Written evidence submitted by Sutton Trust (BYC011)

**The Sutton Trust**

1. The Sutton Trust was founded by Sir Peter Lampl in 1997. We are a foundation which improves social mobility in the UK through evidence-based programmes, research and policy advocacy.

2. From early years through school, college and university to the workplace, we work to combat educational inequality and prevent the subsequent waste of talent. We are concerned with breaking the link between educational opportunities and family background, so that young people are given the chance to fulfil their potential, regardless of their family background, school or where they live.

**Executive summary**

3. The Sutton Trust believes that high-quality work experience can be a useful lever for social mobility, as it can provide young people with opportunities that might exist outside of their immediate network. High-quality work experience can also raise the aspirations of disadvantaged young people who can gain knowledge of a wider range of careers and options available to them that they may previously have been unaware of. Work experience should be part of a wider package of good quality careers advice, in which young people are able to learn from employers about work and the skills that are valued in the workplace. The Sutton Trust also believes that all work experience should be fairly and openly advertised, and opportunities should be spread evenly across the country. This would help to ensure that all young people, regardless of background, location or family connections, are able to access the same opportunities.

**What does “good quality work experience” look like? What do young people and businesses expect to get from it?**

4. Work experience can be a useful lever for improving social mobility and Sutton Trust research shows that improving social mobility is good for businesses and good for the economy overall. Research carried out by Boston Consulting Group for the Trust showed that even a moderate increase in the UK’s social mobility to the average level across western Europe could be associated with an increase in annual GDP of approximately 2%, equivalent to £590 per person or £39bn to the UK economy as a whole (in 2016 prices).[[1]](#footnote-1)

5. Work experience should be one of the ways in which businesses can encourage young people who are from under-represented backgrounds to get involved in the profession that their organisation offers. This in turn is beneficial to businesses in the long term as it may enable them to gain access to a wider pool of talent as young people from disadvantaged backgrounds apply for employment opportunities, as well as providing the business with the strengths associated with a diverse workforce with different talents, skills, and experiences.

6. With a growing proportion of the population holding at least an undergraduate degree, relevant work experience is an increasingly important requirement for accessing graduate jobs.[[2]](#footnote-2) For young people, good quality work experience should be offered as part of an overall package of good quality careers advice and guidance in schools. It can provide considerable insight into a career and is seen as an important part of gaining insights into different career paths, which can be especially important for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

7. According to the Gatsby benchmarks for good quality careers guidance, young people should have the opportunity to access ‘multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace’.[[3]](#footnote-3) This could include shadowing at various levels within a particular organisation as this can provide valuable insights into the different aspects of a sector and opportunities for progression. This should be accompanied by the opportunity to learn about the routes to get into specific sectors which should be part of good careers guidance. Good work experience should therefore give a young person a valuable insight into the profession that they are interacting with, and should provide opportunities for young people to interact with more than one profession during their educational career.

8. Good quality work experience can also help raise aspirations of young people who may not have otherwise considered the career. This is particularly true of disadvantaged young people who may not be aware of all of the career opportunities that are available to them given their possible lack of social capital. To ensure access to high quality work experience for people from all backgrounds it is important that there is a distinction between a young person undertaking work experience and a young person carrying out the role of a paid member of staff. If a young person is undertaking a longer position where the work that they are doing is of value to their employer and they have set hours and responsibilities, then they are likely to qualify as an employee under UK employment law, which means that they are entitled to be paid the minimum wage.

9. The Sutton Trust believes that it is important that this distinction is made to ensure that an organisation is clear as to whether it is offering work experience or whether it is employing an unpaid intern.

**What evidence is there that work experience boosts social mobility?**

10. Helping young people to learn about education and employment enables them to discover and access opportunities that might exist outside of their immediate networks.[[4]](#footnote-4) If disadvantaged young people do not have access to connections and networks of professionals, they may not be aware of the variety of careers that are open to them. Work experience can be an effective way to expose disadvantaged young people to these new possibilities.

11. Research shows that in a highly competitive job market there is an increasing value placed on life skills such as confidence, motivation, resilience and communication.[[5]](#footnote-5) Sutton Trust polling found that 94% of employers view life skills as at least as important as academic results, yet only 1 in 5 young people say that their school curriculum helps them “a lot” with developing these skills.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Sutton Trust recommends that businesses expand their work experience programmes to ensure that young people are better prepared for the workplace upon entering the job market.[[7]](#footnote-7)

12. In addition to developing these essential life skills that can help with employability, work experience may provide practical advice that can help young people to secure a job in their chosen sector. Research has shown that access to graduate jobs is often reliant on work experience with a specific company. At least half of entry-level vacancies at City investments banks and leading law firms are likely to be filled by graduates who have already completed work experience with the employer.[[8]](#footnote-8) Good quality work experience should lead to more informed career choices and give a young person greater knowledge of the route that they need to take to get there, and may improve a young person’s chances of securing a permanent job with the employer.

