

A young man with curly hair and safety glasses is looking intently at a piece of machinery. An older man, also wearing safety glasses, is pointing at the same machinery, likely providing guidance or instruction. They are both wearing dark blue polo shirts. The background shows a workshop environment with various tools and equipment.

**spark!**  
KICK  
STARTING  
CAREERS

# Strategy 2025

Increase • Innovate • Improve • Impact • Influence

# Executive Summary

This strategy is the product of hours of discussions with the Spark! team, Board of Trustees, and Youth Board; engagement with stakeholders, including young people, schools, employer partners, and Local Authorities; liaison with national bodies and policy makers, as well as considerable research related to the challenges of youth employment, and more specifically education-to-employment transitions. The overall aim of this strategy is to produce a clear roadmap and agreed priorities for Spark! in meeting these challenges, for individuals and for communities.

The work Spark! does is undoubtedly of huge benefit to the young people, schools, and employers we support. We continually receive

high praise and positive feedback from all partners, and our data shows a consistent trend towards improving young people's confidence, motivation and employability.

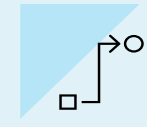
However, across society, young people's employment and career chances are diminishing, and the impact of COVID-19 on young people is stark, with 16 to 24 year olds accounting for 63% of the total fall in employment during the pandemic.

The majority of young people who are 'Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)' are NEET in the long-term, and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to be NEET than their better-off peers.

## Our 5i strategy



Increase reach



Impact



Innovate and learn



Influence



Improve

# Executive Summary

As we move into a post-COVID recovery period the expectation is that the challenges related to youth employment will sustain, with significantly more school leavers becoming NEET than in previous years.

It is these factors that make it an imperative for Spark! to think more holistically about our work, and to adapt to develop more joined-up and targeted approaches. Only in this way will we be a significant and relevant partner in developing and implementing sustainable and systemic solutions to growing youth unemployment.

The following strategy identifies several key priorities for Spark! over the next 4 years, including the commitment to:

pro-actively seek to **serve young people who will most benefit** from our services and support.

collaborate across sectors, to **design more holistic and place-based approaches** and solutions.

increase our reach into **communities where there is a clear identified need**, and to work with a greater number of young people.

design and implement **high engagement, high impact programmatic approaches**, for those young people who will benefit the most from extended support.

continue to support employers and education institutions to **develop sustained and meaningful relationships** and partnerships.

robustly **measure the value and impact of our work**, to inform subsequent delivery, and to positively contribute to continuous improvements.



# Vision, Mission and Values

## Our new vision

A society in which all young people are ready, equipped, motivated, and able to enter the world of work.

## Our new mission

To ensure all young people, particularly those who will most benefit, have access to meaningful employer engagement, work readiness skills development, and employment opportunities, enabling them to transition into sustained work and rewarding careers.

# Our values

## Empowerment

We believe in empowering young people, ourselves, and others, to be self-determining in achieving personal and professional goals.

## Collaboration

We believe that a collaborative approach is the most productive and effective way to work, and actively seek to be inclusive and partner with others in achieving our vision and mission.

## Reliability

We strive to always be reliable, dependable and trustworthy in our dealings and interactions with partners and beneficiaries.

## Quality

We have a constant commitment to the highest of quality, actively aiming to continuously improve what we do and how we do it.

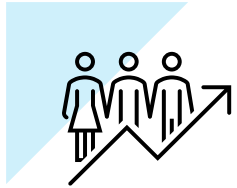
## Learning

We are a learning organisation, always seeking to listen, reflect, develop, adapt and improve.



# Our 5i Strategy

# Our 5i Strategy



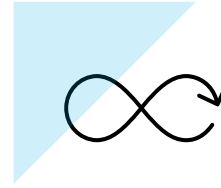
## Increase reach

We will actively seek to increase the numbers of communities, young people, and businesses with which we work, and to build [a place-based approach](#) in identified regions of need which are currently under-served. Hounslow will remain our area of most significant engagement, where we continue to support and collaborate with all schools and communities, creating impactful partnerships with local employers.



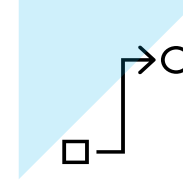
## Innovate and learn

As a learning organisation, we will continue to test and iterate new and impactful approaches, sharing learning, and further developing models that are the most viable. We will maximise our long-standing and embedded relationships in Hounslow, acting as a beacon of innovation and excellence; from where we can learn, replicate, and scale initiatives and programmes, wherever need is identified.



