



Prosthetic and Orthotic work experience programme

A handbook for host organisations

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Introduction

The British Association of Prosthetics and Orthotics (BAPO) Work Experience Initiative offers prospective learners meaningful opportunities to gain insight into the prosthetics and orthotics profession. Through placements with NHS centres, industry partners, and charities, learners experience both workplace settings and, where appropriate, engagement with service users. This handbook provides guidance for host organisations.

BAPO's work experience initiative is proudly endorsed by:

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Why host organisations should support BAPO's Work Experience programme

Supporting BAPO's Work Experience Initiative provides significant benefits for host organisations, learners, and the profession as a whole.

Securing the workforce pipeline

The future of prosthetics and orthotics depends on attracting motivated and capable individuals into the profession. By offering structured work experience, host organisations play a direct role in inspiring the next generation of prosthetists, orthotists, technicians, and support workers. This investment helps address future workforce shortages and ensures services remain sustainable and patient-centred.

Increasing visibility of the profession

Prosthetics and orthotics is a highly specialised field that many prospective learners, educators, and careers advisors know little about. By opening doors to learners, host organisations raise the profile of the profession, highlight its life-changing impact, and broaden the diversity of those considering a career in this sector. Increased visibility also strengthens the public's understanding of the essential role prosthetists and orthotists play in healthcare and rehabilitation.

Working alongside the professional body

Participation in the initiative connects host organisations with BAPO, the professional body for the prosthetic and orthotic workforce. This collaboration ensures the whole industry is working together and contributing to national workforce development efforts. It also provides organisations with a platform to demonstrate leadership in professional development and commitment to the growth of the field.

In short, hosting learners through BAPO's Work Experience Initiative is a chance to shape the profession's future, enhance its visibility, and work in partnership with the professional body to ensure a strong, sustainable workforce pipeline.



The benefits of work experience placements in prosthetics and orthotics

Introduction to the Profession

Prosthetics and orthotics (P&O) is a specialist healthcare profession focused on improving the mobility, function, and quality of life of individuals with limb loss or physical impairments. Both roles combine clinical care, engineering, problem-solving, and patient interaction, requiring a balance of technical skill and empathy.

A work experience placement in P&O offers a unique opportunity for learners to gain insight into this rewarding, multidisciplinary profession that blends science, creativity, and compassion.

Understanding the many roles within prosthetics and orthotics

During a work experience placement, learners will discover that the field is much broader than it first appears. Within a clinical setting, prosthetists and orthotists collaborate closely with patients, our allied health, and medical colleagues, and are assisted by dedicated support workers. Behind the scenes, skilled technicians fabricate the devices using materials such as carbon fibre, thermoplastics, and silicone. There are also roles in research and development, education, management, and clinical innovation, as well as in the commercial sector where design and manufacturing technologies continually evolve. Exposure to these varied pathways helps learners appreciate how diverse the profession is and how many options exist beyond purely clinical work.

Real-world experience and learning

Hands-on experience is one of the most valuable aspects of a placement. Learners may observe patient assessments, fittings, and follow-up appointments, gaining a real sense of how prosthetic and orthotic devices are tailored to meet individual needs. They might witness the measurement process, computer-aided design (CAD) and manufacturing (CAM). They may work alongside the design team at a P&O company or observe the production of prosthetic and orthotic devices during manufacture, or even the finishing and fitting of devices. Observing how prosthetists and orthotists adapt to each patient's circumstances, be it an athlete returning to sport or a child learning to walk, provides an appreciation of the profession's human impact. They may spend time with a prosthetic and orthotic charity at a P&O event, meeting P&O service users, and gaining an understanding of the real-life impact P&O has on the people who rely on us.

The placement environment also introduces the learner to soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and professionalism. Learners see first-hand the importance of empathy, respect, and patient-centred care, which cannot be fully understood from textbooks alone.

