



Work Experience Works

A best practice guide to
creating meaningful
pathways for NEET young
people



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Why Work Experience Works



"At a time of rising youth unemployment, meaningful work experience can shape a young person's future, by helping them understand the workplace, build skills and grow their confidence.

Movement to Work's new 'Work Experience Works' guidance is a powerful resource to deliver successful placements that benefit both young people and employers.

I encourage all organisations to explore how they can unlock talent by offering this potentially life-changing opportunity."

Charles Woodburn

Group CEO, BAE Systems
Chair, Movement to Work



"With a critical number of young people not in education, employment, or training, the Work Experience Works guidance is crucial, reflecting our shared vision with Movement to Work to support as many young people as possible into sustained employment."

Alison McGovern MP

Minister of State for Employment, DWP



"I struggled to find a job where I truly fit in after leaving school, but my work experience programme with Movement to Work and BAE Systems changed everything. I discovered my passion for engineering, and now I'm training as an electrician, with an exciting career ahead of me in a field I love."

Gabrielle Howell

Electrical Apprentice, BAE Systems

Message from our CEO

In the face of rising youth unemployment and economic inactivity, removing the barriers that prevent young people from accessing the world of work has never been more critical. Time and again, young people tell us that the biggest barrier to securing a job is a lack of work experience. This is the harsh reality of the "no experience, no job" cycle—one that leaves too many young people struggling to step onto the career ladder.

At Movement to Work, we are committed to breaking this cycle. For over a decade, we have worked alongside employers and youth outreach organisations to create high-quality, accessible work experiences—ones that do more than just fill a CV gap. These opportunities provide real experience, build confidence, support positive mental health and well-being, and offer invaluable insight into the world of work, helping young people find the right path for them.

We are at a defining moment. Now, more than ever, we must advocate for work experience as a vital solution to youth unemployment. Emerging government policies reinforce this urgency, with initiatives such as a Youth Guarantee and a commitment to providing two weeks' worth of work experience along with specialised careers advice for all young people. These measures signal progress, but to be truly effective, they must be backed by high-quality, well-structured work experiences that deliver real value to both young people and employers.

Work experience offers a mutual opportunity between young people and employers—a chance to explore potential, assess suitability, and unlock new possibilities. We've seen firsthand the power of work experience, and we want more employers to harness it to help young people take those crucial first steps into employment.

That's why we are launching the Work Experience Works Campaign, calling on employers to embrace work experience as a meaningful pathway for NEET* young people. This isn't just the work of one organisation—it's a collective effort, driven by our Movement. We have brought together our employer network and partners to refresh best-practice guidance, showcase real-life success stories, and ensure impactful work experience is accessible to all young people who are NEET.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to delivering work experience programmes; each is unique in how it engages and supports young people. We encourage employers to take a blended approach, combining new and emerging technologies with established models and frameworks to maximise impact.

A heartfelt thank you to our incredible partners who have contributed their expertise to shape this guidance. Together, we can equip more young people with the experience they need to succeed.

***NEET:** Not in education, employment, or training

The impact is clear—Work Experience **Works**. It has the potential to empower young people, strengthen businesses with diverse untapped talent, drive social mobility, and fuel economic growth. Now, let's build on this momentum and ensure everyone benefits.

Join Movement to Work in our mission to help more young people work, leveraging work experience as a pathway—and remember, we're here to help you every step of the way!

Sareena Bains
CEO, Movement to Work



About the guidance

Founded in 2013, Movement to Work has spent over a decade driving meaningful impact by partnering with leading UK employers and youth outreach organisations to create high-quality, transformative work experience programmes.

In recent years, these programmes have had to evolve significantly—shaped by emerging technologies, the lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, shifting workplace norms, a worsening youth mental health crisis, and growing inequities. In response, we have developed new guidance to ensure work experience opportunities truly support isolated and marginalised young people, ensuring no one is left behind.

Drawing upon evidence, research and existing best practice from across our network of employers and delivery partners, these nine guiding principles form the basis of what we collectively understand to be best practice for high impact work experience programmes. This guidance will continue to be iterated upon as new data emerges and social needs evolve. By staying responsive to ongoing research, employer insights, and the lived experiences of young people, we will ensure that our guidance remains relevant, effective, and inclusive.

Additional resources and case studies are available on our website to ground the guidance in examples of best practice that already exist within the Movement. A *huge* thank you to our community and beyond who have contributed to this important work!

