

Vulnerable Learners

It is important for Work Experience Co-ordinators to understand that safeguarding/ child protection guidance does not only refer to long-term extended work placements, but also to young people who are considered as vulnerable.

Background

Annex A of *Safeguarding Children in Education and Safer Recruitment in Education (DCSF, 2007)* addresses specifically the issue of child protection on long-term extended work placements. In the main the guidance refers to long-term extended work placements, but there are special factors that all Work Experience Co-ordinators need to consider.

The overall message to Work Experience Co-ordinators is that they should regard child protection/safeguarding in a similar way to health and safety. Currently, a great deal of attention is rightly paid to ensuring that placements are generally suitable and that risks have been reduced to the lowest level practicable. 'Safe learners' (a term used by the Learning and Skills Council see www.safelearner.com) should also have some health and safety briefing in preparation for the placement and an induction by the employer. Pre-placement Assessors have a responsibility for assessing the general suitability of the placement, while employers have a responsibility to carry out a risk assessment.

An additional consideration that the Work Experience Co-ordinator should also take into account is the duration of the placement. Guidance issued by the DfES entitled "*Extended Work Experience and Child Protection: Safeguarding Children in Education – Supplementary DfES Guidance for Work Experience Organisers – 20/12/04*" states that in order to thoroughly safeguard learners a distinction should be made between short-term and long-term extended work experience placements (see *Glossary of Terms* p.103).

Any potential risks to the learner from the placement should be considered as part of this initial assessment of general suitability which looks at health, safety and **welfare**. Additional safeguards may be necessary when there are certain risk factors present. Some of these risk factors apply equally to short-term extended work experience or block placements include:

- Where the learner may be vulnerable.
N.B. A variety of factors can make a child vulnerable, including special needs, immaturity, abuse or neglect, substance misuse, etc. The home learning base/school that the learner attends should identify any learner who may be vulnerable, and who may therefore require additional safeguards, to the Work Experience Co-ordinator
- Where the nature of the business means that the learner is likely to be or will be alone with an adult as part of the work placement, e.g. sole trader, journeyman (i.e. self-employed tradesperson), self-employed person working from home (NB. this does not apply to short periods alone, for example, a solicitor taking a learner to and from court in a properly insured car).
- Where the work placement has a residential component.

Short-term extended work experience placements have recently developed as part of IFP and GCSEs in vocational subjects. As an alternative to a block placement, learners often go out for half a day or a day per week for a term. The amount of time spent on such placements is broadly equivalent to a block placement that is typically for five or ten working days, but it could be for 15 days. A day's placement once a week during the longest school term would be roughly equivalent to a three-week placement.

Such short-term extended placements would not normally require the additional safeguards to be in place, although the home learning base/school and central placement organiser should still take child protection into account when assessing the general suitability of the placements. However, central placement organisers should consider, in consultation with the home learning base/ school, whether any additional safeguards might be necessary.

Long-term extended placements became common as part of programmes of extended work-related learning which accompanied the disapplication of the National Curriculum regulations. Many learners are still on extended work experience, say one day a week, as part of alternative curriculum programmes which may last for the whole of Year 10 and/or Year 11. Students taking NVQs or other vocational courses as part of IFP may also have long-term extended work experience. Most recently learners taking part in the Young Apprenticeship programme typically will have up to 50 days of work experience during Key Stage 4.

The DCSF thinks that because of the greater amount of time and the spread of time – over several months or one or two years - that learners will spend in the company of adults, there is a greater risk than in short-term placements. Hence, additional safeguards are necessary to protect children.

The measures that need to be in place are common-sense policies and procedures. In some circumstances they should include obtaining CRB Enhanced Disclosures on individuals working with a child as part of the placement (further advice about CRB Disclosures is given in page 12. Additional safeguards are only required for long-term extended work placements as defined above. Nevertheless, Work Experience Co-ordinators should use their judgement and that of the DSP to decide what additional measures may need to be put in place.

Guidance

It is recognised that there are children who are vulnerable e.g. to bullying or abusive behaviour, or have emotional and behavioural difficulties, the Work Experience Co-ordinator along with the DSP must take this into account when arranging a placement.

At all times the Work Experience Co-ordinator will take into account the vulnerability of individual learners and seek to categorise the level of risk and then identify appropriate safeguards to reduce the level of risk. The indicators of risk that exist for an individual learner will dictate what appropriate safeguards are put in place and these may be

discussed with the placement provider **only after parental consent and that of the learner has been given.**

