

# HELPING STUDENTS BE 'READY ENOUGH' FOR INDUSTRY PLACEMENT



## Introduction - A practical guide for schools and colleges

Industry placements are one of the most important and distinctive parts of a T Level programme. They give students the opportunity to experience a real workplace, develop professional behaviours and apply their learning in industry. When placements work well, students often describe them as the most valuable part of their course. Employers build confidence in working with young people and providers strengthen long-term industry relationships.

However, across recent employer and provider feedback, a consistent challenge has emerged around student readiness. Employers are often less concerned about technical knowledge at the start of placement and more focused on behaviours such as communication, reliability, professionalism and willingness to learn. At the same time, schools and colleges are balancing increasing operational pressures, varying levels of curriculum engagement and the challenge of preparing students with very different levels of workplace experience.

This guide has been developed to support schools and colleges to reflect on what readiness really means in practice and how it can be strengthened across the whole programme experience, not just through late-stage preparation sessions or employability workshops. It explores what employers are telling us, where confidence can dip and the practical approaches that appear to make the biggest difference to successful placements.

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The guidance is intended to support the full range of industry placement approaches now used within T Levels, including traditional placements, remote activity, project-based models and experiences delivered across multiple employers. Regardless of the delivery model, impactful placements are usually the result of intentional design, clear expectations and strong preparation rather than chance or luck.

The guide is not intended to be a compliance document or a checklist of additional tasks. Instead, it aims to support more joined-up approaches between curriculum teams, tutors, employer engagement colleagues and leaders so that students receive clearer, more consistent messages about workplace expectations and feel more confident as they move towards placement.

Alongside reflection and insight, the guide also includes practical examples, discussion points and supporting tools that schools and colleges can adapt within their own context. Providers may choose to use it as part of staff development, curriculum planning, quality improvement activity or wider conversations about student readiness and employer engagement.

At its core, this guidance is about helping more students feel “ready enough” to enter the workplace, engage positively and build confidence through meaningful industry experience.





## How to use this guide

This guide is designed to support reflection and discussion rather than be read as a compliance document or checklist.

### Providers may choose to:

- read sections independently
- use sections within staff development activity
- discuss themes in curriculum or employer engagement meetings
- use reflection prompts to support improvement planning
- revisit sections at different points in the academic year

Not all sections will feel equally relevant at the same time.

### At the end of each section, you could consider the following:



One thing to review



One thing to discuss



One thing to strengthen



### Why this matters now

Industry placements are a defining part of a T Level. They are not designed as something that happens alongside the programme, rather a core requirement, and without successful completion, a student cannot achieve their T Level.

For many young people, this is their first meaningful experience of a professional working environment, where expectations shift and where behaviours are tested and confidence can either build or reduce quickly.

When placements work well, they are often described by students as the most valuable and memorable part of their course. They bring learning to life, help students understand their future career pathway, and build the confidence through real responsibility.

However, when placements do not work as intended, the impact is equally significant:

- students can lose confidence or disengage
- employers may feel let down and reduce or even remove future opportunities
- staff spend time repairing relationships rather than developing partnerships

### What we are hearing

Across employer feedback, provider insight and recent engagement activity, a consistent picture is emerging.

#### Student readiness is:

- inconsistent across cohorts and providers
- difficult to define in practical terms
- often shaped by timing pressures rather than deliberate preparation

At the same time, employers are clear about what matters most, particularly at the start.

They are not primarily concerned with technical knowledge or curriculum coverage. Instead, they are looking for students who can:

- arrive on time and prepared
- communicate clearly and appropriately
- engage positively with tasks and people
- respond well when they are unsure



## *“We can teach the technical side. What we struggle with is basic workplace behaviour.” - Employer feedback*

**There is also growing concern about timing.** In some cases, students are being placed early in their programme, before they have had sufficient opportunity to develop the behaviours and confidence required to succeed. Practical pressures often drive this; securing placements, managing capacity, meeting required hours, but it creates a risk that students are set up to struggle.

### **What this looks like in practice:**

A student may not need to be fully confident or fully polished before placement starts. But they do need enough preparation to arrive on time, communicate appropriately, ask for help when unsure and stay engaged when tasks feel unfamiliar. These practical markers often matter more than technical perfection in the early stages.

### **What does this tell us?**

This is not about a lack of effort or commitment from schools and colleges.

Across the FE sector, there is clear dedication to supporting students and building strong employer relationships.