The opportunity to ask questions and make informed career choices

A placement enables learners to engage directly with professionals and ask questions about training routes, daily responsibilities, and career development. They can learn about the academic and practical requirements of university courses in prosthetics and orthotics, as well as potential career progression into advanced clinical practice, research, or management. Speaking with clinicians helps learners to reflect on their own interests and abilities, allowing them to make an informed decision about whether this career aligns with their aspirations. For many, such experience confirms their enthusiasm for pursuing formal study in the field; for others, it provides clarity about alternative healthcare or engineering pathways.

Benefits for the host organisation

For the host organisation, welcoming learners brings several advantages. It offers an opportunity to showcase their work, inspire the next generation, and foster links with schools, colleges, and universities. Staff members who supervise learners can gain satisfaction from their role in inspiring the next generation. Hosting placements also helps organisations identify potential future recruits and build a positive reputation within the community. By investing time in learner engagement, clinics, and companies demonstrate their commitment to education, inclusion, and workforce sustainability.

Benefits for the Profession

The wider prosthetics and orthotics profession also benefits from such placements. Increasing the visibility of P&O among potential new recruits helps raise awareness of this often-overlooked field within healthcare. When learners share their experiences with peers, teachers, or family members, they contribute to a broader understanding of what the prosthetic and orthotic workforce do and how vital their work is. This visibility is crucial for encouraging new entrants into the profession and securing the future workforce pipeline.

In the long term, nurturing learner interest supports the sustainability of services and ensures that individuals in need of prosthetic and orthotic care continue to receive high-quality support. A steady influx of motivated, informed learners helps to maintain innovation, diversity, and excellence within the field.

A work experience placement in prosthetics and orthotics offers learners a rare and valuable window into a profession that transforms lives through technology and compassionate care. It equips them with real-world understanding, professional insight, and confidence in their career choices. At the same time, host organisations and the wider profession benefit through greater visibility, engagement, and the cultivation of a future workforce ready to carry forward this essential and inspiring field.



Standard Operating Procedure for BAPO's Work Experience programme

1 Purpose

To outline procedures for implementing, managing, and evaluating the BAPO Work Experience Programme, ensuring placements are safe, structured, and beneficial.

2 Aim of the programme

The aim is to:

- provide prospective learners with workplace experience.
- offer exposure to prosthetic and orthotic service users.
- promote awareness of career pathways.
- strengthen collaboration between NHS, industry, charities, and BAPO.

3 Scope of the programme

Applies to:

- NHS prosthetic and orthotic centres.
- prosthetic and orthotic industry partners.
- charities supporting service users.
- prospective learners.
- BAPO staff and volunteers.

4 Responsibilities

BAPO:

- Coordinate programme, applications, and evaluation.
- Provide resources to learners to provide them with information about the prosthetics and orthotics profession as a career choice.
- Maintain an up-to-date list of organisations supporting the programme.

Host Organisations:

- Deliver structured, safe work experience.
- Assign supervisors and ensure compliance with safeguarding and relevant health and safety.

Learners:

- Apply formally, respect rules, maintain confidentiality.
- Complete preparation reading and feedback.

5 Eligibility

The BAPO work experience initiative is open to people over 16 years of age who are currently living in the United Kingdom.

6 Procedure

Application Process: Application via BAPO's dedicated online application form. BAPO will review all applications and connect learners with host organisations.

Pre-Placement: Induction by host and pre-reading from BAPO.

Placement: Can include a range of activities including observation, shadowing, access to manufacturing workshops, service user interactions, supporting charitable events.

Safeguarding: Hosts follow their local safeguarding policies and health and safety processes and policies. Parental consent is required for learners under 18 years of age, to be confirmed on the application form.

Evaluation: Feedback from learners and hosts, collated by BAPO.

7 Records & Documentation

Applications, consent, and feedback stored securely by BAPO.

8 Review

The SOP will be reviewed annually by BAPO's Career Outreach Team in collaboration with host organisations.



