



PROVING THE VALUE OF VIRTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE:

An Analysis of the Post-placement Video
Feedback from Young People

Occasional Research Paper

Report written by Elnaz Kashefpakdel and Funbi Akande

June 2022



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employers, educators, parents, policy makers and other professional bodies have long recognised that work experience has a crucial part to play in helping young people prepare for the world of work. But whilst the benefits of in-person work experience have been extensively researched and documented, very little research exists to substantiate the benefits of virtual work experience to date.

As it stands, there are established national guidelines and benchmarks in place for young people who chose to undertake in-person work experience across the UK. And though some of these guidelines and benchmarks have been adapted to take account of the online alternatives, virtual work experience has developed so rapidly and so recently that its value has yet to be fully explored and proven.

In the absence of published research into the value of virtual work experience, this paper aims to provide qualitative data based on findings by Speakers for Schools that can serve as a first step toward establishing a reliable evidence base to determine the value of virtual work experience.

Following detailed analysis of video feedback submitted by some of the young people who attended virtual work experience placements through the charity, this paper presents evidence that supports the theory that **virtual work experience can deliver many of the same proven key benefits found to be associated with in-person employer engagement.**

OUR TOP 3 KEY FINDINGS

1. Young people value virtual work experience as a way to learn about different opportunities within a business.

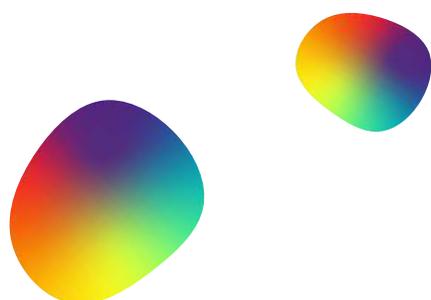
It is evidenced that young people can gain access to new, useful and trusted information and networks while interacting with professionals through in-person placements. Feedback from young people who completed video feedback following an online placement with Speakers for Schools confirmed that they found virtual work experience to provide an easy way to have multiple meaningful encounters with employers, enabling them to discover helpful information about career pathways and gain the self-knowledge that they need to be effective in setting and achieving ambitions for their next steps.

2. Virtual work experience helps young people to build essential skills such as teamwork and presentation skills.

Video testimonies submitted by young people after their virtual work experience show that the activities they have participated in have provided them with the chance to learn and practice essential skills such as teamwork and presentation skills. Around a third of the young people who submitted video feedback after a virtual placement actively agreed that they had had the opportunity to develop essential skills.

3. Virtual work experience builds self-efficacy and confidence.

Our research shows that virtual work placements can play a critical role in restoring some of the self-belief that young people need to pursue their dream careers. The evolving world of work and new working patterns have made some young people question some of the assumptions they had made previously about their future careers and capabilities. This lack of confidence was compounded by the pandemic. However, young people who attended virtual work placements through Speakers for Schools expressed in their video feedback that they felt more confident about the next steps to take in their future career. In fact one of the main top tips for other young people was to “go for it..”





1. INTRODUCTION

The evidence base on what works well in virtual experience is minimal as most tech-assisted career activities have expanded rapidly in response to the pandemic in 2020. This working paper aims to contribute to what is known about virtual activities and how young people feel about them after participation.

There is published evidence that interaction with the world of work improves young people's education and employment outcomes¹. But many are less inclined to agree that these findings apply in the context of virtual work experience and question whether online placements deliver a similar or equivalent impact to traditional in-person placements.

Speakers for Schools is a youth social mobility charity that offers the largest non-profit UK-wide work experience programmes for young people aged 14-19. It first launched its in-person programme in 2016/17 offering employer-led placements for young people from state schools, colleges and academies across the UK. In the academic year 2019/20, the charity developed a virtual option to help improve equity of access and opportunity for underrepresented groups in the 14-19-year-old demographic and overcome challenges around geographical availability. Although this change in approach pre-dated the pandemic by a matter of months, travel restrictions and social distancing quickly rendered virtual work experience the only viable option for the duration of the pandemic.

As we emerge from the pandemic and in-person, virtual and hybrid placements become a possibility, it is important that employers, educators, parents, policy makers and other professional bodies can assess the respective pros and cons of each option objectively.

