



The business case for work experience

Modern work experience.

Let's make it work.



Addressing the National NEET Challenge

The UK has almost 1 million young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET).

However, a young person who has four or more encounters with employers is 86% less likely to be unemployed... and can earn up to 18% more during their career.¹

There is potential to add £69bn to the economy if we matched the lowest NEET rate in the OECD.² Even within the UK³, if we improved NEET rates to match those in the best-performing region, it would add £23bn to the economy.

Work experience provides learners with a better understanding of the world of work, while enhancing essential employability skills such as communication, problem-solving and adaptability. It also helps inform subject and career choices and encourages learners to connect curriculum learning with life beyond the classroom⁴. Similar findings were seen in [CEC's 2025 equalex pilots](#).

This matters even more as the world of work undergoes profound and accelerating change.

AI and the changing workplace

McKinsey's research states that >70% of employees believe that AI will change >30% of their work within 2 years. This is higher for millennials, who are also more likely to report familiarity with gen AI tools. And with 92% of companies planning to invest more in gen AI over the next 3 years this is likely to grow⁵.

According to the WEF's [Future of Jobs report](#) 2025, the top ten skills on the rise in this evolving job market are⁶:

- **Creative thinking**
- **Analytical thinking**
- **Technological literacy**
- **Curiosity and lifelong learning**
- **Resilience, flexibility, and agility**
- **Leadership and social influence**
- **Empathy and active listening**
- **Motivation and self-awareness**
- **Talent management**
- **Service orientation and customer service**

The majority of these can be developed and enhanced via work experience. They align well to the Skills Builder framework of essential skills which we recommend embedding in your careers education approach (and forms a key element of our Employer Standards).



Commercial benefits of work experience

Employers offering work experience are more likely to report business benefits⁷. These can vary by size, sector and function, but many are relevant across the board:

› Early talent pipeline development⁸

Work experience can help build awareness of your brand and your sector. By starting with younger learners you are a step ahead in addressing skills shortages⁹ and can support your future recruits to make informed subject choices, understand qualification routes and make better application decisions – increasing your retention rates.

Employers delivering the highest quality ‘meaningful opportunities’ (including workplace experiences) are 2x as likely to say their work is helping close skills gaps.

87% say their work in this area is encouraging young people to take up careers in their sector.

Employers delivering meaningful opportunities (including work experience) over the long term are 34% more likely to report that it has encouraged young people to apply for roles in the business.

By ensuring inclusivity¹⁰ you can break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and broaden your future talent pipeline, which can maximise interest in your organisation.

Employers proactively targeting their activities to under-represented groups are 31% more likely to say that their education outreach is helping them to develop new talent pipelines¹¹.

› Cost savings

Engaging your prospective talent pipeline can lower the cost per hire of early careers recruitment and reduce onboarding attrition.

Nearly 40% of employers say working with schools and colleges has helped them to reduce their recruitment costs.

› Social value and community impact

By investing in young people that are local to your operations, you can demonstrate to a range of stakeholders that you are committed to the community. For smaller employers this can drive customer loyalty, and for larger employers it can translate into enhanced reputation and contract opportunities.

› Innovation through fresh perspectives

Young people often bring creativity and different ways of thinking about problems. Their digital expertise and lack of industry assumptions can provide valuable insights for product development, marketing approaches and process improvements. They may help identify opportunities or inefficiencies.

› Employee engagement

Offering workplace experiences can provide opportunities for staff to supervise and mentor young people; as well as developing the planning and management skills. Employees often feel a sense of pride in sharing their own career stories and value being part of an organisation that supports the next generation.

Case study: Jaguar Land Rover (JLR)

At JLR, employees receive two fully paid volunteering days per year, with many choosing to support education and outreach. Their STEM Ambassador network has grown from 50 to over 500, mainly driven by internal advocacy and visible impact. JLR has observed measurable improvements in employee engagement scores (pulse and ENPS) and has significantly increased its reach to young people through this expanded volunteer base.