BAE SYSTEMS



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MBDA



youth futures FOUNDATION



wagamama

Best practice guidance



Prioritise Equity through Intentional Design & Collaboration

Principle 1: Design with purpose and inclusion

Principle 2: Set clear objectives and structured learning outcomes

Principle 3: Build impactful partnerships through collaboration



Deliver Transformative Learning Experiences

Principle 4: Cultivate robust mentorship and peer support

Principle 5: Foster holistic support and wellbeing

Principle 6: Integrate transferable employability skills



Create Sustainable Pathways for Growth

Principle 7: Track impact and iterate

Principle 8: Celebrate achievements and long-term impact

Principle 9: Curate meaningful outcomes for all young people

Principle 1:

Design with purpose and inclusion



Why It Matters

A best-practice work experience programme begins with a clear purpose and an informed understanding of the young people it aims to support.

Young people start their career journey from vastly different positions; financial barriers, accessibility challenges and personal circumstances all create barriers that prevent NEET young people from accessing early-stage career opportunities.

By prioritising equity and tailoring programmes to those with additional needs, all young people can have the chance to break the no-experience, no-job cycle. From an employer's perspective, skills gaps are a real challenge—well-designed work experience programmes can serve as a valuable talent pipeline, helping to bridge these gaps while providing meaningful opportunities for young people.



Key Considerations

Identify Programme Purpose:

Create a clear focus for the programme by clearly articulating the role of the work experience programme for your organisation and for young people. Consider trialling a programme and scaling once you have integrated your learnings from this.

Identify Participant Demographic:

Is there a particular demographic of young people you would like to support? Ensure that this is aligned with the mission of your organisation (e.g., increasing diversity in your team), and consider bringing on board youth outreach/delivery partners that can support with engaging these young people.

Explore Co-Designing:

Bringing in young people to co-design what the work experience would look like is the best way to align your programme to their needs – whether this is programme alumni, young people from your organisation, or community representatives.

Identify Funding & Budget:

It is important to identify where your funding is coming from, and what the constraints associated with this are. Consider whether you have the infrastructure to deliver an impactful work experience programme internally, or whether you may need to find a delivery partner to support you. Work experience programmes can be time and resource intensive, so ensure that the development and delivery of the programme has a lead that can support young people from the start. Additionally, consider leveraging existing learnings and materials that can be adapted to support the young people you are working with, reducing the need to start from scratch.

Consider Potential Barriers & Solutions:

Support with upfront costs for uniform & equipment as well as travel costs so that young people aren't out of pocket before the programme begins, and consider providing lunch for the duration of the programme. Explore how you can best support those with additional needs (e.g., ramps, accessible restrooms, quiet breakout spaces, subtitles, assistive technologies, and disability-trained staff), and communicate these clearly in recruitment materials to ensure young people know what support will be provided. Also consider flexible working times and offering shorter or multiple experiences to better suit those with additional needs. Lastly, consider providing a virtual or hybrid experience so you can reach more young people who may be unable to attend in-person because of geographical restrictions or personal circumstances.

Create Accessible Outreach & Applications:

Use clear, jargon-free language and multiple channels to meet young people where they are (social media like TikTok/Instagram, community hubs, and youth organisations) to reach young people effectively, and encourage applicants to apply in whatever way best suits them (for example, through a submitted video application or an informal conversation). Ensure your application process is intuitive and easy to follow. Remember to let young people know upfront if and where they can use Generative AI as part of the hiring process, and communicate whether young people can continue to receive benefits while on the programme. For a virtual experience, you may not need to restrict numbers and have a lengthy application process which can be a barrier for some young people.

Run Insight Days & Provide Pre-Application Support:

Consider running an insight day before running a work experience programme so that young people can get a taste of what your programme(s) are about before they commit to it, and ensure that someone in your team can answer any questions and offer support to the young people considering applying to the programme. This can also serve as a valuable opportunity to identify and select suitable candidates for the work experience programme. You might want to offer a virtual experience as an introduction to your company, its mission, and values, helping participants feel more confident when applying for your work experience programme. Provide introductions with your team and “tech checks” prior to the programme start so that any additional access needs can be worked through and the young people feel less anxious about starting.

Set Clear Expectations:

Provide transparent information on what participants will expect from the programme and what you expect from them, what they will gain, time commitments, and the support available. Ensure that the young people brought in to your programmes aren't given tasks or responsibilities in place of another colleague.



Principle 2:

Set clear objectives & structured learning outcomes

Why It Matters

Clarity and structure provide a sense of direction, particularly for young people who may feel uncertain about their career paths.