Since the start of the pandemic, Speakers for Schools has responded to a growing demand from young people and employers for more accessible work experience placements through its virtual work experience programme. During this time period, it increased the number of virtual placements offered per annum from 2,718 in the academic year 2019/20 to more than 100,000 in 2021/22. It has also increased the number of employers supporting its work experience programme from a pre-pandemic figure of 70 to a post-pandemic figure of 1,235. But though this quantitative data serves to illustrate a significant shift towards virtual work experience, it does not explicitly prove or disprove the value of virtual work experience.

To be able to compare the outcomes of virtual activities with in-person interactions, research and evaluation have a role to play. However, the challenge of high-quality data remains. Most of the available data comes from programmatic delivery and is slightly biased based on self-report. But in the absence of better data, data collected after virtual activities could be used to fill the knowledge gap one study at a time. The aim is to triangulate the findings of these working papers with existing and future studies and other external sources to validate the results.

By the end of the current academic year, Speakers for Schools aims to have delivered 1,866 in-person placements and 159,150 virtual work experience placements since launch. A core objective of our work experience programme is to ensure that our employer partners provide opportunities for young people that demystify industries and provide information on career pathways. To achieve this aim, we continuously improve the programme by collecting participant feedback.

Feedback is collected before and after each work placement from participants through optional online surveys and we also request that each young person voluntarily uploads video feedback via the SeenIt platform after they have completed their virtual work experience. These videos offer an opportunity for young people to talk frankly about their placement and provide a great source of insight into what worked well for them and what they have taken away from their placement.

By analysing the content of these videos from young people who have completed online placements through Speakers for Schools, this paper attempts to shed some light on the benefits of virtual placements for young people and what we can learn from their feedback to improve or innovate. Throughout this paper, we will look at young people's responses to each question using qualitative data analysis methods.

2. CONTENTS

Executive Summary **1**

1. Introduction **2**

2. Contents **3**

3. Methodology **4**

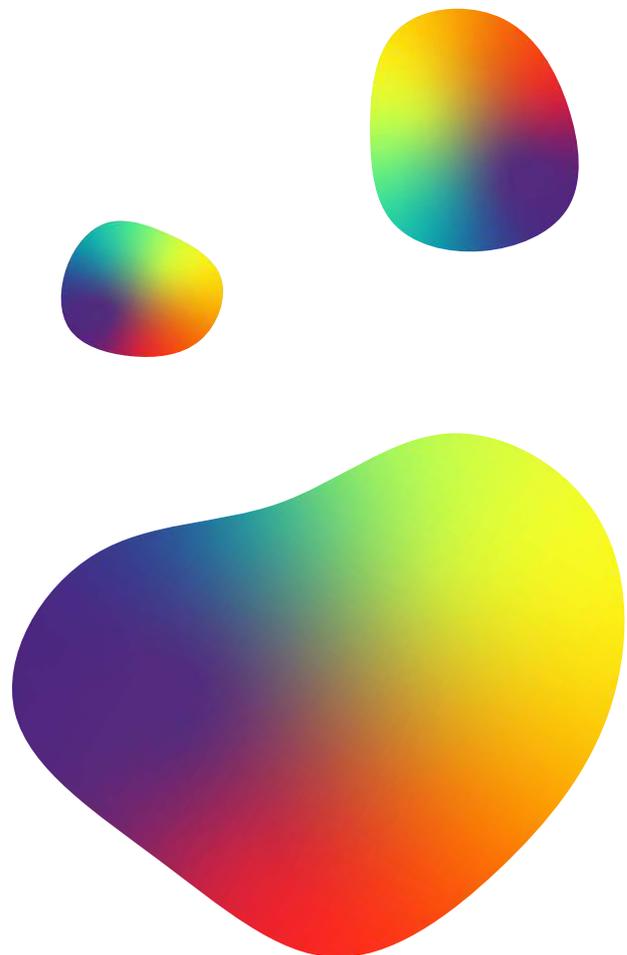
4. Findings **5**

- 4.1 What was the best part of the virtual work experience for participants? **5**
- 4.2 What did young people learn from their experience? And what were their top tips for other young people? **7**
- 4.3 What did young people learn about themselves due to their experience? **9**

5. Conclusion **13**

6. Implications for Practice **14**

7. Referencing **14**



3. METHODOLOGY

This report summarises our qualitative research into responses from 202 young people² collected from video feedback submitted voluntarily that reviews the virtual work experience placements they completed through the Speakers for Schools Experience programme.