How work experience can support diversity, equity and inclusion

Half of young people who are NEET for over a year share one or more of these characteristics¹³:

- Black, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi heritage
- experience of the care system or the justice system
- a learning disability or autism
- mental health challenges

These young people benefit disproportionately from work experience as do those young people on the borderline of low attainment¹⁴.

Targeting your approach to young people facing barriers provides additional benefits.

› Supports social mobility

A commitment to social mobility begins with supporting young people without social networks to have their first experience of the workplace. McKinsey calculated that improving social mobility could increase the EU GDP by €1.3 trillion¹⁵.

Children's aspirations are shaped, moulded and restricted by gender stereotyping, socio-economic background and social networks. These stereotypes begin to develop as early as seven

years old. Early interventions can have a lasting impact on how young people perceive different occupations and the subjects that support them¹⁶.

Young people from low socio-economic backgrounds need more support to build their networks, confidence and skills and attainment is positively impacted by meeting relatable workplace role models¹⁷.

› Employer brand - inclusive and socially responsible.

Employers who take practical steps to develop their inclusivity, including through targeted work experience programmes, are more likely to appeal to employees and customers who value social responsibility.

Research from Co-operatives UK reveals as many as 61% of young workers place as much importance on their employers' values, such as green credentials, honesty and social responsibility, as what they take home in their pay packet.

More than four in ten (42%) of the 18 and 27 years olds polled have even considered quitting their job because the company doesn't have enough social purpose or strong enough values, with 40% even turning down or avoiding applying for jobs at companies they considered 'unethical'¹⁸.

› Creates a feedback loop for accessibility

Work experience placements offer an opportunity to identify physical, technological, and systemic barriers that may hinder accessibility. Young people with disabilities or neurodivergence can share insights into adjustments or accommodations that can benefit current and future employees.

› Enhances long-term workplace ED&I

Developments that enhance your work experience offer will usually benefit your employees too. Examples can include reducing stereotypes, improved cross-team working and enhanced self-declaration rates (particularly effective where this relates to enhanced support needs).



Particular benefits for different functions within a business

› Human Resources

Work experience can be a cost-effective recruitment pipeline. It reduces costs of attraction, builds brand and pipeline, and allows teams to evaluate potential talent before making hiring commitments. It can also support Learning & Development needs by giving opportunities for employees to develop project management and mentoring capabilities.

› Operations & Production

In some organisations, work experience learners can support operational capacity by assisting with routine tasks, freeing up experienced staff for more complex work. This can also create opportunities to test and clarify processes and the communications around them. Work experience programmes can also build relationships with technical institutions that are training relevant skilled workers.

› Marketing & Communications

With fresh perspectives and digital-native insights, learners can provide authentic insights into emerging consumer trends and digital behaviours. Work experience activities can also generate positive PR opportunities and social media content. The programs generate compelling content for social media and marketing materials.

› Sales & Business Development

Sales teams can leverage work experience participants for lead generation, market research, and customer outreach activities. Learners often bring energy and enthusiasm that can positively impact customer interactions.

› CSR and social value

Work experience supports your social Impact. By helping to tackle inequality and increase social mobility, it can support your ESG targets.

As well as providing volunteering opportunities it supports young people without networks to build essential skills for the workplace.

It can also enhance your employer brand and reputation with local communities and customers.

Work experience can fulfil your Social Value Model by directly mapping to required social outcomes in UK public procurement (original PPN 06/20 new PPN 002). It delivers against social value metrics. It contributes to robust, reportable social value impact (NT100, NT99 & 2 new measures on work experience being developed, along with TOMs/LOOP etc). It can also improve bid performance, increasing scoring in competitive tenders especially when you target your work to relevant cohorts.

According to NCVO, volunteering also drives a more engaged, confident, and mission-focused workforce.

1. **Making a difference:** Nine in ten volunteers (89%) agreed that it makes them feel like they are making a difference.
2. **Wellbeing:** Three-quarters (75%) reported that volunteering improved their mental health and wellbeing.
3. **Connectivity:** Almost nine in ten volunteers (87%) connect to new people.