When learning outcomes are well-defined and aligned with real-world opportunities, participants can build skills with confidence, track their progress, and stay motivated.

A structured approach also ensures that employers and training providers deliver meaningful, impactful programmes that lead to tangible outcomes, whether in employment, further education, or personal development. Understanding the wider context of the learning helps those with additional needs to contextualise and compartmentalise what they are learning about.



Key Considerations

Understand your Learner:

Based on the demographic of young people you invite into your programmes, consider how you can tailor your delivery to support those with additional needs. Remember that there are other organisations out there that can support with refining your programme for the young people you work with!

Link Learning to Goals:

Be clear about how the learning will lead into specific outcomes such as employment or further education, and when/how they will apply the learning during the work experience programme.

Learning outcomes should be clearly defined and agreed upon with participants. Throughout the programme, regularly reinforce these outcomes by summarising the skills gained through completed tasks. As participants may want to showcase their newly acquired skills and experience on their CV or LinkedIn, support them by providing suggested content aligned with the learning outcomes.

Creating clear timetables for young people can help to outline opportunities to review progress, set goals, and make any necessary adjustments.

Use Bite-Sized Targets:

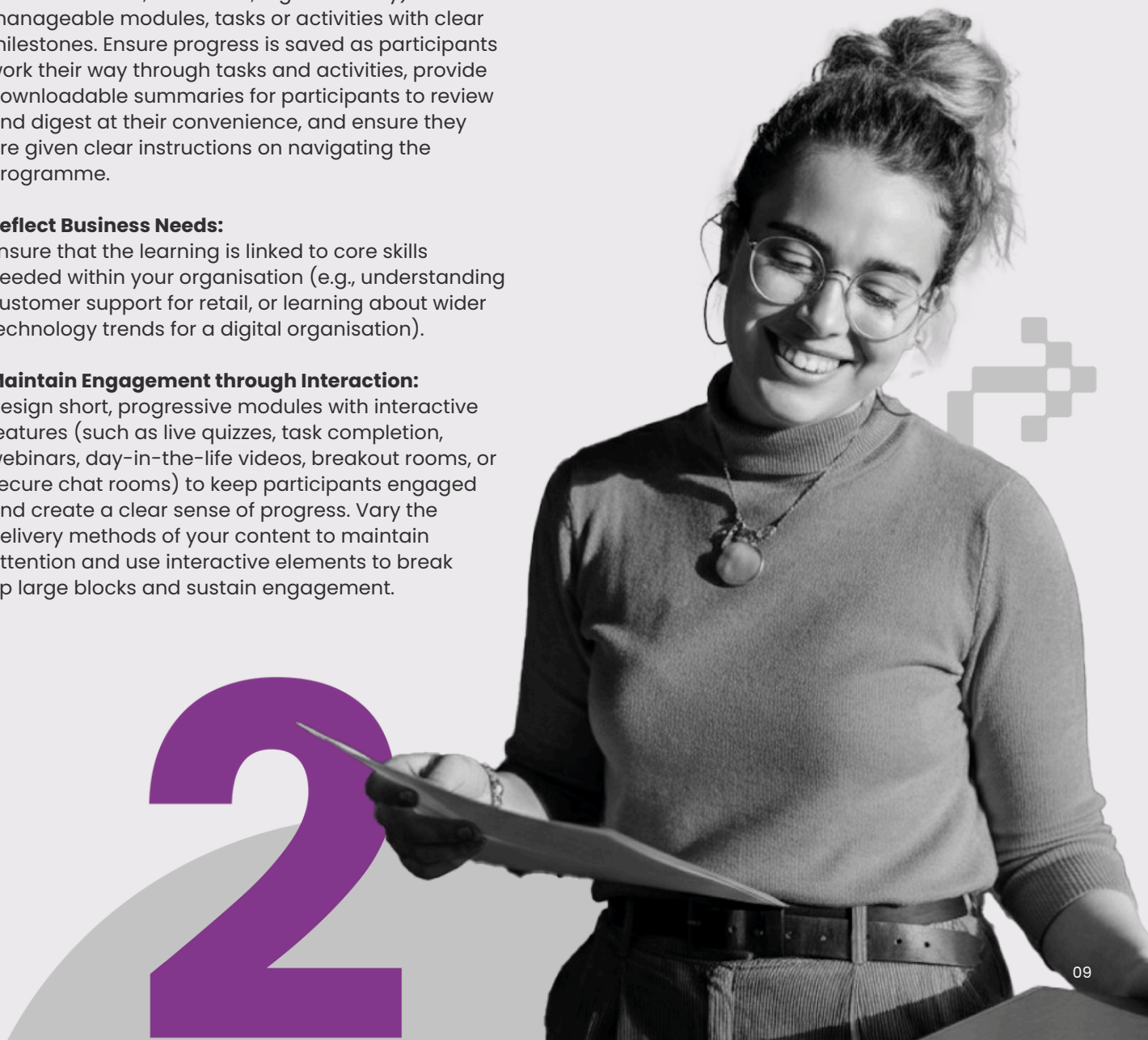
Break down core employability skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, digital literacy) into manageable modules, tasks or activities with clear milestones. Ensure progress is saved as participants work their way through tasks and activities, provide downloadable summaries for participants to review and digest at their convenience, and ensure they are given clear instructions on navigating the programme.

