**Written evidence submitted by The Canal & River Trust (BYC038)**

**­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­Background**

The Canal & River Trustexists to care for and protect over 2,000 miles of canals and rivers and make life better by water for individuals, communities and society more broadly. Our ambition is for waterways to make a difference locally, to be inclusive and relevant. There is significant potential and opportunity to achieve this ambition and for waterways to contribute to personal, community and societal wellbeing. With over 14% of the national population living within one kilometre of one of our waterways, over eight million people have access to this ‘free to use and enjoy’ resource on their doorstep: this presents immense opportunities to enhance personal and community wellbeing across many different communities in a wide variety of places. Waterways can provide a strong sense of place and connection and help shape the way people live their lives, feel about themselves and their relationships with others in their community – all creating better outcomes in terms of individual, community and societal wellbeing.

The Trust’s youth engagement work has grown and developed significantly over the past 5 years with a diverse range of projects and activities offering meaningful engagement opportunities to young people from all walks of life. Work experience has always played a part in our youth offer and in 2017 we carried out a comprehensive review of all related approaches, policies and procedures. We also conducted external and internal consultation and developed a series of recommendations based on best practice, organisational need and young people’s priorities.  In late 2017 / early 2018 we successfully piloted our new delivery model and plan to roll it out across the organisation by the end of the year.

**General**

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

Good quality Work Experience (WEX) is well planned, well supported, meaningful and impactful and involves a clear ‘double benefit’, for young people and organisations. WEX opportunities should be inclusive and accessible to young people from all walks of life. Gone are the days of photocopying and making tea (unless as part of a placement in an office or a café!) - tasks should be varied and diverse, give young people the opportunity to develop skills and make a difference to the organisation and give them a real flavour of life at work. We have recently reviewed work experience at the Trust and have developed an entirely new approach which we have successfully piloted in a number of areas. In our experience, WEX placements that take a more holistic approach and give opportunities for the young people to develop personal skills and qualities and take part in social action as well as developing employability skills and gaining experience of the workplace itself, are more impactful for both the individual young person and the organisation.

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

WEX could and should play a part in the government’s industrial strategy. Research shows a gap between the skills young people have and those sought by employers. Whilst this is being addressed successfully through a number of funded programmes, more could be done to embed this nationally and introduce more young people to the world of work and business to start to develop key disciplines such as punctuality, teamwork and problem-solving from an early age. Work experience offers young people the opportunity to apply classroom learning in a real-world setting, highlighting the importance of transferrable skills. By encouraging young people to recognise and reflect on their skills development and application at various points and providing opportunities throughout their education, through WEX programmes as well as social action, enrichment activities and volunteer placements, young people will gain a better understanding of the skills they have, those they need to develop and the types of jobs available to them. This will enable them to make more informed decisions which should hopefully smooth the transition as they progress from education to Further Education / Higher Education / employment / traineeships / apprenticeships etc

The industrial strategy should recognise the potential to engage organisations across all sectors from private companies to third sector organisations, public sector and Community Interest Companies etc. It should include the resources required to support these organisations to enable the broadest range of WEX opportunities to be developed, ensuring there is something for everyone across all sectors, industries and areas of interest.

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

No comment

**Young people**

1. How do differences between young people (eg. geographic location, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, disability) affect the work experience opportunities they people have?
2. How could resources to help young people find out about and access work experience be improved?

**Schools and businesses**

1. **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?**

Work Experience for 14 – 16 year olds would look very different from work experience for 16-18 year olds. The safeguarding requirements also vary greatly across these age ranges which for non-youth focused organisations can often be seen as a real barrier. We found that a lack of understanding and a lack of common language around work experience had been a major issue across the Trust. The term ‘work experience’ had been used to describe the traditional year 10 / 11 opportunities as well as volunteer placements for 16-18 year olds and graduate opportunities. In our experience developing a shared definition of work experience has enabled us to refine our offer and develop a delivery model that ensures a consistent and high quality experience for all involved. If work experience is made compulsory, it would be essential for government to effectively engage a wide range of businesses and organisations and provide guidance and support to ensure that an adequate number of diverse, high quality, meaningful placements are available for students. It would also be essential to ensure a fair and inclusive recruitment process to enable young people from all backgrounds and walks of life the same access to the opportunities.