The videos provide answers based on the following three open questions:

- 1. What has been the best part of your virtual work experience?**
- 2. What did you learn from your experience? Please share your top tips for others.**
- 3. What did you learn about yourself as a result of your experience?**

These questions were chosen to encourage young people to freely express their thoughts on the soft skills they gained, the parts of the work placement they found enjoyable, what they learnt about themselves and what they would say to others also considering whether to participate in a work placement. This study will be a starting point for future Speakers for Schools' research into the impact of work experience placements.

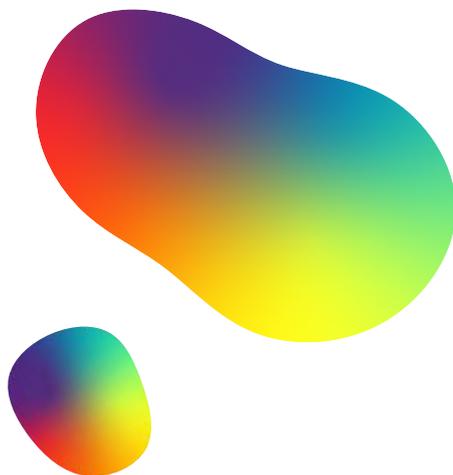
For each of the three questions we posed, we analysed 202 video responses, making 606 videos in total. The video selfies were submitted via the SeenIt app following our request for video feedback to anyone who completed either a virtual insight day (lasting 5 hours) or a 3-5 day virtual placement. For context, both types of virtual placement described here are live, employer-led internet-based sessions that the young person accessed remotely using a computer. Both types of virtual placement offered opportunities for young people to meet employers, hear from people who really work at their organisation and join in with activities based on real-life scenarios.

We designed our feedback process to ensure that evidence is collected before and after work placements through online surveys. Our delivery team also follows up with young people with a letter that provides links to the SeenIt app and how to use the app to submit video evidence. The young people submitted the videos included in this paper between 18 February 2021 and 17 March 2022.

We transcribed the videos using the Descript app and then carried out a thematic analysis to analyse the text. Based on the frequency of words, a framework of analysis was created by which three overarching themes were used to group responses to each question.

The findings of this analysis are then contextualised within the feedback collected via the Speakers for Schools Youth Panel conducted by the Policy team in February 2022. It is also compared with some of the findings of the YouGov survey commissioned by Speakers for Schools in May/June 2021³. To help corroborate the evidence documented here, it will also be vital to locate existing literature from other sources to determine whether the result of our video feedback echoes the findings of research collected via other organisations evaluating and comparing virtual work experience with in-person activities.

The results of our research are presented in the next section.



4. FINDINGS

4.1 What was the best part of the virtual work experience for participants?

Theme 1 - Learn about employers and gain insights into careers

We know from the evidence that many interactions with employers help young people gain insight into the world of work, learn about different industries and careers within it and really engage with employers about opportunities in their sector. They also get the chance to ask questions about how employers recruit, what skills and qualifications they need to achieve a career like theirs, and listen to personal stories about journeys to employment and to achieve a successful career⁴.

The analysis of the video feedback is in line with the existing literature on employer engagement. 60% of young people (which equates to 6 out of 10 young people) agreed that attending a virtual experience via the Speakers for Schools platform has helped them gain insight into different careers and learn about a wide range of employers. This is the most cited reason why they enjoyed their experience (including insight days and longer work experience opportunities).

I think the best part of my work experience was being able to see the wide variety of opportunities valuable. And through this placement, I feel more confident about my career path because of the extra options that I now know I have. It was fun and exciting to learn more about different careers. And I hope to participate in more virtual work experience placements like this in the future.

Trina, 16-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with Harper Adams University.

The best part of the experience for me was hearing from industry professionals about their careers and journeys. I think the information that they shared with students was very helpful and it gave me an insight into what a professional stem environment resembles.

Atharva, 17-year-old student who completed a construction collaborative VWEX with Wates, Willmott Dixon, Balfour Beauty and Amey.