According to research conducted with over 1,000 business volunteers, undertaken by Education and Employers¹⁹:

1. **Education volunteering supports wellbeing:** 62% reported improvements to their “sense of mission” at work as a result of their volunteering in education. 88% reported benefits for their motivation in day-to-day life outside work; 77% reported the same for motivation at work. 49% reported that their volunteering has ultimately improved their satisfaction with their employer or line of work.
2. **More is better:** The more hours volunteered, the more likely employee volunteers were to report an impact. For instance, 55% of those volunteering the equivalent of 10+ days a year reported strong or very strong impact on their in-work motivation, compared to 32% of those doing <fewer than 4 hours a year.
3. **Supportive employers matter:** The more personally supported volunteers felt, the greater the benefits they reported in all areas, especially when employers actively seek out volunteering opportunities for staff.

What our Cornerstone Employers say about work experience



“We need to move from a single touchpoint to year-round engagement – virtual and in-person. Some roles, like train operators and customer facing jobs, require in-person work experience, but for others, a continuous, blended and variety of experiences are essential. If I don’t work in the office five days a week, why should we offer placements that don’t mirror the reality of how we work now?”

**Karen Wallbridge, Head of Talent,
Transport for London**



“Offering work experience is a key part of how we recruit and helps our team grow by developing their coaching and mentoring skills. We create flexible opportunities, from weeklong placements to virtual insight days, which fit around our business. At the end of each placement, learners share what they’ve learned, and that’s when we know we’re making a difference.”

**Davinder Lotay, Managing Director,
Altimex Ltd**



“In the world of hybrid working, the traditional five-day work experience is ever challenging to achieve. Our approach offers experiences of the workplace of different lengths, intensity and venues for maximum flexibility and scale”

**Ian Browne, Early Careers
Professional, Lloyds Banking Group**



Endnotes

- 1 [Contemporary transitions: Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college - Education and Employers](#)
- 2 [One in eight young people across the UK not in work or education - Youth Futures Foundation](#)
- 3 [PwC comments on the latest UK NEET rates among young people](#)
- 4 [what-works-report-work-experience.pdf](#)
- 5 <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/superagency-in-the-workplace-empowering-people-to-unlock-ais-full-potential-at-work>
- 6 <https://luminate.prospects.ac.uk/how-will-generative-ai-affect-learners-and-employment>
From CEC's Employer Standards data we see that employers who offer work experience are 77% more likely to report business benefits, such as a stronger talent pipeline. This figure rises to 90% for those providing the widest range of experiences, including job shadowing and T-levels
- 7 [From CEC's Employer Standards data we see that employers who offer work experience are 77% more likely to report business benefits, such as a stronger talent pipeline. This figure rises to 90% for those providing the widest range of experiences, including job shadowing and T-levels.](#)
- 8 [81% of employers say their work in schools and colleges helps to develop new talent pipelines. This figure rises to 93% for those doing the highest-quality outreach and engaging over a sustained period.](#)
- 9 [CEC's Employer Standards analysis, shows that employers who engage intensively with young people, such as through workplace experiences, are 47% more likely to report that their outreach is helping to close skills gaps.](#)
- 10 Employers using the [Employer Standards tool](#) who were actively targeting underrepresented groups in their education outreach reported significantly higher business benefits. They were:
 - 31% were more likely to say their outreach is helping to develop new talent pipelines (77% vs. 41%)
 - 28% more likely to report improvements in early careers recruitment effectiveness (90% vs. 59%)
 - 33% more likely to agree it's helping to improve workforce diversity (80% vs. 52%)
- 11 <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/employer-standards-for-careers-education-one-year-on/>
- 13 <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/about-us/strategy-2025-2028/>
- 14 [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 reaching key attainment targets](#)
- 15 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/breaking-the-standstill-how-social-mobility-can-boost-europes-economy>
- 16 <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Drawing-the-Future-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>
- 17 https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/3ogdxqu1/bit67-cec-report_v3.pdf
- 18 [New research: Gen Z demands workplaces with purpose – and co-operatives fit the bill | Co-operatives UK](#) Similar global findings are seen in [Randstad's 2025 Workmonitor report](#).
- 19 [Working Well: How volunteering to help young people also boosts volunteers' wellbeing - Education and Employers](#)





THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

Our Evidence