However, the gap that it highlights is that there is not yet a shared, practical understanding of what “ready enough” looks like or how it is built over time.

#### **Without that shared understanding:**

- preparation can become fragmented
- responsibility can feel unclear
- and students can receive mixed messages about what really matters

### **A shift in focus**

If industry placements are to consistently deliver for students and employers, the focus needs to shift from **“preparing students for placement as a one-off activity”** to **“building readiness as part of the whole programme experience”**.

This applies across the full range of industry placement models now used within T Levels. Whether students are completing hours through traditional workplace activity, remote working, small team projects or experiences across multiple employers, the same principles apply.

Students need clear expectations, opportunities to build confidence and support to understand how professional behaviours translate into different working environments.



## SECTION 2

## THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH ABOUT READINESS

In many cases, preparation for industry placement is well-intentioned but limited in scope.

**It often includes activities such as:**

- CV writing sessions
- interview preparation
- employability workshops

These activities have value. They help students reflect on their strengths and practise presenting themselves. However, they do not prepare a student for the reality of a workplace.

Employers consistently tell us that early impressions are shaped by what they observe in the first few hours and days:

- Does the student arrive on time?
- Are they prepared and organised?
- How do they communicate with colleagues?
- Do they ask questions when unsure?
- Do they stay engaged, even when tasks feel unfamiliar or routine?

*“The first day tells you a lot. It’s not about what they know - it’s how they show up.” - Employer feedback*



## The gap between preparation and reality

This creates a clear gap between what students are often prepared for, and what they experience.

What preparation often focuses on	What the workplace requires
Structured activities	Real situations
Getting the “right answer”	Responding when unsure
Individual performance	Working as part of a team
Assessment outcomes	Behaviour and attitude

Students can perform well in a controlled environment and still find the transition to the workplace challenging particularly those with limited exposure to part-time work or professional environments.

## Why this matters

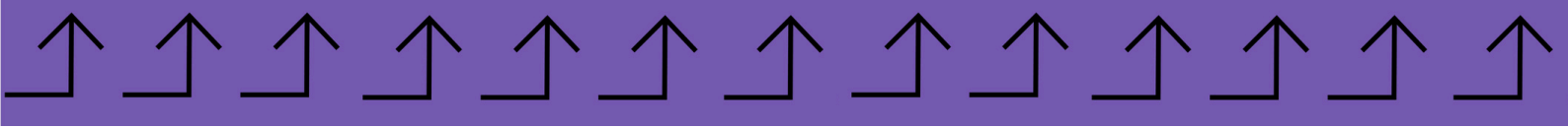
When the gap is not addressed:

- students feel uncertain or overwhelmed in the first few days
- employers reinforce basic expectations
- confidence drops on both sides
- opportunities for meaningful work are reduced or delayed

In some cases, placements fail to reach their full potential or become difficult to sustain.



*“We want to give students meaningful work, but we need to feel confident they’re ready for it.” - Employer feedback*



## Reframing readiness

Readiness is not about producing students who are fully skilled, fully confident or fully workplace-ready.

Instead, it is about supporting students to be ready enough to enter a workplace, engage positively, and build trust over time.

In practice, this means placing greater emphasis on:

- behaviour and attitude
- communication and interaction
- consistency and reliability
- willingness to learn

These are developed through repeated experience and reinforcement – not one-off activities.

## A practical challenge

CV writing, interview preparation and employability sessions are part of the picture - not the whole picture.

The opportunity is to strengthen what already exists so that students are prepared not just for recruitment processes, but for the reality of being part of a workplace.



### Reflection

*Are we preparing students to present themselves well, or to operate effectively in a workplace?*

Both matter, but it is the second that will determine whether a placement succeeds.



# SECTION 3

## READINESS IS BUILT OVER TIME, NOT DELIVERED IN A SESSION

One of the most consistent themes from employer and provider feedback is that timing matters - not just when a placement starts, but how readiness is developed beforehand.

In many cases, preparation is concentrated into a short period just before placement begins. While this activity is important, it is rarely enough on its own.

### What we see in practice

Where readiness is treated as a late-stage activity:

- students understand expectations but have not had time to practise it
- expectations are introduced quickly, rather than reinforced
- confidence is low, particularly for those with limited exposure to work
- placement coordinators carry the pressure of ensuring students are “ready”

*“We do prepare them, but it’s often quite close to when they start. You can see some students aren’t fully ready yet.” - Provider feedback*

This reflects the reality of delivering a complex programme, but it highlights a key point:

***Readiness cannot be created in a few weeks. It needs to be built over time.***

### What building readiness looks like

When readiness is built effectively, it is not confined to a single part of the programme. Instead, it develops progressively:

This does not require new activity just a more intentional use of what already exists.