Reflect Business Needs:

Ensure that the learning is linked to core skills needed within your organisation (e.g., understanding customer support for retail, or learning about wider technology trends for a digital organisation).

Maintain Engagement through Interaction:

Design short, progressive modules with interactive features (such as live quizzes, task completion, webinars, day-in-the-life videos, breakout rooms, or secure chat rooms) to keep participants engaged and create a clear sense of progress. Vary the delivery methods of your content to maintain attention and use interactive elements to break up large blocks and sustain engagement.



Principle 3:

Build impactful partnerships through collaboration

Why It Matters

Long-term impact requires collaboration. Employers, training providers, charities, and government agencies all play a crucial role in creating a joined-up system of support for NEET young people.

Sustainable partnerships enable resource-sharing, mutual learning, and the expansion of opportunities—tapping into the knowledge and skillsets of others means you don't have to build it all yourself.

By working collaboratively, you can draw upon the skills, resources and impact of other key players in the ecosystem so that we can all play our part in developing resilient, confident, and work-ready young people.



Key Considerations

Engage Your Supply Chain:

Encourage suppliers and partner networks to amplify the impact for NEET young people, such as sharing CVs (with permission) for employment opportunities, and arranging onsite days at partner locations so participants experience diverse work environments first-hand and can better understand the wider ecosystem that your business sits within.

Job/recruitment fairs at the end of the experience is also a great way to involve your supply chain. It is crucial that delivery partners are able to support the programme focus and participant demographic you have identified.

Leverage Targeted Expertise:

Collaborate with charities, social enterprises, and local community groups to amplify reach and diversity of support, and lean into collaboration with delivery partners to enhance the impact of your programmes.

Recognise Collaboration:

Regularly highlight collective achievements & learnings and develop clear goals for collaboration, ensuring partners see tangible value in continuing the partnership. Involve partners from different locations and showcase different roles within the programme. Ensure that best practice and success stories are shared to engage existing partners and encourage new partnerships.



Principle 4:

Cultivate robust mentorship & peer support

Why It Matters

A strong support network can make all the difference for a young person navigating the transition into work. Mentors and buddies offer guidance, encouragement, and real-world insights that help participants feel less alone in their journey.

Where possible, try to pair young people with mentors or buddies who share backgrounds or experiences (e.g., programme alumni) to encourage the creation of safe and supportive relationships.



Key Considerations

Thoroughly Train Mentors:

Equip mentors and buddies with the necessary upskilling to support NEET young people effectively. This includes training on their unique challenges and contexts, such as mental health, first aid and safeguarding, to ensure they can provide meaningful guidance and support. Ensure mentors, staff and anyone interacting with the young people have passed a DBS check*.

Implement Peer Mentoring & Buddying:

Aim to connect participants with mentors and/or buddies who share similar backgrounds and lived experiences. Buddies / peer mentors should feel equipped to handle situations they may not have been exposed to so that they can signpost helpful support opportunities for young people on the programme. Provide a list of popular questions as a prompt for young people who may be anxious to ask for support.

*DBS check definition

A DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check is a background check that helps organisations assess an individual's criminal record for roles involving vulnerable people. Find official guidance at [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/dbs-check-requests-guidance-for-employers).

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/dbs-check-requests-guidance-for-employers>

Build your Mentor Programme:

Showcase success stories to build your team of volunteers to support work experience, and highlight the value of your programme both for the mentor and mentee. Provide a bio/intro for your mentors sharing their career journey, details about their current role and what they hope to gain from supporting work experience.

