

# Inspire to Work

Year 1 pilot Impact and Learning Report

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STARTING  
CAREERS



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# About Spark!



Spark! is a charity with 40 years experience working in partnership with schools, communities and alongside a large and diverse range of local and national employers.

We **support young people's employability skills, knowledge development, and experience**, so that they are better prepared for and able to effectively transition into the workplace, finding and keeping a job.

## We provide:

- **high quality work experience** placements and internships
- inspiring **careers mentoring** relationships
- a diverse **range of employability skills development** opportunities
- an online **employability and careers platform**
- supported **transitions into employment**

We believe it's possible for every young person to be ready, equipped, motivated and able, to enter the world of work, and with youth unemployment rapidly rising, there's never been a more important time for our services.

# About Woodbridge Park Education Service



WPES are a multi-site Alternative Provision based in the London Borough of Hounslow, offering tailored education and support to learners who are not in a position to be in a mainstream school.

WPES sets high expectations for themselves and the learners. Their approach is founded on a deep understanding of the need to be emotionally stable and socially engaged to be able to benefit from the vast choices that life can offer.

The foundation of the school's work is in **building strong, stable relationships**, ensuring all their learners are provided with **warmth, compassion, and trust**, with clear social boundaries. WPES want for every single child a future full of choice, freedom and a good standard of living. By focusing on **developing personal resilience, self-esteem, self-regulation and strong relationships**; not only do they set their learners up for formal learning, we also set them up for a more productive, successful life.

WPES works across multiple sites; The Bridge Primary Centre, Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and their CATE Centre, which takes **a holistic and nurturing approach for students who, due to mental health and medical issues, are unable to access mainstream education.**

# Programme overview and structure



# About 'Inspire to Work' programme

In partnership with **Woodbridge Park Education Service** (WPES), and with support from **Inspire Hounslow**, we launched a 2 year pilot programme, **Inspire to Work** – a new Alternative Provision careers model for students who are at a high risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) by age 16/17.

All students taking part in this programme have been excluded from mainstream education for a variety of reasons and have severe barriers to educational engagement and transitions into sustained education, employment or training.

Every year, by the Easter following their final year at Woodbridge Park, **30-40% of the young people have dropped out of their post-16 destination**, due to low resilience and personal challenges.

Engaging them at age 15 with a **relevant and accessible career pathway** will enable them to **connect their curriculum learning with the real world of work**, and develop a vocational area of interest.

This will make it far **more likely that the learners will remain engaged**, and will be able to **sustain their employment** by age 18 and beyond. They also **benefit from a meaningful curriculum offer**, grounded in real world learning.

In the Year 1 micro pilot we focused on a small group of 5 x Year 10 students, in partnership with 4 employers, hosting the young people on supported placements for 8 weeks. Employer hosts in Year 1 were:

- **Lampton Services**
- **West London Audi (Sytner)**
- **Martha Brook Ltd**
- **London Museum of Water & Steam.**

# 'Inspire to Work' objectives

1. Participating students engaged in a **part-time, long-term, and relevant internship**, to
  - improve their **employability skills** and work readiness skills
  - raise their **career aspirations** and confidence
  - achieve a work readiness **qualification** (from Year 2)
  - **successfully transition** to a relevant post-16 course, apprenticeship, training or employment
  - **remain engaged** in an apprenticeship, training, or employment, until the age of 18
2. Local **businesses will feel confident working with this demographic of young people**, and see the benefits of sustained long-term relationships with WPES and its students.
3. A **new Alternative Provision careers curriculum model is developed**, tested, scaled and embedded across WPES, and promoted to other Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provisions, across West London and beyond.

# Our learning journey

Spark! commissioned the [Centre for Education and Youth](#) to support the 'Inspire to Work' learning journey. In partnership with all stakeholders, we developed:

