



Reach and Impact Report 2023/24

Kickstarting careers

About Spark!

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

Our mission is 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 Programmes

Since 2010, Spark! has been supporting young people's employability skills, knowledge, experience and access, so that they are better prepared for and able to effectively transition into the workplace, finding a job and sustained employment.

We do this through:

- a range of employer engagement opportunities.
- engaging employability skills workshops and activities.
- high-quality workplace experiences and internships.
- inspiring one-to-one career mentoring.
- impactful place-based partnerships.

Letter from our CEO and Chair

Talent is equally distributed, opportunity is not.

Youth unemployment remains persistently high across the UK and London is one of the most affected areas of the country, with 15% of young people currently unemployed, compared to 4.1% of the overall population.*

This is why it's vital for us to maintain our strategic objectives of:

- expanding our reach into areas of unmet need and high demand.
- directing our resources and services towards young people who need it the most.

We are very pleased therefore to report that 2023/24 has indeed been a year of continued growth for the charity, both in reach and impact.

- We expanded our corporate partnership programmes with SEGRO, GSK, Notting Hill Genesis and Jacobs Engineering and delivered new programmes alongside Heathrow and Peabody Housing.
- Our Career Mentoring programme has been accessed by more young people than ever and our supported Work Experience programme has been extended into Harrow, Barnet and Brent.
- We continued to develop our programmes with Alternative Provisions and Special Schools, and 38% of our delivery was with young people who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- Our commitment to develop bespoke responses addressing unique local challenges, has seen us extend our 'Youth Employability Partnerships' in Brent and Ealing, and launch the 'Youth Skills and Employment Guarantee' alongside the London Borough of Hounslow.
- Finally, we are proud to have grown our income to meet need, with generous funding, including from Garfield Weston, John Lyons Charity, Heathrow Community Trust and Inspire Hounslow.

We hope you enjoy reading this report and we welcome conversations with anyone willing to explore how we can effectively collaborate to make a long-term difference to young people's employment prospects.



**Matt Lent (CEO) and
Susan Swabey (Chair)**



WHO WE WORKED WITH in 2023/24

Young People

5,338

young people

52% were male and 48% female
33% were eligible for free school meals
74% came from ethnic minority communities
54% had English as an Additional Language
20% had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (and 38% of our delivery was with young people who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.)



28% of young people engaged in more than one Spark! programme, **15%** engaged in 3 or more, including:

2356 

on employer engagement and employability skills development workshops

1163 

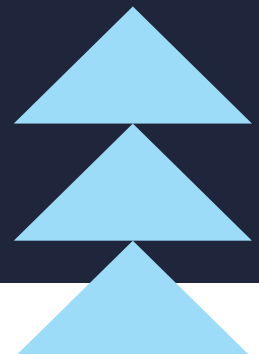
had an industry insight workplace visit with business challenge