Stage	What is happening in practice
Open days / Enrolment	Placement expectations are explained to students and parents/carers
Early programme	Expectations introduced clearly and consistently
Mid programme	Behaviours practised and reinforced regularly
Pre-placement	Confidence built through realistic preparation
Placement start	Students apply behaviours in a real environment

## A shift from preparation to development

Instead of asking: “How do we prepare students for placement?” It becomes: “How do we develop the behaviours students need over time?”

### This shift:

- reduces pressure on late-stage preparation
- create more consistent student experiences
- builds confidence gradually

## Where collaboration makes the difference

Teamwork between tutors and placement coordinators is critical.

When roles operate in isolation:

- tutors may not have full visibility of employer expectations
- placement coordinators may feel responsible for “fixing” readiness late in the process
- students receive mixed or inconsistent messages

When they work together, the impact is noticeably different.

- expectations are reinforced consistently
- employer insight informs teaching
- readiness is developed across the programme

*“When the curriculum and placement teams are aligned, students are more confident and placements run more smoothly.”*



## Practical ways to build readiness over time

The aim is not to introduce new workload, but to make small, deliberate adjustments.

### Introduce expectations early

- agree what “ready enough” looks like from the start
- use consistent language across staff
- revisit expectations regularly

### Reinforce behaviours through everyday delivery

- link behaviours such as punctuality, communication and engagement to workplace expectations
- recognise and reinforce when students demonstrate them

### Create opportunities to practise, not just discuss

- build in opportunities for students to speak and present, ask questions and respond to feedback
- use low-stakes activities to build confidence over time

### Use employer insight to shape preparation

- share real examples of what employer’s notice
- bring the employer voice into the programme at different points



### Reflection

*If we removed our final pre-placement session, how much readiness would students already have built?*



# SECTION 4

## READINESS IS BUILT IN EVERYDAY MOMENTS

The next question is ‘where that readiness is actually developed in practice?’

In practice, it is not built through isolated preparation sessions. It is built through what students experience every day in their school or college environment.

### **This includes:**

- lessons
- tutorials
- group work
- feedback
- informal interactions

### **These everyday moments shape how students:**

- understand expectations
- communicate with others
- respond to challenge
- take responsibility for their work

## **Why this matters**

For many students, particularly those without part-time work or prior workplace experience, the classroom is their main reference point for what is expected of them.

If expectations around timekeeping, communication, behaviour and engagement are not clear and consistent in that environment, it becomes much harder for students to adapt when those expectations increase in a workplace.

*“Students often behave in placement in the same way they behave in college, it just has more impact there.”*

This is not about changing teaching into something different, it is about making clearer connections between what students experience now and what they will experience next.

## **Making expectations visible and consistent**

Expectations are often present, but implicit or inconsistently applied.

### **Students may experience:**

- different expectations across lessons
- varying responses to behaviour
- mixed messages about what “good” looks like

This makes it harder to build consistent habits.





## What consistency looks like in practice

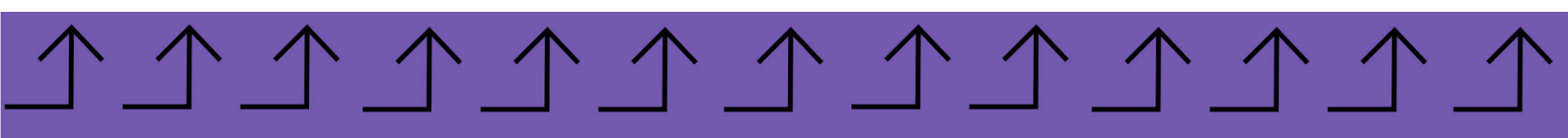
Consistency does not mean rigid delivery, it means key expectations are clearly communicated, regularly reinforced and applied in a similar way across settings.