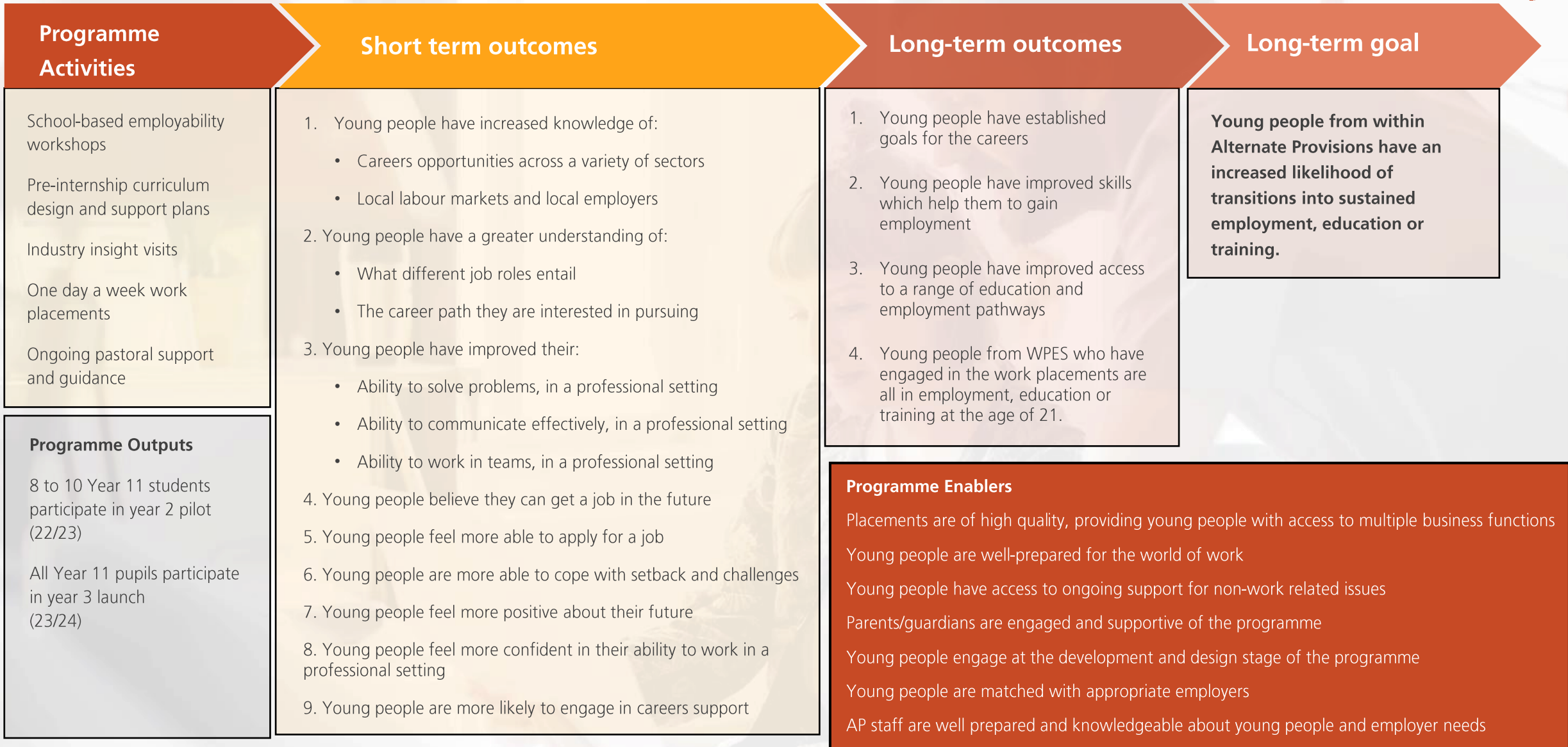
- **A programme Theory of Change for young people and employers** (i.e. impact framework)
- **A validated impact measurement evaluation tool** (i.e. baseline and endpoint surveys)
- **A structure for qualitative evaluation from young people, employers and school staff** (i.e. focus groups)

Additionally, we worked with [Big Picture, Doncaster](#), who provided:

