensure the offer remains purposeful. This might include feedback from young people demonstrating that the intended purpose of the placement has been achieved, evaluation data that the employer has reviewed and acted on, or evidence of how the experience has delivered against the employer's own organisational aims.

02

Standard 2: Engagement & Outreach

Once an employer has established the aims of the programme, the next step is to consider who the opportunity is for and how young people will access information about it. This standard focuses on the practical relationships and outreach routes that make placements accessible and equitable. This means moving beyond informal or reactive arrangements - working with schools, careers leads or partner organisations such as Futures For All to create a clear, structured process for opportunities to be shared and taken up, rather than relying on personal networks or word of mouth.

Some programmes go further: taking a targeted and strategic approach to who they are trying to reach, with the explicit aim of ensuring opportunities reach young people who might not otherwise access them. This might include running engagement sessions with specific schools or communities, or working with partners to actively recruit from underrepresented groups - and reviewing this approach regularly to keep it fair and effective.

Standard	The employer works with schools or partner organisations to share opportunities with young people through a clear, structured process, rather than on a reactive or request-only basis. This might include opportunities listed on a portal, shared through a careers lead, or promoted through a partner, with a clear sign-up or application process in place.
Excellent Practice	The employer has a targeted and strategic plan for who they are trying to reach, with the explicit aim of ensuring opportunities reach young people who might not otherwise access them. This might include engagement sessions with specific schools or communities, a structured application process designed to be open and fair, or active recruitment from underrepresented groups, reviewed regularly with partners to remain effective.

03

Standard 3: Safe, Accessible & Inclusive Practice

Once routes into the placement are in place, the next step is making sure every placement is safe, inclusive, and set up so young people can take part with confidence. This means putting essential safeguarding and health and safety measures in place, and being clear with young people in advance about what to expect.

Some programmes go further, taking a proactive approach to inclusion - checking for access needs and working with educators or partners to remove barriers before they arise, whether practical, physical, or social and cultural. Meeting this standard means young people feel safe, welcomed and able to engage fully, regardless of their background or individual needs.

Standard	The employer has essential health and safety and safeguarding procedures in place and shares key information with young people in advance so they know what to expect and how to get support. This might include sharing a schedule, key contacts, and expectations ahead of the placement, and having a health and safety policy and safeguarding document in place.
Excellent Practice	The employer takes a proactive approach to inclusion, checking for access needs in advance and working with educators or partner organisations to provide support and remove barriers. The employer regularly reviews what is working and uses feedback to improve accessibility over time. This might include adapting activities or materials to meet individual needs, or making changes to delivery in response to feedback from previous cohorts.

During the Placement:

Delivering an engaging and meaningful experience

Standard 4: Learning & Development Outcomes

Standard 5: Programme Structure

Standard 6: Meaningful Interaction

04

Standard 4: Learning & Development Outcomes

Once aims are clear, the next step is ensuring learning and developmental outcomes mirror them. These outcomes make the placement intentional and structured, supporting young people to build skills, confidence, and an understanding of working life. They shape the tasks and interactions during the placement, guide staff in delivering a consistent experience, and help young people reflect on and articulate what they've gained.

Some programmes go further, evaluating whether outcomes have actually been achieved, asking what impact the experience has had on young people's employability skills, and keeping a record of specific examples to demonstrate impact over time.

Standard	The employer has identified clear learning and developmental outcomes describing what young people should gain - the knowledge, skills, or confidence they will leave with. These are shared with young people and staff from the outset. This might include outcomes stated in programme materials, shared in an introductory session, or communicated as part of a sign-up or application process.
Excellent Practice	There is evidence that the intended outcomes are actually being achieved. This might include young people being able to articulate what they have gained, or impact data showing skills or confidence have developed - for example, evidence of the experience's impact on employability skills, or specific examples of how the programme has shaped the employer's own practices. The employer actively reviews this evidence and uses it to refine outcomes over time.

05

Standard 5: Programme Structure

This standard is about designing what the work experience looks like in practice, day by day. This means moving beyond an ad hoc approach to deliver a structured programme: a clear, logical sequence of activities that gives young people genuine opportunities to participate actively throughout, rather than spending most of their time observing.