Cultivate Community:

If you have a cohort of young people starting at the same time, connect them in advance to foster a sense of support and belonging. Providing a network of peers who are experiencing similar experiences and challenges can help build confidence and engagement. Utilise safeguarded messaging apps, chat rooms, or video-call platforms to facilitate interaction, ensuring clear guidelines on communication frequency and best practices for online engagement.



Principle 5:

Foster holistic support & wellbeing



Why It Matters

A young person's ability to learn and thrive is deeply connected to their overall wellbeing. Stress, financial insecurity, mental health struggles, or unstable living situations can make it difficult to focus on career development.

Providing a supportive environment that acknowledges these challenges – through safeguarding, wellbeing check-ins, and ongoing emotional support – creates a foundation for success.

When young people feel safe, heard, and cared for, they are far more likely to stay engaged and make tangible progress.



Key Considerations

Emphasise Safeguarding:

All facilitators, staff and peer supporters/buddies must know how to raise safety concerns and should be trained in safeguarding to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all involved in the programme. A safeguarding policy and/or procedure should be in place, with all staff understanding how to respond live to any wellbeing concerns raised in individual or group environments during the programme.

Ensure Digital Safety:

When delivering virtual components, ensure your digital platforms allow participants to ask questions. For larger audiences, consider a managed Q&A to maintain appropriateness. Provide secure, safeguarded chat rooms where participants can connect with employees, and establish clear guidelines on communication, including access, availability, and expected behaviour.

Embedding chat functions for quick responses can help address access issues efficiently—personalised replies foster trust and prevent frustration. Ensure that all aspects of your programme meet GDPR* standards.

*GDPR definition / guidance

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) is a UK and EU law that protects personal data by setting strict rules on its collection, storage, and use. Find official guidance on the [ICO website](https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/).

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/>

Promote Digital Inclusion:

Provide access to necessary devices and internet, use user-friendly platforms, offer digital skills support, and ensure clear guidance so all participants can fully engage.

Promote Emotional Wellbeing:

Incorporate mindfulness or wellness check-ins into the programme, encouraging young people to share their thoughts and feelings in a way that is most comfortable to them – whether this be with the group, or a trusted peer. Clearly communicate how participants can access the safeguarding lead and any emotional support during the programme,

Provide Continuous Support:

Ensure clear signposting to mental health and wellbeing resources, financial assistance, and other support services that young people can access before, during and after your programme.



Principle 6:

Integrate transferable employability skills

Why It Matters

Traditional, passive learning methods can leave young people disengaged and unprepared for the demands of the modern workplace, while essential skills are often assumed or overlooked.

Embedding transferable employability skills—such as problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability—into hands-on, experiential learning ensures these competencies are developed in a meaningful way.

Real-world projects, simulations, and peer collaboration make learning more engaging while reinforcing critical skills that boost confidence, readiness, and long-term career success that support young people's development long after their work experience programme ends.



Key Considerations

Integrate Core Employability Skills:

Support young people to develop essential employability skills by integrating them into the modules of your programme, focusing on the most relevant and innovative topics that align with current industry trends and future job market demands, such as generative AI.

Include practical workshops for tasks like building CVs and interview skills/mock interviews so that the young people are better equipped for the next step in their employment journey.

Also consider including real-world workplace scenarios that emphasise key skill requirements, helping participants grasp the relevance and importance of transferable employability skills. Providing tasks and model answers allows participants to apply their knowledge and assess skills.

Incorporate scalable feedback on tasks and activities, drawing from industry insights, such as debriefing videos where an employer explains their approach to specific tasks.

Communicate Essential Skills Consistently:

Essential skills, such as teamwork, are typically broad concepts which are open to varying interpretation. A consistent language for essential skills development is essential so that no young person is left to assume or be left out.