For me, the best part about the RAF work experience was being able to see the RAF base virtually and have a look around and see what different types of jobs there is there and how we would apply for them and what they're looking for.

Dylan, 16-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with the Royal Air Force.

The best part of my work experience was definitely to be able to get a brief insight on what life as a psychiatrist is like through interacting with professionals who have been doing it for so many years.

Harshil, 16-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with Pennine Care NHS UK.

The testimonies of young people post-virtual experience are also very closely linked to what we heard from the Speakers for Schools Youth Panel. When we asked the panel members what they valued about their virtual work experience, a chance to gain knowledge of the business was cited the most.

Our panellists suggested knowledge about “What is employees’ day-to-day life like?” could potentially challenge young people’s idealised or biased views about a profession. Additionally, many think there is a single path to certain careers when in reality there is a range of possible pathways. Therefore, finding answers to questions relating to “How to progress in that career path” or “How employees got to their present position – any challenges/hurdles staff had to overcome” could empower young people and broaden their horizons.

Theme 2 - Opportunities to develop essential skills⁵

Developing skills such as teamwork and communication has been reported to be crucial for modern workplaces in many studies. Employers have continuously emphasised how valuable they find these skills in the recruitment of young people⁶. Educators are now embedding essential skills in the curriculum to support young people's growth and development; they believe developing skills such as creativity, problem-solving and leadership will not only prepare students for the world of work, but it also supports their wellbeing⁷.

Young people also agree that essential skills are important for their future career and would like more opportunities to develop them in their education⁸. There is some evidence showing that career activities impact development of skills, mostly when done in person⁹. But it is interesting to find out whether this is still the case when work experience is delivered virtually.

Video testimonies submitted by young people after their virtual work experience show that the activities they participated in provided them with the chance to learn and practice these skills. 32% of young people who submitted video feedback after their placement agreed that their placement had given them the opportunity to develop essential skills.

Teamwork was cited numerous times in their feedback, particularly in the cases where young people got to work together to create things. Interestingly, some of the video feedback also underlines how career activities such as work experience can touch on several skills at the same time, providing a unique opportunity for attendees to practice multiple skills – such as teamwork, communication and developing self-confidence – in one task.

Here are some examples:

The best part of my work experience was being able to work as a team with other people, especially the ones that I'd never met before. Also using confidence and skill to be able to present an idea and poster and the work that we'd done in a team to other panellists, who I'd never met before.

Fred, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work placement with East of England Energy Group.

The best part of my work experience was the interviewing stage. It brought me out of my comfort zone, and it developed new skills for me. So, in the future, when I do an interview, I know what to do and what not to do. The interviewers are really good at what they do. And it really taught me a lot.

Sam, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Cisco Systems.

The best part of my work experience was when we split into the breakout rooms and brainstormed ideas on how we can increase tourism post-COVID. It was very interesting for everyone to share their opinion and to listen to each other.

James, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work placement with VisitBritain/ VisitEngland.

The best part of my work experience was getting to work together in a team virtually to design a new building in London.

Dzifa, 17-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Scott Brownrigg.

We know from existing evidence that developing skills like those mentioned above result in better life outcomes for young people including stronger social and emotional competencies, wage premium, and higher levels of qualifications. It is therefore important to reassure young people and other stakeholders that, by completing virtual work experience placements, the young person still gets the opportunity to grow essential skills even though it may look different when this is achieved through online interaction.

4.2 What did young people learn from their experience? And what were their top tips for other young people?

Theme 1 - Learn about employers and gain insights into careers

Studies have shown that uncertainty at the age of 15 by students about the type of job they expect to have in the future relates to worse than anticipated employment outcomes later on¹⁰. Engagement with employers from different sectors, roles, and seniority levels will widen young people's aspirations and equip them with the knowledge and confidence they need to make more informed decisions about who and what they want to become when they grow up. Young people who participated in virtual work experience shared some tips with their peers on the benefits they had derived from their placement and gave some tips to young people who may not be sure about what they want to do or have no career ambitions.

25% of young people who submitted video feedback felt that their peers should participate in virtual work placements to better understand the opportunities available in the careers they would like to pursue. Because employers introduced members from multiple teams as part of a single virtual work experience placement, young people also felt that they learnt what skills they would need to progress to those careers and how enjoyable they would find such roles.