Some programmes go further, explicitly designing structure around the learning and developmental outcomes in Standard 4, building skills and confidence progressively, and using feedback from young people to actively review and strengthen the programme between cohorts. A well-structured programme outlines a clear sequence of activities, balances variety and structure, enables active participation, and can adapt to different formats, group sizes and access needs.

Standard	The employer delivers a structured programme with activities set out in a logical order that gives young people genuine opportunities to participate actively throughout. The structure is coherent and purposeful rather than ad hoc. This might include a timetable showing a clear progression of activities, with a balance of different tasks that keep young people engaged rather than passive observers.
Excellent Practice	The programme is explicitly designed to deliver the learning and developmental outcomes in Standard 4, with a sequence of activities that builds skills and confidence progressively. There is feedback from young people on specific activities that the employer uses to review and strengthen the programme over time. This might include iterations of session materials, evaluations of specific activities, or evidence of how the structure has been adapted between cohorts.

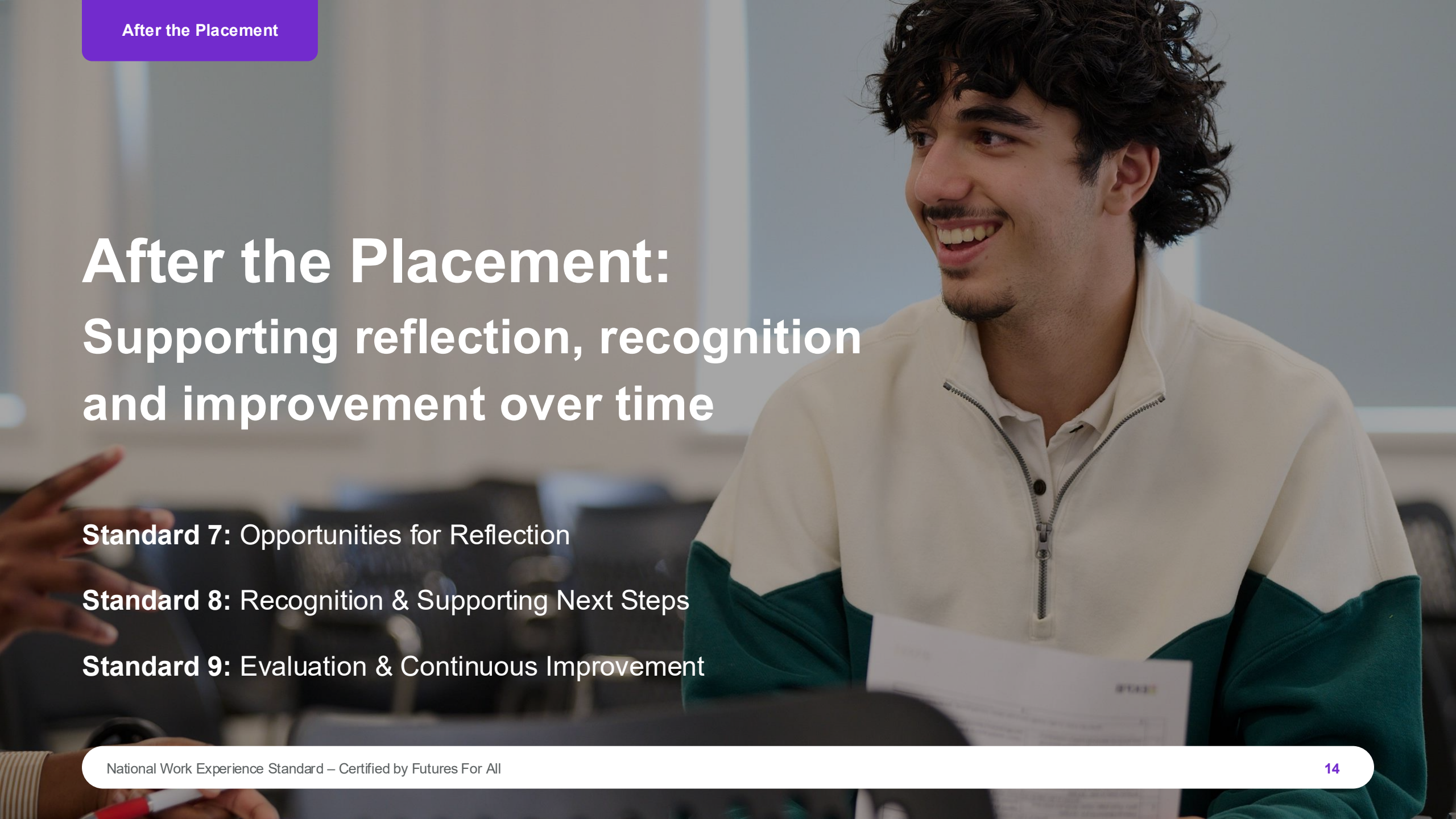
06

Standard 6: Meaningful Interaction

This standard focuses on creating live, meaningful two-way interactions between young people and workplace staff, and between young people themselves. These interactions support the learning and developmental outcomes in Standard 4, in a way that feels appropriate, safe and inclusive. This means young people have genuine opportunities to ask questions, take part in tasks, and contribute to discussions throughout the placement.

Some programmes go further, creating a more diverse range of opportunities, giving young people the chance to engage with a mix of people, rdes or functions across the organisation, and to collaborate with each other. Young people should feel supported, engaged and able to contribute throughout.

Standard	Young people have opportunities to interact with workplace staff throughout the placement, and activities are designed to facilitate conversation, questions, and participation so young people take an active role and feel supported. This might include Q&A sessions with staff, opportunities to ask questions during tasks, or structured discussions built into the programme.
Excellent Practice	The employer creates a diverse range of meaningful interaction opportunities, giving young people the chance to engage with a mix of people, roles, or functions within the organisation, and/or to collaborate with each other. This might include group project work presented back to staff, tours led by apprentices or early careers employees, or problem-solving tasks that require young people to work together.



After the Placement:

Supporting reflection, recognition and improvement over time

Standard 7: Opportunities for Reflection

Standard 8: Recognition & Supporting Next Steps

Standard 9: Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

07

Standard 7: Opportunities for Reflection