681 

had a high-quality work experience placement

154 

were matched with a one-to-one career mentor



WHO WE WORKED WITH in 2023/24
Employers & Volunteers

Our delivery has been supported by

406

employers,
 representing **25**
 different sectors



27% micro
 30% small
 9% medium
 34% large

122

employers
 hosted
 students on
 workplace
 visits



326

employees
 participated
 in employer
 engagement
 activities

98

employees
 participated
 in career fairs



133

employees
 volunteered as
 career mentors



312

employers hosted
 one or more work
 placement students



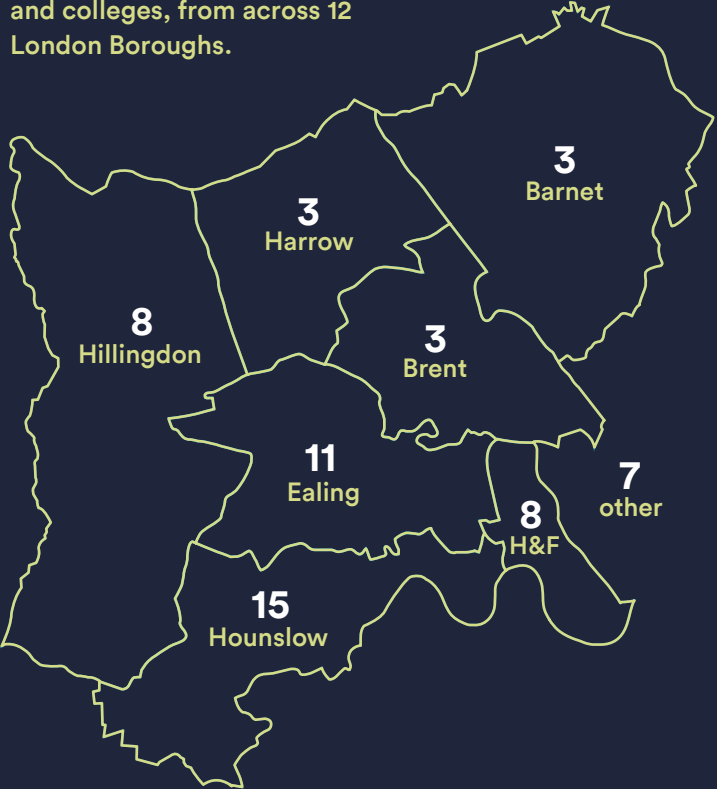
619

volunteers supported our activities and gave an
 astonishing **16,303 hours** of their time to support
 the work of the charity and local young people



Where we worked

We delivered our services in
 partnership with 58 schools
 and colleges, from across 12
 London Boroughs.



A place-based approach

At Spark! our work is centred around having a deep understanding of local needs and challenges, and developing long-term relationships and collaborations with school communities, employers, local councils and Third Sector partners, to best meet that need.

We focus on bringing together and mobilising powerful partnerships to support young people who need it the most, to develop the skills, experience, knowledge and access they will need to find and sustain good employment and have rewarding careers.

In this way, we:

- support schools to more effectively deliver employer-endorsed career guidance strategies and meet their Gatsby benchmark requirements.
- work with schools and local employers to build long-term productive partnerships, which will sustain beyond any third party support.
- support employers to become ‘youth-friendly’, developing diverse talent-pipelines of local young people and making their recruitment practices more accessible for all.
- work with local councils to identify youth employment service gaps and design provisions to better meet local need and embed preventative approaches.
- collaborate with other local third sector providers to avoid duplication and to design and implement complementary, joined-up provisions.

Our ‘Youth Employability Partnership’ with Ealing Council and ‘Youth Skills and Employment Guarantee’ with Hounslow Council are prime examples of this approach in practice. Across both of these boroughs we have **partnered with 26 school communities and 136 local businesses** in the last year alone, creating multiple and diverse employer and workplace engagement opportunities for hundreds of young people identified as being at risk of becoming ‘Not in Employment Education or Training’ (NEET).



Impact STATS

Before **46%**

After **75%**

of young people feel very confident or confident speaking to an adult in a professional work setting.

65%

of young people agree they have improved their knowledge of careers and employers in their local area.

Before **52%**

After **74%**

know the steps they need to take to get a job they are interested in.

94%

of young people state that they feel confident about applying for a job after the programme.

“

“It was engaging and fun and every time we would learn new skills and new things.

Mandika, Featherstone High School student

“

“At the Mock interviews, a young man impressed our volunteer so much he was encouraged to apply to our Management Trainee Programme. He has since been offered a place from September.

Sophie Goddard, The Hill Group

“

“Like many others who participated in Spark! sessions I have improved and gained the necessary knowledge and skills that are needed by employers and overall it helped me increase my confidence.

Mohammed, Featherstone High School student



WORK EXPERIENCE: The Way To Work

When asked, young people identify a lack of work experience as their number one barrier to employment (Youth Census 2024)

Our 'Way to Work' programme supports young people with barriers to employment to develop their skills, knowledge, motivation and access to employment, by sourcing and matching them with high-quality supported work experience placements.

Prior to their placements, young people take part in an engaging workshop to prepare them for their employer host and to ensure they are able to make the very most of their experience.

Following their week-long work experience they attend a post-placement workshop, supporting them to reflect on and apply their learning, further developing their employability skills and establishing career goals.

In 2023/24 our work experience programme was supported by **an amazing 312 employers**, from large multi-national corporations to high-street shops. Together this incredible network of employers hosted **681 young people** on their high-quality placements.



Impact STATS, after Ealing Council Work Experience

Before **61%**

After **87%**

of young people agree or strongly agree that they are clear about what they need to do to achieve their ambitions.

Before **64%**

After **91%**

of young people have a good understanding of different job roles within an organisation.

Before **71%**

After **96%**

of young people agree or strongly agree that they have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

100%

of young people say they can identify the skills and qualities employers are looking for upon completion of their work experience.

“I’ve seen significant growth in my creativity and problem-solving skills, which has boosted my confidence and ability to handle complex tasks independently.”
Davina, Work Experience Student

“It was such a rewarding experience. Our young person was a great addition to the team, had fantastic ideas which we looked to implement, and I learned a lot about leadership.”
Chris Young, Ealing Council Work Experience Host

Pathway Partnership Programme

Our Pathway Partnerships bring together the most impactful elements of our work into one extended programme.