## Examples: Everyday behaviours that build readiness

Area	What this looks like in school / college	How this translates to placement
Timekeeping	Arriving on time, being ready to start	Arriving reliably and prepared for work
Communication	Speaking clearly, listening, asking questions	Communicating appropriately with colleagues
Engagement	Participating in tasks and discussions	Staying engaged, even when unsure
Responsibility	Completing work, responding to feedback	Taking ownership of tasks and actions
Phone use	Limiting phone use in lessons	Following workplace expectations around focus
Identification / access	Bringing a college lanyard or ID	Using security passes appropriately

These expectations can feel routine in school or college, but they often mirror workplace expectations. Making this connection explicit helps students understand that they are already developing the behaviours they will need.

In simple terms, it is about helping students see the link between the classroom and career.



## Where the team approach strengthens this

Consistency does not mean rigid delivery, it means key expectations are clearly communicated, regularly reinforced and applied in a similar way across settings.

### When less aligned:

- tutors focus on classroom expectations without linking to placement
- placement coordinators introduce expectations later, often under time pressure
- students see classroom and placement as separate rather than connected

### When aligned:

- tutors reinforce behaviours that reflect workplace expectations
- placement coordinators share employer insight that informs teaching
- expectations are introduced early and reinforced consistently
- students experience a clear, joined-up message

*“When staff are aligned, students hear the same message in different ways - and it sticks.”*

## Practical ways to build readiness through everyday delivery

- make behaviours explicit and explain why they matter, e.g. timekeeping
- link classroom expectations to workplace expectations
- create low-stakes opportunities to practise communication and responsibility
- use feedback to reinforce expectations behaviours as well as outcomes
- recognise and reinforce positive behaviours



### Reflection

*If an employer observed our students in a typical lesson, what would they notice?*

**For many students, the workplace is unfamiliar.** They may not have had a part-time job, spent time in a professional environment or seen how different roles and teams operate.

As a result, expectations can feel abstract, unclear or difficult to relate to.

### Why this matters

If students cannot picture what professional working environments look and feel like, it becomes harder for them to understand what is expected, prepare with confidence and apply what they have been told.

*“Students often don’t know what to expect until they’re in it and by then, it’s quite a big adjustment.” - Provider feedback*

### Using employer voice

One of the most effective ways to address this is real employer input. This works best when it is:

- regular rather than one-off
- focused on real expectations
- linked to what students are learning

#### What this looks like in practice:

- short employer talks or Q&A sessions
- workplace visits or virtual tours
- sharing real examples of tasks
- discussing what employers notice in the first few days

**Instead of a general talks, the most effective input focuses on:**

- how they expect students to communicate
- what makes a strong first impression
- how to respond when unsure



*“It’s great to get employers in front of our students. We say the same things, but when an employer says it, it carries more weight!”*

## Using student experience as a powerful resource

Alongside the employer voice, one of the most underused but readily available teaching resources is students’ own experience and that of their peers.

**Within most cohorts, there are already students who:**

- have part-time jobs
- have experienced workplace expectations
- have started or completed placements

**Students often respond strongly to peers because:**

- the experience feels more immediate
- the language is familiar
- it feels achievable

**For students who have not yet had exposure to work, this can help to:**

- build understanding
- reduce uncertainty
- make expectations feel more realistic

*“Hearing it from other students makes it feel more real – you think, I can do that too.”*

### What this can look like in practice:

- students with part-time jobs sharing what is expected of them
- early placement students reflecting on their first experiences
- second-year students sharing what worked and what they would do differently



## Benefits beyond readiness

### This also supports second-year students to:

- reflect on their own development
- build confidence
- develop communication/presentation skills

## Where the team approach supports this

- placement coordinators identify relevant student experiences
- tutors create space to share and reflect
- both reinforce the key messages

## Practical ways to build this in

- plan for peer input, rather than relying on it informally
- structure discussions with clear prompts
- link back to key expectations
- keep contributions short and focused



## Reflection

*If an employer observed our students in a typical lesson, what would they notice?*

# SECTION 6

## A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: MAKING THE TEAM APPROACH WORK IN PRACTICE

**Responsibility for student readiness can feel unclear.** This is not always because roles are poorly defined, it is often because readiness sits across multiple parts of the programme.