Young people need time and support to make sense of what they are doing and why it matters. This standard focuses on how employers help young people reflect throughout the work experience, so they can recognise what they have learned, build confidence in their strengths, and understand how the experience links to future choices. This means building in planned, structured time for reflection rather than leaving it to chance.

Some programmes go further, giving young people the opportunity not just to reflect but using additional employer feedback to apply what they have reflected on, such as improving a piece of work, updating a CV, or participating in a mock interview. Reflection works best when it goes both ways: the most effective programmes also create space for employers to reflect on what they have learned, recording benefits, action points, and how insights will shape future delivery.

Standard	The employer plans structured time for reflection during and/or at the end of the placement, supporting young people to think about what they learned, what they found challenging, and what they have gained. This might include a guided discussion, a reflection activity built into the programme, or live feedback on tasks to support in-the-moment reflection.
Excellent Practice	Young people have an opportunity not just to reflect but to apply their learning, improving a piece of work, updating a CV or personal statement, or participating in a mock interview. The most effective programmes also create space for employers to reflect on what they have learned, recording the benefits, any action points, and how insights from this cohort will shape future delivery.

08

Standard 8: Recognition & Supporting Next Steps

This standard focuses on employers recognising young people's efforts, helping them understand their progress, and supporting their next steps. Recognition is most valuable when it is specific, giving young people meaningful feedback on their strengths and areas to develop makes the experience more useful and memorable.

Some programmes go further, providing follow-up support such as signposting further opportunities, sharing information about pathways into the sector, or directing young people to relevant resources and networks. Work experience is often one of the first times young people are treated as a professional, and clear recognition can build confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging.

Standard	Young people receive clear acknowledgement for taking part, recognising their participation and contribution. Where possible, this includes specific feedback on strengths and areas to develop. This might include a certificate of attendance, a follow-up email of thanks, written or verbal feedback on their performance, or guidance on practical next steps such as writing a CV or preparing for an interview.
Excellent Practice	As well as tangible acknowledgment of participation, following the placement, the employer provides meaningful follow-up support to help young people take their next steps. This might include signposting further opportunities within the organisation, directing young people to relevant external resources, events or networks, sharing information about pathways into the sector, or offering mock interviews or skills sessions to build confidence for future applications.