Here are some examples:

My top tip for the young people is to take up on all opportunities like this, to get a much more accurate idea of what a career in law actually means and what it entails. We all see solicitors or barristers in court, but what about the other 80% of the job? What skills does it require? And can you find fulfilment within that, I think that it's important for students to take advantage of these experiences to broaden their horizons.

Alec, 17-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with High Tide Foundation.

My top tip for other young people is to throw yourself into every opportunity and try different things out. It'll help you narrow down your list of the things you do like, and the things you don't like, but also what skills you possess and where you need to work.

Sarah, 17-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with Jackson Civil Engineering.

My top tip for other young people is just to take these opportunities when they arise because they can open up such a variety of career paths, some of which you might not even know exist.

Jaunti, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with MVV Environment Devonport.

My top tip for other young people is to take as many opportunities as they can because it helps you understand what you enjoy, making sure you end up doing something you love. And it also means you get to meet people with similar interests and make some friends.

Maya, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Fusion; a joint venture of Morgan Sindall Infrastructure, BAM Nuttall and Ferrovial Agroman.

The findings of the analysis of the video feedback in this section resonate perfectly with previously published research on the benefits of multiple interactions with employers¹¹. It is evidenced that young people could gain access to new, useful and trusted information and networks while interacting with professionals. In this way, by taking part in activities that allow multiple encounters with employers, young people are able to build their social and cultural capital, while also discovering practical information about career pathways to help realise their career ambitions.

Theme 2 – Don't be afraid, go for it!

Our research shows that online work experience placements can also play a critical role in restoring some of the self-belief that young people need to pursue their dream careers².

The evolving world of work and new working patterns have made some young people question some of the assumptions they had made previously about their future careers and capabilities. This lack of self-confidence was compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, young people who attended virtual work placements felt more confident about the next steps to take in their future career and one of their top tips for others was to “go for it..”

My top tip for other young people would be, go for it. Ask as many questions as you want during the work experience, because I did, and it really helped me get an insight into quantity surveying.

Mathichudar, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Walter Carefoot.

Another top tip that young people have to give to their peers is to “ask as many questions as possible” to learn more about the work settings of the employers and gain an insight into the various ways that entry-level staff join the company.

My top tip for other young people is to put yourself out there and try to get as much experience as you can, even if it's in a career you're not sure about because that experience is so valuable and there's no harm in trying.

Niamh, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Spotify.

My top tip to young people is don't limit yourself, always chase and reach higher. If you know, you get this opportunity to join the work experience, do it. You will learn so much more and you won't be limiting yourself to the things that you don't know.

Portia, 17-year-old student who completed a virtual work experience placement with the NHS.

My top tip for those who will be younger. Um, don't be afraid to put yourself forward to genuinely try if it's something you would be interested in. And even if it's not, if you have that slight bit of interest still go forward for it because you never know where it could take you. It could give you a very big opportunity for the future. You never know what can happen from that? You could decide, oh, well, I would be interested in a career in this now, as long as your subject specifically would cater to that. And the subjects that it would be based around would encourage that. Then I would recommend you to go for it because you only get experiences once and if you don't go for the chance, you're not going to get that chance.

Natalia, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Robertson.

37% of the comments provided by young people in their videos encouraged others to do virtual work experiences because it would challenge how they see themselves and the world around them and support their career decision-making.

Young people also highlighted how interacting with employers from various industries and meeting with people from early-career employees to senior professionals provides a unique opportunity to explore interests, confirm career choices, or rule out options in an informed way.

4.3 What did young people learn about themselves due to their experience?

Theme 1 – Recognising the importance of essential skills

According to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), employers expect the need for workplace skills such as communication and teamwork to increase in the next three to five years. However, worryingly, they are not confident about meeting these skills needs¹³.

As companies continue seeing applicants without the right skillsets, the Speakers for Schools Experience programme seeks to enable young people who participate in placements to acquire and develop essential skills based on the Skills Builder framework. In the transition to virtual delivery, choosing online activities that still allowed young people to develop essential skills remained key and our findings from our analysis of the post-placement video feedback show that young people acknowledge this to be the case.