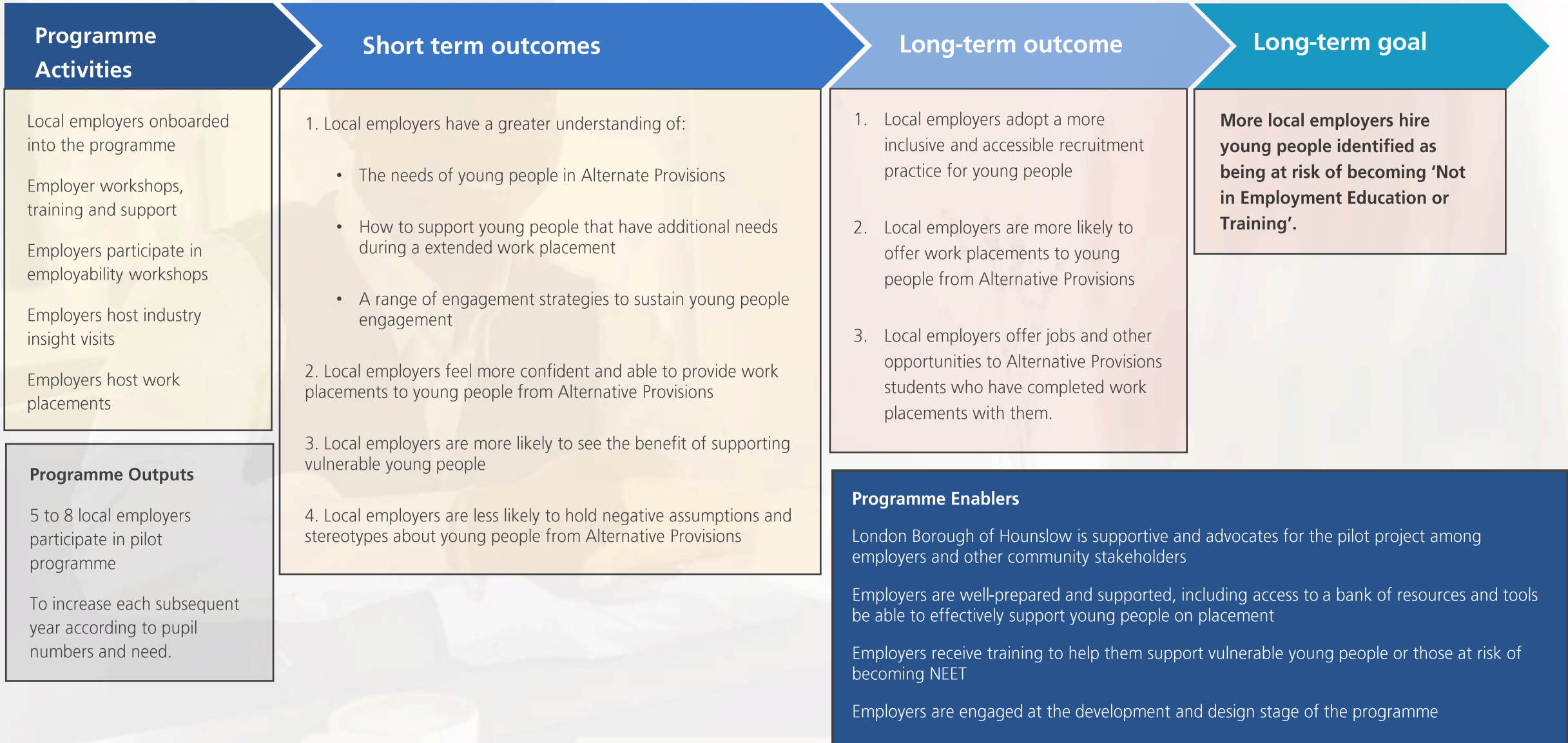
- **Consultancy and support on the programme model development**
- **Training for WPES and Spark! staff, as Work-Place Learning Mentors**



# Theory of Change - young people



# Theory of Change - employers



# Programme structure

Activity	Time	Support and training
<b>1. In-school workshop (before)</b>	Approximately 2 hours	A short briefing call prior to workshop with all employers and school staff.
<p>Spark! will facilitate the workshop, to explore career options, develop employability skills, and network with the host employers. Baseline surveys will also be completed.</p>		
<b>2. Workplace visits and tours</b>	Approximately 3 hours	Scheduling and planning visit. School staff supervise visit.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spark! will work with the employers to structure the visit, and to co-host on the day.</li> <li>• The young people will be welcomed by the employer host, given a tour of the workplace, and introduced to key personnel who can tell them a bit about their work.</li> <li>• Employer’s colleagues will join the group in a meeting room, to explore in more depth about their roles, challenges and pathways into employment.</li> <li>• Young people will be given a short business challenge or activity to complete, providing a taste of typical projects, and to develop employability skills.</li> </ul>		
<b>3. Internship placements</b>	<p>1 day a week for up to 8 weeks. Placement will initially just be morning, with the aim to become a full day after 2 to 3 weeks.</p> <p>ASDAN accredited Level 1 Employability qualification (tbc)</p>	<p>Guidance and ongoing support from Spark!.</p> <p>Pastoral support for young person, and regular visits from school staff.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers will be matched with a young person as best as possible based on interest and career aspirations. All employers will be risk assessed, and health &amp; safety compliant.</li> <li>• Spark! will be support employers with guidance and resources throughout, and help to create the placement structure.</li> <li>• Employers and school to arrange a time to meet at the workplace, to let young person know specifics of the job role and expectations, including location, day of work and hours.</li> <li>• Employers will support and supervise the young person on the days they are working. With the addition of a named ‘Buddy’ for them to ask for help or support.</li> <li>• Ideally all young people will be on placement on the same day each week.</li> <li>• School staff will visit a number of times over the placement to motivate young people, check on how they are performing, and to support with any challenges.</li> </ul>		
<b>4. In-school workshop (after)</b>	Approximately 2 hours	A short briefing call prior to workshop with all employers and school staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spark! will facilitate the workshop, to reflect on learnings, further develop employability skills, and set career goals. Endpoint surveys will also be completed.</li> <li>• The workshop will be followed by a celebration and graduation event, attended by the young people, families, employers and school staff.</li> <li>• Young people will be offered a further one-to-one with a Spark! Employability Champion, to help them identify options for post-school transitions, including FE and apprenticeship pathways. Further employer engagement opportunities can also be coordinated to support with CVs, interview skills, and job applications.</li> </ul>		

