



SPEAKERS
for schools



Work Experience For All

Exploring the impacts of work experience
on young people's outcomes

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November 2022

FOREWORD

Speakers for Schools is all about improving social mobility through levelling the playing field between state schools and the fee-paying sector. As its founder, I and the charity are motivated by improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged in society. So this report is not an exercise in altruistic rhetoric. It is evidence of the important role that work experience has played and can continue to play in increasing the career and earning prospects of state school students.

It analyses data collected from 18 to 30-year-olds who did work experience in secondary school and/or in a post-16 setting and makes a solid case for the many ways that work experience can help to address skills gaps, achieve smoother transitions from school to the workplace and also motivate young people to achieve and make more informed career decisions.

Disparity in levels of participation in work experience from across the UK-wide cohort of 2,098 respondents who took part in our YouGov survey is no surprise. It illustrates why so many of the top professions are still so dominated – scandalously – by the tiny number educated in fee-paying schools.

At Speakers for Schools, research like this informs our actions and inspires us to do more to address the many factors behind the UK's poor social mobility. The findings together with our track record for delivering high-quality work experience means we are uniquely placed to work with a growing network of policymakers, employers and educators to lead a step-change in how work experience is perceived more generally and accessed by young people.

The UK desperately needs a more resilient and adaptable work force. And this means working with those still thinking about the careers that lie ahead of them, and with employers to direct them to the cohorts of brilliant young people traditionally excluded from top quality work experience. This report provides validation that work experience – whether in-person or virtual – can and should be a cornerstone of every young person's education.

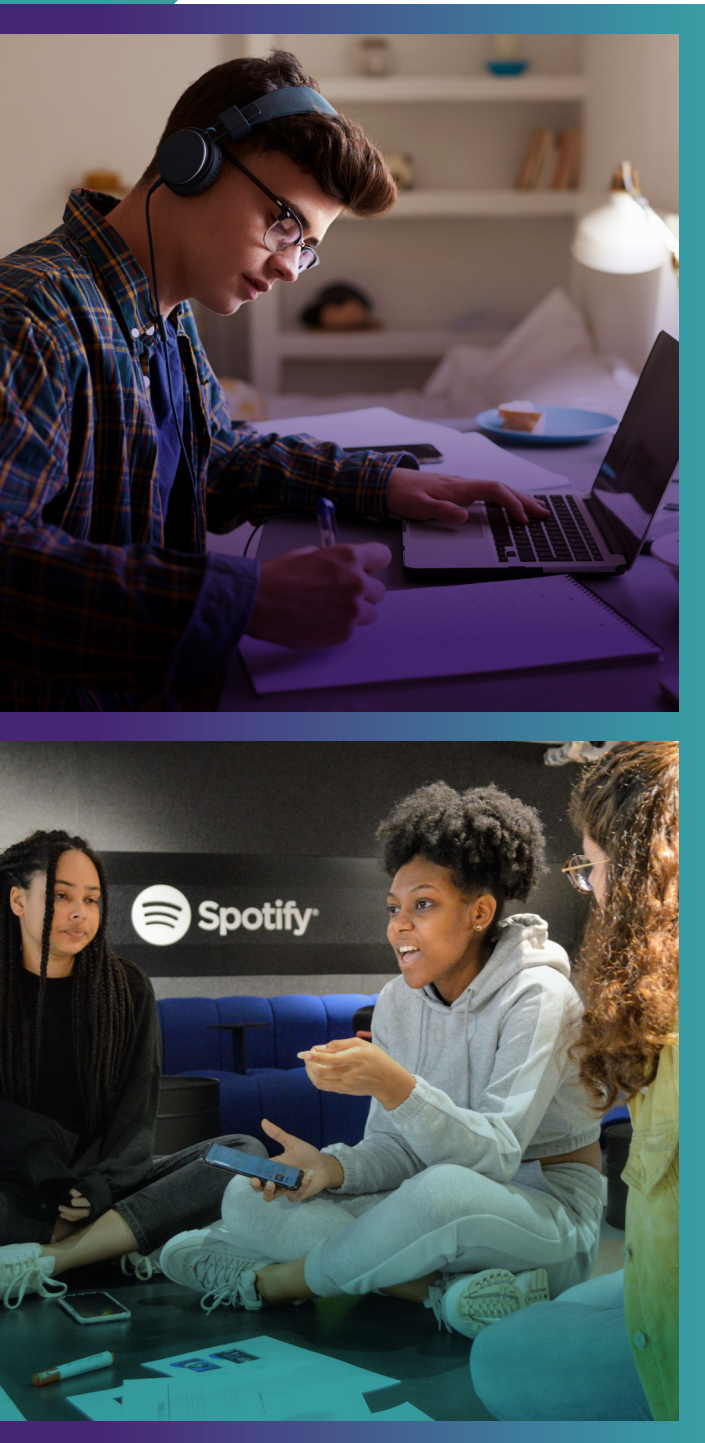


Robert Peston

Founder of Speakers for Schools



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OUR 7 KEY FINDINGS

The real value of work experience

This report uncovers the real value of work experience.

It is the first in a series of studies we are undertaking as part of our recently launched campaign **Work Experience For All**, aimed at enabling every young person across the country the opportunity to access meaningful work experience.

This initial work involved a comprehensive survey of young British adults aged 18-30.

The report sets out the recollections of the respondents on work experience participation; their perceptions of the quality of their experiences and what they found valuable and finally what it was that schools and colleges did which helped with those transitions.

The study follows up on a 2011, 2017 and 2020 survey, also undertaken by YouGov, on behalf of various education and employability charities. Analysis revealed evidence of wage premiums and reduced incidence of being Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) related to participation in work experience.

This study found that:

- 1 Only a third of teenagers aged 16-18 had work experience, and only half of 14-16-year-olds did.
- 2 Pupils from independent schools were twice as likely to have done multiple work placements as their state-educated peers.
- 3 Young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have participated in multiple work experience opportunities.
- 4 Older respondents recall higher volumes of work experience and the overall number of young people participating in work experience has reduced over the past decade.
- 5 Attending work experience is associated with higher wages when young people are in full-time employment. The analysis shows that for each additional type of work experience reported throughout secondary school, whether virtual or face-to-face, respondents reported a 3.4% higher average wage after controlling for socio-economic factors.
- 6 Attending work experience is linked to lower odds of young people becoming NEET. The analysis shows that attending work experience reduces the probability of becoming NEET from 11% to 7%, having controlled for socio-economic status.
- 7 Attending work experience helps young people develop essential skills, motivation and confidence.