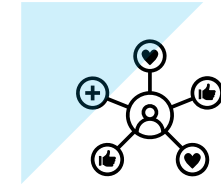
## Improve

We understand that however well we are performing as a team and an organisation, we can always make incremental improvements to systems, processes, and our delivery. We are therefore committed to quality assurance and to continuously striving to be the best at what we do, ensuring effective and efficient systems to allow us to function to an exemplary standard.



## Impact

In all that we do, we aim to have as high an impact as possible on beneficiaries. We will continuously and rigorously assess and measure the value of our work and our delivery, with the objective of constant improvement in service of our targeted young people and partners.



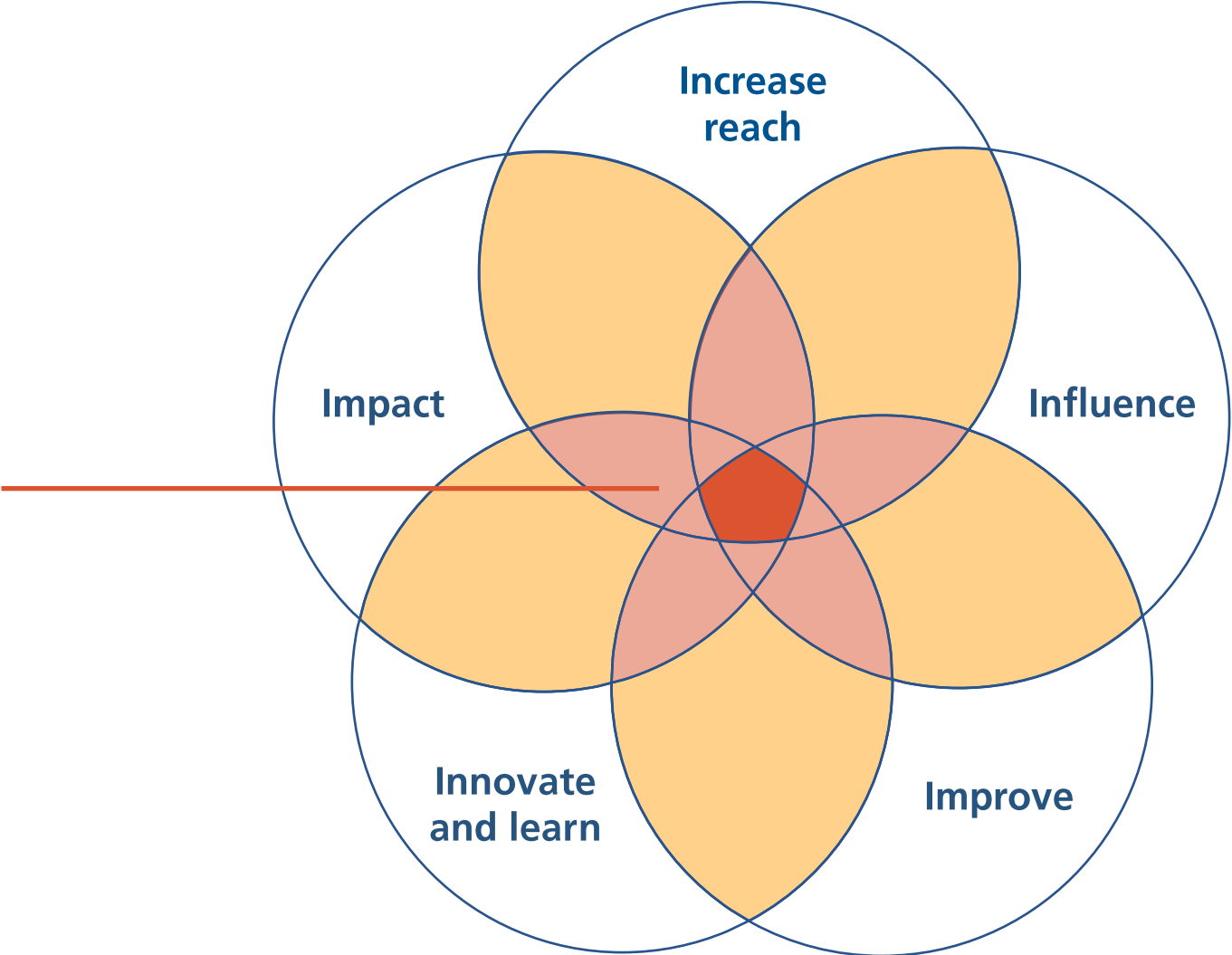
## Influence

As part of a community of providers, we appreciate that Spark! can offer significant value to young people by understanding what works, sharing our learnings, and supporting others to excel, in order that we might influence systemic changes to achieve our wider vision.



