



Work Experience:

impact and delivery – insights from the evidence

Anthony Mann

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About the author

Dr Anthony Mann is Director of Policy and Research at the Education and Employers Taskforce. He is an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Education and Industry at the University of Warwick and sits on advisory boards for the Institute of Education, the National Foundation for Educational Research and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. He is a former policy official with the Department for Education.

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General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders

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Foreword



Brian Lightman
General Secretary
Association of School and College Leaders



There is no doubt in my mind that work experience can make a significant difference to the motivation, attainment and progression of students. As a headteacher I have seen attitudes to school of many young people completely transformed as a result of their highly positive experience on a placement. Those who lacked the necessary motivation or maturity to work to their full potential have often returned from placements fuelled up as a result of an experience which can genuinely be life changing. Other academically high achieving pupils have been challenged to aim even higher and broaden their experience.

However, this does not always happen automatically. Effective work experience placements need proper planning and need to be matched to the needs of students. They need to involve the students in a range of meaningful activities with opportunities for reflection on what they have learned. Schools and employers need to liaise closely and students need to be fully briefed before arriving at the placement. The expectations of students and their parents need to be managed so that they understand the purposes of work experience. ASCL is delighted to have been able to support the expert group over this important project.

Key insights from the research: an overview

Work experience and clarifying career aspirations

- Work experience is under-utilised as a means to stretch the career horizons of young people. The problem is that half of placements are found by young people or by their families using largely existing social networks
- There is a strong connection between clarity and realism of career aspirations aged 16 and later adult labour market outcomes. There's significant correlation between career uncertainty or confusion and NEET status at 16 to 18
- Work experience helps determine that a specific career is not for the individual. Allowing return to career exploration at a point when decisions over what qualifications to pursue can still be made
- Work experience can be a very effective means of challenging social stereotypes about the realism of occupational ambitions
- One size does not fit all. More needs to be known about the relative effectiveness of alternative means of workplace exposure, notably career fairs, workplace visits and job shadowing

Work experience and getting into university

- Work experience often plays an important, at times essential, role in determining admission to university courses, but this is not well understood by policy makers
- Young people taught in independent schools routinely have access to high quality work experience which is more relevant to university admissions than their state-educated counterparts
- Greater attention should be given to enabling pupils within the state sector to access experiences comparable with those enjoyed in the private sector
- Further research is needed to understand the extent to which work experience shapes university admissions

Work experience and academic attainment

- 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 experience
- Timing work experience to take place towards the end of Year 10 is unlikely to optimise the attainment benefits of placements

Work experience and employment

- Young people strongly believe that the work experience helps to develop their employability skills
- Around half of work experience placements are sourced directly by pupils or their families, this does not mean a good fit with the realities of demand in the labour market
- An estimated one-quarter of pupils are offered part-time employment following a work experience placement
- Work experience undertaken closer to ultimate labour market entry (aged 16 – 18) optimises opportunities for jobs to be secured, but is too late to inform important decisions about post-16 educational and training choices



1: Introduction - work experience in context

“A placement on an employer’s premises in which a student carries out a particular task or duty, or range of tasks or duties, more or less as would an employee, but with an emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience.”

- Definition of work experience, Department for Education

Over the last generation, work experience has become a very familiar, though not universal, element of British school life. This paper presents findings from recent research into the value of work experience to young people. It does so at a time when the delivery of work experience is undergoing fundamental change and its future direction is uncertain. The purpose of this paper is to share evidence considered by the Education and Employers Taskforce’s 2011 Expert Working Group on Work Experience to raise awareness of those findings together with new data, contributing to an ongoing debate on the purpose and future of work experience.

A short history of work experience in England

The opportunity for young people to undertake a short period of work experience towards the end of their compulsory education has been an element of debate among educationalists, employers and governments for over forty years. Following a period of occasional, uncoordinated practice, the Education (Work Experience) Act of 1973, clarified the law to allow pupils to undertake placements on employers premises during the last year of compulsory education. The 1973 legislation was prompted by the raising of the school leaving age in 1972 to 16, and was designed, and initially delivered, largely with the interests in mind of young people who would be expected to enter the labour market early. Consequently, the early focus of work experience programmes in the UK were on lower attaining pupils interested in finding employment at age 16.

A growing appreciation of work experience

Over the 1980s, however, the focus of work experience broadened, moving by the end of the decade to an assumption that all pupils should experience a placement before the age of 16. Over the following two decades, governments demonstrated a growing appreciation of work experience, standardised around a vision of a two-week placement typically at age 15. National guidance on work experience, including quality standards for schools and colleges, employers and work experience organisers were issued for the first time in 1998, and in the same year, schools were allowed to offer extended work experience (such as one day a week over a year) as part of greater flexibility in Key Stage 4 and disapplication of the National Curriculum. In 2004, work-related learning became a statutory requirement at Key Stage 4 in England with similar approaches being taken by governments in Wales and Scotland. The statutory requirement has often been misinterpreted as an obligation on schools to ensure their pupils undertake work experience. This was not the case. However, use of work experience became one of the primary means by which schools sought to fulfil their obligations to develop Key Stage 4 provision to include education about, for, and through work.

Discrete funding subsidises costs to schools

From the mid-1980s to 2011, government has put in place discrete funding to enable work experience placements to be found and appropriately managed for ever growing numbers of young people. Through a number of initiatives and funding routes, departments for trade and industry and education contributed central government funding to intermediary bodies to liaise between employers and schools. By the turn of the century, a unit cost of £30 for a work experience placement was assumed with central government contributing half of funding in the expectation that schools or, perhaps, local authorities would make up the shortfall. For much of the last decade, central government funding for work experience was wrapped up in a £25m budget distributed through the Learning and Skills Councils and then Local Authorities to support the delivery of a wide range of employer engagement activities undertaken by schools in meeting the requirement to provide pupils with work-related learning.

was relevant. In a similar vein, the 2008 Work-related Learning Guide (Second Edition) published by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families set out the nine underlying aims of work-related learning (of which work experience was conceived as a primary delivery mechanism).¹ Such approaches, however, focused strongly on the development purposes of work experience – for example, its perceived capacity to develop the broad ‘employability skills’ of young people or to facilitate their personal and social development – rather than focus on harder outcomes such as securing jobs or increasing attainment.

Moving centre stage

Towards the end of the last decade, curriculum innovations such as the Young Apprenticeship and the Diploma, identified appropriate and relevant work experience as central to the learning process. In seeking to integrate insights gained from the workplace into classroom-based teaching, these curriculum innovations spoke to a long standing debate about the nature and purpose of work experience. Should it be a standalone activity or an integral part of a learning programme? Was it more about the facilitation of the first steps into work of particular relevance to early school leavers, or an experience important, in different ways, to all pupils regardless of their progression intent?

The purposes of work experience

Certainly, over the last generation, policy makers have seen work experience as a means to achieve a range of very different objectives. Influential work by educationalist Professor Tony Watts, first published in 1991, set out ten different educational and development aims to which work experience

The Wolf Review

The 2011 Wolf Review encouraged a change in focus. It signalled a significant change in how work experience will be delivered in English schools, arguing that work experience would be more productively delivered at 16-18 as a means to ease the transitions of young people into the workforce, with work experience at 14-16 targeted primarily at lower achievers. The Wolf agenda spoke to wider governmental concerns surrounding supporting economic growth by tackling skills shortages, acting to reduce record youth unemployment and supporting young people at risk of NEET through action to raise the required age for participation in education or training to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015. From another government perspective, the 2011 Social Mobility Strategy identifies access to work experience as a key means of helping gifted young people from disadvantaged backgrounds optimise their chances of accessing professional employment.

This document highlights the evidence presented to the group in terms of the impact of work experience on career decision-making, attainment, university entry and employment. It also notes recent research on the quality of placements and how they can be optimally delivered. Summaries of these findings form the bulk of this document. Among its annexes are notes from three focus groups with young people and the results of a 15,000 pupils survey reflecting on their own experiences of placements.

A changing delivery landscape

Amid this renewed policy interest, the delivery landscape through which work experience has, in recent years, been largely delivered has been fundamentally changed. Government has decided to repeal the statutory requirement to work-related learning at Key Stage 4 and in March 2011 announced the ending of centralised funding through Local Authorities to co-ordinate liaison between schools, colleges and employers across a wide range of activities, including work experience. Schools, therefore, from April onwards began to incur the full costs of funding work experience placements, with head teachers and boards of governance deciding afresh whether they would continue participation.

In such a dynamic environment, the Education and Employers Taskforce brought together a range of stakeholders to discuss the future of work experience. Chaired by Peter Lambert, Deputy Director of Business in the Community, the working group provided a platform for leading representatives of schools, employers, intermediaries and government to take stock of the change. A full membership list of the group is annexed. The group received two key papers setting out available recent evidence on the impact and delivery of work experience and, within its conclusions, recommended that these findings be shared more widely to allow deeper more informed debates in schools, colleges, universities, places of employment, local authorities, intermediaries and government.

The scale and costs of work experience in 2009/10

In considering the future of work experience, it is useful to take stock of its delivery in the last full year of historic funding. In 2009/10, the last year for which English data is available, a minimum of 525,000 young people aged between 14 and 19 went on a work experience placement organised through their school or college. Of these, the overwhelmingly majority undertook a two week placement of five to ten days duration during Year 10. Over that year, some 400,000 employers took young people on placements, including approximately 60,000 new employers which had not done so the previous year. Looked at from another perspective, a 2011 survey of young Britons aged 19 to 24 showed that 86% of former pupils of non-selective state schools had undertaken a work experience placement, as did 84% of former pupils of both grammar and independent schools. Of all young Britons, 63% undertook a placement at 14 to 16, 13% at 16 to 19 and 10% at both ages.