32% of young people who submitted video feedback after their placement agreed that they have had the opportunity to develop essential skills, with 26% of young people who answered the question, “What did I learn about myself?” citing teamwork or participating in group projects as an essential skill that they have gained through their placement. This suggests that online work placements can help young people to improve those crucial skills required by employers.

Here are some specific examples taken from the video feedback:

Probably the best thing I learnt about myself would be that I am able to work properly in a team because in the past, I had very negative experiences with that, whether it be somebody slacking off or not being fully, you know what I mean, fully interested. And I did feel comfortable with the people I was paired with, and I did appreciate that. And everybody encouraged each other that they get involved in having specific sections for each part. Um, so everybody had an equal part roughly, and everybody helped read the presentation at the end. I'm very awkward around people, and I don't always have the ability to read out loud, but this did give me a little bit more freedom and made me feel a bit more comfortable in myself, not only for now but also in the future, which I think will help me overall.

Natalia, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Robertson.

I think what I realised about myself was that I really enjoy putting my ideas forward and I really thrive in a creative setting where I can do things like that and talk with people and interact with others.

Inaaya, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Reach Plc.

What I learnt most about myself is that I'm able to think quickly and creatively to complete a task that I'd never done before. And I'm able to work with people who I'd never met before.

Niamh, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Spotify.

What I learnt about myself is that I actually am a very competent speaker. Prior to work experience, I thought speaking online to people was awkward. Tesco gave me an opportunity to speak to people.

Jeevan, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Tesco.

According to previous research on what works well in career activities, having the opportunity for young people to reflect on their experience maximises the impact of an experience¹⁴. Getting direct feedback from the employers and undergoing self-reflection exercises following their placement helps the young person to better understand what they learnt and be better prepared to present or express how they have developed their skills on their CV or in future interviews more confidently.

Theme 2 – Self-efficacy and improved confidence

Believing in one’s abilities can play a crucial role in many aspects of the career development of a young person and their life outcomes¹⁵. Being confident in choices made from the early stages of life could support individuals with a smoother school-to-work transition. Confidence and self-esteem are also closely linked with the well-being of young people and, according to YouGov research commissioned by Speakers for School in May/June 2021 Making Up for Lost Time research report¹⁶ is an area of concern where young people feel they need more support to make up for lost time following the pandemic and as a result of school closures.

The videos submitted by young people show that their virtual experiences of the world of work have helped them to realise the importance of confidence for their future planning.

What I learnt from this work experience is that there are many routes open all the time. So if one fails, there’s always another path to go to. I also learnt that confidence is very important. If you want to, um, if you want to perform at your personal best.

Varad, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with the British Army.

What I learnt about myself was how little my list of opportunities I was limiting myself to was before my work experience placement. And now I feel more confident afterwards because of the wider range of options I actually have that I wasn’t aware of before.

Trina, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with the NHS.

What I learnt I learnt about myself was that confidence is a very big thing in life. And if you don’t have much confidence in you, you won’t succeed.

Gabriel, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Wates.

Well, I learnt most about myself is that I am committed to achieving my goals and dreams. No matter how long or challenging.

Karolina, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Haworth Tompkins.

The analysis of the videos also shows that young people gained confidence in communicating and collaborating and working with others albeit in a digital setting. Changes to the workplace arising from a greater reliance on technology and a greater acceptance of remote working following the pandemic mean that digital skills and confidence in communicating and collaborating online are all vital skills for young people to develop to prepare them for the world of work. In 43% of the post-placement video feedback, young people commented on a boost in confidence, feeling more positive about working with other people and having learnt how to communicate well with others.

Here are some examples:

What I learnt most about myself is I can work in a team. When I first started doing the work experience, and I saw that that’s work in a team. I was nervous about not knowing how to do it. And now that I’ve done it, I’m confident that I could do it again. And I feel like now I’ve done the work experience; I can work better in a group.

Mathichudar, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Walter Carefoot.

Uh, well, I learnt about myself from the work experiences is that I could be more confident than I sometimes think I am. So for example, I didn't think I'd be able to speak in front of all the other people, and we split into the breakroom spot and I was able to do so.

Loki, 14-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with the British Army.

What I learnt most about myself was that I am capable of contribution. I communicated with people who are unknown to me... I've not been given enough opportunity to communicate with unknown people previously.

Maheen, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Tesco.

