

How can we make work experience more useful?

Work experience can help young people from less advantaged backgrounds decide which profession or what type of career to pursue. But how accurate is it? And how well does it prepare young people for the workplace?

Previous Bridge Group research has found that work experience and other work exposure during sixth form and undergraduate study is a valuable source of information for young people from less advantaged backgrounds in planning their futures. However, we have also found instances where work experience can give an inaccurate impression of graduate-entry jobs, resulting in problems when new hires encounter reality.

We want to explore more fully the impact of work experience and other work exposure on young people: which aspects were most helpful in planning their futures? To what extent did the information they received and the tasks they undertook accurately reflect the reality of the workplace, once they got a job? What would they have liked to find out during work experience, or do differently? And what about employers: how do those running work experience acknowledge the less attractive aspects of a job (for example, an expectation of long working hours), without putting off potential applicants? Lastly, what are the relative benefits of face-to-face experience and online provision?

The Bridge Group's proposed research will explore these questions through:

- > Surveys of sixth-form students, undergraduates and recent graduates now in employment
- > Interviews with young people to explore questions in more depth
- > Interviews with employers running work experience relating to graduate-entry roles.

Our findings will enable us to develop practicable recommendations for employers and those who mediate work experience for making it more useful.

Contact penelope.griffin@the-bridgegroup.co.uk for more information.