The work experience placement is the sum of a series of component parts, which include from the finding, and checking placements for health and safety, matching pupils, preparing both pupils and employers and evaluating experiences.² While neither pupil nor employer are typically paid, the requirement for health and safety inspections and the need to identify and manage relationships with employers means that work experience comes with costs attached. A review of 2009/10 of costs by the Education and Employers Taskforce identified an average unit cost for a two week placement of £62 (including estimated school costs) where managed through an Educational Business Partnership Organisation operating within a single Local Authority area, reducing to £55 (again including estimated school costs) where operating over two or more authority areas. Best data available to the review suggested that the average unit cost to a school of managing the whole work experience process itself rises to an average of £138.³

2: Work experience and... clarifying career aspirations

One of the primary purposes of work experience has long been seen as providing young people with opportunities to explore different jobs and so make better decisions about their occupational ambitions. Recent high quality research has shown just how important it is for young people, as they reach the end of compulsory schooling, to have occupational goals in mind, certainty and realism of career ambitions at age 16 and later outcomes in the jobs market. Analysis of longitudinal survey data by a team led by Scott Yates (DeMontfort University) has shown a significant correlation between career uncertainty or confusion and NEET status at 16 to 18. With controls in place for other characteristics such as social background and attainment, young people who are uncertain or unrealistic (where typical entry requirements exceed expected attainment) about their career ambitions are two to three times more likely to be NEET after the age of 16. US research adopting a similar methodology has looked at the earnings of young adults in their earlier twenties and explored the significance of career uncertainty at 16. Again, it is found that

having controlled for social characteristics and attainment, young people who were uncertain about career aspirations at 16 were at a significant disadvantage in the labour market, earning less than their peers.⁴

The views of young people

Respected surveys of young people show that work experience is typically seen as being useful to deciding on future careers. Table 1 sets out the findings of three polls of young people after they had completed placements, each with large numbers of respondents. The results are consistent in showing that approximately two-thirds of young people find their placements generally helpful in thinking about career aspirations, with one-third finding them very helpful. The table highlights responses to questions that relate both to long term career aspirations and shorter term steps towards achieving them. In this way, it suggests that work experience placements help young people to make more confident choices at key transition points.

Table 1. Results of three surveys investigating the link between work experience and changes in young people's views on careers choices, 2005 – 2008.⁵

Survey team, year of survey: respondent statement	Number (sample size), age	% agreeing strongly /finding very helpful	% total agreeing /finding helpful
IEBE (2008): "I am clearer about what I want to do in my future education and career (post-16)"	15,025 (15-16yrs)	37%	75%
London Metropolitan University (2005): "Encouraged /discouraged you from choosing work like this"	566 (15-16yrs)	N/A	60%
Loughborough University (2005): "Work experience was helpful in making a post Year 11 decision"	18,989 (16-18yrs)	34%	65%

Focus groups with young people (three are annexed in this document) often highlight the important role that work experience can play in determining that specific career is not for the individual. This effective negative choice is of particular value as it allows the young person to return to career exploration at a point when decisions over what qualifications to pursue can still be made, increasing the chance of an ultimately successful school-to-work transition.

The views of young adults

A February 2011 pro bono YouGov survey of 986 young British adults, aged 19-24 shows that young adults feel, from the vantage point of the labour market or higher education, that work experience did make a difference to their career choices: 57% of survey respondents that undertook a work

experience placement between the ages of 14 to 19 felt that it helped them in terms of deciding on the sort of career they wanted in later life (18% believe that it helped them a lot). The survey provides further data to suggest that young people with extensive experience of the workplace whilst still in education proved more adept at navigating early careers. Data reported in the Taskforce paper, *It's who you meet* (2012), showed that, controlling for highest level of attainment, young adults who had experienced four or more employer engagement activities (such as work experience) were five times less likely to be NEET than peers who recalled no such activities and, if in full-time employment, earning an average of 16% more.⁶ The survey also provided evidence to show that young adults with extensive employer engagement experience felt themselves that they were progressing well towards career ambitions.

Table 2. Correlation between number of employer engagement activities undertaken whilst in education (aged 14-19) and perceptions as a young adults (aged 19-24) of usefulness of current activity to future career aspirations.

Taskforce/YouGov Survey		Some schools and colleges arrange for their students (aged between 14 and 19) to take part in activities which involve employers or local business people providing things like work experience, mentoring, enterprise activity, careers advice, CV or interview practice. On how many different occasions do you remember such employer involvement in your education?				
		0	1	2	3	4 or more
Thinking about the sort of job you'd like to be doing in 5 to 10 years time, how useful do you think what you are doing now is as a way of achieving this?	Very Useful	35.7%	38.0%	40.7%	45.8%	54.4%
	Useful	31.6%	32.5%	37.2%	25.4%	30.9%
	Not that Useful	15.8%	13.3%	10.3%	11.9%	7.4%
	Not at all Useful	16.9%	16.2%	11.7%	16.9%	7.4%
Weighted Base		266	345	145	59	68

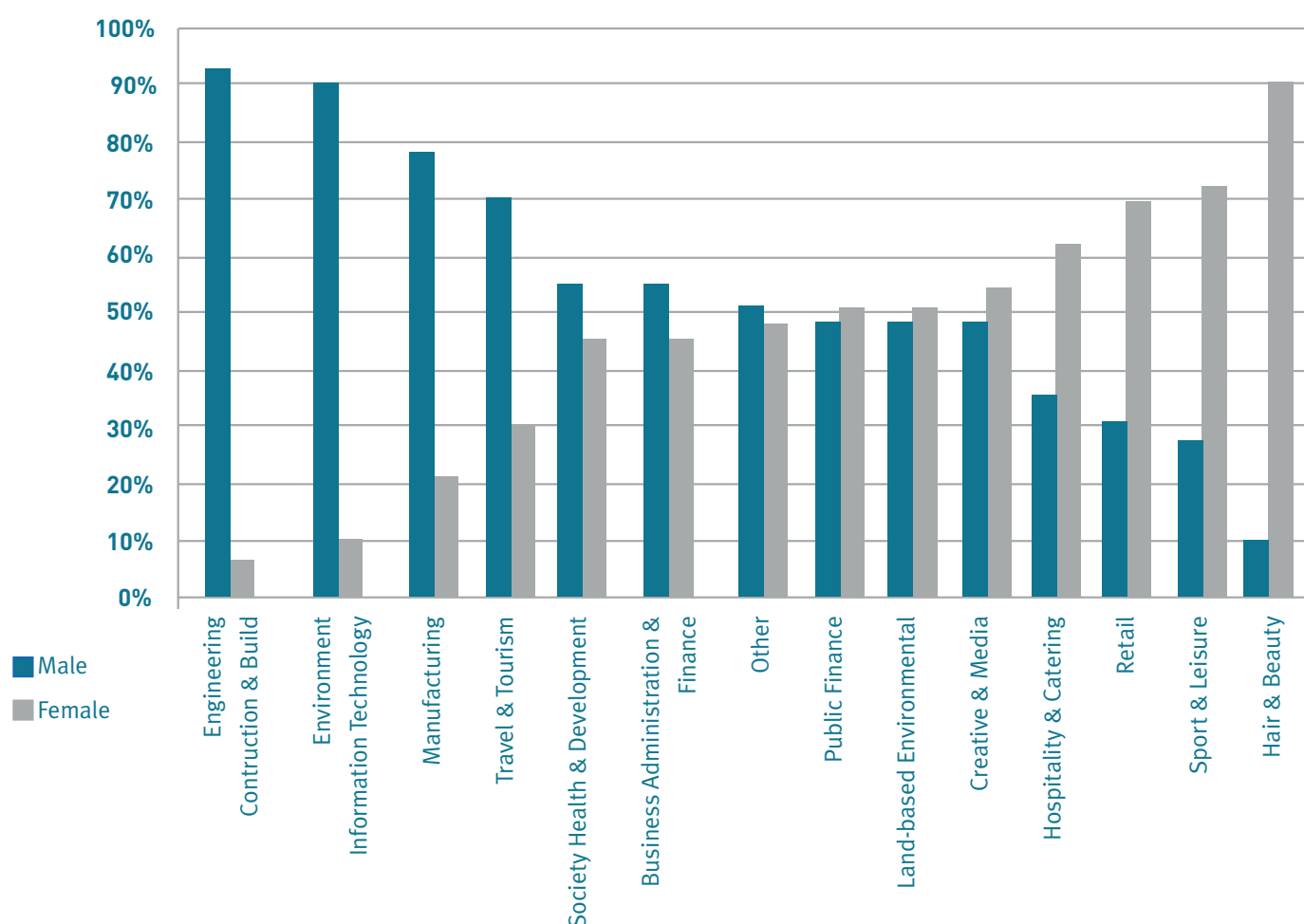
Work experience and social immobility?

Work experience is often seen as a very effective means to broaden the career aspirations of pupils. The authenticity of the experience and opportunity to investigate the breadth of professional areas provide rare and valuable resources to young people. However, young people need to access the experience in order to gain from it. The career ambitions of young people emerge out of their specific social contexts shaping the extent to which different occupational areas are appropriate or not for 'people like me'. Work by sociologists and educationalists highlights the ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity often limit ambitions, regardless of aptitude. In such a context, work experience can often be a powerful means to challenging stereotypes by providing first-hand evidence that girls do become engineers, boys do go on to work in childcare, or that black and minority ethnic pupils do become scientists.

Two important studies have shown, however, that work experience is under-utilised as a means to stretch the career horizons of young people. The problem lies in how work experience placements are found. Around half of placements are found by young people themselves or by their families using largely existing social networks. This is problematic in itself as access to work experience in many areas is determined by pre-existing personal ties which vary considerably by the social background of pupils. Research has shown for example that one-third of solicitors and barristers' firms only provide work experience informally, responding to requests from clients or other personal contacts, such as family relationships.⁷ Inequity of access becomes then a significant issue. Moreover, while young people commonly have freedom to choose their placements, their thinking is heavily shaped by pre-existing conceptions of vocational aspirations. The work of Professor Richard Hatcher and Dr Tricia Le Gallais (Birmingham City University) has shown that young people are far more likely to choose placements which feel comfortable and familiar to them. In such a way, the academics demonstrate, working class pupils commonly end up in what can be seen as placements linked to lower paying, lower status jobs

whilst middle class pupils access placements linked to professional careers.

A further consequence of self-selection of placements is that participation in different occupational areas is highly gendered. Available data shows (see Table 3) that in many vocational fields, pupil participants are overwhelmingly drawn from one gender.

Table 3. Gender split of participants in work experience placements by major vocational areas, 2009/10.

And yet, there is also evidence, from a 2005 study led by Professor Becky Francis (London Metropolitan University) that significant proportions of young people (14% of boys and 36% of girls) would be interested in trying a non-traditional placement.⁸ As noted in the government's 2011 Social Mobility Strategy, work experience is an under-utilised means to enhance social mobility in the UK.