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

No comment

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

We have had some dealings with Business Education Partnerships (BEPs) but have found that the provision, support and experience varies greatly across local authorities. Where it works well, we have found it much easier to get into schools and engage students. Where we are reliant upon contacting schools directly, this has proved to be far more challenging. Due to high workloads and often conflicting priorities for schools and businesses, having services, such as BEPs that align these priorities, highlight the mutual benefits, facilitate introductions and provide practical support makes a huge difference.

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

* More support in terms of resources, toolkits, best practice and guidance
* More support regarding legislation and safeguarding, particularly when engaging 14-16 year olds
* A shared understanding of what ‘work experience’ is and what it isn’t and common language – lots of confusion currently. Work experience is often used as a catch all for all engagement with students. A shared definition of WEX would be useful as outside of the education sector there is limited understanding
* Better links with BEPs and EBPs – networking opportunities between schools and businesses / organisations to link supply to demand and match the right people to the right opportunities in the right places
* Better understanding of the benefits for businesses and how WEX could be embedded – sharing successes, approaches and best practice
* Better and shared systems to measure outcomes for young people, schools and businesses and demonstrate impact to stakeholders including senior managers, Trustees, shareholders etc

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

* Consult with young people – ask them what types of WEX opportunities within your organisation would be most appealing and relevant to them. Similarly consult with teams and find out where and how WEX could add value to their existing plans and priorities. Develop programmes that bring these together to ensure mutual benefits.
* Clear, well defined, shared understanding across the organisation of what work experience is and what good quality WEX placements look like
* Robust processes and systems in place to plan, manage and evaluate work experience
* Named leads for Work Experience – key contact/s across an organisation
* Fair, open and transparent application and recruitment process.
* Well planned placements – built into business plans / clear descriptions of activities and outcomes so that both businesses and young people are clear on what is expected of them and what they will get out of the opportunity from the outset.
* Adequate time set aside to advertise and recruit to opportunities
* We have opted for a cohort based model rather than offering one to one placements on an ad hoc basis as we have previously done. This enables us to plan for the programme and engage teams from across the organisation to offer well-rounded week-long experiences for up to 15 year 10 & 11s

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

* Increased awareness of business / organisation as a potential future employer amongst young people
* Brand awareness and positive PR
* Employee engagement – opportunity to pass on skills, expertise and enthusiasm / can boost morale / development opportunity for staff
* Offering a high quality programme will increase competition meaning businesses are able to select the young people who will not only benefit the most from the opportunity but also bring the most in terms of skills, attitude and potential.
* Diversity, energy and new ideas. Young people engaged through WEX may lack experience but they do bring a wide range of new skills and are often full of fresh ideas. They are also able to view things in a completely different way and may well find creative solutions to problems.
* Opportunity to give something back – benefit young people and wider society

**Other services and organisations**

1. What role should the Government have in ensuring young people have access to quality work experience?

* Support for businesses and organisations to enable them to develop work experience opportunities and embed WEX programmes into core business where appropriate
* Support BEPs to improve relationships and links between schools and businesses / organisations
* Shared understanding and definition of work experience and what good WEX programme should include
* Introducing measures to ensure diversity, inclusivity and equality of access to opportunities

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

No comment

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

(similar answer to point 4 above)

* Highlight the benefits for businesses / organisations
* More support in terms of resources, toolkits, best practice and guidance
* More support regarding legislation and safeguarding, particularly for non-youth sector organisations
* A shared understanding of what ‘work experience’ is and what it isn’t and common language – lots of confusion currently. Work experience is often used as a catch all for all engagement with students. A shared definition of WEX would be useful as outside of the education sector there is limited understanding
* Better links with BEPs and EBPs – networking opportunities between schools and businesses / organisations to link supply to demand and match the right people to the right opportunities in the right places
* Better understanding of the benefits for businesses and how WEX could be embedded – sharing successes, approaches and best practice
* Better and shared systems to measure outcomes for young people, schools and businesses and demonstrate impact to Trustees, Exec Teams etc

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

No comment

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