These findings serve to underline the size and scale of the ongoing social mobility crisis but also help to illustrate how making work experience more accessible and more inclusive presents a huge opportunity. An opportunity for employers, educators and policymakers to work together to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution – a future-facing solution that leaves no young person behind.

Changing policy to make a difference: Our Work Experience For All campaign

Speakers for Schools is passionate about social mobility and ensuring young people have access to opportunities to develop skills regardless of their location or background. The report's findings suggest that delivering meaningful and impactful work experience – whether in person or virtual – creates opportunities for young people and has a long-term positive impact on their employment outcomes.

To help young people realise their potential, Speakers for Schools has launched its **Work Experience For All** campaign. The overarching aim of this ambitious campaign is to explore what it would take for every young person across the country to access quality work experience. Currently, we are working with a range of partners to answer this question. As we move forward, we will explore what policy levers we can and should pull, as well as how schools, local and national government and the private sector can work together to enable every young person to benefit from access to quality work experience. We fundamentally believe work experience is a universal right for every young person.



To learn more about our campaign, or show your support, just scan the QR code or visit speakersforschools.org/work-experience-for-all



The findings of this report are consistent with previous studies on the importance of experiences of the world of work. The social and economic benefits of supporting young people to become more work ready and develop the essential skills they need for uncertain and complex career journeys cannot be overlooked. We can now see that through activities like work experience young people develop some type of social capital which enhances successful school-to-work transitions. It is an unfortunate reality that access to social capital is not equally distributed across the country. As a social mobility charity, we are committed to ensuring young people from throughout the UK, particularly from disadvantaged communities, have the same access to opportunities and support to realise their potential as everybody else.

Work experience is a catalyst for young people to explore various routes into employment, access first-hand insights into specific sectors and jobs, develop both essential and technical skills such as digital competencies, and more importantly bring their learnings to life by applying their knowledge in unfamiliar situations and real-life projects. This has significant implications for employers as they strive to build a more diverse workforce with a reliable future talent pipeline, and for the government, as it strives to address skills gaps in key industries and regions.

This research is also another great reminder that, when thinking of the relationship between career-related learning activities and experiences of the world of work, we should consider that:

- **More opportunities mean better outcomes: young people need more than one work experience during their time at school and college and this research shows why.**
- **Equity matters: access to meaningful work experience is still influenced by factors such as school type, family social class and other socio-economic factors. This has implications for social mobility.**
- **Innovation is valued: with quality at the heart of any provision, we need to be forward looking and flexible in our approach to delivery of work experience and capitalise on new opportunities for innovation.**

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of work experience

The launch of the Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in 1983 first saw the government provide funding for students in full-time compulsory education to gain experience of the workplace via a short-term placement. The TVEI aimed to develop students' personal and social skills and help them to see the relevance of the curriculum to the world of work. Positive evaluations of TVEI led the government to continue funding for work experience once the initiative ended in 1997¹. Recognising the benefits that work-related learning could have for all pupils, from 2004, its provision became a statutory requirement for all students in Key Stage 4 (14 to 16-year-olds) in England.*

Until 2012, all schools and colleges were obligated to ensure that all students participated in work-related learning, which was generally interpreted as substantive work experience placements. In 2012 the Department of Education (DfE) removed the statutory guidance placed upon schools and instead shifted its focus to providing work experience in study programmes (16-19 education programmes)². According to the Wolf Review, in times of financial stringency, the government was advised to focus on value-added programmes which in fact refers to work experience for 16 to 18-year-olds as they are much closer to the transition phase to employment³. The review also argued that at the time fewer and fewer employers were willing to accommodate young people under 16 on their premises, and the paperwork associated with placements has increased exponentially.

For that reason, the blanket requirement to give all KS4 pupils 'work experience' – or as it officially became termed, 'work-related learning' – had served its time. Official statistics on how many young people participated in work experience before 2012 are not clear. However unweighted survey data from young people recalling their experiences at school showed that about 80% of secondary school students did work experience during that period⁴.

The removal of the statutory duty was intended to create more freedoms for secondary schools to choose the most appropriate service for students. However, the consequence of this policy meant that many secondary schools withdrew their work experience programmes and student experience therefore varied hugely during this period. There is limited evidence on the number of young people who have done work experience since 2012 but according to Moot and Archer's large-scale survey of young people less than half of the population had the opportunity to do so (cited in Buzzeeo and Cifci 2017). Their survey also showed how access to opportunity is regionally imbalanced with pockets of opportunity deprivation in some parts of the country including the North West and York. This indicates there has been a declining trend in work experience when it comes to ease of access and opportunity for young people.

In 2017, with the publication of the UK Career Strategy (2017) and the introduction of Gatsby Benchmarks, it was recognised that access to experiences of the world of work while in education would enable young people to make a smoother transition into a difficult labour market and secondary schools were tasked with taking a more holistic approach to helping young people to become 'career ready'. It is important to note that since their introduction, the Gatsby Benchmarks were a statutory guidance and secondary schools and colleges were encouraged to adopt them. Secondary schools currently have a legal duty to secure independent careers guidance and provide opportunities from a range of providers to inform pupils about technical education qualifications or apprenticeships and publish information about the careers programme on the school website.

However, according to The Careers and Enterprise Company, little over half of secondary schools (54.5%) are offering the majority of their students a meaningful experience of the workplace by the end of year 11⁵. When comparing this to previous statistics, on average, there hasn't been much improvement in the uptake of work experience. The numbers have somewhat stagnated and in some cases are still declining.

With steep reductions to education budgets, it is hard for teachers to dedicate the necessary time and resources to supporting whole year groups with work experience too. Schools are under immense pressure to deliver the curriculum but have also increasingly adopted new responsibilities to support young people and families from deprived backgrounds – a particularly pressing challenge given the current cost-of-living crisis and escalating energy bills.**

Unfortunately, this means that both access to work experience and organising work experience tend to largely fall to the young person and their own informal and familial support network. The House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility (2016) found that 82% of young people cited parents as their biggest source of careers guidance⁶.

In some cases, parents are being asked by schools to subsidise work experience placements by paying around £50 or more for the opportunity, with an additional fee for placements in London. Following the government's decision to drop compulsory work experience for 14 to 16-year-olds parents are now picking up the bill for risk assessments and any additional admin associated with their child taking part in a placement. Placing a financial burden on parents seems not only unfair, but also likely to enforce social imbalances in the classroom and the workplace. Asking parents to pay a higher fee for placements that are not in their immediate geographical area but further afield imposes a barrier that many young people and their parents will not be able to overcome⁷.