# Our 5i Strategy

The 5 elements of this strategy are inextricably linked and reliant upon one another. It is only when we are effective in all, that we will be best able to succeed.



# Theory of Change

# Our Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change is our impact framework. It defines who we are, what we do, why we do it, and makes clear our criteria for success. It also informs our strategic goals, and directs us in measuring and evidencing our impact on the young people we serve.

We work with the following stakeholders to achieve our impact goals:

## Schools and colleges

We support schools, colleges, and youth-facing services to **build and sustain meaningful relationships** with local employers.

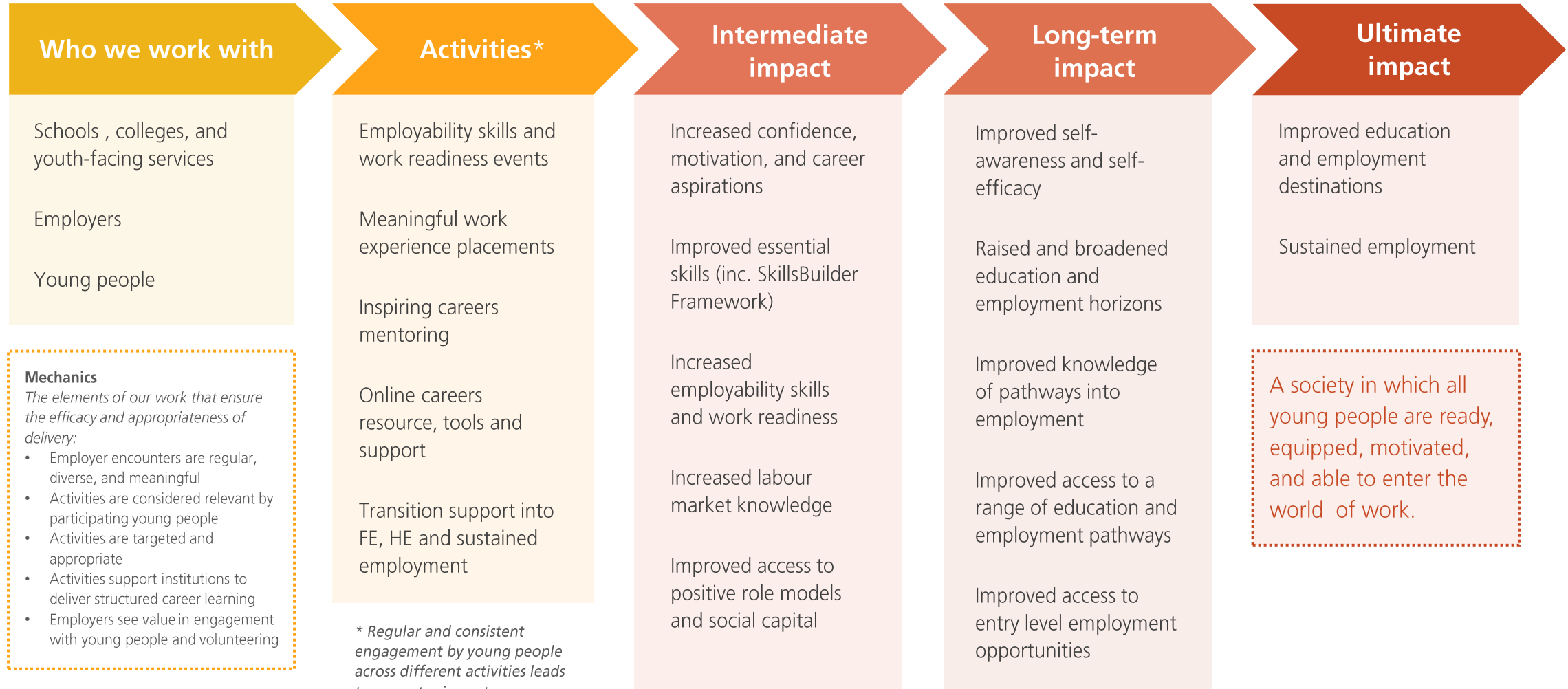
## Employers

We partner with employers to **create positive engagement opportunities with young people**, and to support into work transitions.