By completing group projects, young people validated their knowledge and skills in a space usually outside their comfort zone. In the same way that it would during an in-person placement, feedback provided by employers during the online sessions helped increase the young people's motivation and built a link between what they are studying in their curriculum and how they can apply it practically in the world of work.

40% of respondents cited their "interest(ed/ing)" in "career" and "skills" as what they learnt about themselves through their virtual placement, with some young people self-reflecting on how specific careers might suit them. Gabriela who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with RAPP said:

What I learnt most about myself is the fact that I would definitely want to pursue a marketing and advertising career in the future. This is a field that I would want to explore more. And this work experience allowed me to realise that.

Gabriela, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with RAPP.

Others felt that it reinforced their choices to follow their chosen academic and career path.

What I learnt about myself from this experience was that I fit the university route of entering into employment more than the college or degree apprenticeship mode of going into employment. Because I fit studying and academics, so I found this experience very helpful in finding out whether apprenticeships are for me or aren't for me.

Sabeena, 15-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with United Utilities.

What I learnt most about myself is that I'd rather go into an apprenticeship than go to university.

Lewis, 14-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with BAM Construction.

Theme 3 – Careers education

There are a variety of ways that careers education can be delivered to young people but one of its core purposes is to introduce them to a wide range of industries, to inspire them to become who they want to be – no matter what their starting point or background – and to follow their ambitions while giving them the insight and information they need to make informed decisions. Employer engagement and interaction with real workplaces while developing the skills they need to succeed in the future is an important aspect of any good careers education provision. Taking part in activities that facilitate employer engagement and interaction with real workplaces – whether in-person or online – young people learn so much about what employers are looking for, what different jobs look like on a daily basis and how they can find recruitment pathways into certain roles and industries.

A key message that came through the video feedback that we received from young people following their virtual placements was how important virtual work experience is for careers education. 37% of young people in the sample mentioned how helpful their experience has been in making decisions about their future careers. It showed that young people felt clearer about the different routes available to them to enter certain industries and felt clearer about the options for career progression available within those industries.

For example, by meeting with both junior employers and senior leaders, young people became more confident about the choices they were making in their academic subjects and more convinced that the commitments they were making in school would lead to successful outcomes.

Something that I learnt about myself was learning about how medicine isn't always having to be required within the NHS and how science isn't always having to be applied. You can find yourself within the NHS, you can find yourself doing something that you never thought you would do. And that's what I learnt about myself.

Portia, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with the NHS.

What has surprised me the most is the fact that I'm more interested in construction than I thought I would be. And I might even consider it as a career path for the future.

Meda, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with Farrans Construction

What I learnt about myself was probably my fascination with being self-employed after being taught about financial accounting and tax accounting. I think this is a route that I would consider to go down in the future... this wasn't an option that I intended to have.

Megan, 14-year-old student who completed a virtual insight day with FAR Accountancy Training and Apprenticeship).

Members of the Speakers for Schools Youth Panel echoed this sentiment, reflecting that meeting junior and senior staff on a virtual work placement helped them understand the bigger picture of what a career entails and how companies work from the bottom right to the top of the ladder. This message was reinforced by Alec, a 16-year-old who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement focusing on the ethics of law with High Tide Foundation who said:

What I learnt most about myself is that I have a real interest in the ethics of law. I also learnt that there are so many different specialisms within the law and, consequently, how important it is discovering what is available to you and what interests you. And ultimately, I was able to ask myself if I think this is a career I can pursue.

Alec, 16-year-old student who completed a multiday virtual work experience placement with High Tide Foundation.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we believe the findings of this paper suggest that virtual work experience has the potential to become a valued part of careers education in its own right with clear benefits to young people and other stakeholders. As we navigate the continued uncertainty of how the world of work will evolve, it makes sense that our collective approach to careers education for young people should adjust to reflect changes in working practices and recognise the importance of technology as an enabler.