* Work experience is a subset of work-related learning, they have different but related definitions

** In this context, 'support' may include providing food banks or opening their doors to families who can't afford to heat their home during the winter months.

What do we mean by work experience?

Although work experience for young people has existed for such a long time, there is still no clear agreed definition for what constitutes work experience and its purpose and interpretation vary from placement to placement.

We believe that work experience should be an opportunity for a young person to partake in high-quality live employer-led interactive sessions while in education where they can meet people from the employer's organisation, develop their understanding of careers at that organisation and build their employability skills. Our definition does not overtly distinguish between online or in-person placements provided the sessions are immersive and in real time with focused group activities that enable the young person to meet a range of people from the employer's organisation and undertake activities that enable skills development.

More traditionally, work experience has been viewed as a one-off time-limited placement that involves a young person visiting an employer's premises while in full-time education. Often in practice, this approach has amounted to a tick box exercise with limited scope for scaling up or providing in-depth insights across an organisation or industry and we are keen to see a more comprehensive definition emerge that has a clearly cited learning outcome as a key ingredient. We need to move towards a more innovative, modern and relevant work placement definitions and delivery models that reflects the flexibility schools and colleges need to respond to the needs of all their students.

According to Buzzeo and Cifci 2017, the purpose of work experience placements – that was put forward following consultation with various key stakeholder groups – was to develop a young person's employability skills to assist in their career decision-making, preparing them for the transition to employment, or increasing their motivation towards schoolwork by helping them to see how their studies apply to the world of work.

In addition, Gatsby Benchmark⁹ number six refers to the experiences of the workplaces as part of a good careers education provision. Gatsby Benchmark six includes work placement as an activity and states that:

“Every pupil should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities, and expand their networks.”

In this paper, we use the term work experience to refer to placements that may vary in duration and delivery method – whether this be virtual or in-person – however, we still hold the view that every work experience placement should include live interaction with employers and deliver the learning outcomes suggested by the wider literature.

Above all, we believe that the quality of work experience should not be compromised. There is some literature looking at what works in effective delivery of work experience and we will be looking to further investigate this in another report.

Why do young people need work experience now more than ever?

We are not short of evidence showing the changing nature of the world of work and the shift towards a more uncertain and complex job market where portfolio careers have replaced the traditional life-long careers of the past and technology is rapidly changing every workplace. Navigating a changing job market where young people face more choices and more uncertainty but do not receive more practical careers guidance is likely to be not only overwhelming but also hugely confusing.

Knowing this, it stands to reason that the education system in England must also change to better prepare young people for the transition into employment. We believe that work experience can be especially helpful with the school-to-work transition specifically in the following areas:

Work experience can help young people to make more informed GCSE subject choices

Currently, in England, most young people choose their GCSE subjects in Year 9 not fully appreciating the huge impact their choices could have on limiting or enabling their future choice of career. Certain careers will inevitably have certain academic requirements or subject preferences that will make a candidate either less or more suitable for a particular role, but it can be very difficult for a Year 9 with little knowledge of the job market to anticipate and reverse engineer their choices accordingly. Aligning the curriculum more closely with the labour market and giving young people opportunities to learn more about different career roles through activities such as work experience earlier in their education would ensure that young people can make more informed decisions about GCSE subject choices based on a better rudimentary understanding of the labour market.

Work experience can help young people to navigate new post-16 pathways and qualifications

The recent introduction of new education pathways and qualifications, such as T levels and higher apprenticeships, has created more post-16 choices for young people adding more pressure on them to decide whether to move into vocational education after completing GCSEs. To make informed decisions about pathways at this age and stage of education, it seems equally logical that they would need reliable and consistent access to labour market information around the sectors that offer apprenticeships and guidance as to whether opting for vocational education will help them achieve their career ambitions. Taking part in work experience as part of a broad careers provision ahead of making key post-16 pathway decisions would improve young people's awareness of the various options available to them and enable them to make more informed choices about which pathway to follow.

Work experience can bridge the gap in access to other opportunities such as Saturday jobs and part-time work

With fewer 'Saturday' jobs available, as well as the lower participation in part-time work and summer jobs, young people have fewer opportunities to acquire any kind of work experience outside of school. If in turn school does not provide opportunities for young people to experience the world of work and obtain useful and trusted insights into different jobs and sectors, we cannot expect that school-age young people will have realistic and informed aspirations. And this will mean that their own potentially narrow view of the job market will go unchallenged leading many to make less informed decisions. Previously published research by the charity Education & Employers shows that having multiple interactions with employers throughout their education supports young people with their decision-making and motivates them to study harder as they believe in themselves more and see the relevance of education to the world beyond the classroom⁹.

Work experience can help young people to prepare for a tech-enabled world of work

We are living in an era where the role that technology plays in connecting people and communities together is indisputable. Technology has enabled new ways of working and allowed new industries and job roles to emerge. This means young people need to develop an appropriate skillset that will prepare them for a job market where innovation and new standards and methods of communication are part of every workplace. Having witnessed how extensively digital technologies are shaping modern work practices, it follows that online work experience can help provide young people with the opportunity to experience this phenomenon for themselves while still in education. Speakers for Schools' recent publication shows that young people who have participated in virtual work experience agreed that they developed their communication and digital skills by working collaboratively with others and using digital technology to connect and interact with employers¹⁰. There is also evidence that once young people develop essential skills such as problem-solving, speaking and listening they are better placed to enter the labour market and progress once in employment. Young people with higher levels of essential skills enjoy higher wages and lower chances of unemployment later in life¹¹.

Work experience can help young people to make up for lost time following the pandemic

There can be no doubt that the pandemic has cast a dark shadow over the hopes and aspirations of many young people – disrupting their education, weighing heavily on their well-being, and greatly reducing the number of opportunities available to them. Extensive evidence exists that documents the many ways that the pandemic has disproportionately affected young people and, though they have shown great resilience throughout a very challenging time, it is widely recognised that they have not emerged unscathed. The pandemic widened divides between the most and least privileged and created a raft of new issues that young people cannot address alone. In another YouGov study commissioned by Speakers for Schools in 2021¹², young people, MPs and business leaders were asked what they thought were the most effective ways to boost young people's post-pandemic recovery. Both MPs and young people who responded to the survey agreed to some extent that access to work placements had a key role to play in helping young people to make up for lost time (over 30% of respondents). Significantly, almost 50% of young people in the sample said that work experience and internships in relevant fields are the most important way to improve their confidence in their future career prospects.