## Young people

We work with young people to develop and deliver diverse and **high quality employer engagement and work readiness**, supporting education-to-employment transitions.

# Our Theory of Change



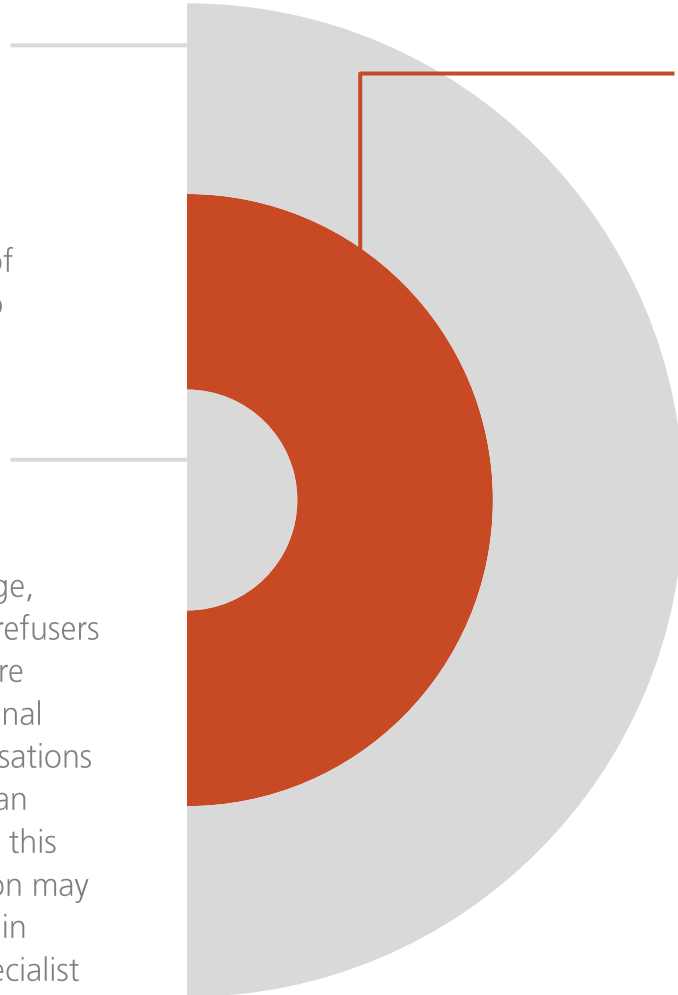
# Who we work with: Our target population

## Wider service population

Beneficiaries we are able to work with under the terms of our Memorandum of Association, i.e. 9 to 24 year olds.

## Highest need population

Young people who are hardest to engage, may include school refusers and those with severe learning and emotional needs. Other organisations are better placed than Spark! to work with this cohort. The exception may be when we deliver in partnership with specialist providers.



## Spark!'s Target population

Young people we actively seek to work with who will benefit the most from our services and support, are:

- 11-to-18 year olds, who are **at risk of not transitioning** into further/higher education or employment.
- Young people on **Free School Meals**.
- Young people eligible for **Pupil Premium**.
- Young people with **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**.
- Young people living in **low social mobility areas**.
- 16-to-24 year olds who are **currently NEET**.

Whilst we seek to direct our services towards young people and communities who will most likely benefit, it is legitimate for us to work more broadly with cohorts of forms groups, year groups, and whole schools, **raising employer engagement standards across whole schools and communities**.

However, we remain aware, that with limited capacity and resource, every young person we help from our service population may limit our ability to support those within our target population.

To increase our engagement with young people in our target population, we will **actively seek to work in regions of lowest social mobility**, and identify and access young people who will most benefit, within schools, colleges, youth services, local authorities and other community based provisions.

# Services and Delivery

# Service delivery priorities



## Continue to act as a connector between employers, schools and young people

Broker, build and support sustainable relationships and activities between local employers and schools and colleges, to ensure that meaningful employer engagement can sustain independently of Spark!



## Design, develop and deliver high engagement, high impact programmes

Support [target young people](#) to transform their employment aspirations, building motivation, self-efficacy and employability skills. Providing a named Spark! 'employment champion' to guide and support them into sustained employment.