### In practice:

- tutors shape day-to-day behaviours
- placement coordinators bring employer insight
- leadership teams set direction and expectations

### Where this can become challenging

#### When readiness is not explicitly shared:

- preparation becomes concentrated late
- placement coordinators carry responsibility for “readiness”
- tutors may not fully connect delivery to placement expectations
- students receive mixed messages

*“We all contribute to readiness, but it doesn’t always feel like a joined-up approach.” - Provider feedback*

### Clarifying roles in practice

<b>Tutors and teaching staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reinforce expectations through everyday delivery</li><li>• model behaviour</li><li>• create opportunities to practise</li><li>• link learning to workplace expectations</li></ul>
<b>Placement coordinators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• bring employer insight into the programme</li><li>• support preparation and confidence</li><li>• identify risks early</li><li>• translate employer expectations into practical guidance</li></ul>
<b>Leadership teams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reinforce placement as a core programme component</li><li>• support alignment across teams</li><li>• create space for collaboration</li></ul>

## Practical ways to strengthen the team approach

### 1 Share employer insight regularly

- build simple mechanisms for sharing feedback from employers
- highlight what employers notice most (especially in early placement)
- keep this practical and relevant

### 2 Use consistent language across roles

- agree simple ways of describing “ready enough”
- use this language with students consistently
- reinforce key messages

### 3 Plan preparation together at key points

- identify when preparation activity happens
- align this with what students are experiencing in lessons
- avoid preparation being isolated from the rest of the programme

### 4 Identify and support students early

- share insight about students who may need additional support
- act early rather than waiting until placement is imminent
- use both curriculum and placement perspectives

### 5 Keep the focus on the student experience

- consider how readiness feels from the student perspective
- aim for clarity and consistency
- reduce mixed messages



### Reflection

*Would a student hear the same message about expectations from different members of staff?*

There are many things that can support readiness. In practice, a small number of factors make the greatest difference to outcomes.

These are not complex. They are often already happening in some form the difference is when they are planned, reinforced and reviewed intentionally.

### What we know works

#### 1. Clear expectations from the start

**Students are more likely to succeed when they understand early on:**

- what is expected of them
- how they are expected to behave
- what “good” looks like in practice

When expectations are introduced late, students often feel unsure, underprepared or overwhelmed.

*“Students need to know what’s expected well before they get there - not just the week before.”*

#### 2. Consistent reinforcement across the programme

**Students build habits through repetition and consistency.** Where expectations vary between staff or settings students can struggle to develop consistent behaviours.

*“It’s the consistency that makes the difference, not just the message.”*



### 3. Opportunities to practise, not just prepare

Students build confidence through doing. **They need opportunities to:**

- communicate
- ask questions
- respond to feedback
- work through uncertainty

Without this, the workplace becomes the first time these behaviours are tested.

*“They need to practise these things before they get there  
- not for the first time on placement.”*

### 4. Exposure to real workplace expectations

**Students are better prepared when they have:**

- heard directly from employers
- see what workplaces look like
- understand what will be expected of them

This reduces uncertainty and builds confidence.

*“It’s much easier when they know what they’re walking into.”*

### 5. Thoughtful timing of placement

Timing is one of the most significant factors. **Where students are placed too early, without sufficient preparation:**

- confidence drops
- employers need to reinforce basic expectations
- early impressions can be negative

*“There’s pressure to place students quickly, but it doesn’t always set them up to succeed. We’ve shifted to a layered approach with tasters and small group projects in year one before employer site days and blocks in year 2.”*

In many providers, this now includes using staged or flexible placement models to build confidence progressively before larger or longer placement activity begins.

## Making this intentional, not incidental

It's worth revisiting the approaches that exist. Consider whether readiness is: **incidental - happening in pockets, depending on individual staff** or **intentional – planned and embedded across the programme**

### Intentional practice looks like:

- built into curriculum planning and sequencing
- reinforced through tutorials and student support
- aligned across staff
- informed by student and employer feedback and reviewed over time

*“The difference is evident in the departments where we’ve planned together, as it’s not something we fit in when we can.”*

## Planning readiness into the programme

This does not require a separate strand of delivery.

## Using feedback to improve, not just report

Gathering feedback from students and employers is a programme requirement. However, its impact depends on how it is used.

### The opportunity is to use it more deliberately:

- what are employers consistently telling us?
- what patterns or themes are emerging?
- what needs to change?

## Looking at employer engagement as an indicator

Employer behaviour provides a clear signal of how well placements are working.

### Useful indicators include:

- how many employers offer placements again
- how many choose not to continue and why
- whether repeat engagement is improving

***Repeat placements are often one of the clearest indicators that the approach is working, for both students and employers.***



## Reflection

*Would a student hear the same message about expectations from different members of staff?*

# SECTION 8

## USING PRACTICAL TOOLS TO SUPPORT A CONSISTENT APPROACH



Alongside this guidance, additional practical resources have been developed to support student readiness:

- a **student readiness guide**
- a **parent, carer and supporter guide**
- a **student talent card**

Each has been designed to be clear and accessible and grounded in real expectations. These are not standalone solutions.