Work experience can help young people to become truly career ready

Many employers continue to observe that school leavers fall massively short of meeting their expectations around career readiness when entering employment while other employers simply need to inspire more young people to consider applying for jobs in their sector. With so much at stake – particularly given the urgency of the net zero agenda and the need to be both more sustainable and environmentally responsible – employers have little to no choice but to engage with education and young people directly through activities such as work experience. We know that meaningful engagements and interactions with employers are vital to help inform young people's career aspirations, widen their horizons and enable them to develop insights into industries¹⁴ It follows then that, with more direct engagement with employers through activities like work experience, young people should be better placed to gain first-hand trusted information about the jobs of the future and build the requisite knowledge and skills that employers themselves demand and value.

Further supporting evidence regarding the documented impact of work experience is included as an appendix at the end of this report.

What does this paper include?

The UK evidence base for the impacts and outcomes of work experience is not extensive. More research needs to be done to rigorously and robustly explore and evaluate work experience's relationship with social, educational and employment outcomes for young people. At Speakers for Schools, we believe that evidence should be at the heart of everything we offer and do. This research was therefore designed to add to the body of knowledge and evidence on the outcomes of work experience.

The result of this analysis also informs our recently launched campaign called **Work Experience For All** which aims to explore what it would take for every young person in the UK to access quality work experience. Currently, we are working with a range of partners to answer this question. As we move forward, we will explore what policy levers we can and should pull, as well as how schools, local and national government and the private sector can work together to enable every young person to benefit from access to quality work experience.

In the next few sections, we explain the methodology behind our research, present our findings in more detail and conclude what the results mean for our next steps.

Work experience can help young people address skills gaps in the economy

Another important factor to consider when assessing the case for work experience is the role it can perform in helping to address and ultimately close existing and future skills gaps in the UK economy. As the job market continues to change and evolve to meet escalating economic pressures, employers with an eye on the future need to keep pace and keep building reliable talent pipelines that meet the demands of their business. Some industries require faster growth than others and current significant skills shortages in industries such as accounting, construction, IT, logistics and engineering¹³ will become increasingly problematic and more of a threat to economic stability without intervention to help steer and guide young people to develop the required skill sets.

METHODOLOGY

YouGov random probability survey

This report considers the responses of 2,098 individuals from across the UK who completed a survey created by the Speakers for Schools team and administered by the polling firm YouGov. The fieldwork was undertaken in April 2022. This paper applies a similar study design to Mann and Percy (2014), Mann et al. (2017) and Kashefpakdel and Percy (2020) where the relationship between employer engagement and employment outcomes for British teenagers were examined using quantitative research methods and young people recalling their experiences during their education.

Measurement of work experience participation

Respondents in the survey were asked to recall any employer engagement activities they participated in while they were in secondary school and in post-16 education settings. Respondents were given a choice of four different work experience activities to select from and could select more than one type where appropriate for each stage of their secondary and post-16 education. Their responses were used to also calculate the number of times (volume) of work experience activities each respondent had done both at secondary school and in college/post-16 education.

The choices provided were as follows:

Pre-16 (aged 14-16)

- In-person work experience that lasted two weeks or more at an employer office
- In-person work experience that lasted less than two weeks at an employer office
- Virtual work experience with live employers that lasted two weeks using digital platforms
- Virtual work experience with live employers that lasted less than two weeks using digital platforms

Post-16 (aged 16-18)

- In-person work experience that lasted two weeks or more at an employer office
- In-person work experience that lasted less than two weeks at an employer office
- Virtual work experience with live employers that lasted two weeks using digital platforms
- Virtual work experience with live employers that lasted less than two weeks using digital platforms

In most cases, each yes response would typically have represented a single activity, albeit of varying duration.

Table 1 shows that only 52% of the respondents recalled doing any type of work experience while in secondary school and that this number drops to less than a third for work experience completed between the ages of 16 and 18.

Table1. Number in total regardless of type (whole sample)

Number of activities (volume)	Aged 14-16 %	Aged 16-18 %
0	31	60
1	52.5	31
2	13	7
3	1	1
4	2	1

Socio-economic control factors

In analyses of this type, it is important that data are gathered concerning those elements of young people's lives which might be driving their educational and employment outcomes. As well as their age, gender and ethnicity, the survey collected information on:

- the type of secondary school the respondents attended pre-16 and post-16
- whether the respondent recalled receiving free school meals (FSM) at any point in their education
- the respondent's familial social grade
- the geographical region the respondents were in on the day of the survey
- whether the respondents had any additional educational needs
- the highest level of academic qualification the respondents had achieved

For all the analysis undertaken in this study these factors were included in the prediction models to create a comparable sample of young people. Such control variables are essential within statistical regression models. They ensure that any relationships found, for example, between participation in a particular type of activity and an economic outcome, cannot be dismissed as a mask for social privilege or a comparable indicator of advantage.

Measuring employment outcomes

As a sample selected to provide insights into the transitions of young people from full-time education into the labour market, one statistic that was particularly relevant was earnings when in full-time employment. This data is used within the analysis to explore whether higher levels of participation (volume) in work experience can be related to higher average earnings.

The analysis also assesses the relationship between participation in work experience and the likelihood of experiencing unemployment (defined as Not in Education, Employment, or Training and often referred to by the acronym NEET).

For the outcome analysis, we have designed a data-cleansing strategy to allow us to present a more robust set of findings. This sample selection strategy results in a reduction in the size of our analytical sample for both the wage and unemployment outcomes. Firstly, for the income analysis, we only considered young people who are in full-time employment of different types.

Of the initial 2,098 responses in the dataset, 1,111 reported being in full-time work or apprenticeship/training or gave a description under "Other" category that specified full-time work, with most saying they were studying while in full-time work. To create a more comparable sub-sample of young people for the income models, we narrowed the sample to those just in full-time work (n=1046). Secondly, we excluded responses that reported an income less than £8,000 and no response (n=832). And finally, we removed data where we felt the respondents either didn't understand the question, or had provided a biased response. Through this process, we obtained an analytical sample size of 717 young people with complete answers.

For the analysis of the unemployment outcomes, we excluded respondents with valid and complete answers to both questions on work experience participation and employment status on the day of the survey (n=1,712). Table 2 shows that approximately 10% of the respondents were NEET when they completed the survey.