## Build robust digital tools and platforms

To drive nationwide engagement among employers, young people, schools and partners, and to support learning and development across all delivery. Helping us to reach and impact on our target populations, and ensure a blended approach (i.e. in-person and online) to learning and employer engagement.



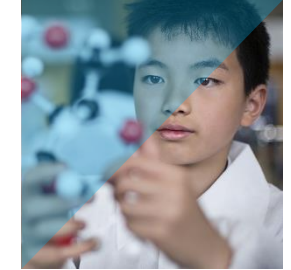
## Develop industry-focused partnerships

Develop and deliver, sector specific and regionally focussed education-to-employment programmes. Driving employment opportunities for young people within growth sectors, and supporting Spark! to grow into new target regions. Working with industry partners to implement programmes that raises awareness of careers in their sector, builds diverse talent pipelines for the sector, and supports young people's work transitions.



## Identify target regions to expand individual and combined services

Secure funding and advocacy to locate staff in new regions of need, to develop a [place-based approach](#) including: building networks of employers, schools, funders, councils, and other providers; developing a robust LMI knowledge; ensuring a clear and articulate understanding of local needs; preparing for and ultimately launching our portfolio of services.



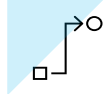
## Build relationships to reach target young people beyond schools and FE

Form collaborations with the youth sector, community services, and local councils to ensure we are able to better reach and support those young people who will most benefit from our services.

