**Written evidence submitted by Business in the Community (BYC018)**

**Introduction**
Business in the Community (BITC), The Prince’s Responsible Business Network, exists to create healthy communities with successful business at their heart. We were borne out of a response to the Toxteth and Brixton Riots in 1981 but over the years we have helped to establish the wider agenda for corporate responsibility. Today, BITC has over half of the FTSE 100 as active members and reaches hundreds more through its campaigns, with over 350 business leaders taking active business roles.

Our work in education is centred on enabling business to play its part so that every young person, particularly those facing social disadvantage, achieves in education, leading to a successful working life, thriving in business. We have a strong record of engaging businesses on this agenda, as many responsible businesses have established partnerships with schools through our programme Business Class, which enables young people the opportunity to engage with local employers. Over 500 schools have been involved in Business Class, supported by over 1,000 businesses (33% of whom are SMEs), impacting on over 250,000 young people across the UK. Crucially, our focus is on the schools most in need of support. Of the schools participating in Business Class: 80% of schools have an above average number of pupils eligible for free school meals; 57% are in the 30% most deprived areas of the country; and only 35% are achieving GCSE results above the national average.

We believe business, alongside schools and the government, has a fundamental role to play to prevent young people being polarised due to their social background, into those who achieve success at school and beyond and those who do not. This is vital in order to build a diverse and effective workforce and help create economically viable, cohesive communities. It is also imperative if we are to ensure that business meets the growing skills gap. The [CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2017](http://www.cbi.org.uk/index.cfm/_api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=DB1A9FE5-5459-4AA2-8B44798DD5B15E77), highlighted that businesses are concerned about finding enough people with the right skills, with skills gaps seen by nearly two-thirds as a threat to the UK’s competitiveness.

We are responding to the Youth Select Committee’s call for evidence on the barriers to work experience and will focus on the business response and barriers on this agenda.

**Consultation response**

As the 2017 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey highlights 78% of businesses with links to schools offer work experience placements, with the model of a week or two being by far the most widespread form of work experience, offered by 92% of them.

Evidence shows that providing young people with world of work experiences has a positive impact on their capacity **to understand how to align their aspirations and abilities** to the jobs market as well as to build employability skills through direct experience. ‘[Destiny should not be determined by Demography](http://www.bitc.org.uk/our-resources/report/destiny-should-not-be-determined-demography),’ our 2015 research report concludes that pupils participating in Business Class are 13% more likely to have alignment between their academic activities and their career aspirations. Which in turn improves the chances of these young people making a successful transition from education into the labour market, reducing their likelihood of being NEET.

Young people who are not able to access experiences of the world work are placed at a definite disadvantage when it comes to applying for jobs. In 2015, Business in the Community and City & Guilds Group commissioned a survey of 4,000 18 to 24 year olds to find out what barriers young people face in the recruitment process. Our survey identified that:

* 57% of young people found that not having the right previous experience was a barrier to accessing employment
* 28% said they did not have the qualifications that employers ask for

At the same time, 61% of employers who used our Generation Talent self-assessment tool revealed that they still ask for previous experience for entry level jobs, even though by definition these roles should not require any. This creates an ‘experience trap’ as young people who are not able to access either the qualifications or experiences required are prevented from applying for roles, regardless of their potential.

Through our campaign [Future Proof](http://futureproof.bitc.org.uk/) we have called on businesses to break down the barriers to their recruitment processes and prevent the ‘experience gap’ by;

* Opening up access to quality entry level job opportunities for young people just starting out and
* Making job criteria more youth friendly and focus on future potential based on attitude and behaviour, rather than previous experience and qualifications

We know that business is enthusiastic about tackling this problem as an overwhelming 96% of BITC members who responded to our 2015 youth employment survey said that they think it is important to create accessible routes into their business for all young people. Encouragingly, 46% of members have achieved some success in implementing changes in recruitment in some areas of their business.

With 1 in 3 young people finding applying for jobs difficult, and ***1 in 5 saying a bad process had put them off the company they applied to***; poor recruitment isn't just damaging young people but also the reputation of employers. There is a clear need for business to provide experiences of work and many as highlighted above are but there remain intrinsic challenges that businesses face in trying to provide uniform opportunities for young people to access work experience, including:

* Offering and matching supply of demand of experiences – businesses are not always able to provide the support requested in terms of volume, timing and geography. Alongside this business is concerned about the competing asks around work experience with the introduction of the T-levels, the apprenticeship levy and the careers strategy all asking for business time and resource
* Ensuring young people are prepared for their work experience and that they have an opportunity to reflect on the experience when it is completed
* Providing diverse and quality experiences of the world of work that deliver a real insight into an organisation, the roles within it and the routes to being successful in securing a job in the future
* Reaching the core influencers on a young person’s decisions around jobs and careers, which are primarily teachers, parents and carers
* Ensuring that beyond experiences of work young people are provided with the opportunity to develop skills that will enable them to succeed beyond qualifications - including leadership, teamwork, listening, presenting, staying positive, aiming high, problem solving and creativity

Whilst the above are barriers, work is underway to tackle these including:

**Timing, volume and geography:**

Through programmes such as [Business Class](https://www.bitc.org.uk/campaigns-programmes/education/business-class), business and schools commit to long term partnerships which begin with the needs of the school. This enables both partners to plan and embed interventions across an agreed timeframe so work experience does not have to just be a week or a fortnight in June/July but can be about building a range of experiences of the world of work from real time business challenges to behind the scenes taster days. We work with employers across the UK including rural and coastal communities and prioritise activity in areas of greatest need.

