

Written evidence submitted by Inspire (BYC041)

Executive Summary

This submission has been put together by Inspire! for the Youth Select Committee inquiry into work experience.

It begins with an overview of Inspire! and our role specifically in relation to work experience, before outlining our ideas in the following areas:

1. **“Good quality work experience”** – should involve genuine job tasks, offer a wider, ‘world of work’ experience, be relevant to the individual young person and be well-supported by both the employer and the school.
2. **Factors affecting young people’s access to work experience** – socioeconomic background and the level of buy-in from schools and parents/guardians are key factors affecting young people’s access to work experience opportunities.
3. **Support for schools and colleges** – having a dedicated careers or work experience coordinator and sufficient funding invested in work-related learning can help schools to provide good quality work experience for their students.
4. **Business benefits of work experience** – hosting a student on work experience provides opportunities for personal development, increased job satisfaction, a fresh insight and young person’s perspective on the business, a raised profile and fulfilment of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) aims.

The views and ideas expressed in this submission are based on Inspire!’s experience in managing work experience programmes across a variety of schools, as well as feedback from students and employers whom we work with.

Introduction

Inspire! is an education charity based in Hackney and our aim is to raise the achievements and aspirations of young people, develop their motivation and skills for the world of work and increase their ability to choose and achieve positive career, life and learning goals.

We work with a range of schools and colleges across the boroughs of Hackney, Camden and Islington, and organise over 4000 work experience placements a year across a variety of sectors.

We typically offer two types of work experience programme to schools:

- Generic – aimed at Key Stage 4 students (14-15 years old), placements are sourced across a broad range of sectors for the school to allocate to their students. The aim of this programme is to provide students with a general insight into the world of work.
- Tailored – aimed at Key Stage 5 students (post 16), the placements sourced typically align to one of three sector choices. The aim of this programme is to provide students a placement in line with their studies and/or interests to bring their subject to life and help to inform decisions about their future.

1. Good Quality Work Experience

In our view, a good quality work experience placement should:

- a) *Involve genuine job tasks* – to enable a young person to try out something tangible and real, with training and guidance, as well as learning about roles within the sector

of work by shadowing and speaking to team members. A sixth form Business student who recently undertook a placement at Inspire! wrote “*Good quality work experience for a student entails a list of things. It is important the student is treated like an employee and not just a work experience student. This means that they should do all the jobs that the other employees do.*” Whilst it is not appropriate for a young person to have exactly the same responsibilities as employees during their work experience, this feedback shows just how important it is to offer genuine job tasks, to help a young person engage with their placement more effectively. Good examples of this could include preparing resources, dealing with telephone and email enquiries, and interacting with customers.

- b) *Offer an experience of the wider, ‘world of work’* – including company culture, the team environment and working hours in the day, all of which will help a young person make decisions about what is right for them. In a recent Inspire! debrief session, a sixth form student mentioned that she had really enjoyed her work experience and being part of a fast-paced team, but she knew now that a Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm job was not for her. Culture and practice vary widely across organisations of different sizes and sectors, and helping young people to recognise this during their work experience is important in shaping their decisions about their future.
- c) *Be relevant to the individual* – as much as possible, a work experience placement should align with a young person’s interests and should also take into account any additional learning and/or health needs, so that they are able to access and engage with their placement and increase their learning. Having a specific interest in a particular sector is often a requirement for many employers, especially in engineering, childcare and law, therefore it is crucial that the school collects this information about their students and uses it accordingly. Many young people may not have a clear idea about what they would like to do, which should not rule them out from work experience altogether, but if a young person is broadly interested in a particular sector then this increases their level of engagement and therefore the chances of a positive work experience placement. It also makes the employer more likely to offer work experience opportunities in future, which contributes to the growth and success of good quality work experience programmes.
- d) *Have support from the employer and the school* – a high level of supervision from the employer is important not only for health and safety reasons but also so the young person feels included and supported. This support could be in the form of a ‘buddy’ in the company that the student can refer to, but it is also imperative that the school echo the value of work experience, otherwise a young person risks being disengaged with their placement as there are no repercussions for avoiding it. Increasingly, Inspire! is being asked by schools to provide high-end, ‘aspirational’ placements in sectors such as law, medicine and engineering; and, if a student turns down a placement in an alternative sector such as hospitality, not all teachers disagree with this. However, hospitality placements provide ample opportunity to develop transferrable skills such as communication, teamwork and customer service and it is important for schools to strike a balance between raising aspirations and promoting unrealistic expectations.

2. Factors affecting access to work experience

Two of the main factors affecting a young person's access to work experience are their socioeconomic background and the level of buy-in from their school and parents/guardians.

Socioeconomic background

Hackney, Camden and Islington are some of the most deprived boroughs in London and a high proportion of our students are on free school meals, meaning they have an annual household income of £16,190 or less. We typically find that the number of students who source their own placement is higher in schools with a more affluent demographic (110 compared with 41 for a year group of the same size at two different schools this academic year). The work Inspire! do within schools is crucial to help these young people access work experience opportunities, as many of them do not have the contacts or ability to find their own. Even with our help, however, this is not always enough and we have had to cancel some of our placements this academic year due to students not being able to afford the public transports costs across London.