Standard 9: Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

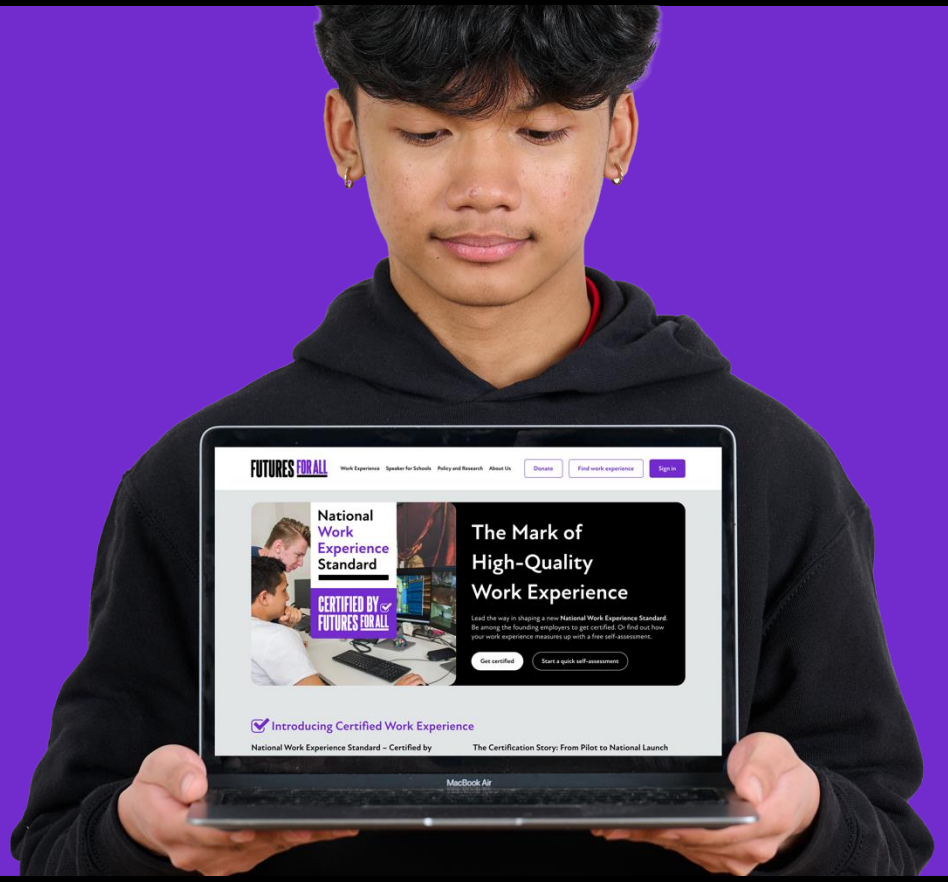
09

Once the placement has been delivered, the final step is understanding what worked well and what could be strengthened for next time. This means collecting feedback from young people and using what has been learned to inform how the next programme is delivered.

Gathering feedback at the end of a placement is a solid foundation - some programmes build on this, creating a more structured cycle of review that draws on insight from multiple points and multiple perspectives. This might involve bringing together the staff and managers involved in organising and supervising the placement, as well as participant insight, to share what they observed and learned. Those insights are recorded and fed back into future planning, so that the programme develops and strengthens over time.

Standard	The employer collects feedback from young people after the placement, reviews it, and uses what they have learned to inform how the next programme is delivered. This might include a post-placement survey, a feedback form, or a review conversation with a partner organisation.
Excellent Practice	The employer has embedded evaluation as an ongoing cycle, gathering insight at multiple points, before, during and after the placement, from young people, staff and partners. Staff and managers involved in the programme come together to discuss what they observed and learned, with those insights recorded and fed back into future planning. Over time, this creates an evidenced picture of how the programme has developed and strengthened in response to what each cohort has taught them.

NATIONAL STANDARD



Get certified now

To find out more about certification, or to talk through how your programme measures up, contact us at **national.standard@futuresforall.org**.

National Work Experience Standard