# Employer partners (2021/22 – 2022/23)



**Before the  
programme**



Before the programme began, we asked young people what they hoped to gain through 'Inspire to Work'.

- A chance to speak to employers
- Get a sense of what I want to do in the future
- To improve my CV
- To give me a chance to explore the world of work.
- To learn new skills, such as typing fast
- To get more comfortable with new people
- To communicate professionally with adults

*"When you get hired to a job, it will say on your resume that you've had experience. Because all jobs want experience before you actually work there, but you don't have any. Because you need to get a job to have experience."*

# Before the programme began, we asked employers why they became involved and what they hoped to gain from 'Inspire to Work'.

One employer noted that they saw it as an opportunity to learn more about supporting young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and establish better ways to provide these opportunities.

For some employers, the placement was in line with the community work they are already doing, and they saw it as an integral part of the organisation's mission, describing it as the 'bread and butter' of their work.

It was seen by some as a great opportunity to provide marginalised young people with work experience, who otherwise would not have had such an opportunity.

*"If we've got the opportunity to support people who perhaps are faced with certain disadvantages, well, we are here for the long term as an organisation, anchored within the community. So it's very much an obligation on us to do that"*

*"What we are gaining at the moment is a better understanding of what as an organisation we can do. And how we can use our resources and better use the facilities we have to create these types of opportunities."*

Reflections on  
delivery



# Year 1 delivery reflections

## 1: School based-workshop (before)

*Facilitated by Spark! staff, with employer volunteers supporting*

### Objectives

- Build relationships between students and employers
- Create clarification on student employment aspirations
- Understand and begin to develop employability skills
- Explore strengths and development areas
- Explore and address challenges and concerns

### Reflections

- Young people engaged well initially, but some 'opted-out' in the second half
- Young people and employers benefitted from meeting each other and sharing their career journeys and aspirations, in an informal environment
- Activities with specific and clear instructions worked best

## 2: Industry insight visit (Bedfont Lakes)

*Facilitated by host employers, with Spark! and WPES staff supporting*

### Objectives

- Clarity on role and responsibilities
- Build confidence in a professional work environment
- Utilise and test employability skills

### Reflections

- *Really valuable experience for the young people to see a place-of work first-hand*
- *Built enthusiasm and motivation for their placements*
- *Hands-on activities engaged the young people the best*

# Year 1 delivery reflections

## 3: Internship placements (1 day a week for 8 weeks)

### Objectives

- Develop vital and transferable employability skills
- Broaden horizons of potential employment and career opportunities
- Build social capital
- Become more able to cope with setback and challenges
- To feel more positive about their future
- To feel more confident in their ability to work in a professional setting
- Secure a relevant employability qualification

### Reflections

- *Placements that closely matched the young person aspirations were the most successful (e.g., working with cars, working with animals)*
- *One young woman disengaged after week one, when she was asked to do a task that she didn't want to do*
- *They worked best when there was an engaged person on site supporting the young person on placement*

## 4: School based-workshop (mid-point and after)

*Facilitated by Spark! staff, with employer volunteers supporting*

### Objectives

- Young people feel well supported throughout and after
- Young people believe they can get a job in the future
- Young people feel more able to apply for a job
- Further develop employability skills
- Set clear career goals and post-education pathways

### Reflections

- *Young people struggled to maintain focus, (or even attend) group workshops*
- *One-to-one sessions with Employment Champion was a more effective way of engaging and supporting the young people*
- *Ability to set career pathways varied greatly, some had a clear idea while others had little idea*



# Young People Feedback

## Young people feedback

- Young people reported feeling that they had problem-solving skills before starting the programme but felt that the programme made them more able to solve problems quickly.
- One young person noted that when a problem arose that they did not know how to solve, they were able to find someone who could support them to solve the issue.
- All young people felt that they had improved their verbal communication skills due to their placement.
- One noted that through the experience, they became more comfortable communicating by speaking to senior staff members.
- It was also noted by two young people that through the experience, they became more confident in speaking to members of the public.

