**Written evidence submitted by Westminster City Council (BYC031)**

**Introduction**

1. The Youth Select Committee has launched an inquiry into barriers to work experience. The Committee has called for evidence from a wide range of witnesses, including businesses and charities, as well as young people who have been directly affected by these barriers.
2. To comply with this, we have consulted the Westminster Youth Council (**WYC**) for their opinions and observations. Westminster Youth Council members come from a variety of ages (11-19), ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and our current Youth MP campaigned on a manifesto which included widening access to work experience and opportunities beyond school. A Youth Council meeting was devoted to discussing the questions and topics raised by the Youth Select Committee questions.
3. The Westminster Youth Council has clear ideas about what constitutes good quality work experience and what does not. WYC members had experience of visiting parents’ places of work or work experience ranging from two days to two weeks. The views of the WYC are not necessarily the views of Westminster City Council. If any sections of the WYC response are published or reproduced, we would please request that they are attributed to WYC.
4. Westminster City Council officers from the Policy and Strategy Team, Children’s Services, and the Business and Enterprise Team have also contributed to this response. Officers have wide experience of dealing with young people, apprenticeships and work experience. Their responses are marked **OR** (Officer Response).

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

1. **Westminster Youth Council** considered that good quality work experience would provide the young person with substantial knowledge of what it means to perform that job, the day to day experience of what the role involves “not only the fascinating stuff, but the boring stuff too.” This would also include having to meet deadlines, and receiving assessment of and feedback on work. Good quality work experience should be meaningful. Having a project to work on during the period of the placement gave a sense of purpose and of being useful to the company. WYC members favoured a three-week period of paid work, but agreed that five days of good quality work experience could be sufficient.
2. There would be a mentoring employee to explain the job, and access to different people within the organisation to explain other jobs within the company and the sector. Employees might even have been trained in how to deliver work experience. It should be a joint effort between the young person doing the work experience and the company, and there should be clear expectations of what young people will be learning and what opportunities they will be given to learn during their experience. Young people would receive feedback, review and guidance on how they might reach their potential. Even better quality work experience would have a follow up mentoring aspect to it.
3. Different types of work experience would be available: work experience to give experience of what it means to work and work experience which is more career-focused. Getting work ready is an important part of work experience, such as planning a commute and managing a budget. Career-focused work experience can provide a young person with direction. Good quality work experience will mean different things for different young people. It should be aspirational and inspire them, so that they might translate some of their experiences in a work environment back into their studies. Or, for a young person who is less academic, work experience might open up new possibilities beyond school. Ideally, there would also be a wide variety of sectors offering a wide selection of work experience roles.
4. Organisations such as Barclays with its Life Skills programme aimed at 14-19 year olds, Bentley – also aimed at 14-19 year olds, and GlaxoSmithKline were given as examples of what good quality work experience looks like.
5. Good quality experience should aim to give a true picture of work, with the variety that involves; it should not be an unrealistic display for a few days of artificially glamorous work. But nor should work experience only be the menial tasks which current adult employees do not want to do, (e.g. making tea or photocopying). Too many firms treat work experience as a low quality internship, or have not given enough thought to how to use the young person usefully, so that both sides benefit. Work experience should not be rhetoric, to make the firm look good or as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) “tick box” exercise.
6. **Officer Response (OR):** The emphasis should be on the quality of the experience rather than the duration. Large organisations such as those mentioned above have the capacity and resource to create and deliver on scale. A degree of flexibility should be encouraged to enable a diverse range of employers, including SMEs – from a variety of sectors to participate. With entrepreneurship becoming increasingly attractive to the next generation, small business owners are ideally placed to share their passion and experience of self-employment. Small businesses also benefit – with the chance to develop employees of the future, build personal skills and give something back to their community.
7. The work experience offer should be a planned programme linked to learning outcomes, (including the opportunity for the participant to evaluate and self-reflect) and areas of interest to the young person. Upon completion, the school/college should follow up with the employer and young person so that experiences can be refined and/or improved based on feedback received.
8. We would not necessarily recommend employers paying work experience participants, but we would urge the consideration of the delineation between work experience and internships, and that the decision to pay participants should depend on the length and/or hours of the arrangement. Generally, we would anticipate that the young person is considered supernumerary to the employer’s normal workforce levels.
9. The findings of the Gatsby report, “Good Careers Guidance”, endorsed by the DfE, recognise that work experience is one element within a framework of multiple opportunities that should be provided to young people to enable them to learn about work, employment and the skills valued in the workplace. Further consideration should be given to developing a range of enrichment opportunities to include visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes. With this in mind, the Business and Enterprise team at WCC have devised a youth engagement plan to support Westminster schools towards achievement of benchmarks 5 and 6 (copy attached).