How schools can challenge social reproduction through work experience

Both the Hatcher/Le Gallais and Francis studies concluded that schools would be able to broaden the career horizons of young people by managing work experience more closely. The former study looked at how five schools in the West Midlands managed work experience and found that one school, serving

a highly disadvantaged area, broke the pattern of social reproduction by adopting a more directive approach to work experience, sourcing placements to fit the most aspirational ambitions of young people following career and progression related discussions. In this case, a much higher proportion of pupils accessed professional placements than was the case with schools with in-takes of similar social characteristics, leading to positive consequences in terms of changing pupils ambitions and study intentions. Both studies concluded that the current model of work experience could be improved to offering young people a much broader range of experiences, challenging pre-conceptions, building better informed decision-making and stretching ambitions.

There is also evidence from the YouGov poll to show that providing work experience at 16 to 19 is especially helpful in clarifying occupational ambitions. The survey segmented respondents by the age which they had undertaken placements. The results, as shown below, suggest that later work experience is significantly more valuable to career decision-making, and this might well be expected,

given that young people nowadays overwhelmingly stay on in education to 18, deferring labour market entry. However, while 63% of the YouGov sample recalled doing work experience only at 14-16, just 23% did it just at 16-19 with 10% undertaking a placement at both ages.

Table 4. Correlations between age work experience was undertaken and its perceived utility across three outcome areas by young adults, 19-24. Education and Employers Taskforce/YouGov, 2011.

Age WEX was undertaken	deciding on a career	getting a job after education	getting into HE	N
14-16	50% (13%)	25% (7%)	19% (4%)	588-609
16-19	74% (29%)	48% (21%)	47% (18%)	104-123
Both ages	76% (31%)	47% (20%)	51% (24%)	81-96

However, it should be stressed that activity undertaken prior to the age of 16 serves an important purpose in helping young people to make more confident decisions about what and where to study after completing their GCSEs. Consequently, the evidence would suggest that a wide range of workplace experiences (including career talks, workplace visits, job shadowing as well as work experience) over the duration of secondary education will optimise the beneficial effects of employment engagement to career decision-making.

Insights from the research

- There is a strong connection between clarity, and realism, of career aspirations at 16 and later adult labour market outcomes
- Young people strongly attest that work experience helps to clarify their career aspirations and progression choices
- Work experience can be a very effective means of challenging social stereotypes about the realism of occupational ambitions

- Most young people, however, choose work experience based upon pre-existing socially structured attitudes and expectations. Consequently, placements often fail to support diversity and social mobility into different occupational areas.
- A wide range of workplace experiences including job shadowing, career talks and workplace visits alongside work experience placements over secondary education will optimise beneficial effects of employer engagement to career decision-making.

Voices of young people: work experience and career aspirations

"I was sat behind a desk, and went out on a visit twice. I learnt that I don't want to be sat behind a desk the rest of my life, so now it's going back to the drawing board and thinking again." (Year 10)

"It changed my mind. I'm thinking of being a veterinary nurse now. I hadn't known about that before." (Year 10)

"I'll probably stay on now, because everyone I worked with said that they did. That was something new I learned." (Year 10)

"I know better now what type of engineering I'm interested in. I learnt that. Now I know where to go." (Year 11)

"[Work experience] teaches you what you don't want to do or what you do want to do." (Year 11)

"Told us about all the different things you can do. I learnt about what social workers do, didn't really know that before." (Year 11)

"You get advice from people you're surrounded by – it really helps you to make a decision" (Year 12)

"I was thinking I would be a teacher, and after it, I knew that I definitely didn't want to be a teacher. Don't know what I want to be, but not a teacher." (Year 12)

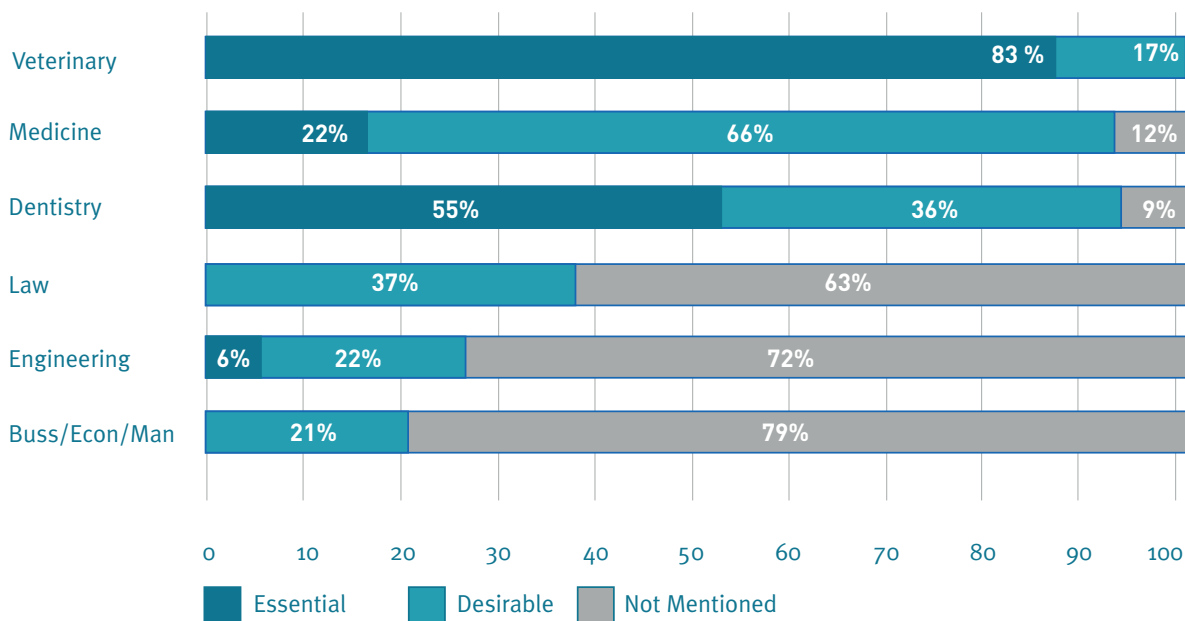
"Work experience is about what you want to do in the long term, about careers. Part-time jobs are just to get money." (Year 12)

3: Work experience and... getting into university

A growing body of research has highlighted the importance of work experience in securing admission to university courses. While more research is needed and attention given by policy makers, insights from existing studies show that placements can play a significant role in influencing successful admissions to undergraduate courses and that pupils attending state schools are often at a disadvantage in being able to draw on relevant work experience to support their admission.

A survey in 2011 of the admissions requirements of six undergraduate courses of study offered by the then twenty Russell Group universities demonstrated that work experience and/or related activities giving insight into, and experience of, vocational areas related to subjects of study was commonly cited as an essential or desirable requirement of applicants. As Table 5 shows, in Dentistry, Medicine or Veterinary Science, work experience is overwhelmingly demanded. In the three other subjects surveyed, Engineering, Law and Business/Economics/Management, between a fifth and a third of courses ask for such experience.

Table 5: Work experience as desirable or essential requirement in admissions requirements across six undergraduate courses at twenty Russell Group universities. Fieldwork, 2010.⁹



Analysis of admissions websites shows that such universities place an emphasis on work experience as a means of allowing applicants to demonstrate:

- insight into careers related to university undergraduate courses
- development of skills related to the subject of study

Table 5 sets out cases where work experience is cited as either a desirable or essential admissions requirement, but to a large extent this is a moot point as these are courses which typically attract more young people with required grades than there are places available. In such circumstances, admissions officers commonly use the Personal Statement element of the UCAS application form to distinguish between candidates who are prompted to discuss their work experience as a primary means of demonstrating suitability for the course in question.

Dr Steve Jones (University of Manchester) has analysed the use of work experience within the UCAS Personal Statements of 327 applicants to one faculty offering humanities and social sciences degrees at one Russell Group university. His work highlights significant differences in the ways in which independent and comprehensive school pupils are able to draw on work experience to strengthen their applications. Dr Jones' classified the work experience described in statements as either 'jobs' (being low skill, low prestige and likely to be paid work, such as a part-time job) and 'experience' (being high skill, high prestige, typically unpaid experience). He found overwhelmingly that independent school pupils were able to draw on 'experience' to support their applications, whilst their comprehensively educated peers relied on 'jobs'.¹⁰

Dr Jones's findings endorse the results from the 2011 YouGov survey of adults aged 19-24 cited earlier in this report. When asked if work experience undertaken at school or college was useful in "getting into higher education" the former pupils of independent schools were nearly twice as likely to agree that it was when compared to their peers educated in non-selective state schools.¹¹

His current work concludes by raising the question of whether inability to access comparably attractive work experience helps to explain why high achieving young people from non-selective state schools are under-represented at Russell Group universities. Insights from his work adds significantly to debates surrounding social mobility and access to the professions.

A review of how high-performing independent schools engage employers to support pupil learning and progression undertaken by the Education and Employers Taskforce and Professor Prue Huddleston (University of Warwick) to be published in July 2012 shows that such schools fully understand the importance of work experience to university admissions. Work experience placements are often timed for Year 12 in order to maximise relevance to university applications and these schools are adept at using their social networks (parents and alumni especially) to find high quality work experience placements which are very relevant to university aspirations. Such schools are adept, moreover, in harnessing support from alumni, and other social contacts, who often work in professions of great interest to pupils and to which specific university courses act as a gateway. The findings suggest that employers working in fields where work experience influences success in admissions to relevant university courses have a particular obligation to ensure that placements are available fairly to all young people with interest and aptitude regardless of whether they, their families or schools, happen to have a pre-existing social relationship. It should also be stressed that there is still much to learn about the relationship between work experience and university admissions and this remains an area demanding further serious research.

Insights from the research

- Work experience often plays an important role in determining admission to university courses, but this is not well understood by policy makers
- Young people taught in independent schools routinely have access to high quality work experience which is more relevant to university admissions than their state-educated counterparts
- Greater attention should be given to enabling pupils within the state sector to access experiences comparable with those enjoyed in the private sector
- Further research is needed to understand the extent to which work experience shapes university admissions

Work experience within university admissions requirements ¹²

“Medical Schools expect applicants to have a range of work experience for two reasons. Firstly, this demonstrates that you have a realistic insight into the profession...Work experience is also important in enabling you to develop (and to demonstrate that you have) the relevant skills and qualities that are essential to becoming a good doctor.”

“It can also be helpful to obtain some work experience... Such experiences should increase an applicant’s appreciation of why [Engineering] is important in the modern world.”

Voices of teaching staff: work experience and HE admissions. 2011 Taskforce focus group. “(Work experience) helps them make more informed choices about where to go. I would expect it helps determine whether they will stay on their course through university. I expect that’s why admissions offices ask for it.”
“We’re told by UCAS and the universities that our kids don’t have enough work experience across the board. Universities want to know that the choices they make are not a fantasy.”