## Young people feedback continued

- Young people noted that they felt very supported on their placements by their supervisors and felt that they were always pushed to do their best and get involved in every activity.
- Young people noted that having a good relationship with their supervisors made them feel more motivated and comfortable to try things outside of their comfort zone.
- One noted that their supervisor could tell when they were struggling with a task and allowed them to take a break and calm down, enabling them to get back to their work in a better frame of mind.

*"There wasn't that many problems that arose, but when they did I was quick thinking towards them whereas I used to have to spend at least a couple of minutes going through them."*

*"It makes me feel more confident because I've been talking to not only people who are alongside me, mechanics but also bosses and people higher up."*

*"They were like, 'well we believe you can do it' and they like got me to do things I wouldn't have done"*

*"Sometimes when like it was just too much for me, he could see that and he would say to me go for a smoke break and I'll finish this off and then when you come back we can start on the tracker and like stuff like that. So that really helped because he knew when I was getting stressed out and he let me go to calm down."*

# Employers Feedback

# Employers feedback

- It was noted by an employer that one young person enjoyed the placement so much that they wanted to work there more, with the young person spending nearly every day there as a result. This employer felt that the placement gave the young person more direction and made that career route feel more attainable.
- Employers felt that the placement gave the young people more autonomy as they were given clear instructions on their role and responsibilities, allowing them to come into work and get stuck in.
- Employers said that young people on the placements were made to feel a part of the team and were involved in tasks that were integral to the business, with some even being provided with keys and passes to get in, which employers felt enabled them to fully integrate into the role and get the most out of their opportunity.
- Across all placements, young people struggled to turn up on time.

# Employers feedback continued

- On one placement it was noted that there was a lack of consistency as they did not have a 'buddy' that they could speak to on the placement, and as a result, the young person felt uncertain about what was expected of them.
- Some employers did not know the young people's specific needs, meaning it was unlikely they were prepared to support them with their additional needs. However, employers themselves did not see this as a negative as it prevented them from forming preconceptions about the young people.
- Broadly speaking, some placements went better than others, with one placement struggling to engage the young person effectively throughout.

*"So for me that was a big thumbs up to see that this boy is enjoying it. He might have found something that he actually likes... [It] gave him a direction, like a stepping stone. And he looked at the building and I said, "would you like to work in a place like this?" And he was like, "Yeah, definitely." And I was like, that's what I want."*

*"A couple of times [she] wasn't willing to ask questions if she wasn't sure....The lack of attendance made me worry she hated it and didn't want to come"*

*"In terms of their behaviour or their attitude, anything like that they were both fantastic and keen and took on everything that we asked them to do."*





# School Feedback



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We are  
2025

Placement Internship  
Graduation Celebration  
2025

# WPES staff feedback

- It was felt that the preparation WPES staff did with the young people was very beneficial, for example, talking to them about the importance of things such as manners.
- One noted that at the beginning of the programme, young people struggled to focus in class, but through their placements they were able to mature and become more focused on what they want to do in the future
- Young people began engaging more with career advisors and thinking more seriously about their subject choices in year 11. One young person explained to their teacher that before, they felt they would only be able to work in a small mechanic shop locally, but through the experience, they now see that they could work for a big organisation and thrive.
- While two parents/guardians engaged with pre-placement activities and the graduation event, it was difficult to secure consistent support from most family members.

## WPES staff feedback continued

- There were a limited number of employers offering work placements, meaning that some young people were offered placements less relevant to their career aspirations. It was noted this could have been mitigated by explaining in more depth how the programme would be beneficial to the young person, despite it not being the exact role they were after.
- Some members of staff felt it was difficult to find time to schedule staff visits for all the young people alongside their other commitments and felt it would have been beneficial to do their visits earlier on in the programme and on a more regular basis.
- More communication was needed between staff at WPES and the employers to ensure that employers are given enough information about the young people upfront.