# Service delivery priorities



Increase    Innovate    Impact    Improve    Influence



Continue to act as a connector between employers, schools, young people



Design, develop and deliver high engagement, high impact programmes



Build robust digital tools and platforms



Develop industry-focussed, regional, partnerships



Identify target regions to expand our individual and combined services



Build relationships to reach target young people beyond schools and colleges



Most relevant    Least relevant

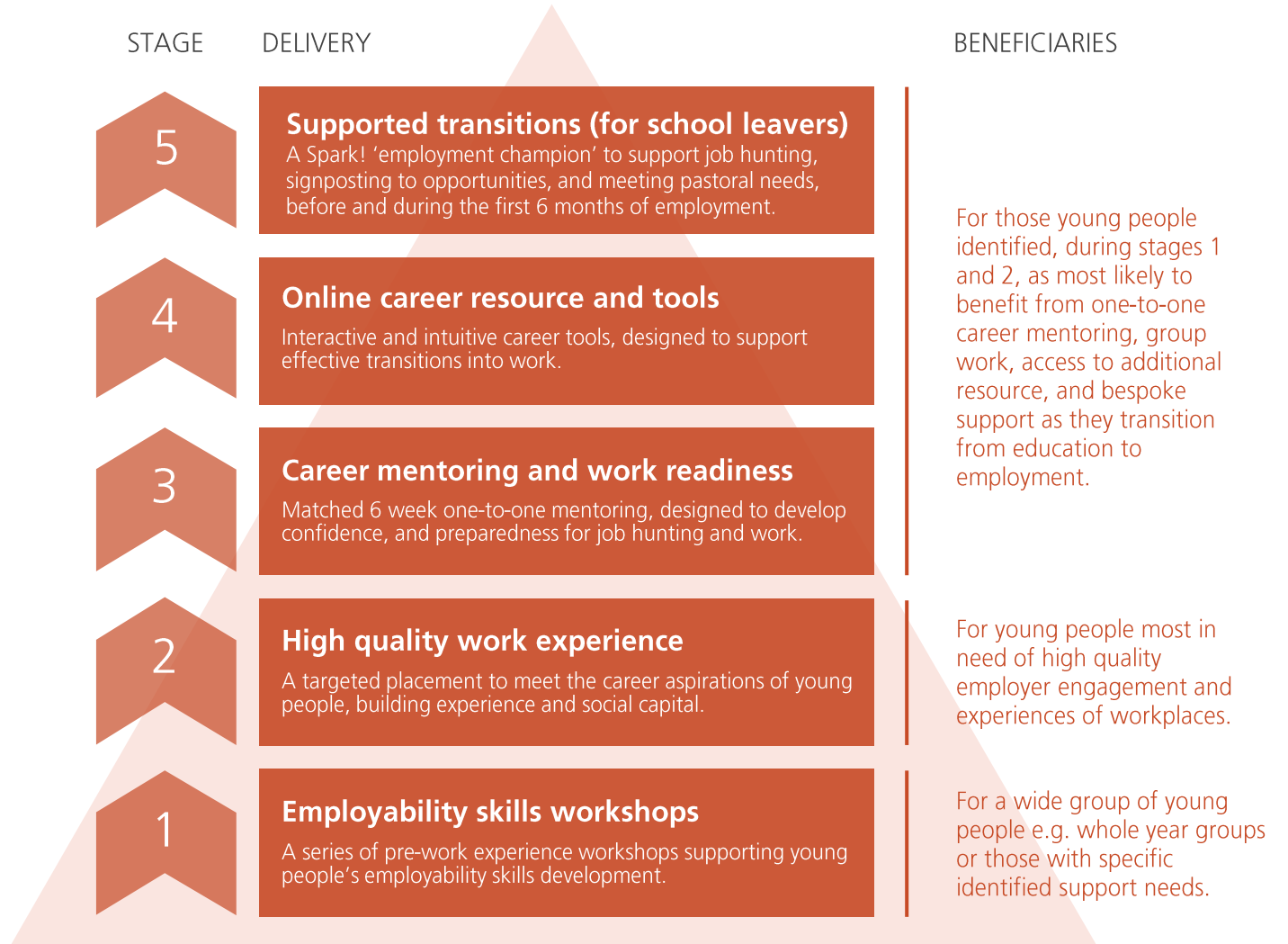


# High engagement, high impact approach

While each of Spark!'s employability activities have significant value when delivered individually, it is when delivered as a whole that we can expect to have the greatest impact, particularly on those young people within our target population, at risk of not successfully transitioning into employment.

Programme Principles are:

- A **structured programme of support**, bringing together all the elements of Spark!'s experience.
- Up to **18 months of support**, from education-to-employment.
- As the programme of work progresses it becomes increasingly **targeted for those young people most in need and likely to benefit**.
- Bespoke support, with a **named Spark! 'employment champion' for each young person**, as they progress through employability skills development, work experience placements, career mentoring and, ultimately, finding and keeping a job.



# A place-based approach

*'Place-based working is a person-centred, bottom-up approach used to meet the unique needs of people in one given location by working together to use the best available resources and collaborate to gain local knowledge and insight.'* (Pugalis and Bentley, 2014)

Place-based approaches endeavour to provide a holistic approach within an identified region, in order to address difficult societal issues, such as youth unemployment, and the fragmented service provision that is often ineffective in addressing the issue. This approach employs both a targeted and environment-level intervention, and crucially, it engages a diverse range of local participants in collaborative decision-making processes and activity.

It is often the case that many organisations carry out the same or similar activities in the same locations, leading to duplication and waste. Furthermore, spending is often focused on crisis management rather than on preventive approaches, and with a limited understanding of how best to meet local needs. A place-based approach is different, it recognises that locally-concentrated and

complex problems require a locally-determined solution, and therefore requires collaboration between the voluntary community sector, businesses and employers, local government, funders, and public services.



# Our place-based way of working

At Spark! we are used to engaging with multiple stakeholders to resolve issues related to the challenges around education-to-employment transitions. Our work is centred around collaboration with and between schools, employers and local councils. In addition, we engage with local funders and other third sector providers to help meet our charitable objectives.

In order to move towards a purposeful place-based approach Spark! will build on this experience and take a more active role in developing sustained partnerships across sectors and organisations within target regions; convening stakeholders and driving a collective and joined-up methodology to better meet the challenges related to the causes of youth unemployment.

This joined-up approach is vital for the implementation of local post-COVID recovery plans, for which Spark! can add significant value, by:

- Supporting schools and colleges to more effectively **deliver a holistic and employer-endorsed career guidance strategy**, and to effectively meet their [Gatsby benchmark](#) requirements.
- Supporting employers to commit to the '[Youth Employment Charter](#)', to open up their recruitment practices, and **develop diverse talent-pipelines of local young people**.
- Working with **schools and local employers to build long-term productive partnerships**, to sustain beyond third party support.
- Working with **councils to identify youth employment service gaps** and design solutions and services to better meet local need, and embed preventative approaches.
- Collaborating with other local third sector providers to avoid duplication, and **design and implement complementary and joined-up borough wide provisions**.



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[www.sparkcharity.org.uk](http://www.sparkcharity.org.uk)

[info@sparkcharity.org.uk](mailto:info@sparkcharity.org.uk)

Charity number: 1138697