4: Work experience and... academic attainment

Academic attainment is perhaps the most interesting area for research into the impact of work experience on young people's attitudes, pupil learning and, consequently, exam success. Unfortunately, it is an area where high quality research is relatively limited. Evidence, however, from surveys and focus groups with large numbers of both pupils and teachers provide very similar insights into connections between experience of the workplace and ultimate academic attainment.

Focus group research with teachers highlights two primary means by which spells of work experience can influence improved attainment. Firstly, there is a sense that work experience can provide an

environment which helps to contextualise classroom learning. Secondly, and more importantly, work experience is seen as a 'wake up call' providing young people with powerful evidence that education and qualifications are of high value in the labour market. In this way, work experience can be seen as a means of motivating young people to apply themselves more assiduously to their studies.

In 2008, some 15,000 young people aged 15 and 16 completed a questionnaire after returning from work experience placements. As set out in Table 6 below, an overwhelmingly majorities felt that the experience had led to a change in their attitudes towards schooling.

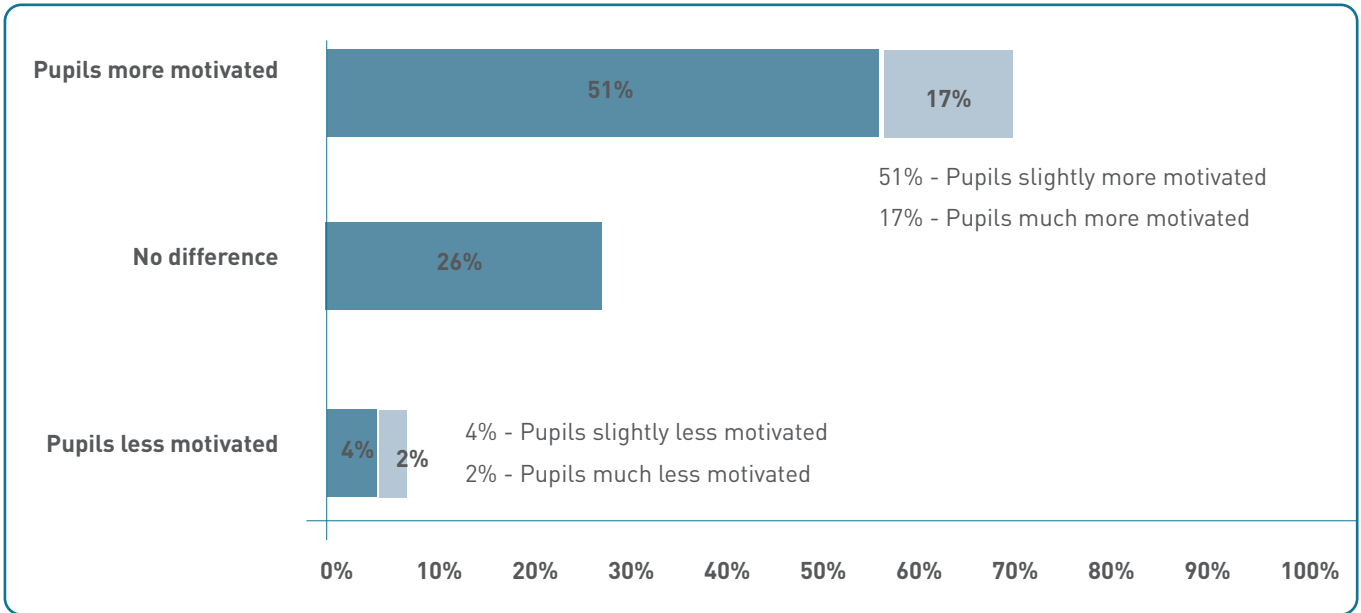
Table 6. Pupil perceptions on work experience following their placement. NEBPN survey of 15,025 young people, 2008. ¹³

I understand better why it is important to do well at school	Strongly Agree	50%
	Agree	40%
	Disagree	7%
	Strongly Disagree	2%
I am more prepared to work hard in lessons and my coursework	Strongly Agree	42%
	Agree	47%
	Disagree	9%
	Strongly Disagree	2%

A 2012 survey of teaching staff undertaken pro bono by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of the Education and Employers Taskforce approached the same question from the perspective of teaching staff. Based on survey responses from more than 700 teachers with experience of teaching at Key Stages four and five, nearly two-thirds agreed that young people returned from work experience placements better motivated to do well at school.

Table 7. Teacher perceptions on the impact of work experience placements on pupil motivation.

NFER. Fieldwork, 2012. Question: What impact, if any, do work experience placements have on the motivation of KS4/5 pupils at your school (e.g. by helping them to better appreciate the benefits of education and qualifications)?



The results are in keeping with one previous survey investigating the connection. In 2000, the Department for Education and Skills-commissioned research which asked 684 work experience co-ordinators in English secondary schools whether they felt that work experience served to motivate students to work harder in school: 16% strongly agreed, 51% agreed, 7% disagreed (or strongly disagreed) and 27% felt uncertain.¹⁴ The similarity between the two polls is striking. While respondents from the 2000 sample would be well placed to observe changes in pupil attitudes, it could be argued that they had a vested interest in reporting significant impacts. The 2012 sample, by contrast, represents a cross-section of secondary school teachers, few of whom are likely to have managerial responsibilities for work experience, but most of whom will have observed pupils returning to class at the end of their one or two weeks in the workplace.

highest achieving pupils rarely return from work experience more motivated than they were prior to the placement. This is explained by the fact that these young people already have a clear sense of the connection between educational success and progression whether to university or ultimately into the workplace.

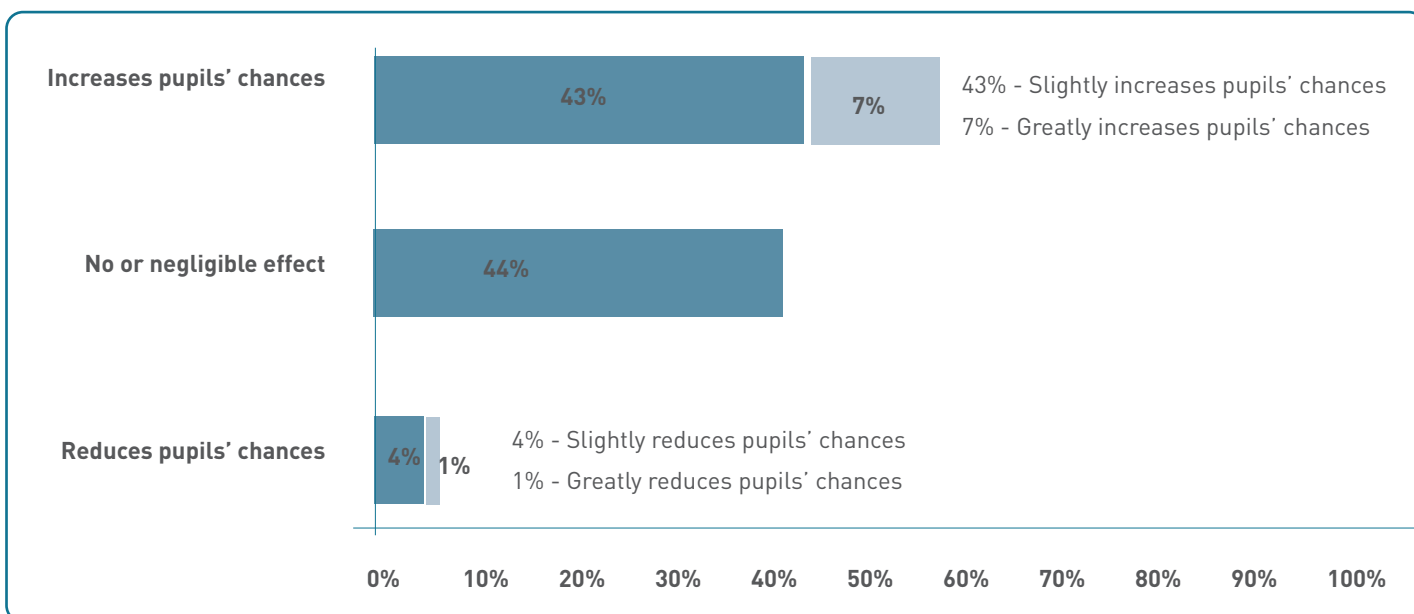
Focus groups with teachers undertaken by the Education and Employers Taskforce have explored the links between work experience, motivation and attainment. These have found a consistent view that

The impact on the lowest performing cohort of pupils was often seen as profound in focus groups, but constrained as these are often young people facing multiple causes of disadvantage and educational challenges. As one teacher at a specialist educational unit serving pupils excluded from mainstream education argued at a Taskforce focus group:

“90-95% of my students would not have got a qualification without employer engagement. They come to us after being kicked out of five different schools. We’re the last stop before the pupil referral unit (PRU). We do extended placements linked to qualifications. They won’t get five GCSEs, but this is the difference between them achieving nothing and beginning to achieve. They’ve spent all their lives fighting with teachers. The thing about employers is that they are not teachers and the workplace isn’t school. They don’t have to put up a front in front of their mates. Employers can be tough with them. They can say ‘you’re sacked’. They fail time after time in class. This gives them the chance to achieve. To feel good about themselves.”

It is the broad cohort of middle-achieving pupils, and particularly those on the borderline of achieving key attainment targets (such as five GCSEs) who, focus groups argue, are likely to benefit the most. For such pupils, the increase in motivation is linked to a tangible educational objective. The 2012 NFER survey reported above found that nearly half (46%) of teachers responding agreed that work experience placements increased to some extent the likelihood of borderline pupils from reaching key attainment targets (see Table 8).

Table 8: Teacher perceptions on the impact of work experience placements on the success of borderline pupils. NFER. Fieldwork, 2012. Question: Focusing on pupils who are currently achieving near the borderline of key attainment targets (such as 5 GCSEs A*-C or equivalent), to what extent do you think that work experience placements increase these individuals' chances of reaching these targets?



Source: Department for Education, Languages at Key Stage 4 2009. Evaluation of the Impact of Language Review Recommendations ⁴⁶

The surveys show us that while a significant proportion of teachers do feel that work experience improves the chances of exam success, a similarly sized proportion feels that it does not. More research is required to understand the reasons behind such variation and particularly the extent to which the perceived quality and relevance of work experience placements influences pupil perceptions. A further pressing question relates to the extent to which it can be predicted which pupils will benefit most from the wake-up call provided by work experience. It may well be that impacts are greatest on pupils with weakest career aspirations or who lack any part-time experience in the labour market. It also seems likely, from focus group evidence with young people, that on occasion pupils learn that qualifications are not so well respected in the labour market as they might have believed.