**How important is good quality work experience to a successful industrial strategy?**

1. **WYC**: Ask Barclays, Bentley or GlaxoSmithKline.
2. **OR**: Good quality work experience can positively impact upon a successful industrial strategy by:
* Increasing students’ occupational knowledge and understanding of the skills, attributes, behaviours and qualifications required;
* Enhancing young peoples’ social and communication skills and help them to develop general business awareness; and
* Enabling employers to raise their profile and helping industry remain competitive.

Young people with their inherent digital expertise can capitalise on these skills during work experience to show how valuable they can be.

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

1. WYC: Work experience, or the lack of widely available work experience, can prevent social mobility. Backgrounds are important. There is a huge difference of opportunity for young people from different backgrounds, as often work experience opportunities are given to friends and family members. If work experience is about your parents’ connections (social capital) or due to your postcode, then it is limited to a privileged few. Bright people from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to progress without access to work experience. There is not enough equality of opportunity.
2. **OR**: The Gatsby report, ‘Good Career Guidance’ demonstrates through studies of international practice that good career guidance is key to social mobility. Two of the eight Gatsby benchmarks (5 and 6) relate to employer encounters and experiences of workplaces.

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

1. **WYC** considered that the differences between young people become amplified when trying to obtain work experience. They recognised that, living in central London, there are more work experience opportunities, but disparities as well. Living in one area, with poor transport connections, may make it harder for a young person to take up the work experience offer. Living centrally will (usually) make it easy for the young person to get to the place where they are doing their work experience.
2. This can have other consequences. Depending on where the young person lives, they may not be able to afford the travel expenses, and it may take more effort and travel time for a young person from a disadvantaged background to meet the basic requirements, such as punctuality. If that young person already has paid work, they may not be able to take the time off from their paid job to do the unpaid job in the sector they would like to work in. It can be difficult to afford work clothes, which can indicate socioeconomic differences. For a young person from a financially secure background, work experience is part of a smoother progression into a career: for example, they can take unpaid jobs.
3. Some families may not support work experience for a number of reasons. This may be because of the family’s financial situation, or because they have set ideas about career paths for their children. Ethnicity can mean that some parents might push their children towards more academic choices. There may be parents who do not understand what work experience is, due to language barriers, such as parents who have English as an additional language (EAL). A letter in a bag may get lost in transit or an email get lost in translation. There may be some families who need more advice and explanation to understand the value of work experience.
4. A young person with learning needs or disabilities will face additional barriers. Being in a new environment might be extra-challenging for them, meeting and speaking to new people might be even more difficult for them. They might need a carer to go with them, and, if the company is very small, they may not have the space for this. Young people with additional needs may be overlooked and WYC members queried whether such young people would be meaningfully employed during their work experience. A young person with physical disabilities, such as for example a wheelchair user, may not be able to access the work experience they want due to physical access limitations. Transport issues for these young people may be even more acute, expensive, and time-consuming. Employers need to be aware of differences.
5. **OR:** We believe that young people whose parents are not in stable work are likely to find it harder to access work experience, as so many young people access work experience through family circles. Further, there are some types of work (e.g. office based) that are more likely to be more conducive to work experience than others (e.g. some elements of the service industry). We believe that differences in young people’s family circumstances will affect their ability to take up meaningful work experience.
6. In line with comments from the WYC on young people with additional needs or disabilities, we believe there are certain conditions, such as autism, that would make it particularly challenging for young people to complete fulfilling work experience. We would urge that the differences between young people and their ability to take up work experience be taken into account.

