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 **EY** Foundation

Work Experience Research  
Insight Report

groundswell



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# Project brief

## Project objectives:

- Understand the potential of digital solutions to reimagine work experience.
- Identify gaps in digital provision and how they can be addressed.

## Research objectives:

- Research the overall work experience landscape to see where a digital intervention would make the biggest impact.

## Methodology

- 10 stakeholder interviews
- In-school focus group
- Off-line analysis of desk research related to work experience



# Work experience



# Is in-person work experience still working?

- All those interviewed were clear about the potential for work experience placements to have transformative effects.
- Industry professionals understand how to design schemes to create these effects, for students with the full range of educational and social mobility needs.
- The richness of in-person interactions and the opportunity they bring to develop confidence indicates that an element of real-world engagement should continue to be available to all regardless of advances in technology such as virtual work experience.

“When we had the students go out to work experience in year 10, we did a lot of prep with them. They had a session at the application stage so they had a good understanding of what it is and what it isn’t. Sometimes you get the questions about, will I get paid? A few employers will give them a little bit towards their travel or lunches, but you explain this is not about the money, but it’s about the personal development that you’re going to get out of it.

But also, I think a lot of the preparation is just really about their confidence going into the workplace, because I think it can be quite scary for students. Just little things like knowing what to do if this happens or knowing what to do if that happens. Running through... We did a lot of prep on what would you do if you’re late or what would you do if you get lost on the day or what would you need to do before in terms of planning the journey. All the things they might not have thought of.”

CAREERS TEACHER

# Models of best practice exist in multiple shapes and sizes

There are positive models where workplace experience is implemented well, with positive outcomes:

- Place-based talent pipelines e.g. Greater Manchester where strategic business sector priorities are aligned with a localised Skills Plan to ensure that strong synergy exists between available talent and the jobs on offer locally.
- In-school models of continuous careers guidance, with single or multiple work experience placements as part of the overall formula but with wrap-around support, inspiration events and expectation management forming a total student careers experience. Best practice support exists in well-resourced schools but also in more cash-strapped establishments that prioritise careers guidance.
- External third sector and private sector brokerage companies providing full-service or modular support in relation to careers guidance and work experience placement organisation. Some of these brokerage services are heavily reliant on emerging technology while others are focused on the human aspects of partnership development. Some focus on corporate partners, whilst others build localised networks of small to medium enterprises (SME) placement providers.
- Supply-side examples e.g. St Barts hospital partnering with local colleges and schools to offer work-related experiences; Construction industry placements are an accepted and integral part of business.

“Our Bond Scholars – they’re students that could do so well, but there’s just so many factors holding them back. We try to give them lots of extra input. So these EY Foundation visits were a big part of that year for them. It always happens in year nine. I just remember the first session that they attended and how they were just sitting quietly. They were very overwhelmed. Then the last session, they were working on a marketing activity and the ideas were just flying and their confidence... When they presented back, it was just like a different bunch of students. It really was. But I also recently took some of my year 12 students to a session on entrepreneurship. They did a session for entrepreneurs, students that want to have their own business. And again, the calibre of people that they had speaking to the students, it was so inspiring. On the train, on the way back,

quite a few of the students said to me, Miss, this has really motivated me to put more work into my business, because they all had a little side hustle. And honestly, I feel so grateful because it opens their eyes and broadens their horizons. I always say to them, Oh, do you think you might want to work somewhere like this? And it’s just the breadth of jobs that are there. And they say, Oh my God, yeah. I thought, I might, maybe. But it’s just planting those little seeds. I think if they haven’t got a parent who’s in a corporate environment or in a professional career, having that opportunity is just invaluable. It really is.”

CAREERS TEACHER TALKING ABOUT EY  
FOUNDATION SCHOOLS WORKSHOPS



“For students with special educational or health needs, they’re normally supported placements, so the young person goes in with either their support worker or TA that’s attached to them for interview so they can see where they’re going. They do shorter working days so that it’s not as tiring for them. They provide transport.

In mainstream schools, you have to get there under your own steam. Safety boots are needed. Provide your own safety boots. So if they’re working in trades don’t be turning up in your designer gear. But you don’t necessarily get told all that detail before you go. Which is where our paperwork does come in. So they’ll get almost like a job description that is bespoke to each placement that each young person who’s going receives.

It says where they’re going - the full address, who they need to ask for a summary of their tasks and duties. A health and safety piece. That’s the risks and the hazards and the control measures attached to those tasks and duties. And then just general logistics of working hours, lunchtime and breaks. Whether you need to take a packed lunch or if there’s facilities to buy your lunch, what you should be wearing, what you should have on your feet, do you need your hair tied up?