An opportunity cost?

Within this consideration of the link between work experience and attainment, it is important to consider the opportunity cost involved. In essence, does going on a placement actually reduce the exam success of pupils? Available evidence would suggest that this is occasionally, but rarely the case. In the NFER surveys, fewer than five per cent of teachers thought that placements would reduce the motivation of pupils or their ability to reach attainment targets. A 2008 literature review, commissioned by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families looking at high quality research into the link between business engagement with schools found, moreover, that no evidence could be found of achievement reducing as a result of employer engagement activities such as work experience. That report, *The involvement of business in education*, found evidence of improved attainment in eight out of the fifteen UK and US studies identified as being of sufficient quality to allow firm conclusions to be made.¹⁵

A common theme in focus groups on work experience is the extent to which the experience leads to a more mature outlook among pupils, and this is validated by limited survey material on teacher attitudes. Fully 93% of the 684 work experience co-ordinators surveyed in 2000 felt that placements promoted student personal and social development, with 47% agreeing strongly. The finding suggests connections between experience of the workplace and positive behavioural change in pupils.

Optimising the attainment link

Again, this would suggest that different pupils respond in different ways to their school-mediated employer engagement experiences. Further research, using randomised controlled trials, should seek to isolate the character of the motivation push coming from workplace exposure, in order to understand whether similar responses are linked to shorter activities such as job shadowing, workplace visits or career talks. Equally, the insight that work experience boosts classroom motivation requires us to question the common timing of placements for the summer term of Year 10. Arguably, more sustained impacts will be felt if placements are undertaken earlier in the academic year.

Insights from the research

- 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
- Pupils needing extra motivation to achieve key attainment targets might be expected to benefit most from the 'wake-up' calls provided by work experience as extra application is likely to increase their chances to achieving academic targets
- Lower attaining pupils can also be expected to gain much from the different learning environment presented by extended work experience

- Timing work experience to take place towards the end of Year 10 is unlikely to optimise the attainment benefits of placements
- Randomised controlled studies are required to fully determine the impact of work experience placements (and other employer engagement activities) on pupil achievement

A teacher perspective

"It's all to do with raising aspirations. Giving them information they wouldn't otherwise have on how everything fits together. How what they do at school relates to work. What they need to do. It's showing them that people like them do go into jobs like that." (2011 Taskforce focus group)

Voices of young people: Work experience and changing attitudes to schooling

"You come back more mature. More grown up. People speak to you as if you were a person and not a four year old." (Year 10)

"It's like a turning point. It helps you change." (Year 10)

"I've done an awful lot better in my English, Maths and Science since. I knew what I had to do to be a lawyer [after the placement]. I talked to one of the lawyers who told me what grades I needed. And they were higher than I expected." (Year 10)

"At the nursery, we were told that it's not just about grades." (Year 10 with interests in working in childcare)

"I had a shock. Learnt that you have to get the grades. It made a difference." (Year 10)

"I'm spending more time on coursework. And if I don't get it now, I will speak to someone." (Year 10)

"I was more enthusiastic afterwards about school. You know what you're doing now." (Year 11)

"It makes you realise that you need to get a B or a C or above – that you need to work." (Year 11)

"That there's lots of competition. I was told that I need to be on top of my game [to get the job of choice]." (Year 11)

"Makes you knuckle down. Lessons that I didn't like before, even if I don't like them, I still need to make an effort." (Year 11)

"All the people working with us told us [at the garage] about how they hated the job and were always telling us stories about how they'd mucked about at school and got nothing. It showed us how easy it could be to go downhill" (Year 12)

"I used to think school was so ridiculous. I hadn't realised how hard work is and how great school is and that you should work [at school] while you have the chance. It definitely makes you work harder [at school]" (Year 12)

"All the other people working [at the garage], they all said that they'd wished that they'd stayed on. It made me think a lot." (Year 12)

5: Work experience and... employment

Over recent years, and certainly in light of the Wolf Report and the changing focus of Department for Education policy, government approaches to work experience have focused on a perceived value of work experience placements in ultimately helping young people secure work after they leave education. To date, however, there has been very little research into whether work experience is a successful means of meeting this objective. Emerging research does, however, suggest that links can be made, and in many cases, strongly so.

Developing 'employability skills'

The argument for work experience placements making a difference in the labour market has largely focused on its assumed ability to develop what are widely known as 'employability skills'. Being the largely softer skills which allow an individual to be personally effective in the work they do, 'employability skills' have been defined in many different ways by governments, employers, educational institutions and other commentators. In 2009, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills helpfully reviewed such work and provided a

synthesis definition highlighting the personal skills of self-management, thinking and solving problems, working together and communicating and understanding the business; the functional skills of using numbers, language and IT effectively; and, the whole, wrapped around a positive approach to employment.

Young people certainly believe that the work experience they have undertaken helps them to develop their own employability skills. In 2008, some 15,000 young people gave their views about the extent to which the work experience placements they had undertaken helped them develop their work readiness. The full results are annexed in this document. Designed in part as a test of employability skills accumulation, the survey found large numbers of young people testifying to the opportunities presented by work experience to develop these skills as well as increasing understanding of what those skills are.

Table 9. Pupil perceptions on work experience following their placement. NEBPN survey of 15,025 young people, 2008. ¹⁶

As a result of my work experience...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was able to show my initiative in a workplace	45	48	6	1
I have developed some new skills that employers value (e.g. customer awareness and use of IT)	42	45	10	2
I developed my spoken communication skills (e.g. talking to adults)	51	42	6	1
I know that I can work well with a team of adults	54	41	4	1

It is interesting to compare the extent to which a short block of full-time work experience develops employability skills with that of part-time employment. One Australian study has done this and the findings are worth highlighting because the young Australians in question would, like their British counterparts, typically undertake placements of up to two weeks duration at age 15.

Table 10. Mean ratings for beliefs about the value of Work Experience and Part-Time Employment, Year 10 Students, Australia, 1996.¹⁷

Item	Work experience	Part-time job	N = 1624
What work is really like?	3.48	3.44	
Getting along with other people?	3.47	3.54	
Following instructions?	3.56	3.64	
Thinking for yourself?	3.38	3.50	
Being confident?	3.49	3.55	
Particular skills needed in that job?	3.55	3.50	
Work conditions?	3.51	3.45	
The career that you would like after school?	3.10	2.31	

These items are rated on a four-point scale where 4 = quite a bit, 3 = a fair bit, 2 = not much, 1 = nothing, so the higher the mean, the more positive the assessment of the experience

The results (see Table 10) show very similar levels of perceived skills development. This is especially noteworthy because US and Australian studies have shown that working on a part-time basis, whilst in school, is positively linked to better employment outcomes for young people after they leave education.¹⁸ It is noteworthy, given the preceding discussion in this document, that young people found significantly greater benefit from work experience than part-time working in informing career decision-making.

Getting a job after education

In 2011, the polling organisation YouGov undertook a pro bono survey of 986 young Britons, aged 19-24, on behalf of the Education and Employers Taskforce. The survey explored young people's experience of employer engagement activities whilst in school or college, such as work experience, and the impact

that such activities may have had on their adult lives. One of the primary findings from the survey (reported in the Taskforce paper, *It's who you meet*) was that there are statistically significant relationships between the volume of school-mediated employer engagement activities and the reduced likelihood of adult NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) status. Survey respondents were asked explicitly about the usefulness of any school-mediated work experience placements undertaken in gaining employment after education. On average, 30% of respondents who had taken part in a placement felt it had helped get a job with 10% feeling that it had helped 'a lot'. As seen below, these averaged results disguise a wide variation in experiences across pupils of different types and achievement levels.

Getting a part-time job while still in education

While largely under-researched, available evidence does suggest strongly that a significant proportion – perhaps one-quarter – of pupils are offered part-time employment following a work experience placement. A 2011 survey of 40 learners aged 16 to 19 in Cumbria found that 23% were offered paid employment after their placement and that a further 20% had discussed the prospect of possible employment at some future date. That survey found that young people often stay in touch with the employers with whom they undertook work experience for months or years after the placement, suggesting that work experience can be a very effective means of enabling young people to develop useful career-related networks as they seek career progression insights and further opportunities to develop practical experience in a specific vocational area. In a larger 2000 survey of 801 pupils, researchers commissioned by the then Department for Education and Skills found that 40% of respondents thought that they might get a job where they did their placement at some point in the future.¹⁹

Looked at from the employer's perspective, an Education and Employers Taskforce survey of 203 employers, undertaken in January 2011, showed that some 80% of 100 respondents who provided paid employment to teenagers and also did work experience placements had offered paid work to someone who had previously been on a placement. Asked whether it mattered if the work experience placement has been at their own place of work or not, a majority said that it did and that it mattered a lot. This is in keeping with findings reported by the

UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and other analysts, which show that employers commonly prefer to recruit through their own personal contacts. Work experience enables such contacts and allows social relationships to develop which might otherwise never occur.

It is very typical for teenagers to undertake part-time work alongside their studies. There is good evidence to show that undertaking such work is positively connected with reduced risks of NEET status after education has been completed.²⁰ By gaining workplace experience whilst still at school, young people give themselves advantages in the competition for jobs with older workers. They are able to demonstrate a successful track record of being in employment and will have had the opportunity to become familiar with the requirements and culture of the workplace. Logically, such experience will be optimised where part-time working is in a vocational area related to the career aspirations of young people. For a significant minority of young people, there is good reason to believe that work experience provides opportunities to secure such relevant employment.

A poor alignment with the labour market?

As noted above, around half of work experience placements are sourced directly by pupils or their families. Once an employer has agreed, details are passed to the pupil's school or brokers working on its behalf to ensure health and safety and other administrative duties are undertaken. The approach increases the risk that work experience placements sought are not representative of actual areas of labour market demand. Recent work undertaken by teams based at the University of Glasgow and the

Royal Academy of Arts has shown that the career aspirations of young people are commonly out of kilter with local labour market opportunities.²¹ While little quantitative work has been undertaken to test the extent of the misalignment, one study of the aspirations of Year 7 pupils mapped against the major occupational sectors in the UK workforce shows marked disparities. See also Annex 4 for most recent data on placement distribution by occupational sector.