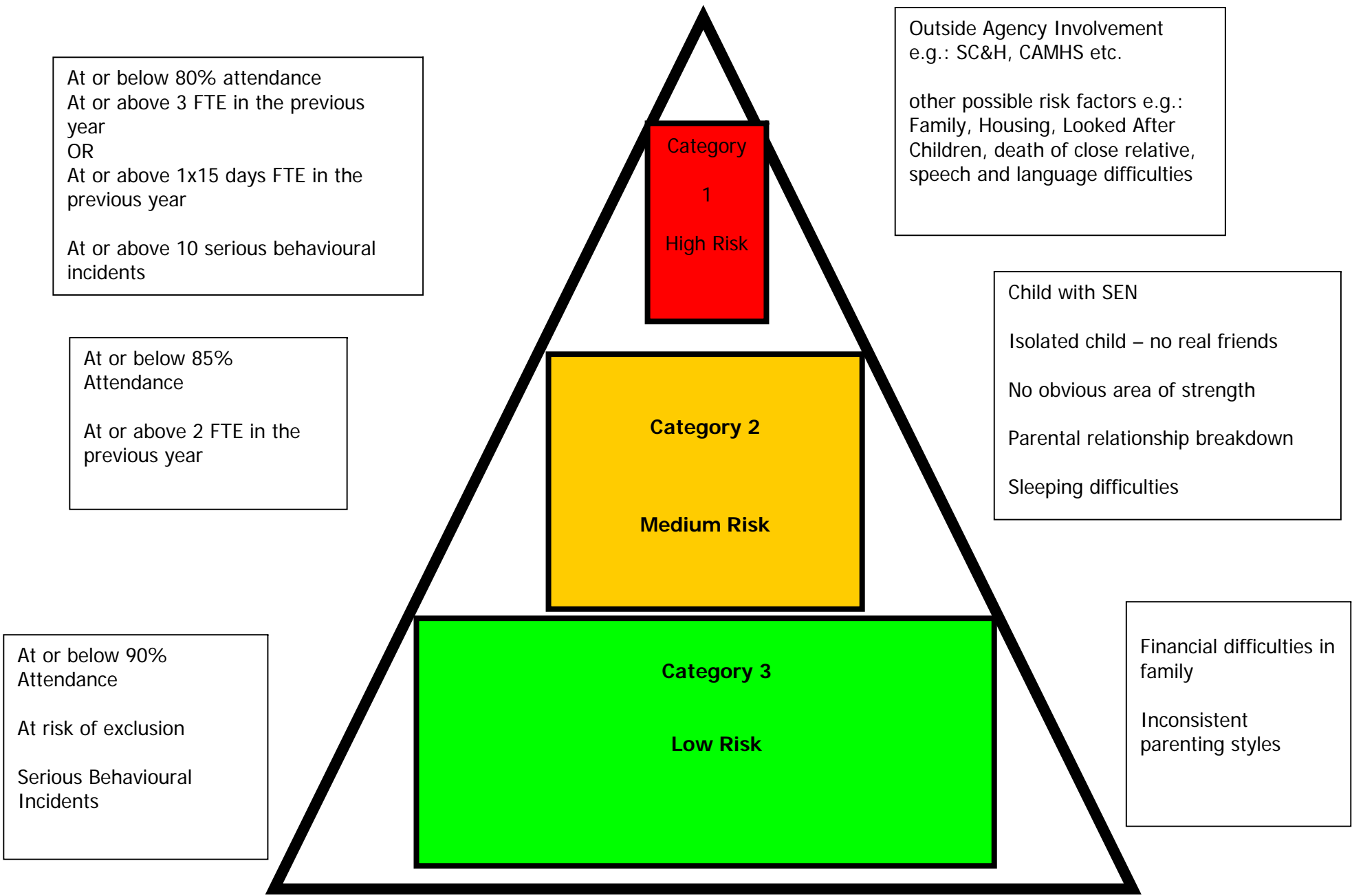
There is also a very real possibility that a young person might pose a risk to vulnerable groups because of behaviours exhibited. In such circumstances, careful consideration needs to be made by the DSP as to the placement being organised, the risks involved and also the control measures.

Where a young person is identified as a child in the care of the local authority, the designated teacher for Looked After Children and also the Work Experience Co-ordinator should discuss the suitability and logistics of a work experience/work-related learning opportunity with the young person's Social Worker, so as to ensure that there are appropriate control measures in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of the young person.

Categorising level of risk and appropriate safeguards

Category of risk	Indicators of risk	Appropriate safeguards
Level 1 – High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance below 80% • At or above 3 FTE in the previous year or At or above 1 x15 days FTE in the previous year • At or above 10 serious behavioural incidents e.g. history of violent behaviour • Known drug use • Outside agency involvement e.g. CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service) • Other possible risk factors e.g. family, housing, Looked After Children, death of a close relative, speech and language difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRB Enhanced Disclosure check to be carried out (if eligible, see p.15) • Placement organiser to contact placement provider on the first day of the placement. • First visit to be made on the second week of the extended placement • Further visits to be carried out every three weeks
Level 2 – Medium Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance below 85% • At or above 2 FTE in the previous year • Child with SEN (Special Educational Needs) • Isolated child – no real friends • No obvious area of strength • Parental relationship breakdown • Sleeping difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRB Enhanced Disclosure check to be carried out (if eligible, see p.15) • Check arrival of young person by telephone with the placement provider • First visit to be made on the second week of the extended placement • Further visits to be carried out every three weeks
Level 3 – Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at or below 90% • At risk of exclusion • Serious behavioural incident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRB Enhanced Disclosure check to be carried out (if eligible, see p.15)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Birth of a new sibling• Financial difficulties in the family• Inconsistent parenting styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First visit to be made on the third week of the extended placement• Further visits to be carried out every four weeks
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Firstly, the Work Experience Co-ordinator must be aware of the policies and procedures in place concerning what action will be taken, and by whom, should a child protection issue be raised before, during or after the placement. This should be written down along with essential and useful contacts, for example, its local Children's Access Service (see *Appendix B – Contact details for Child Protection Concerns* p.97). Making sure these procedures are in place is also part of a general duty of care.

Vulnerable Learners

Below is an aide memoir that summarises the main activities to be completed. The aide memoir does not have to be completed for every learner. A Work Experience Co-ordinator may wish to photocopy the aide memoir and use it when batch placements are organised. If an individual is new to the role of Work Experience Co-ordinator, s/he may wish to use the aide memoir for each placement being organised.

When organising a placement, has the following been done by the:

Designated Teacher for Looked After Children/Work Experience Co-ordinator

The vulnerability of the individual learner has been taken into account using the categorisation table and discussed, if the young person is identified as being a child in the care of the local authority on p.41	<input type="checkbox"/>
A risk assessment has been completed by the placement provider, which takes into account the vulnerability of the learner	<input type="checkbox"/>