And then any special sort of requirements, like make sure you report at the gatehouse and sign in or use entrance so they’re not getting lost on site or a whole ream of specific information to that placement.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER





# Good work experience includes:



Preparation activity beforehand, so everyone knows what to expect



Social skills - how to communicate with colleagues and customers not their age



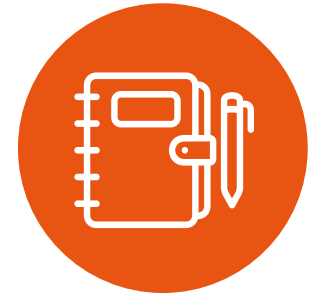
Practical work tasks that help students understand what they would be spending their time doing in this role – with someone on hand to help them if they get stuck



Practical problem-solving to deal with real-world challenges e.g. getting to work on time



Cultural awareness - how to behave in a workplace environment



Reflective activity afterwards

# What do students get out of work experience?

- Testing a career pathway they 'think' will suit them – gaining knowledge to pivot further into it, or out
- Pick up social and life skills – communicating with people outside your social peer group
- Planting career aspirations
- Building confidence
- Students tend to be 'hooked' by work experience as a route to earning money or to following their passion

“Our main drivers are preparing young people for the world of work. Demystifying it. Just opening their eyes to what the world has to offer.”

“Young people who do work experience come back much more motivated and their confidence has grown. So really in a school, that's a win-win. We should be throwing resources at work experience. But the reality is, there's often one person who's really overloaded already. If the school is doing work experience, it's actually a huge logistical job. It's a massive job.”

CAREERS TEACHERS

“Even if the placement doesn't go well, it helps you to decide what to try next. You know you haven't wasted time and money going on to a course to follow that career, because you've tried it out and you didn't like it. My placement was terrible, because there were long stretches of time where there was nothing for me to do.”

“The employer I worked with was so pleased with my work, they've asked me back for a second placement later this year.”

STUDENT FEEDBACK

“It helps with practical workplace skills that just aren't currently in students' social existence – like talking to people who aren't their peers, using email to communicate professionally. It helps with confidence. It's absolutely crucial because it's one thing learning the theory, completely different being in the workplace.”

POLICYMAKER

“The extended work placements [generally 4-6 months] are where we get almost life changing stories – they’re usually on placement because they’re not attending school.

The transformations are just phenomenal. They mature, they take on board what the employers are saying to them, quite often end up going back into school to sit the exams and get passes.

Their work ethic accelerates and what could have been a very sad progression out of school ends up with some positive impacts for them where they are progressing to college or they manage to secure an apprenticeship based on the work experience history that they’ve had, because it makes them stand head and shoulders above the next 16 year old that’s coming along, that’s got no work experience.

I mean, don’t get me wrong, it doesn’t always go to plan. But in the main, that extended work placement programme, for many young people, it changes their lives, particularly if they were able to maintain that school support as well.

They need a pastoral member of staff that’s sweeping up behind them or getting them from a to b, if that’s a challenge. But the confidence accelerates, the communication skills accelerate, and because they’re going on such a regular basis, they become one of the workforce.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER



# What do employers get out of work experience?

- Proof of social value delivery – enhances company profile when bidding for public sector contracts
- Immediate access / sight of talent pipeline – first pick of new recruits
- CPD opportunity for junior staff – start point for people management skills
- Insight into younger generation and access to their skillsets
- Community benefit – providing students with their first taste of work is 'right thing to do'

“I think the employers who are doing it are really putting thought into it and trying to make it a valuable experience. I just think there’s not enough of it.”

CAREERS TEACHER

“It helps to diversify their talent pool. We have 1200 businesses that work with us. The majority of our active partners would be large corporates who have both the budget and the staffing capacity and the inclination to do it.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER

“It’s challenging for people to take on work experience. I think it’s quite a tough ask. It’s a big ask to do it properly and meaningfully. And that’s one of our challenges, the whole health and safety, the paperwork, the spending time making sure they’ve got something to do other than just watch.”

POLICYMAKER

# Why do schools invest time in organising work experience?

- Helping students to apply their own theoretical knowledge.
- Bridge the gap between skills required to study and those required at a workplace.
- Helps improve quality of study, back in an academic setting – can see the value of their studies and their purpose in the outside world.
- Getting young people ready to transition to the next phase of their lives, to make as strong a start as possible in work.

“We’re paid to teach people 16 hours a week\*. How do you get them work ready for a 35, 40 hour a week job when you’re only doing that?”

“Some of the things that we take for granted in the workplace are not what they’re using in their day-to-day lives. And so even constructing emails properly, is a new skill they only learn on work experience.”

“Trafford College, the learners run the restaurant, the front of house, the service. Those are pretty realistic working environments. Sometimes we don’t acknowledge them in some areas as being proper work experience, but it’s fantastic.”

POLICYMAKER

“I think it really depends on the leadership of the school. It depends on how strong the careers leader is and how much they push that message that actually we’re teaching young people, but we really should be equipping them for the workplace.”

CAREERS TEACHER

*\*16 hours teaching time – the meaning here is that students are moving from education with a false expectation of what a ‘busy week’ looks like*

# What else delivers similar benefits to work experience?

- Travel and volunteer work, if students can afford it
- Paid work for odd jobs (13+ paid work for basic tasks e.g. washing up)
- Challenges – virtual or real-world
- Guides / Scouts
- School clubs

“While it wasn’t professional, there was a game that came out when I was maybe 12 called Little Big Planet, which was basically like a design your own... You can do anything in it. You can make your own little worlds and things like that. Sims is human-orientated, whereas in Little Big Planet could be anything. You had a lot of freedom to do whatever you wanted. The games that I loved were ones where I can actually go and manipulate everything inside it and create my own thing.”

TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEUR

# Current pain points

“Monday morning of the first placement week can be carnage – we’re screening all the calls and finding out what’s gone wrong with the logistics”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER



# Underlying systemic issues need to be addressed

Regardless of highpoints identified within the work experience landscape, gaps exist in terms of geographical, sector and role-specific work experience coverage.

Many of the underlying problems inherent in the current delivery model for work experience cannot be solved by technology.

Several issues stand in the way of technology being a complete answer to the improvement of work experience, such as:

- a chronic (and only sporadically replaced) lack of funding,
- low/varying prioritisation levels of work experience among the educational establishment and
- the amount of time required to develop meaningful interactions between each employer and young person

Outgoing European funding has been replaced with patchy UK funding pots, creating a web of strong provision and cold spots where students may have no help at all.

“Sometimes we put a quote out and through our national network, we benchmark what our prices are. **We are the lowest in England and there’s still schools saying they can’t afford us and we’re barely breaking even on that provision.** It’s literally just covering admin time and staff time to make it happen. We’re not making any sort of profit on it at all.”

“Most young people who self-report as having undertaken work experience will do so because of personal networks, either their parents or because of people that they know. **That is a really clear example of where young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are being disadvantaged by the current system.** It’s about poverty of thought as well as poverty of access to the system.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDERS



# Inconsistency in career guidance availability and quality is widening because of shifts in the funding landscape

- Programmes funded by Europe have now fully drawn to a close.
- In some areas, UKSPF or other available funding has been directed to close this gap. Free school meals (FSM) students in these areas may still be well served, if that funding has been focused on students in greater need. In other areas, this is not the case.
- The impact of this shift may take years to come fully to light.
- Current data does not necessarily point to emerging problems – for example, NEET figures may not be increasing yet, however it is likely that people in this category will be better served in some geographies than in others.
- Alongside traditional careers service suppliers such as Inspira, new entrants from adjacent sectors are bidding for public sector funding pots as they appear.

“I see the gaps of when they either drop out of school or they leave school and drop into NEET category. Since the ESF provision has been removed it is literally like all the provisions have disappeared overnight. Nothing’s plugging that gap. Historically, that school leaving age, when ESF was around, there were all sorts of provision, there were steps into construction programmes, there was a lot more work around employability skills and short courses.”

**“EU-funded contracts all ended in March 23. And it’s now that we’re seeing those massive gaps, because this is the first cohort that is going to be missing out on those crucial stepping stone programmes.”**

“One city we just bid to work with is a prime example. They’ve recognised there’s a gap. There’s a whole piece of work around NEET and there’s a posse of providers. It’s probably about 8 or 9 providers literally sweeping up and taking them under the wing. But then you’ve got other areas of the county, the small regional towns and rural areas, and there’s literally nothing.”

# Delivery quality is under pressure which may lead to FSM students being left without proper guidance.

- The mental and administrative work required to achieve success is delivered by passionate professionals who deliver over and above to provide positive impact for all parties.
- Often these individuals are working in schools and colleges, with multiple roles and responsibilities other than the facilitation of work experience placements.
- The skills, training and emotional intelligence required to fit each individual student into a placement (having recruited suitable companies) so that benefit is gained by both parties, are a high bar, which is often difficult to achieve with competing priorities for staff time.
- Where schools can afford to appropriately resource or outsource delivery of work experience placements, students are likely to have more positive outcomes because placements will be planned and carried out with rigour.
- Outside these pockets of leadership, student experiences will be less positive. For students with strong social support networks, this will not matter.
- Less confident and less well supported students are, however, likely to be left with insufficient guidance.

“One particular school didn’t declare medical information to us at the start of the process. So a young man was placed in a garage working on cars. He was helping the MOT testers, flashing the lights and checking the seatbelts and things, but he was partially-sighted and he had low hearing.

Because of the nature of the garage environment, it was a risk with vehicles moving, you couldn’t get in and out of the vehicles correctly to flash the lights and pump the horn and things. And it put the employer on a bit of a back foot because he said, if I’d have known, I’d have set up a secure area within one of the bays, I’d have planned my cars, which were coming in so that it was more accessible for him. But because he literally turned up on the Monday, the employer had to send him back to school temporarily, which really knocked that young man’s confidence.

But the employer was so lovely, by the Tuesday he had set up a special bay and accommodated it all.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER

# School management of work experience is fractured and inconsistent

- No two schools operate in the same way.
- There is no consistency of delivery quality, process or method.
- Schools prioritise careers leadership and funding for work experience to different degrees, even if they recognise its value.

“In theory, the young people should have their work guidance session to talk about what their potential ideas are, and then our career advisors almost reverse engineer that and come up with nice little stepping stones to help them get to that point.

If we know that particular school is doing a work experience programme, we then match the two together so that the young people are getting a learning opportunity that is suited to their career pathway. We almost have an application process, for want of a better description, where the students would select 1st, second and third choice sectors and we work off that information.”

“Other schools, it’s just an auto allocate, 150 jobs get put on the system, somebody in school presses auto allocate and all the names drop into a placement.”

“There’s no sort of magic formula and every school does it differently. Even with the schools we work with, it would be rare that the same pattern and process happens in every school. There’s no standardisation.”