Templates & Forms



Application Form (MS online form)

BAPO has designed an [application form](#) which includes template fields for learners: Personal Details, Education, Application Questions, Emergency Contact, and Declarations.



Learner Code of Conduct

BAPO has designed an online [code of conduct form](#) outlining professionalism, confidentiality, respect, punctuality, and safeguarding adherence. This form will be issued to the learner by BAPO once a placement has been agreed. Host organisations may have their own code of conduct form.



Learner Feedback Form (MS online form)

BAPO has designed an online [feedback form](#) for learners to record activities, reflections, challenges, and suggestions. This form will be issued to the learner by BAPO once the placement is completed.



Host Evaluation Form (MS online form)

BAPO has designed an online [evaluation form](#) for host organisations to evaluate the learner's engagement, professionalism, and suitability.

Placement Overview Sheet

BAPO has designed a dedicated customisable handout for learners, including:

- placement details (dates, times, location)
- key contacts
- daily schedule outline
- rules and expectations
- emergency and safety information
- notes/reflections section for learners

Host organisations can utilise this form if they do not already have a dedicated form in place. The host organisation will ensure the learner receives this form (or their own dedicated form) before the placement commences.

Safeguarding guidance summary

1 Principles

Safety First: the wellbeing of learners and service users is the highest priority.

Zero Tolerance: any form of abuse, neglect, or inappropriate behaviour must be escalated through the host organisation's appropriate processes and policies.

Shared Responsibility: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, learners, supervisors, and all staff.

Transparency: concerns must be reported and dealt with promptly and appropriately.

2 Learner safeguarding

Host organisations must follow their local safeguarding policies.

Parental/Guardian Consent: required for all learners under 18. BAPO will capture this information in the dedicated application form.

Supervision: learners must be supervised at all times by an appropriate member of the host organisation's staff.

Boundaries: learners should not be left alone with service users without supervision.

Professionalism: learners must adhere to the Code of Conduct, and any local policies respecting confidentiality and service users' dignity.

3 Service user safeguarding

Host organisations must follow their local safeguarding policies.

Consent: service users must give informed consent before a learner observes or interacts with them.

Dignity and Respect: learners should be introduced appropriately and withdraw immediately if a service user declines participation.

Confidentiality: no personal or medical details of service users should be shared outside of the placement.

4 Host organisation responsibilities

- Ensure staff involved in supervising placements are aware of the host organisation's safeguarding policies.
- Ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place in line with the host organisation's local policies.
- Provide a local induction to learners at the start of their placement (to include, for example, nearest fire exit, location of toilets, health and safety information).
- Nominate a Safeguarding Lead as the first point of contact for concerns.
- Ensure whether your governance policy requires a DBS from the learner.

5 Reporting concerns

Any safeguarding concern (learner or service user) must be reported immediately to the host organisation's Safeguarding Lead.

The Safeguarding Lead will follow the organisation's safeguarding policy and escalate concerns where appropriate.

6 Practical dos and don'ts

Do:

- Treat learners and service users with respect.
- Use clear, professional language.
- Ensure safe, supervised environments.
- Act immediately if you witness or suspect unsafe behaviour.

Don't:

- Share personal contact details with learners.
- Allow learners unsupervised access to service users.
- Permit photography, video, or social media sharing without prior approval.

7 Review

This safeguarding summary will be reviewed annually by BAPO alongside the Work Experience SOP to ensure it remains current and effective.



Further information

Length of placement

Work experience placements can vary in length, from as little as half a day to a week depending on the request of the learner and the availability of the host organisation.

Some host organisations may prefer to offer group open days where more than one learner attends.

Suggested pre-placement reading

BAPO will provide the learner with BAPO's guide to exploring a career in P&O to familiarise the learner with the prosthetic and orthotic profession. BAPO will also sign post the learner to BAPO resources which explain the different roles within the profession.



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