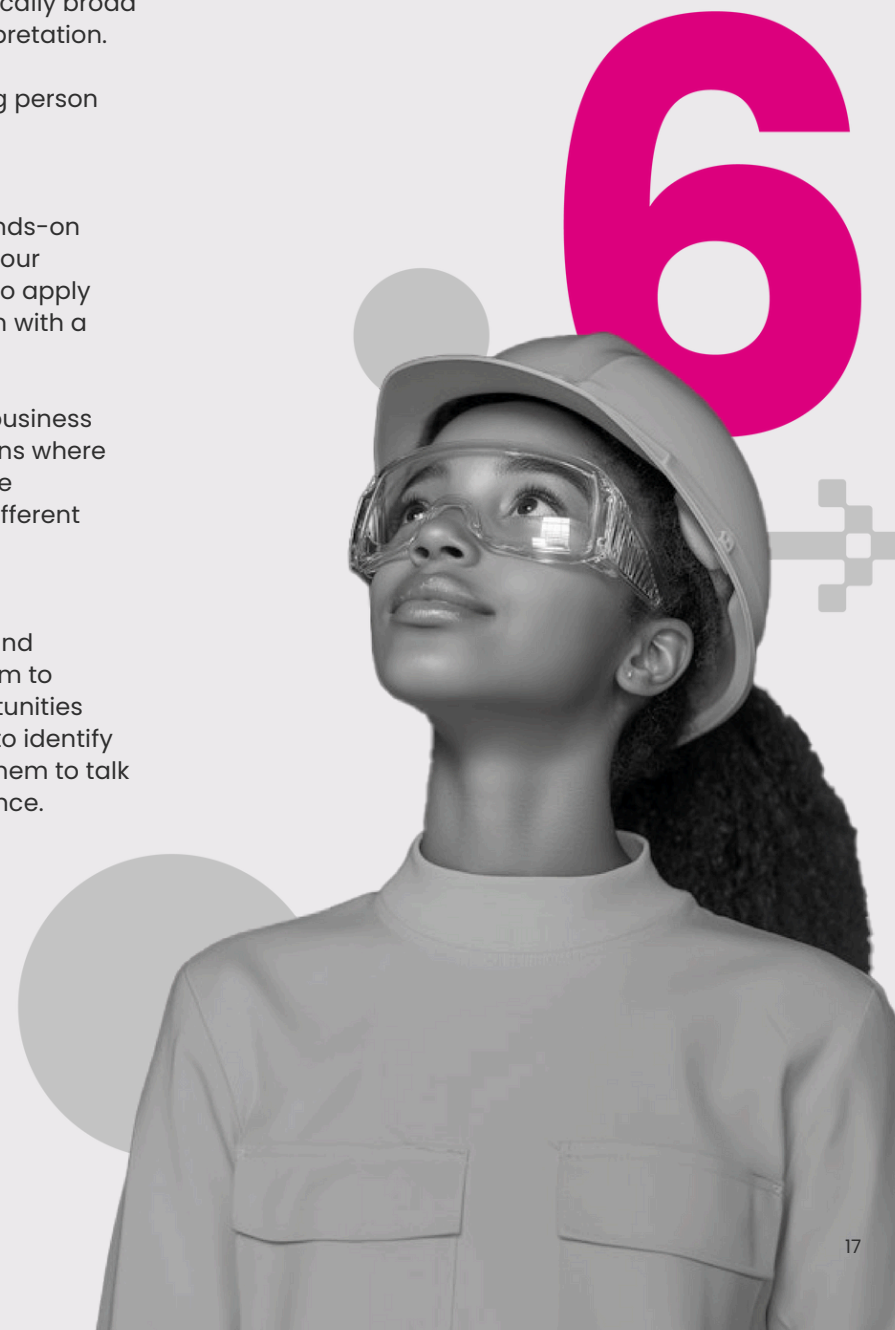
Facilitate Hands-On Projects:

Where feasible, involve participants in hands-on projects that reflect day-to-day tasks in your company or industry, encouraging them to apply existing and new skills and providing them with a sense of tangible achievement.

Consider visits to different departments/business units, site tours, or practical demonstrations where participants can experience the workplace environment first-hand and experience different parts of your organisation.

Develop Confidence & Soft Skills:

Help young people build self-assurance and essential interpersonal skills, enabling them to navigate learning, work, and future opportunities with confidence. Empower young people to identify the skills they already have and support them to talk about these skills with clarity and confidence.



Principle 7:

Track impact & iterate

Why It Matters

Without clear feedback processes and measurable outcomes, it's difficult to know whether a programme is truly making a difference.

Tracking progress ensures accountability, highlights successes, and helps refine future initiatives to better meet the needs of young people.

By gathering meaningful insights, such as employment outcomes, skill development, and participant feedback, you can continuously refine your approach to ensure each programme delivers lasting impact.

Iterating based on feedback from young people ensures the programme remains relevant and responsive to evolving social and business needs.



Key Considerations

Set Clear Success Metrics:

Define what success looks like for your programme. Key metrics may include participant retention rates, satisfaction scores, job placement or education enrolment percentages, alongside qualitative insights such as key stories and case studies. Make sure to include feedback from facilitators/mentors as well.