*"[They] developed a lot, they matured. [They] went out as young adults not being able to focus in class, but after two weeks, they were focused on what they want to do in the future, so it has been a valuable experience."*

*"For the couple it didn't work out for, maybe employers need bit more awareness about type of learner and not to put a high task on the first day that some adults might not want to do".*

*"It has stimulated them to think about their choices in year 11 and engage better with the Careers Adviser."*

## Key learnings



# Spark!'s learnings - young people

1. Audit young peoples' skills early in the process to help manage their expectations and to mitigate issues around being on a placement which is not predominantly based on their career aspirations.
2. Have a larger base of employers to choose from so that young people are more likely to be offered placements more relevant to their career aspirations.
3. Explore and prepare contingency options if the young person withdraws from their placement.
4. Provide a structured workbook for the young people to work through, which aligns the academic learning from their ASDAN Level 1 Employability Skills qualification with their placement experience.
5. Encourage young people to be more focused on skills development throughout their placement.
6. Implement a more robust support structure for young people, such as debriefs at the end of each working day, support with organising their time, prioritising tasks and encouragement to complete tasks.
7. A holistic approach from staff, family members/carers, employers and Spark! is necessary to support a young persons' practical and emotional development.
8. Young people engaged more willingly within a 1:1 setting as opposed to a group setting when undertaking support and feedback sessions.
9. Quantitative data was collected, but with a small sample group the data was found to be not illustrative

# Spark!'s learnings - employers

1. Create and establish a pool of employers and formalise their engagement with 'Inspire to Work' through the completion and quality assurance of a job description, prior to promoting the opportunity to young people. This allows Spark! to identify what employers can offer and can commit to, which helps with the matching process.
2. **Make it clear to employers that no commitment is needed until the young person is assigned to them.**
3. Employers to identify a 'buddy', someone who will be working alongside the young person at all times, who is not their Supervisor. This helps with rapport building and onboard throughout the matching process.
4. **Spark! to design a workshop for employers to help them understand and build tools on how to engage with and work with young people during challenging situations.**
5. Employers to receive information about the ASDAN Employability Skills qualification that the young people are working towards, to appropriately support the young people on placement with them.
6. **Employers to be provided with fuller information about the young persons' needs before placements start. to enable them to better tailor the placement to their matched young person.**
7. Implement an improved communication structure at the start of the programme between the young person, employer and WPES staff, to better understand the needs and expectations of all parties involved.
8. **Employers to implement a task list for the young persons working day, to help support them with structure and focus.**
9. Quantitative data was collected, but with a small sample group the data was found to not be illustrative.
10. **Spark! to begin the employer engagement and onboarding process in the spring term.**

# Spark!'s learnings - WPES

1. WPES staff to create an information pack for employers about the needs of the young people which can be discussed at initial meetings and will allow the employer to make necessary adjustments to job tasks and communications if necessary.
2. Improved communication between Spark! and WPES staff about the employers hosting placements, in the lead up to programme kick-off. This will help staff to manage young people expectations better when offered a placement which is less relevant to their career aspirations.
3. Increase the frequency of staff workplace visits during placements, and ensure early visits, to effectively support the young person, and to better become aware of potential issues and risks.
4. Offer employers the opportunity to participate in WPES training on topics such as SEND, to provide them with the skills and knowledge to support these students.
5. Provide the employers with more information about students, knowing that some young people will need extra support and reassurance that they are valued and are doing good job.
6. Build in more consistent reflection time with young people, during school days, to help complete their weekly journals/logbooks.
7. WPES to continue offering pastoral support to young people to help them feel nurtured and supported on their journey.
8. WPES needs more time to engage with family members, to increase their support and input to young peoples' development. Engagement on the project should begin in Year 10, in preparation for the Year 11 placements.
9. WPES and Spark! to begin the young people engagement and onboarding process in the spring term.

# Year 2 Pilot Delivery

Progressing the pilot and reflecting on our Year 1 experiences and learning, adaptations and new features will be implemented into the 'Inspire to Work' programme, including (but not limited to):

2 Industry insight visits  
(Cisco and Bedfont Lakes)

8 x Year 11 students engaged

One day-a-week for 30 week  
work placements

Increased work place-visits and  
support from WPES staff

Increased ongoing support for  
employers, including young  
people's needs report

Employers provided with  
overview of young people's  
learning objectives

One-to-one support for young  
people, from a Spark!  
Employment Champion

Increased focus on supporting  
post-education transitions

ASDAN Level 1  
Employability Qualification







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