Table 2. Economic activity of the respondent on the day of the survey

	Number of respondents	%
I'm in full time education and unemployed	262	15.3
I'm in full-time education and also doing a part-time job (at least a few hours every week)	163	9.5
I'm doing an apprenticeship/training	32	1.9
I'm in full-time work (any other job)	869	50.8
I'm doing one or more part-time job(s)	148	8.6
I'm not in education, employment or an apprenticeship/training	177	10.3
Other	61	3.6
Total	1712	

Estimation methods

A series of quantitative models were tested to analyse the data gathered through YouGov. Using SPSS and Stata, the following exploratory analyses are undertaken:

- 1 How does work experience participation vary by socio-economic background?
- 2 How do young people feel about their experiences in terms of usefulness?
- 3 How does participation in work experience relate to income and employment status for young people?

We hypothesise that each work experience opportunity (based on young people's self-reported reflection data) will be associated with an improvement in outcomes and measures including increased income and a lower chance of experiencing unemployment. This explorative analysis is primarily carried out using multivariate regression models including logistic regression for NEET analysis and linear regression with robust standard errors.

OUR FINDINGS



Young adults' recollection of work experience at school and college and its relationship with socio-economic factors



Young adults attending private education recalled a greater volume of work experience

The evidence suggests that there are a number of benefits resulting from higher volumes of employer engagement when it comes to future outcomes¹⁵ and more than a dozen publications attest that young people who attended independent fee-paying schools have access to a higher volume of these opportunities¹⁶. When disaggregating work experience participation by school and college type attended the same pattern emerges.

On average, young people who attended independent secondary schools were significantly likely to have done more than three work experience compared to their peers at state secondary schools. Young people from independent schools were twice as likely to have attended 3 or more work experiences (35%) – including virtual and in-person – as opposed to only 17% of state school young people. This pattern is similar when looking at the 16-18 age group. Young people from independent sixth form colleges were significantly more likely to have done 3 or more work experience compared to young people from state funded colleges.

Table 3. Respondent recollection of participation in work experience while age 14-16 N= 1,343

Number of work experience opportunities	State	Grammar	Independent
1	52%	34%	33%
2	29%	31%	31%
3 plus	17%	33%	35%

Table 4. Respondent recollection of participation in work experience while aged 16-18 N= 1,286

Number of work experience opportunities	State	Grammar	Independent
1	50%	39%	30%
2	29%	32%	33%
3 or more	19%	28%	36%



Disadvantage is associated with work experience participation: young people from lower social grades recall a lower number of work experience opportunities

The survey asked a series of questions around socio-economic status of young people including YouGov's measurement of social disadvantage called social grade. The result of the analysis shows that young people from the lower social grade recall having had fewer opportunities than their peers in higher levels of social status.

Table 5. Respondent recollection of participation in work experience at college N= 1,290

Number of work experiences recalled	Social grade C2DE	Social grade ABC1
1	53%	35%
2	30%	32%
3 or more	17%	33%

The newest career trends by The Careers and Enterprise Company based on the activities of 75% of schools across England reports progress against all Gatsby Benchmarks for more disadvantaged schools¹⁷ and shows the gap to be closing. However, it is not clear from reporting around Gatsby Benchmark number six how this translates into access to particular activities i.e. access to work experience as defined in this paper.

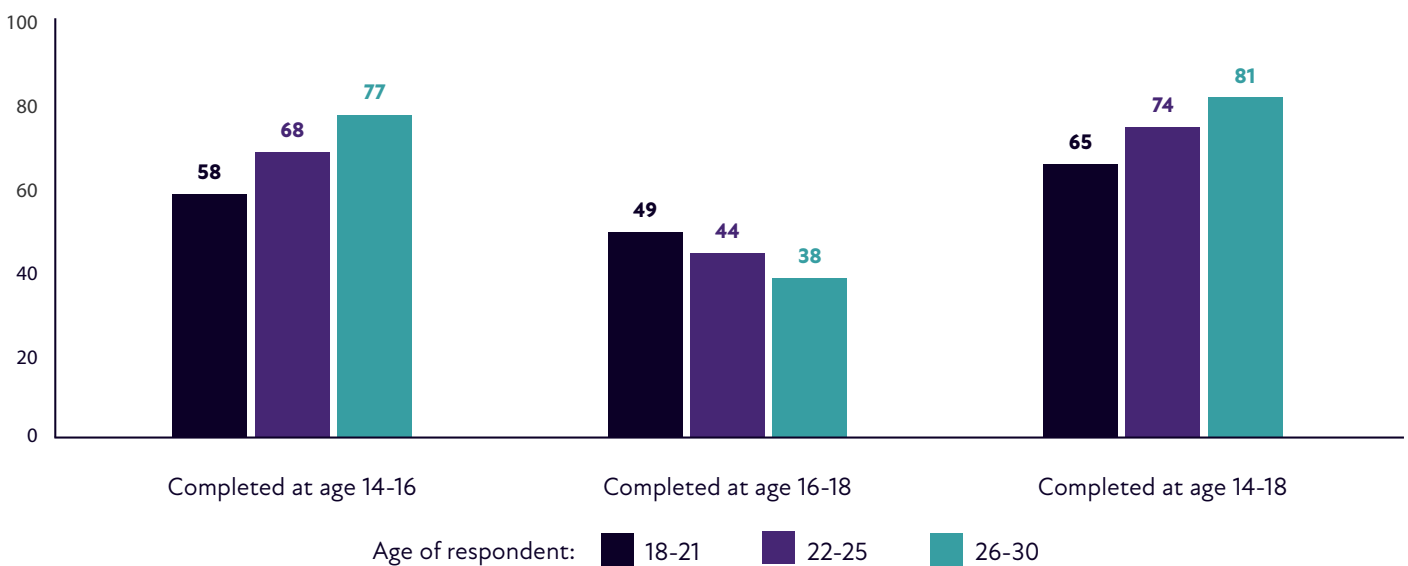


Older respondents recall higher volumes of work experience

To show trends across key age cohorts, respondents were grouped into three categories of 18-21, 22-25 and 26-30. The analysis shows that on average older respondents - i.e those in the category 26-30 - recall higher number of work experience opportunities than the younger age group. About 81% of 26 to 30-year-olds did at least one work experience of any type across their education compared to 65% of 18 to 21-year-olds. The only time the younger respondents reported a higher participation rate is when they recalled experiences at 16-18. 18-21 year olds recall more experiences during that phase of their education compared to both 22-25 and 26-30 year olds.

This declining trend is also evidenced in previous studies as discussed in the introduction. This provides further evidence that young people are not afforded enough opportunities to participate in work experience and access varied according to some socio-economic factors.