They are tools to support a consistent, shared approach to readiness.

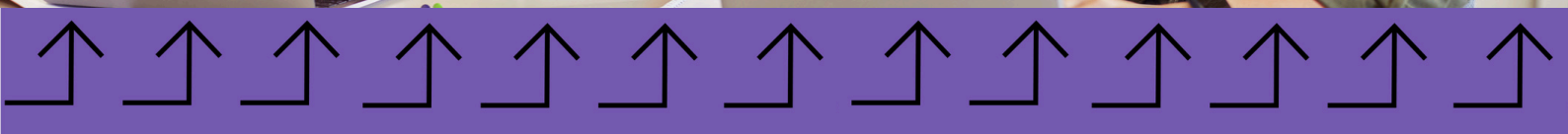
Tool	When/How to use
<p><b>Student readiness guide</b> Supports students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understand what “ready enough” looks like</li><li>• prepare practically for placement</li><li>• build confidence in what to expect</li></ul>	<p>It works best when used as a discussion tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• early in the programme</li><li>• as part of tutorials and group discussion</li><li>• revisit as placement approaches</li></ul>
<p><b>Parent, carer and supporter guide</b> Supports parents and carers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understand the purpose and value of industry placement</li><li>• recognise how expectations may differ from school or college</li><li>• support their young person in developing independence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• share with parents and carers at an early stage</li><li>• use it to align expectations and address common concerns</li><li>• use to reinforce the value of placement</li></ul>

Tool	When/How to use
<p><b>Student talent card</b> Supports communication between students schools, colleges and employers It helps to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• highlight what a student can already do</li> <li>• identify areas where students might need additional support or adaptations</li> <li>• build employer confidence</li> <li>• support more meaningful engagement from the start</li> <li>• encourage students to take ownership of how they present themselves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support students to complete it thoughtfully</li> <li>• use it in preparation for employer interaction and as part of the placement matching process</li> <li>• to reinforce readiness skills and behaviours that students have been practising</li> <li>• to support line managers/supervisors in the workplace</li> </ul>



## Reflection

*Are we using these tools to support conversations, or simply distributed to provide information?*



Across this guidance, one message is clear:

**Student readiness is built over time, through the everyday experience of the programme.**

### What this means in practice

**Students are most likely to succeed on placement when:**

- expectations are clear and introduced early
- behaviours are reinforced
- they have opportunities to practise
- they understand the workplace
- they are supported by a joined-up team

These elements are often already present. The opportunity is to bring them together in a way that is: **intentional, consistent and sustained**

### Recognising the reality

Delivering this consistently is not straightforward.

**Schools and colleges are balancing:**

- curriculum delivery
- student needs
- employer engagement
- and operational pressures

**At the same time, students have:**

- varying levels of confidence
- different starting points
- limited exposure to work

This is not about expecting perfection, it is about making small, consistent improvements that build over time.

1

#### Review expectations

- Are they clear and consistent?
- Do students understand what “good” looks like?

2

#### Strengthen the team approach

- Are tutors and placement coordinators aligned?
- Do students hear consistent messages?



3

### Build readiness earlier

- Is preparation concentrated too late?
- Where can it be developed sooner?

4

### Use feedback more effectively

- What are employers and students telling us?
- What are we changing as a result?

5

### Use tools more intentionally

- What are employers and students telling us?
- What are we changing as a result?

## Looking ahead

**Improving readiness is not a one-off activity.** It is an ongoing process of:

- understanding what works
- identifying improvements
- making small, targeted changes

**Employer engagement is often a useful indicator of progress.** Where placements work well, employers are more likely to:

- offer placements again
- expand opportunities
- recommend the experience

***Repeat engagement is often a strong signal that the approach is working.***

## Final thought

**At its core, this is about giving students the best possible start.**

Not by expecting them to be fully formed or fully confident, but by supporting them to be 'ready enough' to show up, engage and learn

### **When this is achieved:**

- students gain confidence and clarity
- employers have more positive experiences
- placements become more meaningful and sustainable

*If we want students to succeed in the workplace, we need to make expectations visible, consistent and real throughout their time with us.*