“It is perfunctory for most schools. There are many exceptions to that, where schools have an embedded careers-related learning curriculum. Where that exists, you will find teachers and careers leaders. They’ll have associations with their careers hubs through CEC and will be looking for interventions and activities across the year.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

# UK work experience is less an ecosystem, more a series of nodes

- London-centric brokers, employers and policy makers appear to view work experience as primarily the domain of Corporates.
- Outside of London, individual schools and careers partners are working from personal and parental networks to establish healthy localised ecosystems.
- The work experience system in Scotland is different again, with mandated mentoring alongside placements which makes it unworkable for most employers.

“I’d say maybe 10% of the employers on our books who really engage with work experience and are always available for careers days, speaker events etc. The rest will offer a placement once a year. Then there are all the companies we don’t reach at all.”

“Unless you’ve got that little black book of contacts and that social mobility, it’s very difficult to get into the big, well established names.”

CAREERS PLACEMENT PROVIDER

“We don’t deliver any work experience placements in Scotland because mentorship is mandated from participating employers.

We just found that was too heavy a burden on companies wanting to take part, so the schemes become unworkable.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER

# There is no consistent pattern of placement availability across the country

- Interviews have confirmed that specific industries and areas of the UK represent Hot Spots and Not Spots in terms of the availability and effectiveness of work experience placements for students.
- Some industries can immediately capitalise on access to a young talent pipeline where others may struggle to justify the time required for what can be seen as a more 'community benefit' activity.
- Work experience Hot Spots occur in sectors such as Construction where a young talent pipeline is required and can be nurtured, on an ongoing basis. The increased use of Social Value as a way of deciding between competing Public Sector Contract bidders also helps to ensure that work experience and schemes such as apprenticeships will be built into company forward plans.
- Some work environments are less suitable for short-term placements because of on-site safety or privacy risks e.g. where heavy machinery is in operation or where health data would be accessible.
- Some placement roles are in high demand where others have very low take-up in others e.g. within different aspects of the health sector
- Overall, the employer value proposition for work experience is polarising. Perception of time requirements and the administrative burden of work experience holds most SME employers back from offering places, yet most placements outside of London are provided by smaller companies.
- Outside of London, SME employers tend to respond to requests from schools or careers service providers whereas corporate employers appear less keen to engage with short-term placements.
- The variety and nature of work experience opportunities therefore differ dramatically from one district to another.

“So your nurseries, your hairdressers, your hair salons, animal and environmental type placements. Ones where we struggle, for obvious reasons, are quite high risk environments. So your manufacturing, your production warehousing and logistics. But we do make them happen. We work with businesses to make them happen. And surprisingly, the makeup of those businesses tend to be your small and medium businesses, more leaning towards small family run businesses as opposed to your big names.”

“Construction, for example, is massively overrepresented in the industry because they have this legislative mandate to give back to the communities in which they’re working. And one of the major ways that companies do that is through a work experience project. Interestingly,

law and legal firms, there’s a lot of that that we come across. And I think on the other end of the spectrum, what you see very, very little of is the creative sector.”

“Coastal communities is another gap.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROFESSIONAL

“I think the creative careers, it’s a lot harder. Finance, banking and business, there tend to be a lot more placements in those type of areas.”

CAREERS TEACHER



# Role of technology

# How technology is being applied

Technology discussed during interviews, for the most part centred on two areas:

- Software platforms designed to facilitate the administration of placement organisation – primarily used by careers advice brokerage organisations;
- Bibliography of websites designed as self-serve resources for students, but often used more as an aid to career guidance conversations in school or college.

Some interviewees were aware of platforms such as Springpod and broader advances in technology such as AI and VR but few could point to additional technologies that had been put to use in the context of careers advice.

“A young person works with a platform, they’ll create their profile, and then they will conduct a personality quiz that will create for them a profile of the work experiences that will most interest them in their skills and their passions, and then it will put opportunities in front of them. The challenge we have as an organisation is that we can’t always meet their needs because we don’t work with every possible industry in the country. I think it can become quite a frustrating user experience then when you have committed that much to your profile, to then not have anything that actually matches your interests.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER



# Reactions to Virtual Work Experience

- Virtual work experience makes corporate work placements less likely to be ringfenced for 'cream of the crop' students.
- Combined with VR technology, these placements have strong social mobility potential.
- Whilst this is a strong positive, virtual placements are not necessarily perceived as quite so rich in terms of impact on students e.g. in terms of confidence and social interaction.
- Wrap-around support and hand-holding to carry out follow-on steps such as connecting on LinkedIn may make the difference between completing an online task and gaining full social mobility benefits from a work experience placement.

“A thousand people could do work experience with an organisation like Siemens. With virtual work experience, they can make some contacts, then follow them on LinkedIn, go to an interview, be able to say, Well, I did a virtual work experience placement with Siemens.”

“It helps them develop networks that exist outside of their demographics and geography.”

**“I think it has a particularly powerful social mobility angle, especially when you consider the idea of conceptualisation. Can I, as a young person who has never met a surgeon before, imagine myself in that field? Well, if I can see myself in the field and I can access the tools of that field and look at a body or whatever it is in front of me, it’s an incredibly powerful intervention.”**

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER

“If it’s just virtual with no live interaction, I think it doesn’t always develop the confidence that they need. I think they get that confidence through talking to different people or being in a different environment.

“A lot more employers now are doing a bit of a hybrid work experience. They might have two days in the office and then three days where they’re working on tasks online.”

