Written evidence submitted by Hounslow Youth Council (BYC008)

Contents: A short statement agreed by the members of Hounslow Youth Council expressing their thoughts on the subject of Work Experience.

1. The abolition of compulsory Work Experience by the Coalition government in 2012 was a sea-change in the way employers, young people and schools worked together.
2. Prior to 2012, the chief purpose of Work Experience was to give all students experience of working life. Since then, the focus has changed.
3. Businesses, according to every survey conducted at a local and national level, still want to offer work experience placements but without schools as intermediaries find it difficult to do so. It is hard to justify the cost of advertising the opportunity for two weeks’ unpaid work.
4. The end of compulsory Work Experience has also changed the way students think about work experience. Simply being at work rather than at school and experiencing a different environment and different challenges has lost its appeal.
5. Rather, the purpose of work experience is now to experience a specific job or industry, for specific reasons.
6. Students seek out experience in careers seen as aspirational, such as law or medicine and many University courses and work opportunities, even for graduates and school leavers, require work experience.
7. These “aspirational” opportunities in fields such as law, media and politics become more sought-after, and access to them more exclusive and based on “who you know” – damaging social mobility, disproportionately affecting Black and Minority Ethnic students.
8. These students as well as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are also further disadvantaged when graduating and being offered only unpaid “Internships” – acceptance of which is predicated on being able to be financially supported by their parents.
9. The evidence base for the effectiveness of these work experience placements is lacking. Whilst two weeks experience of the world of work clearly has educational benefits for a Year 10 student, it is exceedingly doubtful whether two weeks experience at age 14 is a significant factor in one’s ability to be a successful doctor, lawyer or journalist.
10. Likewise, the end of traditional work experience has hit students with less lofty career ambitions just as hard. For those for whom the discipline, routine and socialisation of two weeks in a factory, shop or office would be of great benefit, the inability of schools to provide such is a major blow.
11. We hope that this inquiry helps policymakers, employers, schools and students “square the circle” – produce the evidence base for the educational benefits of all forms of Work Experience, bring back meaningful work experience for all, improve the quality and relevance of work experience to university and inspire a new regulation in unpaid internships and work experience.