Guidelines for students undertaking work experience with animals

What is the purpose of these Guidelines?

Secondary school students undertaking work experience involving animals could be exposed to risks not found in other workplaces. These Guidelines have been developed to assist students, parents and schools to consider the hazards associated with animal contact, and to help employers plan suitable activities and provide a safe and rewarding experience for students.

Students under 15 years of age

Students under 15 years of age are **NOT** permitted to undertake work experience involving direct contact with animals. They may however, undertake other activities that are safe and suitable, for example, preparing feeds.

What should employers consider?

Previous experience and confidence with animals

Students must complete the Proposed Work Experience with Animals – Summary of Student's Experience form to provide information about their experience with animals when they are being considered for work experience. The school's work experience coordinator should review this form and if it provides satisfactory evidence that the student has relevant experience working with animals, they should forward the form to the employer for their consideration.

Providing appropriate induction and supervision

Work experience students must be given a thorough induction on their first day in the workplace, and must be appropriately supervised. This means allocating responsibility for the student to a staff member. The supervisor/s should be familiar with the information provided by the student in their Proposed Work Experience with Animals – Summary of Student's Experience form, and must explain which activities and workplace locations are prohibited. All staff must understand that some tasks are not to be asked of the student.

Inform the student that safety is the most important consideration during their placement, that you have a duty of care for the student, and in turn they must act to safeguard themselves by observing all requirements you have put in place to protect them.

Managing potential exposure to animals

The student must understand that animal behaviour is unpredictable. Before exposing a student to an animal, a risk assessment must be conducted to establish the likelihood of the animal displaying potentially injurious behaviour.

There are some animals to which students must **NOT** be exposed (that is, come into direct contact with). These include any animal with a known history of behavioural problems, any animal with an injury or condition that is causing them pain or stress, and animals likely to be protective of their young.

Risk assessments should be documented, as should the control measures established to manage risks. These measures may be suitable for trained staff but not for others with less experience – this should be considered before a student is asked to carry out the task in question.

The following table gives some examples of both suitable and unsuitable (prohibited) activities for work experience students:

Examples of potentially suitable activities *	Examples of unsuitable (prohibited) activities
Grooming (brushing or combing only – the use of hydrobaths presents animal handling risks to which students should not be exposed).	Bathing an animal (for example, in a hydrobath).
Exercising (only by walking the animal or supervising while the animal is allowed free movement for a set period, for example, animals boarded at veterinary practices).	Handling (or being exposed to) any hazardous substance used in animal treatment – drugs, syringes, anaesthetics.
Feeding (this means placing food and water for animals, not hand feeding).	Using (or being exposed to) any hazardous plant or equipment, such as x-ray equipment used in radiology.
Cleaning cages or enclosures provided animals have been removed from the area or have been assessed as presenting negligible (or manageable) risk.	Carrying out any manual handling task that presents significant risk (for example, carrying/stacking food containers, lifting heavy animals into or out of cages).
Observing medical procedures, provided these are not viewed as likely to be distressing for the student.	Assisting with any medical procedure, including medicating an animal. This includes holding or restraining an animal while staff carry out the required task.

*** Subject to satisfactory assessment of the animal and of the student's experience with animals, as well as their capability and confidence. Direct supervision must be provided – students must not be left alone with an animal.**

What should students and parents consider?

Hazards associated with animal handling and restraint are difficult to control. Animals of every species are unpredictable, and even people experienced in animal behaviour will occasionally suffer injury when a previously placid animal suddenly becomes aggressive (usually through stress).

The student's employer has a duty of care to all persons in the workplace (staff, customers and visitors) but cannot guarantee complete absence of risk without separating the student from animals altogether. This would defeat the purpose – and remove the interest and enjoyment – of being placed in an environment where animals are present.

To assist the employer to plan suitable activities, students should complete the Proposed Work Experience with Animals – Summary of Student's Experience form to provide information about

their experience and capability with animals (for example, they may have a horse of their own and be confident in grooming and preparing feed). This form will be reviewed by the school's work experience coordinator and then forwarded to the employer before they make the decision to accept the student for work experience. It is in the interest of the student and the employer that the information on the form provides a full and accurate picture.

Before filling out this form, students should read the Workplace Hazards Fact Sheet – Working with Animals to help them appreciate some of the hazards and understand some of the conditions that will apply to their work experience.

What is the role of the school in assessing student suitability?

The school's work experience coordinator should review the student's completed Proposed Work Experience with Animals – Summary of Student's Experience form. If this provides satisfactory evidence of relevant experience working with animals, the work experience coordinator should forward the form to the employer for their consideration before they make the decision to accept the student for work experience.

If the school has any concerns about the student's suitability, the work experience should not go ahead.