There has also been an increase in gang crime across these three boroughs, and a Year 10 student recently noted that work experience can help young people to stay out of gangs. This particular student went on to complete their work experience placement at a high-end restaurant which he never even knew existed until Inspire! found him the placement, but is now considering applying for an apprenticeship with the company. This demonstrates how valuable it can be for a young person to be given a work experience opportunity. Furthermore, in 2016-17, Inspire! found that 100% of students felt more at ease in new situations after undertaking their work experience, which again reflects the importance of work experience in helping young people develop.

Buy-in from schools and parents/guardians

Buy-in from schools is important to ensure young people have a positive work experience placement because, for example, if the placement is not the young person's first choice then the school needs to work closely with them to identify transferrable skills and opportunities to use their initiative, so the student can still take up the opportunity. As mentioned earlier, if the school is dismissive of the placement then there is little incentive for their student to engage with it, which creates a barrier to students being able to access work experience.

Buy-in from parents/guardians is very important too, to ensure the young person attends their placement and makes the most of the opportunity. Only one of the schools Inspire! works with currently involves us in their work experience parents' evening but this is really helpful as we typically find lots of parents ask us questions to see how they can help their son/daughter get the most out of their placement. On the other hand, particularly for placements arranged during the school holidays, we often find that a parent or guardian gives a reason for their son/daughter not to attend, which again can be a barrier for some young people accessing work experience opportunities.

3. Support for schools and colleges

The majority of schools Inspire! works with have a work experience or careers coordinator who fulfils this role as an additional responsibility to teaching, which presents challenges when organising work experience independently or with a third party such as Inspire!. Feedback from a recent work experience student at Inspire! suggested that it would helpful for schools to run more assemblies and hand out more materials to prepare students for

work experience, but all of this requires time and resources which not all schools have. Having a dedicated work experience coordinator could therefore eliminate some of these challenges, by providing a clear representative to drive work experience and focus their time on helping students get the most out of their experience, as well as a point of contact to effectively resolve queries between employers and/or third parties.

Another way in which schools and colleges can be supported to offer work experience is by having sufficient funding for work-related learning more generally. Work-related learning programmes delivered in school or involving short workplace visits provide an insight for young people to better prepare them for when they enter the working world, by helping to manage their expectations and develop employability skills. In 2016-17, 92% of students that took part in Inspire!'s programmes felt they better understood the skills and qualities employers look for. Inspire! has seen fluctuations in schools' spending on work-related learning, whereas spending on work experience provision has remained fairly consistent. This creates challenges because, as a recent student at Inspire! pointed out, some young people are just not ready for work experience and could benefit from other work-related learning. Last academic year, Inspire! ran a 'Get Set for Work Experience' day for a full group of Year 10 students from a Hackney school, involving drama performances and interactive workshops with business volunteers. Compared with another group of students attending their work experience placement during the same fortnight, this year group had significantly fewer issues and more positive feedback from students afterwards, which indicates how helpful the programme was in preparing them for their work experience.

4. Business benefits of Work Experience

The benefit of work experience for a young person can appear more obvious than the business benefits, especially as a good quality placement can take a lot of time and resource to arrange and supervise. However, hosting work experience can have a huge range of business benefits, and recognising these can help schools and third parties such as Inspire! to effectively engage employers to support work experience programmes, which is crucial as the demand for work experience is increasing. In recent years, Inspire! has experienced an increase in demand for work experience in colleges, with the number of groups doubling, and this is expected to rise with the introduction of T-Levels.

Some of the main business benefits include:

- a) *Personal development opportunities* – such as the opportunity to develop supervisory and coaching skills, by supporting a young person during their placement. This is particularly relevant in companies where it might not be possible for an employee to take on formal people management responsibility, but where company still wants to develop their staff.
- b) *Increased job satisfaction* – many work experience hosts report positive feedback; for example, a local charity reflected on how much they had learnt from the experience and how keen they were to host again in future.
- c) *Fresh insight and a young person's perspective* – a recent Inspire! work experience student spent an afternoon reviewing our school briefing presentations and quickly made a number of suggestions to make these more engaging for young people, which were useful for us and we are currently putting them into practice.
- d) *Raised business profile* – Inspire! often posts case studies and thank you messages to work experience hosts on social media, which helps to boost other companies' profiles and can be a good platform particularly for small or start-up businesses.
- a) *Fulfilment of CSR objectives* – increasingly, businesses are recognising the importance of social mobility and CSR, in some sectors there are legal obligations to

fulfil (for example, Section 106 in Construction and Engineering). Offering work experience opportunities enables businesses to engage with their local community and help to shape a young person's future, which in turn contributes to effectively fulfilling a company's objectives.

Conclusion

Good quality work experience has four key elements: genuine tasks, a broad experience, relevance to the individual and clear support; and two of the main factors affecting young people's access to these opportunities are socioeconomic factors and the level of buy-in from schools and parents/guardians. Schools and colleges could be better supported to help young people access work experience by having a dedicated advisor and sufficient funding for work-related learning, but it is also crucial to recognise the business benefits of work experience, to ensure it is a mutually beneficial arrangement which can continue to be offered in the future.

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