**How do differences between young people (e.g. geographic location, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, disability) affect the work experience opportunities that people have?**

13. Socioeconomic background can have a significant impact on the work experience opportunities that young people have access to. If work experience placements are offered informally to friends and family of staff, young people from less well-off backgrounds can be locked out of these opportunities if they do not have the networks with which to secure these placements informally. It is therefore important that this is not the *only* way that young people get access to work experience and that there are other opportunities for young people to access work experience opportunities which do not rely solely on social capital.

14. Geographic location can also affect the opportunities provided to young people. Opportunities should not be concentrated in London, where the cost of living is the highest in the UK. Sutton Trust research estimates that the minimum cost of working unpaid in London is £1,019 per month.[[9]](#footnote-9) Unpaid work experience in London may be difficult for less well-off young people who may be priced out by these high costs, particularly if they have to travel to get to the workplace which may cost a significant amount of money. Work experience placements should be spread evenly across the country to ensure that all young people have access to similar opportunities.

**How could resources to help young people find out about and access work experience be improved?**

15. A key resource to help young people find out about and access work experience can be provided by the school, in the form of good quality careers guidance. Good quality careers guidance contributes to social mobility, helping people to discover and access opportunities that might exist outside of their immediate networks**.** Without this careers provision, young people are often forced to rely on informal networks such as parents’ friends and contacts for careers advice, and young people from more deprived backgrounds are less likely to have access to these professional networks.

16. Careers guidance in schools should be improved so that young people are able to easily find out about work experience opportunities. The connection to the curriculum and to the mainstream activities of the school or college is highlighted as critical to the effectiveness of careers guidance.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Gatsby study resulted in a series of eight Benchmarks that define quality careers provision, including career learning in the curriculum, employer engagement and work experience, as well as one-to-one advice and guidance.[[11]](#footnote-11)

17. Research has highlighted the importance of including active experiences of workplaces and employer engagement as part of programmes to support career learning.[[12]](#footnote-12) The Sutton Trust recommends a good level of careers advice in schools, with extra support available for those from low-income backgrounds.

**What does good practice in offering, advertising and recruiting for work experience look like, and how can businesses be encouraged to follow it?**

18. Without compulsory work experience, young people may have to seek out work experience opportunities independently. It is vital therefore that employers ensure that they are recruiting in a fair and transparent way, so that young people without professional networks are not locked out of these opportunities.

19. The Sutton Trust believes that all work experience opportunities should be advertised publicly, so that regardless of connections, all potential applicants can apply and have the same chance of securing a place. There should be no preferential treatment given to friends or family of staff when recruiting, and securing the placement should be based solely on merit. Recruitment processes for work experience should be held to the same standards as the processes for all other jobs, and should be fair and transparent.

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1. Sutton Trust, Oxera, Helen Jenkins, Katie-Lee English, Ognyana Hristova, Aline Blankertz, Vanessa Pham, Cavin Wilson, *‘Social mobility and economic success’*, July 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sutton Trust, *‘Internship or Indenture?*’, November 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Career Development Institute, the Careers & Enterprise Company, *‘The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit’*, September 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sutton Trust, Tristram Hooley, Jesse Matheson, A.G. Watts, *‘Advancing ambitions’*, October 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sutton Trust, Carl Cullinane, Rebecca Montacute, *‘Life Lessons’*, October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sutton Trust, Carl Cullinane, Rebecca Montacute, *‘Life Lessons’*, October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sutton Trust, Carl Cullinane, Rebecca Montacute, *‘Life Lessons’*, October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alan Milburn, *‘Fair Access to Professional Careers’*, May 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Sutton Trust, Dr Rebecca Montacute, *‘Internships – unpaid, unadvertised, unfair’*, January 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Sutton Trust, Tristram Hooley, Jesse Matheson, A.G. Watts, *‘Advancing ambitions’*, October 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Career Development Institute, the Careers & Enterprise Company, *‘The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit’*, September 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Sutton Trust, Tristram Hooley, Jesse Matheson, A.G. Watts, *‘Advancing ambitions’*, October 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)