Ford Motor Company, one of our Business Class partnerships in Dagenham demonstrate the impact that working in a long term partnership with a school can have. Robert Clack, their partner school lies within one of the poorest 25 areas of England with significantly higher than national average economic inactivity and unemployment levels. By working together Ford and Robert Clack have been able to ensure that young people are able to access work experience and 1:1 mentoring – [read more here](https://www.bitc.org.uk/resources-training/resources/case-studies/education-partnership-award-ford-motor-company).

One great example of enabling SME’s to get involved can be seen through [Workspace’s InspiresMe Week](https://www.bitc.org.uk/resources-training/resources/case-studies/education-partnership-award-workspace-group-plc). This programme saw Workspace reach out to their clients, predominantly entrepreneurs who utilise their flexible workspace to support them to provide week long placements for young people from disadvantaged communities. Not only were the young people able to gain an insight into what being an entrepreneur means but they also had to complete a business challenge and present this on the final day in front of industry experts and their peers.

However we are clear that more businesses need to take the approach that Ford and Workspace have by prioritising support in the areas that need it the most and by working to enable their suppliers and clients to get involved, if we are ever to tackle the social mobility agenda.

**Providing quality experiences**

BITC launched a business led campaign called Work Inspiration focussing on the need to ensure that young people had access to quality work experience. A core part of this was the recognition that young people needed to be supported to prepare for their work experience and at the end have time to reflect and gather feedback.

Working across business, a wide range of partners and young people, we created the Work Inspiration Toolkit which many of our members embedded within their practices. At the heart of the toolkit are three insights which we encourage all businesses to deliver as part of their work experience placements, these are:

1) **‘All about me’** This exercise puts the focus on the students themselves, giving them a chance to talk about what they’re interested in and good at. The Supervisor/Buddy should lead this one-to one conversation encouraging the student to consider their preferences and future plans.

2) **‘Look behind the scenes’** This Insight ensures that whatever the specific experience of work the student has with a business, they are also made aware of the wider variety of opportunities in the business.

3) **‘Careers happen’** In this interactive session the students interview a colleague to talk through their career path, highlighting the different jobs and expectations that they may have had along the way. The student then creates a ‘career board’ a visual representation of that staff member’s journey. This insight illustrates for the student the opportunistic way careers unfold, it teaches students that they will need to be resilient and adaptable to navigate a successful career in the changing world of work.

The application of these three simple insights ensures that young people are able to gain a greater insight not only into the business but how their skills and interests may be applied to roles within that business. The Work Inspiration toolkit has further examples of how the insights can be applied, as well as best practice guidance of how to set up work experience and how to avoid barriers such as health and safety issues. To access the toolkit visit: <http://futureproof.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloadable-files/How%20to%20guide%20-%20Work%20Inspiration.pdf>

**Building skills, not just focussing on experiences**

The CBI/Pearson Education & Skills survey concludes that ‘by far the most important factor employers consider when recruiting school and college leavers is their attitude to work (86%), followed by their aptitude for work (63%) and general academic ability (43%). Indeed over the past few years we have seen commitments from [EY](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/ey-firm-says-it-will-not-longer-consider-degrees-or-alevel-results-when-assessing-employees-10436355.html), [PwC](http://www.cipd.co.uk/pm/peoplemanagement/b/weblog/archive/2015/05/05/pwc-scraps-a-level-requirement-for-graduate-scheme.aspx) and [Penguin Random House](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/18/penguin-ditches-the-need-for-job-seekers-to-have-university-degrees), to remove the academic qualifications from their school leaver vacancies and instead recruit against core competencies.

It is important therefore that businesses, young people and schools recognise that work experience does not and should not be limited to the traditional week or two week within a business. More needs to be done to ensure that young people can develop skills that will enable them to be successful in work and that they can recognise and articulate that these have been developed. This can be done through business engagement in the curriculum, helping to provide real time business experience and inspiration such as the work we deliver through [Careers Lab](https://www.bitc.org.uk/system/files/careers_lab_inspiring_the_next_generation_web_version.pdf). Or these skills can be developed through things such as youth social action and we would encourage the Youth Select Committee to support the call to recognise these activities as well as more traditional routes.

**Conclusion**
Employers have both an appetite and real business need to provide young people with experiences of the world of work. Be it for reasons of increasing diversity, addressing skills challenges or providing a licence to operate we know that business wants to ensure that all young people are prepared for the world of work.

However the world of work is changing, simply providing experiences of jobs that currently exist is not enough. We believe that business needs to provide opportunities for young people to develop the skills and competencies that will enable them to be successful in the ever changing world of work. These can be developed through traditional work experience routes but these need to be high quality and focussed on the areas of greatest need. They also need to be complimented by a recognition of wider experiences and opportunities, be that embedding a business challenge in curriculum time or enabling a young person to deliver a youth social action programme.

An education system that works alongside businesses to build skills and knowledge of character, enterprise and employability is one that will ensure that all young people, regardless of postcode or family income, ­­­­­­­are able to build successful working lives.

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