CAREERS TEACHER

“I was speaking to someone about a construction project where they wanted to have work experience, but it’s a VR experience instead, because the liability that the construction firm has to go through to get a kid on site is way too much.

They were actually looking at how could we have an interactive game that transported you onto the construction site and you’re able to do these tasks and I guess experiences that you might feel or have on our construction site, but virtually.”

“The main barrier to what you can do is usually the money. But I think you can definitely get small and meaningful fun experiences that maybe don’t look real but can still challenge you.”

“We’ve actually talked to **Youth Zone** about a virtual **Careers** person. This is my end job that I want to do. How do I get there? Or these are my skills and what jobs could be available for those skills? Being an always present and always knowledgeable career person that could educate these kids in a language that they understand, because AI can adapt to whoever is in front of them.”

“One client wanted to explore critical thinking tasks. So putting people into higher pressure situations that you cannot replicate, being able to create these experiences in a way that you can actually put people in these situations that may only happen once, twice, three times in their life, but we could actually replicate them and then create these really high pressure situations to help people learn how to fail and succeed.

Which is quite nice for the fact that I think a lot of the work experience things, you want to put them in those situations where they understand you could go through this, and this is what happens in real life, and how do you tackle that?

So you really want to go into hospitality. This is the worst day and this is the best day you’ll have. And how do you cope with each of these days? Basically, giving them those life skills. This is what it makes you feel like, and this is how as a result, what you can do. But then when the really worst day comes, this is how you tackle it, and this is how it’s going to challenge.”

TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEUR  
CONVERSATION



Future-focused



# The changing skills landscape

## Views from World Economic Forum January 2024

Literature put out in January '24 by the World Economic Foundation points to the changing nature of the work environment.

The WEF Putting Skills First report states that the following skillsets will be crucial for a future global workforce:

- Tech-based skills, particularly AI and Big Data
- Creative and analytical skills
- Green (environmental / ESG) skills

The report sets out several Skills First Lighthouses (case studies) that are demonstrating good practice here. The following 3 examples are all focused on tech-based skills

- IBM SkillBuild – free courses in technology for life-long learning
- Academy of Career and Technology Cambodia, Digital Pathways for Youth.
- Edge Tech, the Musa Initiative – upskilling and re-skilling using WhatsApp and chatbot technology in Latin America.

Constantly evolving technology will undoubtedly change how large corporates make use of young talent. These changes are already happening, at pace. It is interesting to note however, that common technologies such as WhatsApp are being deployed as effectively as cutting-edge tech when it comes to education and skills transfer.

The last of these case studies in particular (Musa Initiative) shows how simple technologies can be used to democratise learning and expand the reach of programmes that connect talent with career opportunities.

These perspectives, viewed in conjunction with the fact that current work experience formats feel out of line with the UK business context (majority SME / micro, very few of which employ other people; many traditional sectors in decline, huge skills gaps in others) leave us with the hypothesis that even the best performing current model of work experience appears strongly out of line with what will be required in future.

“You can see that there’s a really clear trajectory that suggests that manual type work will become less and less of a thing in our economy the more that technology advances, the more you have to think about where the advantage lies of being a human, right?”

And it is by understanding those social and human factors that make you stand out from the crowd to something that can be generated through automation or through AI.

So whether it is critical thinking or whether it’s creativity or whether it’s that intellectual scrutiny, those sorts of characteristics are the things that will become markedly valuable in the future of the world as well as understanding how best to utilise technology to enhance what you can already do.”

CAREERS SERVICE PROVIDER



# The future of work experience

## Summary insights drawn from stakeholder interviews

The current system of work experience delivery is most short of:

- Funding
- Consistent interpretation of Gatsby benchmarks – the amount of energy put into delivery of careers guidance and work experience varies greatly from one school to another
- Consistency of placement management – no one system governs how work experience operates in different schools, so work experience quality standards vary wildly
- Consistency of student experience – across geography; school type; socio-economic background

Most concerning aspects of these shortfalls:

- Funding changes have exacerbated regional inequalities in work experience provision
- This means that students in most need of social mobility may have more chance of falling through the gaps
- Work experience – virtual and in-person – will not necessarily be of strong positive benefit to FSM students if:
  - They are disinterested or unaware of its existence

- They are not coached through the process, to maximise the benefits it brings

Most exciting recent developments in work experience:

- An infinite supply of work experience via virtual channels
- Technology that helps you to 'try on' different career roles, as one would a new item of clothing / haircut
- We are understanding more about where human skills diverge from the strengths of machines and technology, so we know more about what careers education must include to ensure that a future workforce is adapted to future employer needs

These exciting developments would be of strong benefit to FSM students, however it is highly possible that they will instead be accessed most readily by students with strong self-motivation and self-confidence, who may also already benefit from strong social advantages.

# Recommendations



# Re-imagining work experience – start earlier?

- Life and career experience of the people around you in early life, can build in strong limiting factors in terms of aspiration levels.
- The boundaries that students grow up with can then be compounded by careers advice (or lack thereof) in secondary school.
- Technology can be used as a delivery channel (alongside traditional media and in-person events) to expand children’s thinking out of that, from an early age.

“I feel that work experience needs to happen earlier now. There’s a big disconnect between the fact that primary schools really aren’t educating kids or letting kids think about the opportunities they could do.