Chart 1. Total number of recalled work experience opportunities by age range across each age category



Work experience participation varied by type associated with ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status

On average participation in work experience across their education by young people from ethnic minority groups was higher (24.5%) than their white peers (15%). Participation in virtual work experience specifically was also generally higher among young people from ethnic minority groups than their white peers. In both virtual and in-person activities the relationship is statistically significant at 5%. There is a similar trend among the more disadvantaged groups of young people and those from ethnic minority groups across their education and the same pattern can also be observed specifically for work experiences completed between the ages of 16-18.

In terms of gender, work experience participation was generally equally balanced between male and female respondents and there was generally not much gender difference across the different types of work experience except for virtual interactions with live employers where male participation was almost twice as likely as female participation. This relationship appears to be significant at 5%. However, it is important to take the low uptake of virtual interaction into account (N=1947 full sample).

When looking at more disadvantaged groups of respondents, gender affected participation trends more strongly and male respondents were significantly more likely to have participated in all types of work experience especially the virtual interactions.

A similar gender pattern can be observed for the survey's findings for the 16-18 age range with male respondents being 6% more likely to have attended virtual work experience at this age than their female peers, but no discernible gender difference was observed for in-person work experience (N=1680-88 full sample).

When looking at more disadvantaged groups of respondents in the data for the 16-18 age range, once again gender affected participation trends in both in-person and virtual interactions more strongly. Male respondents were significantly more likely to have participated in all types of work experience especially the virtual interactions.



Work experience participation varied by region

Our data revealed that work experience participation and where young people live are correlated. Table 6 shows that young people who reported living in Northern Ireland, Wales and London recalled most work experience opportunities compared to other areas. There appeared to be fewer opportunities recalled by young people who reported living in the West Midlands and Scotland when compared to other areas such as the North East.

Table 6. Geographical distribution of the respondents and work experience participation N= 1,171

Region	No work experience	At least one opportunity
Northern Ireland	13%	87%
Wales	16%	84%
London	19%	81%
North East	20%	80%
North West	21%	79%
East Midlands	23%	77%
South West	24%	76%
Yorkshire and the Humber	26%	74%
South East	26%	74%
East of England	30%	70%
Scotland	32%	68%
West Midlands	34%	66%

Impact of work experience participation on young adult employment outcomes



Attending work experience drives wage growth

The research applied several quantitative methods for exploratory analysis. The possible relationship between work experience and income can be formulated in a few ways. It is very likely, as seen in the previous section, that a range of factors influence work experience access, level and quality of education and future income. The following analysis therefore seeks to iteratively control for each potentially confounding factor available in the survey data in the relationship between work experience participation and income in order to better understand the true relationship between these variables. For instance, age affects access to work experience types (government policy changes, growth of virtual delivery in younger cohorts) and wage (i.e. length of time spent in work).

In each version of the regression models, work experience volume is regressed onto the natural logarithm of income, as is common practice for income variables, and which in this instance indeed produces more normally distributed residuals.

Chart 2. Levels of regression modelling according to control factors addition: wage analysis



The analysis shows that for each additional type of live work experience reported throughout secondary school, whether virtual or face-to-face, respondents in full-time work reported a 3.4% higher average wage, statistically significant at the 10% level using robust standard errors. This equates to an additional £1,088 per year using the sample average salary of £32k. For those very few reporting the maximum of eight different types of work experience compared to zero types, this average association is the equivalent of a 31% higher wage.

This wage premium relationship is consistently significant at the 10% level or better, varying between 3.1% and 3.8% as additional control variables are added in, ensuring the results are not simply a mask for key factors like respondents' age, region, highest qualification level, type of employment, socio-economic background or demographic background.

As with all analyses of this type, we cannot rule out that other variables might exist that confound this relationship or whether some form of survey bias or hindsight recollection bias might be misleading us, such that the empirically observed correlation does not contain a meaningful causal component. However, some confidence can be gained given that many work experience activities of these types are organised at the school or class level, with limited potential for individual student agency over participation.

Table 7. Results of the regression analysis level by level

Linear regression on ln wage	N	R ²	Coeff on Total Wex Types	Robust p-value for non-zero value
Raw	715	0.01	3.4%	0.072
Level 1 controls	646	0.16	3.1%	0.096
Level 1 + 2 controls	637	0.21	3.8%	0.039
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls	637	0.28	3.2%	0.085
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls; non-robust standard errors	637	0.28	3.2%	0.010
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls – only include those in full-time work, without declared education/apprenticeship	622	0.27	3.0%	0.106
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls – do not drop any sample for data quality concerns	686	0.27	2.1%	0.226
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls – remove outliers (Cooks distance D 4/N heuristic)	604	0.33	1.4%	0.214
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls – remove outliers (Cooks distance D 3 times mean heuristic)	635	0.28	3.2%	0.085

Attending work experience reduces the odds of young people becoming NEET

We employed a similar approach in the NEET status analysis, by introducing control variables – that could potentially directionally and bidirectionally affect access to work experience and likelihoods of unemployment – to the models level by level. For each model, binary logistic regression is used to investigate the relationship between work experience participation and the probability of becoming NEET at a later stage. After introducing a wide range of control factors across all the logistic models, the models' fitness is consistent at 90%.

Chart 3. Levels of regression modelling according to control factors addition: NEET analysis



Regression analysis found a statistically significant relationship between recalled participation in work experience and whether respondents were NEET on the day of the survey. Looking at the odds from the final model with all control variables included and having controlled for socio-economic status, we can conclude that attending work experience at secondary school age (pre-16) reduced the probability of becoming NEET from 11% to 7%.

Table 8. Work experience participation while aged 14-16 – Results of the regression analysis level by level N=1,390

Linear regression on ln wage	Odds	Robust p-value	Standard Error
Raw	0.64	0.03	0.16
Level 1 controls	0.64	0.01	0.18
Level 1 + 2 controls	0.65	0.02	0.19
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls	0.69	0.07	0.2

When looking at the participation rates for recalled work experience for the 16-18 age group, the raw relationship is insignificant. After adding controls to the logistic model, we start to see some meaningful relationships. The maximum effect size for the 16-18 age range is in fact slightly higher than the 14-16 age range when looking at the model with all control factors in. Attending work experience after the age of 16 reduces the probability of becoming NEET from 11% to approximately 6%, having controlled for socio-economic status.