Table 11. Occupational preferences of Year 7 pupils mapped against UK labour force by sector, 2009.²²

Industry	Total number employed in industry	% employed in industry	% of Y7 choosing these careers (N = 483)
Agriculture & Fishing	250,943	0.9	0.21
Energy & Water	171,718	0.6	0.21
Manufacturing	2,875,201	10.6	0
Construction	1,280,044	4.7	5.18
Distribution, Hotels and Restaurants	6,477,187	23.8	2.28
Transport and Communication	1,580,448	5.8	6.42
Banking, Finance and Insurance	5,760,210	21.2	3.11
Public Administration, Education and Health	7,329,546	27	36.23
Other	1,455,977	5.4	46.38

Historically, work experience placements have been overwhelmingly sourced either by young people, schools or their agents with comparatively little regard to employer demand for youth labour. In moving towards a situation where work experience becomes more strongly focused on enabling transitions into work, it is important to understand the economic sectors which have heaviest demands for younger workers and ensure that they are aware of, and supported in, providing work experience opportunities. The evidence suggests that work experience undertaken closer to ultimate labour market entry (i.e., at ages 16 to 19) optimises opportunities for jobs ultimately to be secured, it

also suggests that earlier exposure can help young people make more informed choices about desirable qualifications and experiences to make them as competitive as possible for later job openings. Data from the Education and Employers Taskforce's 2011 YouGov poll also suggests that young people leaving school with lower levels of qualifications are more likely to find work experience to have been useful in securing employment after education (see Table 4 above).

Table 12. Correlations between perceived utility of work experience in securing employment after education and highest level of qualification achieved by young adults, 19-24. Education and Employers Taskforce/YouGov, 2011.

Highest qualification level	getting a job after education	N
0	100% (0%)	3
1	50% (42%)	24
2	38% (18%)	57
3	28% (9%)	397
4	30% (9%)	268
5	27% (5%)	65

The work of educational sociologist Carlo Raffo (University of Manchester) provides some insight into how lower achieving young people may particularly benefit from periods of work experience. His close study of curriculum innovations using extended work experience (one day a week over Key Stage 4) often demonstrated significant effects on young participants who were expected to struggle to reach the level 2 threshold of five GCSEs.

“What we have evidenced is that, based on the process of developing social capital through trustworthy reciprocal social relations within individualized networks, young people are provided with an opportunity to gain information, observe, ape and then confirm decisions and actions with significant others and peers. Thus, everyday implicit, informal and individual practical knowledge and understanding is created through interaction, dialogue, action and reflection on action within individualized and situated social contexts.”

Raffo found on a number of occasions, young people who learned significantly from their work experience placed themselves at an advantage when it came to ultimately securing full-time employment.²³

Insights from the research: a summary

- Young people strongly believe that the work experience helps to develop their employability skills
- Available survey data suggests that young people feel that work experience placements develop employability skills to a similar level as part-time paid employment
- Around half of work experience placements are sourced directly by pupils or their families, this does not mean a good fit with the realities of demand in the labour market
- An estimated one-quarter of pupils are offered part-time employment following a work experience placement
- Work experience undertaken closer to ultimate labour market entry (aged 16 – 18) optimises opportunities for jobs to be secured, but is too late to inform important decisions about post-16 educational and training choices
- Young people leaving education with lower levels of qualifications appear to feel that the work experience which they undertook was of greatest value in finding employment after education

Voices of young people: work experience and employment opportunities

“I was told that if an apprenticeship came up, I would probably be first choice” (Year 11 pupil)

“It makes it easier to get a job because you have references” (Year 11 pupil)

“They said if I keep in touch [with Hair Salon], when I’m 16 they will take me on as a trainee if I’m still interested. Won’t be doing it though” (Year 10 pupil)

6: The quality of work experience

A number of surveys questioning large numbers of young people about their perceptions of work experience provides useful insight into the value of the placement they undertook. It is clear, for example, from YouGov's 2010 survey for the Edge foundation that the overwhelming majority of young people looked forward to their placement.

Table 13. Pupil attitudes towards undertaking work experience.

Proportion agreeing with statement: I approached [my work experience placement] with a positive attitude.	92%	YouGov for Edge, 2010. Survey of 1,123 young people had a placement, aged between 11 to 24
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And following the placement, young people overwhelmingly viewed the experience as enjoyable and satisfying.

Table 14. Pupil perceptions on enjoyment/satisfaction with their work experience.

Proportion agreeing that placement was enjoyable (very enjoyable)	93% (49%)	IEBE, 2008. Survey of 15,025 young people following placement, aged 14-16
Proportion agreeing that placement was enjoyable (very enjoyable)	87% (57%)	CBI, 2007. Survey of 1,034 young people following placement, aged 14-16
Proportion agreeing that they were satisfied (very satisfied) with the placement	92% (50%)	IEBE, 2008. Survey of 15,025 young people following placement, aged 14-16

One problematic issue with placements, given their importance to enhancing career planning, is that a meaningful minority of young people feel that their placement was not relevant to their aspirations.

Table 15. Pupil perceptions on the relevance of their work experience.

Proportion agreeing that their placement was not at all what they wanted	7% (F) 11% (M)	Francis, 2005. Survey of 566 young people following placement, aged 15-16
Proportion agreeing that their placement did not match their interests	32%	CBI, 2007. Survey of 1,034 young people following placement, aged 14-16
Proportion agreeing that they were not well matched to their placement	14%	YouGov for Edge, 2010. Survey of 1,123 young people had a placement, aged between 11 to 24

To a large extent, these statistics which suggest between seventy and ninety percent of young people felt that they did undertake work experience which was relevant to their interests is a remarkable testament to the operation of a mass system which over the last decade has typically delivered half a million placements a year. For those involved, however, the lost opportunity may well have been significant.

In 2010, YouGov questioned more than a thousand teenagers and young adults about the placements they had undertaken and found that around one third complained of a poor quality experience where structured opportunities for learning were very limited. The table suggests that for many young people, their experience of work experience could have been much better.

Table 16. Pupil perceptions on the quality of their work experience..

Proportion agreeing that they had a supportive manager of their placement	71%	YouGov for Edge, 2010. Survey of 1,123 young people had a placement, aged between 11 to 24
Proportion agreeing that they were given some responsibility during their placement	64%	
Proportion agreeing that they were given feedback on their work or progress	59%	
Proportion agreeing that the work they undertook was meaningful	58%	
Proportion agreeing that school/college staff were involved during the placement	38%	
Proportion agreeing that they only met people in one small part of the organisation	32%	
Proportion agreeing that they only did routine or mundane tasks	32%	
Proportion agreeing that they were given objectives to meet during the placement	31%	
Proportion agreeing that their host employer was not well prepared for their placement	21%	

Such responses have informed new approaches to work experience which are more closely structured and managed. In 2009, Sir Stuart Rose, then chair of Business in the Community, launched Work Inspiration (www.workinspiration.com) as a national employer-led campaign to “make work experience more meaningful, relevant and inspiring for young people.” Dozens of high profile employers have signed up to the campaign, committing to providing placements which seek to understand the interests and aspirations of young people, provide opportunities to understand the breadth of the working world and improve understanding of career progression in the modern working world.²⁴

Most recent advice from the Department for Education has equally urged a more strategic approach to work experience. It identifies good practice as a placement which has:

- Clear purpose, aims and objectives which are discussed and agreed with the young person, school/college and employer/training provider
- Planning and preparation to ensure that all parties understand their role and responsibilities, including induction once the young person starts their placement
- Matching individual young people with appropriate placements according to their interests and needs, and considering what they may need while they are on the placement
- Monitoring and review during and after the placement, to help the young person make use of what he or she has learnt ²⁵

7: Work experience: opportunities and obstacles

It makes a difference for the overwhelming majority of young people

Over the last generation, work experience has become a familiar element within the British educational experience. For much of the last 30 years, it has been assumed that young people taking part in placements will benefit in a wide range of positive ways, but there has been remarkably little energy devoted to understanding the extent to which the experience contributed to meaningful outcomes. This report has gathered together evidence published largely over the last two years to demonstrate compelling evidence that pupil participation in work experience whilst in secondary education for significant numbers of pupils serves to improve career decision-making, increases the chances of accessing university courses, improves pupil motivation towards education, contributing to increased attainment and improves chances of securing employment by building networks and enhancing skills. A strong message from the work is that work experience is overwhelmingly relevant to the vast majority of learners. As an activity, it is perhaps best understood, and conceptualised, within the school to work transitions of young people, helping them to explore and confirm career aspirations and navigate their way effectively towards them. In thinking about work experience in these terms, the value of post-16 experience is clear, but that is not to say, young people have not secured significant value from experiences at younger ages. Sixteen is a key transition point in the British education system and experience of the workplace related to career interests enables young people, and their families, to clarify and confirm decisions about what they will do in the remainder of their teenage years which will be of high significance to their future lives.

One size fits all doesn't work

Historically, UK schools have largely adopted a one size fits all approach to delivering work experience. Young people have commonly undertaken a two week placement at the end of Year 10. As set out in this report, this practice is unlikely to optimise the motivational benefits which two-thirds of teachers see as stemming from placements. The practice, moreover, serves to restrict access to work experience placements as employers face inherent limitations in the numbers of pupils they can accommodate at any one time. More needs to be known about the relative effectiveness of alternative means of workplace exposure, notably career fairs, workplace visits and job shadowing. Perhaps, of greatest importance, there is an urgent need to raise awareness in schools about the existing evidence on the impact of work experience (as well, of course, to increase resources devoted to understanding the depth and breadth of impacts).

The new landscape

From April 2011, schools have been required to pay the full costs of work experience and need to be able to make informed investment decisions at a time when budgets are under close scrutiny. The importance is high because emerging evidence suggests that many state schools are choosing not to invest in work experience for all or some of their pupils placing them at what may prove to be significant disadvantages in the competition for university places and employment.

The urgency is compounded by two factors. Firstly, increases in youth unemployment (and understanding of the long-term scarring effect it has on individuals) and in the costs of university education (in England) mean that the penalties facing young people who enter the labour market poorly prepared for job opportunities are unprecedentedly high. Secondly, in some parts of England, gaps have emerged in the availability of local brokerage between schools and employers. Research presented to the Education and Employers Taskforce's Working Group on Work Experience highlighted the fact that where school may typically pay five to ten thousand pounds to a broker to manage placements for a typical year group, the costs to a school in managing the same process are commonly considerably higher.