'Pathway' takes young people through a journey, that starts with initial employer engagement and includes workplace insight visits, one-to-one career mentoring and work experience.



We are very proud to work with amazing employer partners to make this brilliant programme a reality for hundreds of young people across west and north London. GSK, SEGRO, Notting Hill Genesis and Peabody Housing not only provide the vital resource, but also enable access to inspiring workplaces and give hundreds of hours of employee volunteering.

Impact STATS

Before **47%**

After **77%**

are very aware of their personal strengths and how they can help them succeed.

Before **44%**

After **91%**

have a clear idea of what they want to do in the future and how to achieve this.

100%

would recommend the Pathway Programme to a friend.

The Pathway Programme also benefits our employer partners by:

- helping fulfil community investment commitments.
- raising awareness of the company as a local employer.
- building local and diverse talent pipelines.
- creating rewarding skills-based volunteering opportunities for staff.

01 Meaningful Employer Engagement

In-school/college activities introduce young people to local employers and potential career pathways. They develop employability skills, broaden horizons and explore careers goals

02 Workplace Insight

Young people visit a local workplace, networking with employees, learning about an industry and taking on a team business challenge.

03 Career Mentoring

Young people are matched with a local employee for one-to-one sessions, developing employability skills, work readiness, career goals and social capital.

04 High Quality Work Experience

Young people spend 3 to 5 days taking on workplace responsibilities, developing employability skills and an understanding of their strengths and challenges.

05 Supported Transitions

Young people are supported to secure employment, kickstarting a career they may otherwise not have been able to access.



CONNECT Career Mentoring

Spark!'s CONNECT Career Mentoring programme works with young people on Pupil Premium, Free School Meals, those identified as being at risk of becoming 'Not in Employment Education or Training', and those under-represented in the labour market.

This powerful programme matches young people with trained employee volunteers from our partner businesses, based on gender, ethnicity, career aspirations and hobbies.

The one-to-one sessions support the young people to develop their employability skills, build confidence, set career goals, grow their social capital, ensure they have a quality CV and are well-prepared for interviews.

The relationships formed go so much deeper, with the mentors often telling us that they have got as much out of the experience as their mentees, and it's not unusual for them to stay in touch for many years.

Impact STATS

Before

28%

After

62%

feel very well equipped to achieve their goals.

Before

48%

After

92%

have a clear idea of what they want to do in the future and how to achieve this.

Before

32%

After

100%

have a good understanding about career opportunities.



Diya, a Year 12 student, at Heston Community School, discovered her mentoring opportunity through her school and applied with the hope of clarifying her career interests. Initially unsure about engineering, Diya focused on developing skills like time management, interview techniques, communication, and most importantly, building resilience.

"I wanted to feel less stressed and more prepared" she shared, noting that her mentor, Rebecca, introduced her to practical tools like the Pomodoro technique and strategies for prioritising difficult tasks.

One of the most impactful experiences for Diya was visiting her mentor's office at Jacobs Engineering, where she met professionals, including a highway maintenance engineer who inspired her with stories about international engineering projects.

"She told me about her project in Rwanda building a bridge... I was so inspired" Diya recalled, adding that this experience solidified her goal to pursue engineering abroad.

For other young people, her advice is simple: **"Take the chance... it's something you actually look forward to."**

Our volunteer mentors, who gave **1425** hours of their time and experience, came from a very diverse range of employer partners: Accenture, AtkinsRealis, BCAL, Bibby Financial Services, British Airways, CBRE, Chelsea FC, Colart, Ealing Council, Faithful and Gould, Gowling, GSK, Heathrow Airport, HS2 Railways, Jacobs, JCDcaux, JLL, Logix Property, Laing O Rourke, Laboratory of Medical Sciences, Next DLP, Notting Hill Genesis, Metropolitan Police, Savills, SEGRO, Stantec, Skanska, St George's Hospital, Wates.

Showcase PARTNERSHIP



Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are among the most likely young people to become NEET, and only 4.8% of people with learning disabilities are in paid employment. That's why our collaborations with Special Schools and Alternative Provisions is at the very core of our work to directly address the challenges of youth unemployment.

In 2023/24, in partnership with **SEGRO** and **Heathrow**, we launched a new programme with **Marjory Kinnon Special School**, to support Year 10 students to develop their work readiness and career aspirations.