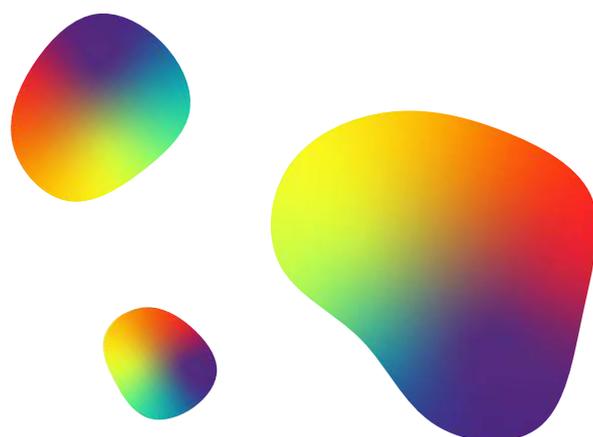
Our research during this study suggests that young people can indeed derive clear benefits from taking part in high-quality virtual work experience – particularly when this virtual work experience is delivered as part of a comprehensive careers education provision that provides multiple and varied opportunities for young people to learn about different jobs and industries through a range of activities such as inspirational talks, career fairs, personal guidance, and so on.

Our analysis of the video testimonies submitted by the 202 young people who took part in virtual placements through Speakers for Schools confirms that they viewed their virtual work experience as having significant value – offering them a unique way to gain insights about careers, acquire basic digital skills as well as boost their confidence levels and develop other essential skills by collaborating and communicating effectively online.

Many of the outcomes the young people commented on are very similar to those achieved previously by in-person work experience placements that are widely referenced in the existing national guidelines, benchmarks and published research relating to work experience and careers education.

It may still be too soon to fully evaluate the merits of virtual work experience in direct comparison to in-person placements, but there can be no doubt that the online alternative has quickly established itself as a hugely valuable tool that can be used to massively improve scale and reach when it comes to delivering work experience across the UK. And because we know from our own quantitative data that virtual work experience also offers such flexibility in terms of breadth of choice and the number of placements available in any location, young people from across the UK can do multiple placements easily at zero cost to their school or parents, meaning more young people are better placed to learn about careers in one or more industries that interest them in a way that just wouldn't be possible through traditional in-person experiences.

Not only this, but our research also indicates that throughout the pandemic and beyond, virtual work experience is providing a much-needed way for young people to address the deficit in self-confidence, self-belief and self-efficacy caused by the pandemic.



6. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Moving forwards, Speakers for Schools remains committed to building a sound evidence base around the value of virtual work experience to contribute to the ongoing debate around what constitutes a robust and comprehensive careers education provision.

Following this paper, we will initiate more in-depth research based on video evidence from the SeenIt app to better understand and compare different types of virtual work experiences and their outcomes based on demographics.

We invite policy makers, educators, employers and other professional bodies to join us in encouraging further research into the value and benefits of virtual work experience. We would welcome the opportunity to review other studies on this topic and we would be very happy to discuss any of the points raised in this paper as part of a working group.

7. REFERENCING

1. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/employer-engagement-in-education>
2. For the purposes of this review, Speakers for Schools defined young people as referring to the people aged between 14 and 19 (and up to age 24 for young people with special educational needs or disabilities).
3. <https://www.speakersforschools.org/campaign/amplifying-the-voices-of-young-people-through-our-research/>
4. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/contemporary-transitions-young-britons-reflect-on-life-after-secondary-school-and-college/>
5. At Speakers for Schools we use the Skills Builder Framework to communicate and measure essential skills. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/universal-framework/listening>
6. https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2960/cbi_work-readiness.pdf
7. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/file/essential-skills-teachers-perspectives-on-opportunities-and-barriers>
8. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/better-prepared>
9. <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/wknmpwvm/what-works-report-work-experience.pdf>
10. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/8b1215dc-en.pdf?expires=1654011352&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=D5FB7B5732E0B4D3C7B95CAB96FFE68A>
11. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/contemporary-transitions-young-britons-reflect-on-life-after-secondary-school-and-college/>
12. <https://www.speakersforschools.org/campaign/amplifying-the-voices-of-young-people-through-our-research/>
13. https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/7020/12684_tess_-survey_2021.pdf
14. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/what-works-in-careers-events-our-findings-published-in-a-new-careers-and-enterprise-company-report/>
15. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3779915/>
16. <https://www.speakersforschools.org/campaign/amplifying-the-voices-of-young-people-through-our-research/>

To discuss how you can contribute to helping Speakers for Schools support more young people through work experience, please contact the authors of this report:

[Elnaz Kashfepakdel](#) and [Funbi Akande](#)