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

1. **WYC** considered that it is important to start early, as this allows young people to develop a work ethic and be pushed. There could be more information available through a number of sources, including schools, libraries, a centralised website, a careers library index dedicated to work experience, social media and even a work experience app, on the model of Job Today. There could be better, clearer descriptions of the jobs which are available as work placements, and more advertising of work experience, to remind young people about it and nudge them into accessing other job placement resources.
2. There should be more consideration for young people with behaviour problems, finding ways to include them in the experience. It would be useful to have a step-by-step guide for teachers and students on how to secure a great work experience placement.
3. **OR**: Improved local economic and local business information would help parents, teachers and young people understand their immediate business community, and learn which sectors show growth. Access to resources to teach young people to engage with employers about work experience. This could be simple tasks, such as how to draft an engaging email or cover letter. Sharing case studies of positive and successful work experience outcomes drawn from varying perspectives (i.e. young person, parent/guardian, school, employer). Opportunities could be leveraged through local authorities (e.g. section 106, social value within contracts and engaging employers on CSR).

**Schools and businesses** **- Should compulsory work experience for under-16s be reinstated? What is the right age for work experience within compulsory education: 14-16 or 16-18?**

1. **WYC**: Yes, compulsory work experience for the under-16s should be reinstated. It would be great to have work experience within compulsory education at both ages 14-16 and 16-18. For the 14-16 age group, it could be to help young people learn what it is like to work. For the 16-18 age group, work experience could be more focused. Work experience can be a crucial part in transition; currently it is left to chance and personal connections. Everyone should have work experience. As things are, a few young people have work experience; very many do not. Any experience can have an impact. Without compulsory work experience, many young people will have no experience of work before they leave school (not least due to the lack of ’Saturday jobs’). This will have a significant impact on their employment potential.
2. Compulsory work experience should be for a period of three weeks and paid, as part of a centralised programme with protocols. A separate organisation should take care of administering work experience to ensure that it is of good quality. It should also be compulsory for firms to offer work experience as part of their CSR.
3. Westminster City Council’s flagship programme, City Lions, was developed with the Westminster Youth Council. The City Lions Programme is aimed at 13-16 year olds, and will generate both work experience and exclusive access to cultural institutions.
4. After the Westminster Youth Council had given its answers to these questions, they were advised about the existence of a summer jobs programme in the US. Please see paragraphs 46-49 below.
5. **OR**: There is a concern that introducing compulsory work experience risks compromising the quality of experience received by young people. However, we do believe that employers offering work experience should be the norm, and we will seek to encourage this in our conversations with employers about CSR. Recent changes to technical education mean the options open to young people to follow apprentice and technical routes are clearer and wider than ever before. The proposed introduction of T levels requiring a work placement of between 45 to 60 days for 16-18 year olds means that employers will be mindful of their capacity to support work-related learning experiences.

**How could schools and colleges be better supported to help their students access quality work experience?**

1. **WYC**: there is a disparity in support received from the schools themselves to enable their pupils to undertake work experience. There could also be some conflict between pupils, families and schools about the students’ “final destinations”. WYC members also expressed concern about young people who are not considered high achievers. Work experience can be an opportunity for them to show their abilities, but it is difficult to get work experience without high grade predictions.
2. Training teachers to help young people in applying for and carrying out work experience would be useful. This would allow young people to have an opportunity to learn about how best to make to the most of their opportunity before they attend the work experience and understand how transferable the skills they learn are in the wider work place. There could be more support and encouragement from within schools and colleges to help young people when they are looking for work experience. This would include training on how to approach organisations, even basic business letter writing, how to write politely and persuasively, and workshops on how to get work experience.
3. Some schools are able to visit their students whilst they do their work experience and assess the quality of the placement. There should be feedback and honest evaluations of what the work placement was like, what work was involved.
4. **OR**: Prepare young people so that they understand the purpose of work experience and what they should achieve from it. Teach young people how to engage with employers, perhaps through role play or scenario setting exercises. Give young people an understanding of the business environment and what to expect on a day-to-day basis. Deliver high quality careers, information, advice and guidance following work experience. Schools could be supported through the provision of a work experience coordinator, enabling potential for cross- school collaboration.

**Are services to help schools and colleges develop relationships with businesses working well? How could they be improved?**

1. **OR**: The ability of schools and colleges to develop business relationships is variable across schools and typically dependent upon teachers’ networks, in the absence of a dedicated coordinator. Relationships could be improved by having a dedicated resource (e.g. producing labour market information), managing relationships with employers. There could be opportunities for pooling information across similar geographic areas to reduce the cost of developing materials relevant to the local economy.