Table 9. Work experience participation while aged 16-18 – Results of the regression analysis level by level N=1,300

Linear regression on ln wage	Odds	Robust p-value	Standard Error
Raw	0.83	Not significant	0.31
Level 1 controls	0.65	0.04	0.21
Level 1 + 2 controls	0.65	0.04	0.21
Level 1 + 2 + 3 controls	0.56	0.01	0.21



Attending work experience helps young people develop essential skills, motivation and confidence

In the survey young people were asked about the impact of attending work experience at different stages of their education on specific outcomes such as developing skills, gaining confidence and motivation. The question asked whether they found their work experience helpful in these areas or not. The result shows that 42% of the respondents believed work experience completed at secondary school (aged 14-16) had helped them develop the skills they needed for future employment. This rises to 54% for work experience when respondents reflected on work experience completed between the ages of 16 and 18. A third of the respondents also agreed that secondary school-age work experience made education relevant (36%) for them and increased their self-belief (31%). More than half of respondents agreed that their 16-18 work experience had increased their self-belief (55%).

Table 10. How helpful young people find work experience

Outcome area	Aged 14-16	Aged 16-18
Developing the skills for future employment	42%	54%
Confidence and believing in myself and my capabilities	31%	55%
Making education more relevant to employment	36%	20%

The survey also asked the respondents to share their views on valuable elements of work experience and how participation in work experience across their education supported them for their journey to employment. For this analysis we were interested to understand if there is any difference between types of work experience and their value added. The reason behind this segregation is that in the wake of the pandemic many programmes and career activities had to be offered online and virtually due to large scale disruption to education to minimise further learning loss in this area.

Virtual delivery is a relatively new development and this should be remembered when drawing direct comparisons between data results for in-person versus virtual work experience activities. Recent research conducted by Speakers for Schools serves to underline the value of virtual work experience and the important role it can continue to play in helping to level up participation levels in work experience across the UK and across the different socio-economic groups¹⁸. There is growing evidence that there are many areas where virtual shows great promise because of the flexibility it offers, particularly since it enables employers to overcome the twin barriers to participation of geographical availability and cost and to offer a higher numbers of inclusive placements more frequently. We have highlighted the areas where young people perceived that virtual work experience performed better or very close to traditional work experience in the tables that follow to emphasise its potential as a viable delivery method that can be further developed and improved.

Overall, young people believed that work experience was valuable in many respects especially in supporting them with their transition from education into the labour market. When looking at in-person work experience completed at secondary school, the respondents strongly agreed that it had helped them add value to their CV and as something to reference in their interview, and that it had enabled them to gain authentic insights into the world of work and day-to-day tasks of employees. On the other hand, they also recognised that virtual work experience completed during secondary school had helped them develop essential skills such as creativity and problem solving, increased aspirations for specific industries, linking careers with subjects at school, increased motivation for selecting non-academic pathways and learning digital skills.

Table 11. What young people found most valuable in work experience completed while aged 14-16

	Work experience while aged 14-16	
	In-person	Virtual
Something to add to my CV or talk about during an interview	85%	54%
Gaining authentic insight into the world of work	77%	39%
Insights into day-to-day tasks of employees	75%	37%
Increased confidence to work in an adult environment	69%	36%
Opportunity to learn about an industry	67%	34%
Interacting with real employees and hearing about their stories	61%	35%
Interaction with more than one employee	58%	26%
Develop and practice essential transferable skills such as creativity, problem solving, teamwork	51%	42%
Work on real life projects	49%	29%
Communication about what to expect	47%	28%
Insights into career pathways available in the industry	42%	35%
Interaction with senior staff	41%	28%
Increased aspiration for certain industry or job role	39%	31%
Linked to one or more subjects at school	27%	32%
Opportunity to learn about the recruitment process	23%	41%
Increased my motivation for selecting non-academic pathways to employment	21%	33%
Develop digital skills such as ICT, distance working via Zoom, Google etc.	18%	30%

When reflecting on work experience completed between 16 and 18, respondents generally regarded the most valuable aspect of work experience as being an opportunity to learn about an industry, followed by CV and interview support and learning about day to day lives of employees. Interestingly young people found their 16-18 virtual work experience slightly more valuable in supporting them with their CV and interview (59%) than their in-person work experience at the same age. More than a third of respondents viewed that work experience of any type completed between 16 and 18 had helped them learn about recruitment processes, increased their confidence to work in an adult environment aspiration and provided opportunities for working on real life projects.

Table 12. What young people found most valuable in work experience completed while aged 16-18

	Work experience while aged 16-18	
	In-person	Virtual
Opportunity to learn about an industry	65%	45%
Something to add to my CV or talk about during an interview	56%	59%
Gaining authentic insight into the world of work	53%	38%
Insights into day-to-day tasks of employees	53%	36%
Insights into career pathways available in the industry	48%	36%
Interacting with real employees and hearing about their stories	45%	34%
Communication about what to expect	44%	34%
Increased confidence to work in an adult environment	41%	38%
Develop and practice essential transferable skills such as creativity, problem solving, teamwork	38%	43%
Work on real life projects	36%	35%
Interaction with more than one employee	34%	21%
Increased aspiration for certain industry or job role	34%	27%
Interaction with senior staff	29%	25%
Opportunity to learn about the recruitment process	26%	23%
Linked to one or more subjects at school	25%	24%
Increased my motivation for selecting non-academic pathways to employment	19%	15%
Develop digital skills such as ICT, distance working via Zoom, Google etc.	15%	11%

The survey also asked the participants to select the essential skills they felt they had developed as the result of participation in work experience during their youth. Definitions of essential skills are borrowed from the Skills Builder Universal Framework¹⁹ and we selected representative skills from their four domains of interpersonal skills.

Table 13. Definitions of the top essential skills young people felt they had developed as a result of participation in work experience

Speaking How to communicate effectively with others, being mindful of whether they are talking to customers, colleagues or other stakeholders and in different settings.	Problem Solving Recognising that while part of Problem Solving is technical know-how and experience, there are also transferable tools that individuals can develop and use.	Staying Positive All about individuals being equipped to manage their emotions effectively and being able to remain motivated, and ultimately to motivate others, even when facing setbacks
Teamwork Working within both formal and informal teams, and also with customers, clients or other stakeholders. Initially, this is about individuals fulfilling expectations around being positive, behaving appropriately, being timely and reliable and taking responsibility. This extends to understanding and respecting diversity of others' cultures, beliefs and backgrounds		

About a third of the respondents who had done work experience at secondary school said they had developed communication and problem-solving skills and a quarter believed work experience had helped them with aspiration and teamwork. Communication skills, staying positive and teamwork were all higher among the people who recalled doing work experience between the ages of 16 and 18 and virtual work experience was regarded slightly more favourably for helping to develop essential skills than in-person work experience at the same age. Overall, teamwork was seen to be the strongest skill followed by communication skills.