“Actually having digital games for kids at that age where they can experience maybe not the actual job, but a game of it and going into Roblox and playing it and doing the roles to experience and understand what could be possible, I think that’s really important.

**“So if all their family have been in the police or where we live, it would be [a construction material manufacturing company]. People live in their own boxes, constraints from what their family do. If there’s a possibility to give children something where it completely opens up their thinking from an early age, that would be really positive.**

“You can pick a selection of jobs when you initially start the game, and it’s very clear to you how much money you can earn from it. So you can stand in a pizzeria and it’ll give you however much money every 30 seconds based off an actual salary in the real world.”

TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEUR



# Age- appropriate careers education

## Early years

- Reading books that talk about the jobs people do <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Richard-Scarrys-What-People-World/dp/0553520598>
- School visits that help to break down embedded stereotypes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3Aweo-74kY>
- Online games e.g. Roblox

## Secondary education

- Talks & drop-in sessions – to raise awareness about different roles / sectors to provide broad exposure to jobs available
- In-company projects e.g. BAE Design Challenge
- Online / VR games that help you understand more complex job roles e.g. I want to run my own company; I want to help animals get better etc.
- Gaming e.g. Bus Driver Simulator

## Year 10

- Careers guidance interview
- Virtual work experience tasks
- Work experience placement – connected to output of careers guidance interview
- Ideally – feedback loop that helps students progress, or change direction

# Recommended routes to reduce inequalities

As stated, there are both systemic and policy changes that are fundamental to improving workplace experience for FSM students. For example, equitable funding and careers provision across all schools is needed to level the playing field.

These are issues to be addressed in the long term, so there are a number of other recommendations that could be considered that will have short-term impact:

- Making virtual work experience accessible to all interested students, prior to in-person workplace experience, would reduce the 'bunfight' for coveted places and makes corporate work placements less likely to be ringfenced for high-performing students (see Met Office case study).
- Using purpose-built spaces (such as Onside Youth Zones) to provide experiences, in addition to in-school activity, to reduce demand on already stretched school resources in areas where provision for young people is lacking.
- Embedding workplace experience learning into the curriculum, as proposed by the Careers and Enterprise Company in their 'Careers Education: Now and next' report, particularly raising awareness of sectors and role types that some students may not be aware of because of limited opportunities.
- Providing alternatives to workplace experience that broaden the scope of roles young people can try out e.g. using games such as Roblox or Little Big World (or purpose-built equivalents) in Youth Zones (as above) or in structured school environments.

# Can we build on place-based approaches for a more inclusive model?

- Better matching of the skills gap to emerging talent pipeline
- Making sure students from all kinds of backgrounds get access to work experience – because funding is directed to gaps identified by a local ecosystem working together

“There is a Local Skills Improvement Fund which helps us respond to the Local Skills Improvement Plan. And that’s helping the colleges make sure that their offer meets current skills needs across Greater Manchester.”

“We do need to recognise though, that if someone is in a paid job alongside their studies, they won’t be able to afford to not go because we mandate a work experience placement.”

**“There may be times we need to think about how we incentivise or support young people from lower social economic backgrounds to do longer terms of study or more hours per week.”**

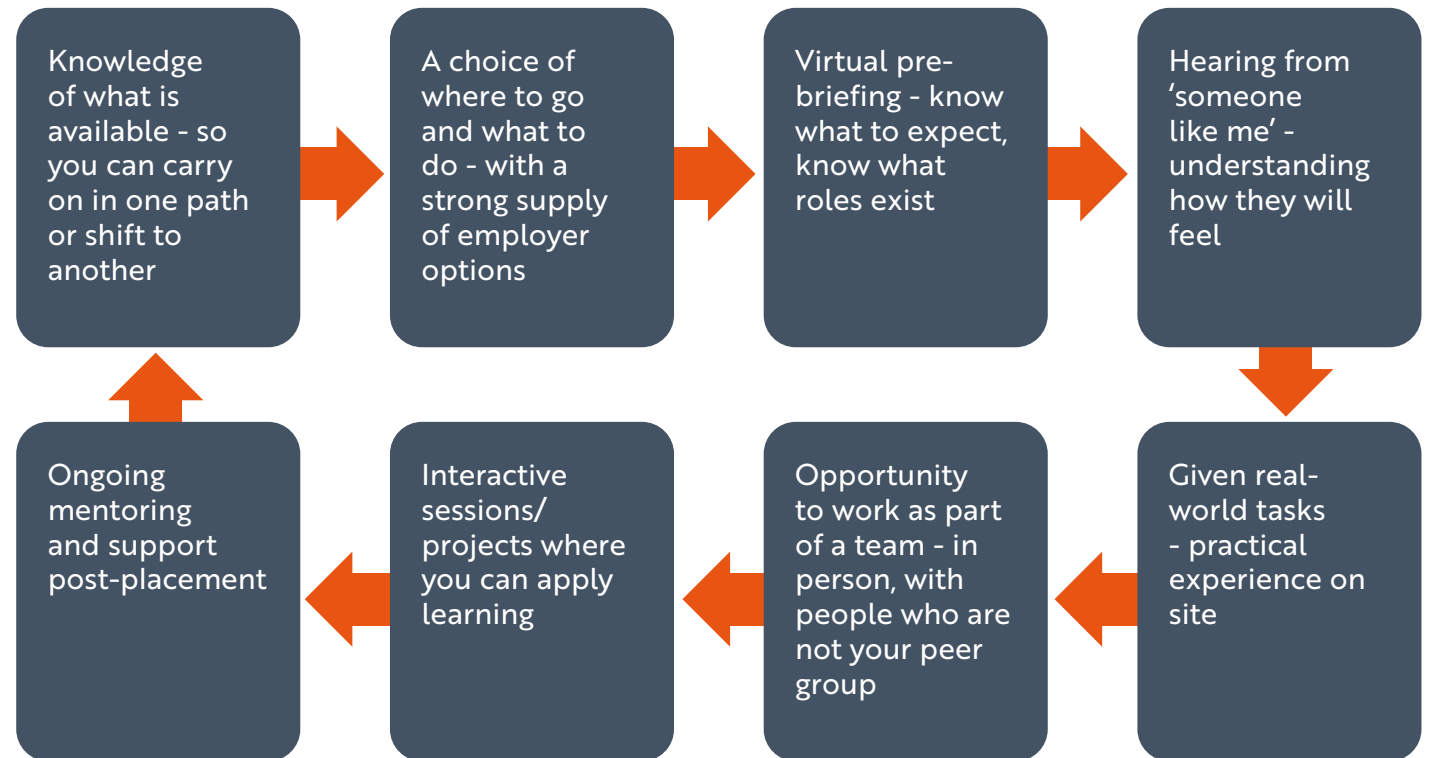
“Colleges will do everything they can with bursaries. I was looking at the way that bursaries are paid to care leavers – making sure the college have got money aside to ensure they can get into work experience. They’re really absolutely clear about the value of work experience to care leavers and move heaven and earth to ensure they remove as many barriers as they can as a college in terms of what transport do you need, how do we fund that, and what support do you get.