Through a series of employer engagements, work readiness workshops, industry insight visits and facilitated group career mentoring, **29 young people**:

- explored career pathways and gained valuable insights into local employment opportunities.
- developed their communication skills and confidence in talking to employers.
- experienced the world of work through industry insights and team challenges.
- developed career aspirations and goals.



Impact STATS

Before **45%**

After **79%**

of students felt confident about having the skills and ability needed to get a job.

Before **52%**

After **79%**

of young people felt confident about finding a job after taking part in the programme.

100%

of students felt this opportunity helped them to learn about different jobs.



Getting out in the community to help local young people prepare for their next step is exactly what our Giving Back Programme is all about – opening our doors so those who live closest can access the benefits of being our neighbour.”

*Becky Coffin,
Director of Communities
and Sustainability,
Heathrow*



It was really informative and accessible to the children. They had a great time. They enjoyed seeing all of the different departments and were surprised by many of the working areas within the airport. It's been a really positive experience.”

*Jas Bassi,
Teaching Assistant,
Marjory Kinnon*



Heathrow STEM Generation

In 2023/24 we launched this dynamic and impactful programme, in partnership with Heathrow, introducing Year 8 students to the diverse careers available at Heathrow Airport and bringing engineering to life through practical challenges and direct interactions with industry professionals.

Through our partnership with schools in Ealing, Hillingdon and Hounslow, Spark! engaged over **2,000 Year 8 students**, captivating them with the possibilities in Engineering and Technology through an interactive and challenging

coding activity, navigating their micro:bit powered move motor around a map of Heathrow.

Working with **12 schools**, Spark! delivered workshops alongside **60 volunteers** from Heathrow, who brought their roles to life, sharing insights into their work and actively helping students navigate through two engineering challenges. They ensured students stayed on course and answered questions about their jobs during the activity and in a Q&A session.

Impact STATS

75%

of students thought the Heathrow STEM Generation programme was excellent or very good.

95%

of students stated that the challenge supported them to understand different engineering roles.

91%

of students state that the workshop helped them develop their team work skills.

Our Young Associates

Spark!'s Young Associates are made up of young people from our target communities, many of whom have taken part in Spark! programmes. They are vital to how we operate as a charity and are central to us understanding local need and deciding how best to respond.

These brilliant young people inform our strategy, co-design programmes, represent the charity and our work, and direct our priorities.

They are paid the London Living Wage for their time.



If you are between 18 to 24 and are interested in finding out more about joining our Young Associates, please e-mail: info@sparkcharity.org.uk



The year to come

In 2024/25 we will continue to be extremely ambitious in growing our reach and deepening our impact to meet the increased need across west London and beyond.

During the year we will be focusing on **5 key priorities**, aligned with our current strategy:

01

Working with young people most in need of our services and support

Over the course of the next year the charity will increase its focus on working with young people with barriers to employment, including those with low attainment outcomes; young people attending Alternative Provisions; those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; care experience young people and other identified barriers.

02

Continuing to develop our most impactful long-term programmes

The charity will further develop its long-term interventions, such as the 'Pathway Programme', working in partnership with funders, employers, councils and the voluntary youth sector to engage and support target young people over extended periods of time and to support transitions into employment.

03

Growing our work experience and career mentoring programmes

We will be working to grow the reach and impact of our Work Experience Programme 'Way to Work', as well as our impactful career mentoring programme 'CONNECT'. In addition, we will be enhancing digital resources to further improve the impact and longevity of our work.

04

Building influential partnerships to effect systemic change

The charity will continue to build cross-sector collaborations to drive and influence systemic and place-based change, creating powerful partnerships and alliances between businesses and the education sector.

05

Identifying and working in new regions of need

We will continue to establish embedded services across the west London boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow, whilst also identifying regions of unmet need and service gaps in other London boroughs.

Funders and Supporters

Our work is only made possible thanks to our amazing network of generous funders and supporters.



Calls to Action

We can't do any of this alone...

- ▶ **If you are an employer** (of any size) we want to work with you to help you engage with your community, provide life-changing opportunities for local young people, build and diversify your local talent pipelines, and create rewarding volunteering opportunities for your staff.
- ▶ **If you are a school or college** please get in touch to explore collaborations and to discuss how our programmes and services can support you and your young people.
- ▶ **If you are a local Council** we welcome conversations about how we might be able to work with you to meet any unmet need and the youth employability service gaps in your communities.
- ▶ **If you are a voluntary sector organisation**, whether a charity, social enterprise, CIC or other, let's talk and explore how we can partner to ensure we aren't duplicating services or competing for increasingly limited and valuable resource.



www.sparkcharity.org.uk

info@sparkcharity.org.uk

Charity number: **1138697**