Stay Informed and Be Iterative:

Tap into data and research around the needs of young people and labour market insights to ensure your programmes and content remains relevant, inclusive, flexible, and impactful.

Leverage Analytics:

Incorporate analytics from virtual platforms, such as engagement and demographic data, into your data set while prioritising the safety and privacy of young people's information, and use your data to identify areas of improvement. For example, are participants starting but not completing the programme, and are you effectively reaching and supporting your target audience? This may prompt questions around the length of the programme or your outreach strategy. Integrate impact surveys before, during, and after the experience to assess learning outcomes related to career confidence and readiness.

Share Results Internally & Externally:

Communicate programme impact to staff and potential participants, celebrating success stories and identifying areas for improvement. Ensure you share participant feedback in any reporting alongside quantitative data.

Apply Learnings:

Explore how your approach to designing an equitable and impactful work experience programme can be extended to other departments or organisations. Consider how insights from young participants can help enhance experiences for everyone within your organisation.



Principle 8:

Celebrate achievements & long-term impact



Why It Matters

Recognition and celebration reinforce progress and build momentum. Many young people who are NEET have faced setbacks and self-doubt; acknowledging their achievements – big or small – can be a powerful motivator.

Publicly sharing success stories also helps inspire new participants, engage stakeholders, and demonstrate the programme's real-world value.

When we take the time to highlight growth and accomplishments, we create a culture of encouragement, pride, and continued ambition.



Key Considerations

Highlight Individual Stories:

Spotlight participant journeys and personal growth, using quotes or mini-interviews to capture real-life transformations.

Incorporate Opportunities for Young People's Feedback:

Youth voice is incredibly important to shape the refinement and success of work experience programmes.

Ensure that feedback is collected at multiple stages, especially once the programme is complete, in ways that prioritise authentic reflections from participants – e.g., 1-on-1 reflection meetings with a trusted point of contact.

Consider recruiting previous participants as mentors, advisors or ambassadors to support with the outreach and delivery of future cohorts.

Encourage Reflection:

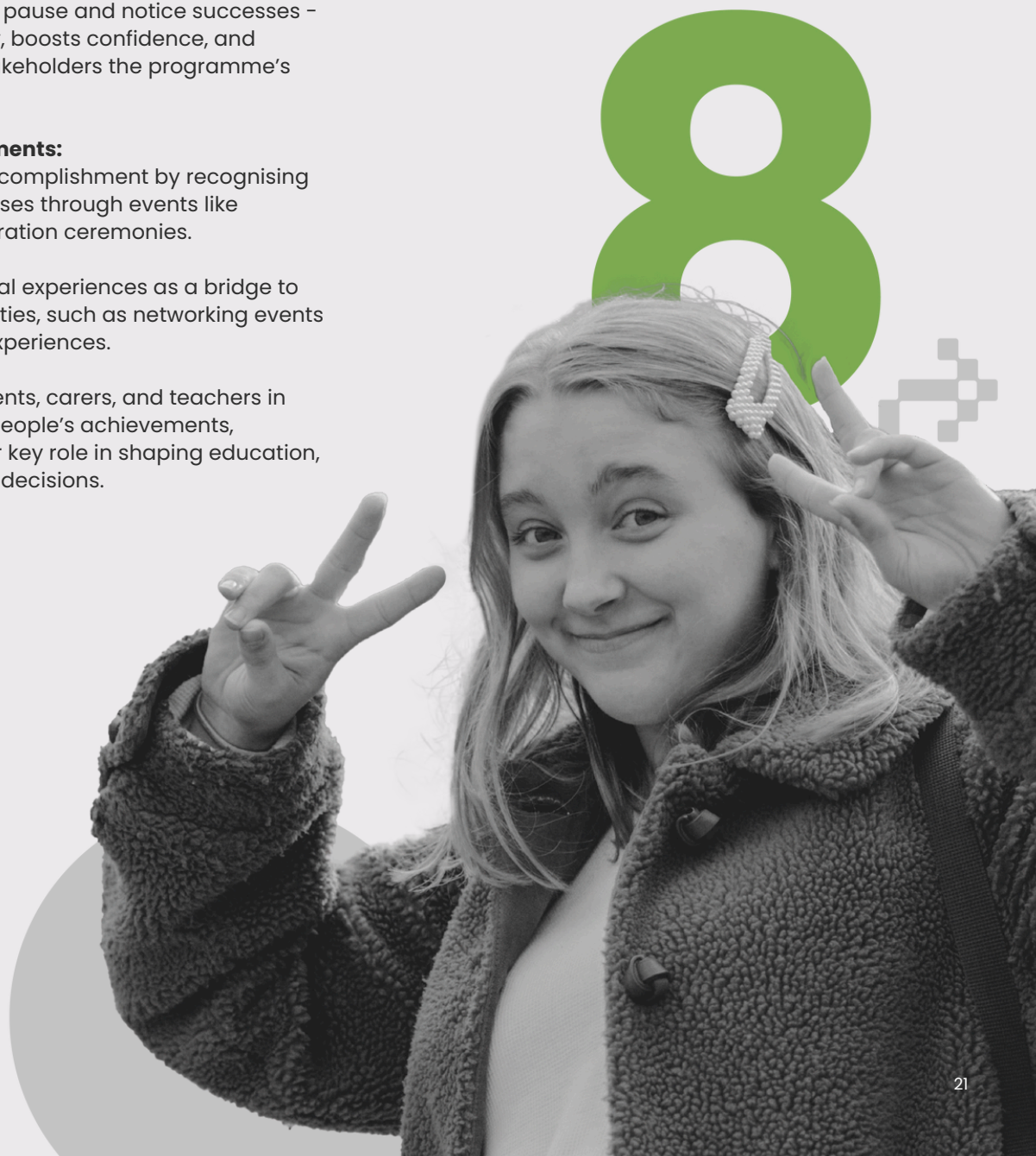
Build in moments to pause and notice successes – this fosters positivity, boosts confidence, and demonstrates to stakeholders the programme's qualitative impact.