So I think colleges are well-attuned to the needs of students from different social backgrounds and will do everything they can to facilitate logistics. Certainly, the bus pass in Greater Manchester helps, the free buses. But of course, sometimes buses aren’t the best route, so colleges will usually use the bursaries where they can, to support.

POLICYMAKER

# The future of impactful work experience lies in an appropriately funded, young person need-led service design that is consistently applied.

- Technologies, deployed as 'tools' within this framework, are likely to be highly useful.
- Technology in and of itself, however it is not the answer to fixing the current state of work experience provision in the UK



# Technology could act as a democratising lever

- **If existing and emerging technological advances were used to develop resources that were accessible, inclusive, well publicised, and free at point of use**, students from lower income backgrounds might gain the same if not greater benefits from work experience than more privileged students.
- With a bigger aspiration and experience gap to bridge (relative to privileged families) FSM students can benefit from a strongly transformative effect from work experience, if it is designed and executed well.
- For example, virtual work experience offered to thousands of students by large corporate employers achieves an outcome much closer to equality of opportunity, because the 'survival of the fittest' element of competition for a small number of work experience places has been taken out of play.
- This utopian vision of a technologically upgraded work experience model is hampered by the fact that equally accessible, open, and inclusive resources are not the norm.
- Further, the personal circumstances and home working conditions of students often act as a rudimentary barrier to resources that many families would be able to take for granted.
- Access to computer equipment, a warm place to work, even lack of 'the same home address to work from over one academic year' can all get in the way of students being able to engage with any online resources that are meant to level the work experience playing field.

“I went and worked in a graphic design firm. But I thought it was boring. I really didn't like it. When I was 16, I thought this doesn't make any sense to my brain. Just a bunch of quiet people sat in a big office just tapping away at a keyboard. I didn't think it was very exciting, to be honest. I much prefer to play games, and that's effectively another reason why we've ended up where we are, because what we do is effectively play with games and turn them into business opportunities as well as educational pieces and everything else.”

TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEUR

# Maximum reach with lowest common tech

- The only technology with coverage likely to enable something resembling equitable access to information and opportunity, is the mobile phone handset.
- Students, schools, technology partners and careers advice professionals interviewed, concur that the more people we want to reach, the more we should focus on low specification technology that is more likely to 'work every time' for students.
- Where power or bandwidth-hungry technologies are used, cloud-based services are likely to be more practicable than on-device software formats.
- This does, however, pre-suppose that Wi-Fi service levels are strong and consistently available across the UK. We know that this is not the case, as digital 'not spots' continue to be in evidence across the UK, particularly in rural and congested inner-city areas.
- Mobile-based, simple technologies may feel less exciting, however they still have the capacity to generate engaging, valuable work experience and careers advice tools for students. Tetris – built on the lowest possible technology specification machines – is still the best-selling video game of all time, with 520 million copies having been sold worldwide.
- Use of mobile may also be problematic dependant on school policy and taking into account current advice from UNICEF advocating the ban of mobile phones in schools. For older year groups, the use of phones as technology in this context could also demonstrate how young people are being treated as adults, and access is given as a privilege and an opportunity.

# Recommended routes for technology exploration

There is a sense that 'frugal innovation' may be an interesting strand of exploration as this project unfolds, given the universality of mobile-led, low-tech solutions.