These skills have been continuously valued by employers and it is evident that modern workplaces require everyone to develop these types of skills while still in education to help make the transition into employment easier.

Table 14. What essential skills did young people develop through their work experience?

Essential skill	Aged 14-16	Aged 16-18
Speaking	30%	45%
Problem Solving	33%	30%
Staying Positive	24%	27%
Teamwork	23%	54%

CONCLUSION

In this report, we have looked in detail at the changing nature of work experience and sought to establish a clearer sense of its purpose and value in helping to improve outcomes for young people.

We have reflected on the merits of work experience as a means of enabling a closer reciprocal relationship between the spheres of education and industry which benefits the economy by helping to address skills gaps and achieve smoother transitions from school to the workplace while also motivating young people to achieve and make more informed career decisions.

From our own research, we have further validated existing published evidence (referred to in previous sections) that having multiple opportunities to engage with employers through activities like work experience during a young person's education can positively impact their earning potential and reduce their chances of becoming NEET in later life.

But we have also observed worrying patterns and trends that reveal a far from level playing field when it comes to which young people have historically had the greatest opportunity to participate in work experience. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our data confirms what many of us might already imagine: that socio-economic background, whether the young person attended a private fee-paying or state-funded school or college and the geographical region in which they lived all significantly affected a young person's access and participation in work experience.

The evidence leads us to draw a simple conclusion, but also poses a more complex challenge:

Without unfettered access to high-quality work experience to provide a practical way to gain insights into careers in a rapidly changing labour market, how can young people build their skills and knowledge at the same time as improve their career awareness and career readiness? Particularly those young people who are from less privileged backgrounds who attend state-funded schools and colleges and/or also live in underserved communities, or even designated cold spots or opportunity areas?



Viewed as an intrinsic part of the same problem, our findings serve to underline the size and scale of the social mobility crisis but also help to illustrate how making work experience more accessible and more inclusive presents a huge opportunity. An opportunity for employers, educators and policymakers to work together to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution – a future-facing solution that leaves no young person behind.

As a youth social mobility charity, Speakers for Schools is committed to improving diversity in the workplace and ensuring that under-represented groups of young people can access career-enhancing opportunities such as work experience.

Our expertise in innovating to deliver experiences of the world of work to hundreds of thousands of young people across the country in the last five years means that we are all well-placed to both understand and help respond to the evidence of growing need to which this report and other published evidence attests.

**CALLING
FOR
CHANGE**

We recognise that a big problem requires a big solution, and we are calling on leaders of industry and policymakers to help us drive forward an open discussion on the decisive role that work experience can play in shaping young people's futures.



Together, we can ensure that every young person is better prepared for the world of work with the necessary skills to support our economy.

Together, we can embark on the next evolutionary phase of work experience.

Together,
we can make
work experience
FOR ALL a reality.



To learn more about our campaign, or show your support, just scan the QR code or visit speakersforschools.org/work-experience-for-all



APPENDIX

Impact of work experience on young people– brief evidence

Work experience can be incredibly beneficial for young people and completing work experience while at school can support young people in their career and education decision-making while also developing their essential skills and providing them with first-hand experiences of workplaces.

According to Mann (2012)²⁰, work experience has impact on a number of outcome areas for young people including career aspiration, access to university, academic attainment and employment. Mann (2012) argues that there is a strong relationship between clarity and realism of career aspirations at age 16 and labour market outcomes. Work experience helps a young person determine whether a specific career is or is not a good fit for them; allowing them the space to continue to explore career options at a point when there is still time to decide which qualifications they would like to pursue.

High proportions of both pupils and teaching staff believe that young people return from work experience more motivated to do well at school. Qualitative evidence from teaching staff suggests that different types of pupils respond in different ways to placements. Many believe that work experience helps borderline pupils to achieve academic targets such as five GCSEs. Lower attaining pupils can gain much from the different learning environment presented by extended work experience²¹.

In another study by Arum and Way (2004)²², researchers conducted an analysis of an American longitudinal survey data — High School and Beyond survey, following 14,825 students from their sophomore year in 1980 through to their post-secondary and labour market experiences in 1986. The study examines the early labour market experiences of these young people and finds that the women who received their first job after education who also completed a high school-based assisted job placement programme earned 21% more than comparable peers. Considering the operation of school-assisted job placement programmes whereby US students were referred either informally through a recommendation from a teacher or career guidance counsellor or formally through a High School placement service, Arum and Way (2004) see impact, witnessed through higher initial wages, mediated through institutional social capital²³.

In new analysis of the British Cohort Study undertaken for OECD (2020)²⁴, researchers assessed the long-term impact on outcomes for young people who had completed short work experience placements in the UK, typically undertaken at the age of 15 or 16 over one to two weeks. Placements would have been undertaken for a variety of purposes: confirmation or exploration of career aspirations, to gain experience of an occupation likely to be entered after the completion of compulsory schooling, or to gain experience of the workplace more generally. The analysis shows that female respondents from disadvantaged backgrounds (lower paternal socio-economic status) were found to be 5.4 percentage points more likely to be in full-time work at 26 if they had undertaken a placement as a teenager. Work experience placements that were reported as useful were found to be associated with higher life satisfaction at age 26, especially for female respondents.

There are also some survey studies that indicate that participating in work experience contributes to the development of essential transferable skills. A survey of work experience coordinators by NatCen Social Research and SQW²⁵ showed that the main benefits associated with this activity were better communication and interpersonal skills and increased confidence. Hatcher and Le Gallais (2008) found that KS4 pupils from schools with a more advantaged intake had a better awareness of the value of work placements in strengthening these softer employability skills. They suggest that these pupils may therefore be more knowledgeable of the general competencies they could attain as part of the placement and the value of these in the job market, regardless of whether the placement is linked to their career²⁶.

Generally, the evidence base for the impact of work experience on young people's outcomes is scarce, with most published literature based on programme and survey data. In their publication, Buzzeeo and Cifci (2017)²⁷ suggested further work to show that these opportunities can be effective in driving impact on young people. High-quality evaluations of work experience placements are therefore required. Ideally, these would incorporate a control group, and track participant outcomes over time. This would provide more robust insights into what impacts are closely associated with participating in work experience, the size of these effects and the groups it works best for. It would also further assist practitioners in schools and colleges in deciding how work experience should be incorporated into the careers education of different young people.

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