Questions of equity and effectiveness

This paper raises, moreover, two serious questions about how work experience currently operates. Firstly, there is good reason to believe that while access to high quality relevant work experience is of real value to the progression of young people, it is not equitably accessed by young people of different social backgrounds. Too much work experience is accessible only on an informal basis. The culture of young people, with their families, commonly finding their own placements compounds the risk of social inequality. Given the importance of work experience within school to work transitions, its importance is especially high to pupils from backgrounds where family social networks are weak, such as the two million children who live in workless households. Good research shows too that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have most to gain from work experience which is managed and personalised to stretch aspirations, rather than fall back on comfort zones.

Secondly, there is little evidence to suggest that work experience placements are well aligned with

the labour market, responding as they do more to pupil choices than reflecting areas of greatest labour market demand. Consequently, opportunities are lost to raise pupil awareness about the breadth of local employment prospects.

What employers need to know

For employers, a key point from this report is that work experience is a very effective means of informing young people about jobs and what they should do to optimise their chances of achieving them. In this way, if in no other, the provision of high quality work experience deserves a central place in any talent pipeline strategy. Many employers already recognise this and the work of the CIPD and UKCES to further raise awareness is to be applauded. However, there is a simple obstacle preventing many employers from offering work experience: no one asks them. There is a great opportunity to support schools, and reduce their costs incurred, by making it as easy for employers to signal their willingness to offer work experience as it is for employees signal their willingness to offer career talks through Inspiring the Future (www.inspiringthefuture.org). By adopting a similar approach to work experience, connecting employers with schools and/or their intermediaries, it becomes possible to simplify a key aspect of work experience and this is an objective of the Education and Employers Taskforce and its partners. In so doing, it contributes towards a more strategic approach to work experience in keeping with its importance to young people, schools and to our national prosperity.

Annex 1: Members of the Education and Employers Taskforce Expert Working Group on Work Experience, 2011

Josie	Armitage	UKCES	Senior Manager
Paul	Bell	National Children's Bureau	
Dave	Brockington	ASDAN	Trustee
Nick	Chambers	Education and Employers Taskforce	Director
Barbara	Chantrill	Leicestershire Education Business Company	Chief Executive
Louis	Coiffait	Pearson Education	Policy Manager
Gary	Durbin	Schools Network	
John	Fairhurst	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)	President
James	Fothergill	CBI	Head of Education &
			Skills
Jenni	French	Gatsby Foundation	
Leanne	Ferguson	Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership	
Sarah	Gibb	Business in the Community (BITC)	Director, Talent and
			Skills
Mary	Hanrahan	The Ellen Wilkinson School	
Barbara	Hearn OBE	National Children's Bureau	Deputy Chief Executive
Kate	Holt	The Richard Rose Federation of Academies	Principal of 14-19
			Education
Lynda	Howe	Brune Park Community College	
Stephen	Jackson	Department for Education	
Peter	Lambert	Business in the Community (BITC)	Deputy Chief Executive
Tricia	Le Gallais	Birmingham City University	Researcher
Anthony	Mann	Education and Employers Taskforce	Director of Policy and
			Research
Joan	McVittie	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)	ASCL President
Katerina	Rüdiger	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)	Skills Policy Adviser
Helen	Sanson	Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership	
Katherine	Sharpe	BITC	Account Manager
Christine	Sydenham	The Ellen Wilkinson School	Head
Deborah	Waddell	Devon EBP	CEO
Tony	Watts	Consultant	
Attending			
James	Mee	HM Treasury	
James	McLellan	HM Treasury	

Annex 2: Young People's views on work experience. A survey of 15,025 pupils following their work experience placement, 2008. NEBPN National Support Group for Work Experience (2008), Students' Perceptions of Work Experience. Department for Children, Schools and Families

As a result of my work experience...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I better understand the skills employers are looking for (please refer to the chart)	34	60	4	1
2. I know which personal qualities employers think are important	37	57	5	1
3. I was able to show my initiative in a workplace	45	48	6	1
4. I have developed some new skills that employers value (e.g. customer awareness, and use of IT)	42	45	10	2
5. I developed my spoken communication skills, e.g. talking to adults	51	42	6	1
6. I know I can work well with a team of adults	54	41	4	1
7. I was able to show a positive attitude at work	60	37	2	1
8. I feel more confident in handling new situations	45	48	6	1
9. I have a better understanding of my own strengths and weaknesses	35	53	10	1
10. Do you understand better the importance of problem solving at work?	29	53	10	1
11. I understand better why it is important to do well at school	50	40	7	2
12. I am more prepared to work hard in lessons and my coursework	42	47	9	2
13. I understand better how workplaces are organised	41	51	6	1
14. I have experience of working with people who have different roles	47	45	6	1
15. I have a better understanding of people's rights and responsibilities at work, e.g. health and safety & equal opportunities	40	50	8	1
16. I am clearer about what I want to do in my future education and career (post-16)	37	37	18	6

Annex 3: Three focus groups with young people at a Northwest secondary school

Focus group with Year 10 pupils, March 2011

Eight young people joined the group. They had all completed a work experience placement of one week's duration in the preceding January. With one exception (who had experienced a workplace visit), the work experience placement represented the only interaction with employers they had had during their schooling to date. A school member of staff sat in on the meeting, but did not contribute.

Participant	Location of work experience
Anthony (M)	Architects
Beth (F)	Vets
Catriona (F)	Children's Nursery
Connor (M)	Law Centre
Danielle (F)	Hair salon
Emily (F)	Office
Hannah (F)	Primary School nursery
Maisy (F)	Law Courts

What were their main reflections on the placement?

"Good."

"Tiring, too long."

"Better than school."

"I got a good report."

"Treated with more respect."

"Some of my friends said theirs were rubbish."

"You get to do stuff you wouldn't normally do at schools. I had to deal with confidential files. Sign forms."

"It was what I wanted."

"You come back more mature. More grown up. People speak to you as if you were a person and not a four year old."

"It's a like a turning point. It helps you to change."

What was the process for finding the placement?

Three of the eight participants sourced their placements through family connections.

"We got a letter and had to fill it out."

"I went into the shops and asked."

"I only wanted to do something on law and the only place that was left was at the law centre. Then I had to have a meeting."

"The vets where I did mine, is where we take our animals. I asked them."

"I phoned up the architects and asked and they said it was fine."

Did going on work experience have any influence on their school life?

A majority agreed that the placement had had a positive impact on their application at school.

"I was less lazy afterwards."

"I've done an awful lot better in my English, Maths and Science since. I knew what I had to do to be a lawyer [after the placement]. I talked to one of the lawyers who told me what grades I needed. And they were higher than I expected."

"I'm spending more time on coursework. And if I don't get it done now, I will speak to someone."

"At the nursery, we were told that it's not just about grades."

"I had a shock. Learnt that you have to get the grades. It made a difference."

Did the work experience help to inform thinking about future careers?

Six of the eight had completed placements which they had chosen because they were relevant to career aspirations.

"Got us thinking."

"Made me think that it would be proper interesting [to work in the placement career field]."

"I was sat behind a desk, and went out on a visit twice. I learnt that I don't want to be sat behind a desk the rest of my life, so now it's going back to the drawing board and thinking again. I'm still interested in law. I got to speak to the police and some of the young offenders and they opened up to me and told me their life stories and trusted me. I thought that was really good."

"It changed my mind. I'm thinking of being a veterinary nurse now. I hadn't known about that before."

"I'll probably stay on now, because everyone I worked with said that they did. That was something new I learned."

Did the work experience placement lead to an offer of real work?

One had secured a part-time job out of the placement, two were offered the prospect of future employment opportunities.

"Because people liked what I did, they offered me a job. Every Thursday after school I go [to the law centre] to help with other work experience kids from other schools. Sometimes parents bring their kids in from nursery and I would play with the kids."

"They said if I keep in touch [with Hair Salon], when I'm 16 they will take me on as a trainee if I'm still interested. Won't be doing it though."

"If I need a placement, I can go there." [School]

"If I continue with architecture, they said they would give me a part-time job."

Would they change anything about the work experience placements?

"Should have been longer."

"I wanted to do two different things."

Annex 4: Work experience by occupational sector, 2009/10.

Distribution of placements.

Sport and Leisure	18%
Society, Health and Development	15%
Business, Administration and Finance	13%
Retail	12%
Public Services	7%
Engineering	6%
Travel and Tourism	5%
Land-based and Environmental	5%
Hair and Beauty	5%
Hospitality and Catering	4%
Construction and the Built Environment	4%
Creative and Media	3%
Information Technology	1%
Manufacturing	1%
Other	1%
Total	100%

Focus group with Year 11 pupils, March 2011

Ten young people joined the group. All had undertaken work experience of one week's duration during the summer (June/July) of Year 10. Pupils were selected by teaching staff as individuals who had experienced a 'successful' placement. Four of the ten knew their employers prior to the placement – mainly through family connections. Eight sourced their own work experience, two were helped by teachers. A teacher sat in on the group, and only made comments to clarify the school's work experience policy.

Participant	Location of work experience
Alex (M)	Probation Service
Dan (M)	Museum
Holly (F)	Children's Nursery
Jake (M)	Fencing Contractor
Jamie (M)	Computer Shop
Joe (M)	Engineering Design
Michael (M)	Courts Service
Natalie (F)	Primary School
Nicky (F)	Hair Salon
Phil (M)	Electrician

What were their main reflections on the placement?

"Different."

"Something different."

"Gave you independence for the week."

Did the work experience help to inform thinking about future careers?

"It teaches you what you don't want to do or what you want to do."

"Confirms that's the job you want."

"Not that job."

"Told us about all the different things you can do. I

learnt about what social workers do, didn't really know that before."

"I made my mind up after it."

"It opened doors."

"I know better now what type of engineering I'm interested in. I learnt that. Now I know where to go."

Did they learn anything while on work experience?

"It was a learning curve"

"I developed skills"

"New software, new skills."

Did going on work experience have any influence on their school life?

"I was more enthusiastic afterwards about school. You know what you're doing now."

"It makes you realise that you need to get a B or a C or above – that you need to work."

"That there's lots of competition. I was told that I need to be on top of my game" [to get the job of choice]

"Makes you knuckle down. Lessons that I didn't like before, even if I don't like them, I still need to make an effort."

"Nothing."

"Learnt what I want to do and what I need to do for it."

"Refreshes you."

Did the work experience placement lead to an offer of real work?

Three of the ten secured part-time employment following their placement. A fourth was offered a job, but declined it. Two were asked to stay in touch in case an appropriate job did come up in the future.

"I was told that if an apprenticeship came up, I would probably be first choice."

"It makes it easier to get a job because you have references."

Would they make any changes to the work placements they experienced?