Alongside this practical route, wider technology-led research strands most certainly warrant exploration, for example:

- **Virtual and augmented reality software** to bring specific job roles and situations to life;
- **AI powered, human-delivered careers advisory services;**
- **Employer-centric work experience platform** to ease the admin burden for SME companies;
- Corporate sponsorship-funded '**Finland**' **funding platform** – see p40 quote – to empower any student to choose their work experience employer of choice.
- The relatively recent trend towards **Gamification** also has strong potential for exploitation when it comes to ensuring that careers advice and work experience maintains student interest.

In all cases, a large amount of time and resource should be given over to the design of a wrap-around service experience for each new product, that ensures all kinds of students with varying needs, to derive maximum benefit from it.

We would suggest that **place-based pilots** of existing and new technology would be highly beneficial, so that they can be designed in alignment with Local Skills Improvement Plans in a particular county or urban area and hence more easily attract partnership involvement from local employers.

# Build a tech-led Employer Proposition

- If we are to generate in all areas of the UK, a truly representative and future-focused array of work experience opportunities for students, there is again, a role for technology to empower and enable a much wider span of work experience placements.
- The potential exists for Not Spots to improve, by directing technology innovation not towards the student experience, but more towards the Employer experience.
- Moving from a system where goodwill and social conscience put a heavy burden on the same small group of employers to arrange placements, a system could be created whereby any employer of any size, was able to help students understand and bring to life the kinds of jobs that exist in their immediate community or wider society.
- Due to the higher technology use of companies (of all sizes) versus individual students, this creates opportunities for a wider landscape of employers to increase their familiarity with more complex / emerging technologies via the field of work experience.
- This again, supports the idea of technology as democratising force – empowering smaller companies to enhance their employer brand visibility and role understanding among a wider talent pool.

“In Finland, as I understand it, they gave every 16-year-old a voucher for something like £500.

And that was for them to go to an employer and say, here is my salary for two weeks. Can I come and work and you pay me that money?

They said lots of people don't take it up because they've already got jobs and they earn and they don't want to take the time off. But for young people, the fact that they were paid for it, it gave the young person some empowerment to knock on doors and go, I fancy working here and I've got a cheque for you.

I just love the empowerment that comes with that, the opportunity that comes with that, I just think it's a runner.”

POLICYMAKER



# Case studies: Examples of best-practice work experience

The following examples came to light during conversations with stakeholders or during the desk research phase of this study. They showcase in-person, virtual and combined channel work experience programmes.

There is a clear analogy here to 'bricks & clicks' retail models - digital and in-person experiences have been designed according to the needs and working context of each delivery partner.

We would suggest that this points to the fact that these two delivery channels offer **distinct benefits that are not easily replicated by the other**. Used in combination (and in a way appropriate to each sector / place-based context) the two create a powerful partnership



# Education Business Partnership North West

Education Business Partnership Northwest bring education and business together each year supporting 10,000 young people by providing career and work-related activities support schools to meet the Gatsby benchmarks.

They provide work experience, site visits, mock interviews, 'meet the employer' events and other employer-led activities.

**EBPNW's experience in supporting young people takes the pressure off local companies and allows them to get involved in ways that they can manage, without having to worry about bureaucracy and paperwork, focusing on providing meaningful opportunities.**

Source: <https://www.ebpnw.co.uk/business/>



# Barts Health NHS Trust

Barts Healthcare Horizons programme enables young people and students to learn more about prospective careers in healthcare and is recognised by the British Medical Association.

They support years 10-13 from 37 schools in their locality of East London, and can offer virtual work experience, practical sessions, parent engagement and careers advice. They also offer online mentoring via an app. Their support is through a wide variety of formats and opportunities, not just through a one-off placement.

Source: <https://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/beginning-your-career/>

**These opportunities get round the logistical issues of confidentiality and safety in healthcare, offering meaningful workplace experiences.**



# Class Of Your Own

COYO manage career development and work experience opportunities for young people in the construction sector, through their Design Engineer Construct! (DEC) programme.

These opportunities are virtual and in-person. Virtual includes films, presentations and live discussions, accessed by mobile phone, computer, laptop or tablet. The young people then produce either a digital or paper-based portfolio.

**COYO also support the teaching of DEC for years 7-11, embedding meaningful skills and knowledge into the curriculum that can then be enhanced with work experience.**

Source: <https://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/beginning-your-career/>



# OnSide Youth Zones

Onside Youth Zones are purpose-built spaces that provide young people aged eight to 19 affordable access to high-quality sports, arts and leisure facilities and activities. Each visit costs 50p, and a hot meal is £1.

Onside provide opportunities for young people to try new experiences, like photography, sport, film and music. They also offer an employability support programme for 16-19 year olds.

**The youth zones give an opportunity, particularly for younger age groups, to try a range of experiences without being marked or judged, and in an environment with peers.**

Source: <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/>



# The Met Office

The Met Office runs online work experience for 13-18-year-olds, offering an insight into what it is like to work for them. Places are uncapped so all students are guaranteed a place.

Developed with Springpod, the programme **provides interactive sessions and assigns work-based projects.** It also **provides a flavour of how it feels to work remotely as an employee** and can be completed over one week or longer.

**Completing the virtual course means students can then apply for in-person work experience.**

Source: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/careers/apprentices-graduates-and-placements>

**Offering virtual work experience before in-person reduces demands on the employer and 'fear of the unknown' for the young person.**





THANK YOU