**How could barriers to businesses (including small businesses) offering work experience be overcome?**

1. **OR**: Increased flexibility around the duration of the work experience with a focus on the quality instead to enable small businesses to participate. Improve the channels and routes to foster employer and school engagement.

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

1. **WYC**: businesses should consider what they, as well as the young people, might get out of work experience. It would be useful if the businesses had a clear idea of what they can offer as well as being interested in what motivated the young person to apply. Some companies do not promote that they offer work experience. It would be useful if all companies had work experience sections on their websites. Please see the Barclays, Bentley or GlaxoSmithKline websites.
2. **OR**: Businesses could also be encouraged to sign up with or adopt the practices of the Social Mobility Foundation and the Gatsby benchmarks. Opportunities should correlate with the career interest of the young person and need to be clearly defined with the expectations of the young people and the benefits they will receive. Advertising needs to include more information about the opportunity, details about the sector, what they do and the types of activities they will be engaged in (light touch version of a job specification).

**Does work experience benefit businesses? What are the motivations for businesses to offer work experience?**

1. **OR**: Yes, a well thought out and clearly defined work experience can benefit the business. Work experience can support a business with workforce development and raise the profile of the sector. It provides the opportunities for junior members of staff to supervise other members of staff. It can help to address diversity and inclusion challenges through open opportunities.

**Other services and organisations - What role should the Government have in ensuring young people have access to quality work experience?**

1. **WYC**: This could be through the creation of a centralised organisation to oversee work experience and by making work experience compulsory as a national programme. This organisation would remove the need for parental or school connections, creating equality of opportunity, and would allow wider access to more young people to a greater variety of jobs. If work experience depends on family connections, good work placements go out to “family and friends”, leaving others to pick up the non-stretching and non-aspiration placements. One centralised organisation would increase access to work experience.
2. Members also described how local job market availability might be limited to, or dominated by, a particular sector (e.g. nursery school placements). A central organisation would be able to administer financial support for those from low-income backgrounds to enable them to take up work experience. Having a national programme would make it easier for families and schools to support work experience.
3. **OR**: Focus on the quality of the activities and not just a box ticking exercise. The government should lead by example by creating an innovative work experience programme within all tiers of government. Profile good practice in this area. Consider funding opportunities where geographical partnerships are formed that deliver best value.

**Should the Government invest in resources to help young people find work experience independently? What would these resources ideally look like?**

1. **OR**: Yes. Utilise s.106, contractual obligations and CSR to source work experience opportunities. Digital resources to support young people in engaging with employers would be beneficial. Introduce a recognition scheme for employers with exemplar programmes.

**How could private and third sector organisations be better supported and encouraged to help young people access quality work experience?**

1. **OR**: Access to free advice and support to employers looking to engage in work experience that seeks to debunk some of the myths surrounding it. An employer’s toolkit to support employers to engage in work experience, look to build and collate best practice.

**What lessons can be learned from the approaches of the devolved administrations and other countries to work experience?**

1. **WYC**: The Westminster Youth Council was advised about the existence of the Detroit Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which is a citywide summer jobs programme that trains and employs young adults between the ages of 14 and 24 for six weeks in July and August. There are 200 businesses involved with the scheme and a broad range of jobs is available to the participants (e.g. community clean-ups, event planning, accounting, law firms, retail and the Junior Police or Fire Cadets). In 2017, over 8,000 local youth received employment through the summer scheme.
2. Job placements are based on a developmentally appropriate, tiered model for summer employment. Tier 1 is the Career Exploration tier, for youth with little to no previous work experience (typically 14-16 year olds). This introduces young people to first-time work and career opportunities through community service, team projects, and job shadowing. Tier 2 is the Ready for Work tier, developed for young people with some previous work experience. This tier places young people with a host employer or in a vocational training experience, whilst continuing to build career readiness skills (typically 16-24 year olds). Tier 3 is the Career Pathway Internships tier, which is competitive and aimed at young people with previous work experience. The additional factor is that the young person may have a desire to focus on a specific career pathway with a host employer (17 years or older).
3. Besides valuable work experience, some past employers have hired the young people into permanent employment. During the summer programme, younger people (ages 14-17) are paid $7.50 per hour and older age groups (18-24) are paid $8.15 per hour and can work 20 – 25 hours per week.
4. The Westminster Youth Council was unanimously in favour of a similar programme here in the UK.

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