“Should be two weeks. Not enough variety.”

“You should get two different opportunities. Would make you to think more.”

“Should be longer.”

“I wanted to do two different things.”

“You should have 2 or 3 different ones, at different times of the year.”

“Everyone should do work experience in Year 10 or 11.”

“You should do it in year 9 before you choose your options.”

“A week in year 9 and a week in year 10 would be good.”

“Year 10 is good. It’s when you start to think about your future.”

Do they think that work experience would be better if available between 16-19 than 14-19?

“It’s too late. You’ve already made your choices.”

Would they like other opportunities to interact with employers as part of their schooling?

“Would be good to talk about careers. Speak to people in work. They know what they are doing, what they did to get there. People in their 20s.”

Post-focus group discussion with class teacher

Q: Does work experience have an impact on their school work? Do you observe them working harder afterwards?

A: When they come back, certainly for the first two weeks after, they are more focused, but lose it again. It is a week at the end of Year 10. I’d say though that 75% come back and realise better what school is for. If the parents are career-driven, the pupils are. If it’s a workless house, we need to give them more information about work to help them strive.

Q: How easy/difficult is it to find the right work experience placements?

A: It was really hard to give much choice this year. The state of the economy means that there is less choice.

Q: If it was no longer a universal entitlement and you had to target the work experience, how would you go about it?

A: It’s hard to differentiate. The working-class kids do often have access to a trade through their families. They can get five GCSEs D-G and then go into a trade. I think we should target the gifted and talented to show them what they are capable of. And target the pupils who can’t decide. Ones who are coasting, with no drive. The driven ones will push themselves. They will do work experience in their holidays. That could be done. I’d target the borderline kids the most – they haven’t got the drive. They need a reason. Lots of them we’re working with to get five GCSEs. They coast because they are uncertain about what they want to do at 16. They need a reason.

Focus group with Year 12 pupils, March 2011

Eleven Year 12 pupils joined the group. All were studying 'A' levels and all were intending to progress to Higher Education, but had yet to begin the application process. Each had one week work experience, mainly in year 10. Two of the participants (*) had studied a Young Apprenticeship at Key Stage 4 with fifty days work experience. One of the participants (\$) had completed 6-7 weeks in total of work experience, arranging placements herself and a further pupil had undertaken work experience placements of more than 11 days duration. Half of those present had also been on a workplace visit. No other employer engagement activities had been undertaken by any member of the group. Pupils were not accompanied by a staff member.

Participant	Location of work experience
Chris (M)	Police
John (M)	Building site
Lauren (F)	1. School 2. Department store
Lucy (F)	Charity Shop
Lucy (F)	Library
Niall (M)	Garage*
Rachel (F)	Primary School (\$)
Rachel (F)	School
Richard (M)	Garage*
Stuart (M)	Regional newspaper
Tom (M)	School

What were their main reflections on the placement?

"It builds confidence."

"It breaks a boundary. You don't know anything about world of work before hand."

Did the work experience help to inform thinking about future careers?

There was general agreement that work experience, in contrast to part-time work, helped informed careers thinking. Five of the participants changed their career aspirations after the placement.

"You get advice from people you're surrounded by – it really helps you make a decision."

"Work experience is about what you want to do in the long term, about careers. Part-time jobs are just to get money."

"It's totally different. Part-time work helps you get by, work experience helps increase your confidence."

"I was thinking I would be a teacher, and after it, I knew that I definitely didn't want to be a teacher. Don't know what I want to be, but not a teacher."

"I'd been thinking about medicine, and changed my mind to teaching."

"I'd wanted to be an archaeologist and changed my mind to doing something in TV."

"I changed my mind about wanting to be a doctor."

"It reinforced my thinking. I wanted to be a teacher and still do."

"A teacher gave me advice on 'A' levels, on what would keep me in good stead."

"It can help you get your ideal job."

What value is there in being about to talk to employers about career aspirations?

Four of the participants had spoken to someone from a career area they were interested in.

"I'd jump at it, if I had the chance."

"If you've a field in mind, there should be more opportunity to talk to someone in that field."

"It would be nice to have a link – at university especially. We're really wary of going to university and making the wrong decision."

"[Name of town] doesn't have a wide range of business. There's not much to go on. You need to look for them to find them. I spoke to someone in an advertising firm in London and that was brilliant."

"I'd like more one-on-one chance to talk about different courses from university. Just to get the information. So I can check everything out. It should be personal, individual."

"There should be more trips to businesses, for small groups to go to workplaces."

What is the best age to do a placement?

All agreed that placements should be early, overwhelmingly agreeing on Year 10 as the preferred age.

"By the time you get to sixth form, you've probably got a job already. It's good preparation for getting a real job if you do the placement earlier. If you do it in year 10, you get to see what you want to do, there's time to change your mind."

"You know where to set your sights."

"If you always wanted to do something, it's a bit of a test to see if it's right."

"It's too late by the time you're doing 'A' levels."

"It shouldn't be compulsory in sixth form, but there should be chance to do it, so you can check something out. You're under a lot of pressure [in sixth form] from yourself to do well in your 'A' levels. If it is done, it should be targeted, high quality."

"Work experience can change 'A' level choices. You don't want to go to university and find you've made the wrong choice. There should be someone for careers advice, and be able to do work experience if still relevant. There should be more links and organised days to speak to people from the subjects we do."

Did going on work experience have any influence on their school life?

Two of the participants said that they had changed their 'A' level choices as a consequence of work experience.

"Doing a placement [with the police], helped me understand what subjects would be greatest relevance to the police."

"Increased my motivation."

"Kept me motivated."

"All the people working with us told us [at garage] about how they hated the job and were always telling us stories about how they'd mucked about at school and got nothing. It showed us how easy it could be to go downhill."

"I used to think school was so ridiculous. I hadn't realised how hard work is and how great school is and that you should work [at school] while you have the chance. It definitely makes you work harder [at school]."

"I did the young apprenticeship at a garage to be a mechanic. All the other people working there, they all said that they'd wished that they'd stayed on. It made me think a lot."

Did the work experience placement lead to an offer of real work?

Just one participant was offered a job when they reached 16 and one was told to stay in touch. A small number of friends got jobs after work experience, one person known to many of the participants was recommended to lots of employers by the work experience employer leading to many job opportunities.

Does work experience have any relevance to progression to higher education?

[Applying to higher education] "is daunting. There's no one who you can talk to."

"We're not advised. No one's really talked to us. We've not had careers advice. Some Newcastle admissions people came last year, that was good."

"All my work experience has been at primary schools. Because I've already worked there and I can get a recommendation from the head teacher, I think it will help me to get to the university where I want to. People's grades might be the same, but I'll have the experience and recommendation."

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¹ See Watts A G (1996) "Experience-based learning about work" in Watts A G, Law B, Killeen J, Kidd J M & Hawthorn R eds, *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance – Theory, Policy and Practice*. London: Routledge. In the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008), *The Work-related Learning Guide (Second Edition)*, the underlying aims of work-related learning are given as: develop the employability skills of young people; provide young people with the opportunity to 'learn by doing' and to learn from experts; raise standards of achievement of students; increase the commitment to learning, motivation and self-confidence of students; encourage young people to stay in education; enable young people to develop career awareness and the ability to benefit from impartial and informed information, advice and guidance; support young people's ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills; improve young people's understanding of the economy, enterprise, finance and the structure of business organisations, and how they work; and encourage positive attitudes to lifelong learning.

² In setting up and running a work experience programme there are organisational and curriculum issues to be undertaken. Typically where work experience is centrally organised (i.e., by an external organisation eg EBPO), organisational tasks are shared with the school but curriculum work is primarily the responsibility of the school. **Organisation** includes: finding placements; maintaining an employer database; health and safety checking and safeguarding plus revisits; matching students to placements; monitoring students during the placement; evaluation. **Curriculum** includes: preparing students; briefing employers; work experience logs, diaries and workbooks; debriefing students; evaluation; work-based assignments linked to courses.

³ The principal cost of work experience organisation is staff time involved in the administrative and curriculum tasks cited above. A 1997-98 national DfEE survey found that on average schools spent 38 days of teacher time on all aspects of work experience (i.e. both organisational and curriculum tasks). The 2001 Hillage evaluation of pre-16 work experience found that teachers and administrators in schools spent an average of 160-170 hours (or c.23 days) organising work experience (excluding curriculum-related tasks). The evaluation found that in 2000 the average unit cost of work experience was £24.75 and the range was £5-£45. Where schools contributed to the costs of central organisation the mean average payment was £16.05. Costs included: health and safety checks; full placement and matching services; salary costs; administration; stationery; training; and travel.

In contrast the Wolf Review stated that the costs of organising a school-based work experience programme are the equivalent of at least half a full-time senior teacher's salary (which can be estimated at £24,000) plus substantial administrative support (which can be estimated at £5,000). On the basis of a seven form entry school with 210 students the school costs would be £29,000, i.e. a unit cost of £138. Disadvantages of this model are that schools tend not to have a secure, vetted database of employers. This model also causes an additional burden for employers who have to deal with uncoordinated requests from students and teachers.

During 2009-10 data on unit costs was provided to the

Education and Employers Taskforce by 11 EBPO areas representing 20.9% of placements during the year. The range in unit costs was between £19 and £53 with an average unit cost of £37. The average for the eight reporting EBPOs serving one LA area was £38 (range £19-£53) and for the three sub-regional EBPOs the corresponding figure was £31 (range £22-£40). In 7 of the 11 areas the schools contributed to the cost of provision and here the YPLA grant was £2,270,303 (69.5%) and the school contribution was £995,080 (30.5%). In the example above with a centrally organised scheme it is reasonable to add the £5,000 administrative cost (as typically they liaise with administrators rather than teachers following the Workforce agreement). So the total cost of the centralised scheme would be £38 x 210 = £7,980 + £5,000 school administration costs = £12,980, i.e. a total unit cost of £62. Using the same methodology, the unit cost for a sub-regionally managed scheme would be £55.

⁴ Yates, S. et al (2010) "Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK" *Journal of Social Policy* 10; Staff, J. et al (2010) "Uncertainty in Early Occupational Aspirations: Role Exploration or Aimlessness?" *Social Forces* 89

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¹² Ibid.

¹³ NEBPN National Support Group for Work Experience (2008), *Students' Perceptions of Work Experience*. Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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²⁰ For a discussion of the links between teenage NEET and poor workplace experience, see Mann A with Lopez D & Stanley J (2010), *What is to be gained through partnership? Exploring the value of education-employer relationships*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce

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