Celebrate Achievements:

Foster a sense of accomplishment by recognising participants' successes through events like graduation or celebration ceremonies.

Consider using virtual experiences as a bridge to in-person opportunities, such as networking events or hands-on work experiences.

Actively involve parents, carers, and teachers in celebrating young people's achievements, acknowledging their key role in shaping education, training, and career decisions.



Principle 9:

Curate meaningful outcomes for all young people



Why It Matters

For young people who are NEET, the transition from work experience to the next step—whether employment, education, training, or further development—can feel uncertain and overwhelming.

Providing clear next steps, networking opportunities, post-programme resources and ongoing touchpoints helps sustain momentum and ensures young people leave with more than just experience—they leave with direction, a plan for what comes next, and a sense of confidence and excitement to enter (or re-enter) the world of work.

Key Considerations

Define the Desired Outcomes:

Establish to the young people in your programmes what a successful outcome looks like—whether that's employment, apprenticeships, further training, or increased confidence and employability skills.

Ensure these are clearly communicated to young people from the outset and throughout the programme.

Create Pathways to Employment:

Where possible, offer direct routes into entry-level roles, apprenticeships, or paid internships. If hiring is not an option, provide structured referrals to partner organisations, training providers, or other organisations within your supply chain.

Offer Ongoing Support:

Maintain communication with alumni through check-ins, mentorship, or job alerts. Consider creating a network where past participants can stay engaged, share experiences, and access ongoing professional development.

Provide Post-Programme Resources:

Ensure each experience includes clear directions to additional resources and recommended activities for further learning, such as career planning templates, access to employer networks/online communities, recorded masterclasses for continued learning, websites for pathways like apprenticeships, and college open days.

Provide Certification or References:

A well-documented record of achievement—whether in the form of a certificate, LinkedIn endorsement, digital badge or formal reference—can help young people showcase their experience to future employers.



From guidance to action

These nine principles provide a framework for building work experience programmes that truly work for both NEET young people and businesses, sourced from our wider community of partners and employers.

Together, we can create more equitable and inclusive workplace experiences through which all young people have the potential to thrive – breaking the ‘no experience, no job’ cycle and building meaningful pathways into employment, apprenticeships, education, training and further opportunities.

As the needs and challenges of young people and employers evolve, we will continue to co-create and refine guidance to ensure our support remains relevant and impactful.

Let's get started!

1. Use MtW's 'Work Experience Works' best practice guidance to leverage your work experience programmes as a pathway into impactful, inclusive, and cost-effective talent pipelines.

2. Explore the 'Work Experience Works' resource library on the campaign website below for case studies, templates, additional guidance, and more!

3. Share your own best practices, case studies, and success stories and help us spread this message far and wide.

If you haven't already, join the Movement!

We offer fully-funded professional support, and are here to help you make an impact.

If you know organisations in your network that would benefit, please introduce us!

Learn more at movementtowork.com



movementtowork.com/work-experience-works

