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# Modern Work Experience Pilot

## Changing the way young people experience the world of work

## Academic Year 2025/26

**1,180** student experiences planned across 3 terms

**82** new employers engaged

**23** exsisting employers now engaging with WEX

**16** educational institutes taking part

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# INTRODUCTION



For many years, work experience has been associated with a single placement during Key Stage 4 (students aged 14-16), often delivered over one or two weeks. Whilst these placements can provide valuable experiences for young people, they have also presented challenges for schools and employers, including limited capacity, varying quality and unequal access to opportunities.



At the same time, the Government's ambition for every young person to access ten days of meaningful work experience throughout their secondary education has created **an opportunity to rethink how work experience is designed and delivered**. Rather than viewing work experience as a single event, the ambition is to **create a progressive journey** of employer encounters and workplace experiences that help young people build skills, knowledge, confidence and aspirations over time.



As part of the **National Modern Work Experience Pilot**, Greater Essex Careers Hub was selected to explore what this could look like in practice. Working with 16 secondary schools, employers, local authorities and strategic partners, the pilot set out to test whether meaningful work experience could begin earlier, reach more young people and be delivered in a way that was sustainable for both schools and employers.

What followed was far more than a pilot programme. Over the course of the academic year, the Careers Hub worked to influence, connect and support schools and employers across Essex, helping to build the foundations for a new approach to work experience. Conversations about meaningful work experience became embedded in employer engagement activity, schools began exploring how employer encounters could be integrated into curriculum delivery, and employers increasingly recognised that impactful work experience did not have to rely solely on traditional block placements.



## The Result:

The result was **1,180** planned student work experience opportunities, **82** new employers engaging with work experience and **23** existing employers expanding their activity. More importantly, the pilot demonstrated that meaningful work experience can be delivered earlier, more flexibly and more inclusively, whilst maintaining a strong focus on learner outcomes.

# WHY CHANGE?

When the pilot began, many schools continued to view work experience as something that happened towards the end of a student's secondary education. This often meant that young people had limited exposure to employers, workplaces and career pathways before making important decisions about their future, including GCSE option choices, post-16 pathways and future aspirations.

Schools also reported barriers including limited employer engagement, competing curriculum pressures and challenges securing senior leadership support for work experience activity.

Employers, meanwhile, often associated work experience solely with traditional one-to-one placements and felt they lacked the capacity to participate.

The challenge was therefore not simply to create more opportunities. It was to change perceptions, challenge established ways of working and create a shared understanding of what modern, meaningful work experience could look like.





## Stakeholder perspectives:

> ***This is so much better than a careers fair. Young people get to see the reality of what we do, discover careers they never knew existed, and build confidence through real conversations. That's where the impact happens.***
>
> Jo Norris and Penny Calder, Braintree District Council

> ***What an incredible insight and hands on experience the Modern WEX was for young people starting to think seriously about their futures.***
>
> Matthew Coffey, Careers Lead

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# BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

Creating meaningful work experience opportunities at scale required more than coordinating visits and matching schools with employers. It required a change in culture across the local education and employer ecosystem.

Throughout the pilot year, the Greater Essex Careers Hub actively championed Modern Work Experience through every available engagement opportunity. Discussions around work experience became a standard part of employer conversations, networking events, business forums and strategic meetings. The Hub attended district council business network meetings, created dedicated employer presentations, delivered webinars and used social media and communication channels to raise awareness of the changing national picture.

Work experience was also embedded into the Hub's internal systems, ensuring employer engagement processes increasingly focused on understanding the opportunities organisations could offer to young people. This represented a significant shift in the way employer relationships were developed and managed.









## Work experience working group:

The Careers Hub established a dedicated **work experience working group** and engaged **Cornerstone Employers** in a series of strategic discussions about the future of work experience. These conversations provided valuable insight into employer perspectives, identified barriers to engagement and created a growing network of advocates for Modern work experience across Greater Essex.

A dedicated work experience **Meet and Mix** event brought together pilot schools, employers and strategic partners to share learning and shape future plans.

Modern work experience also became a major focus of the **Greater Essex Careers Conference**, where a panel which involved employers, and education from the pilot discussed the opportunities and challenges involved in transforming work experience provision. Feedback identified these discussions as one of the highlights of the conference.

**Over time, the Hub's leadership in this area began attracting national attention. Practice developed through the pilot was shared through national Careers Hub networks, case studies received recognition from the Careers & Enterprise Company, and local examples of innovative practice were highlighted externally as examples of effective delivery. This work helped establish the Greater Essex Careers Hub as both a convenor and an advocate for modern, meaningful work experience.**

# THE JOURNEY

| Period | Focus |
|---|---|
| **Autumn 2025** | School expression of interest and pilot launch |
| **Autumn 2025** | Employer engagement, awareness raising and promotion of modern work experience |
| **Winter 2025** | Community of practice sessions for schools and employers |
| **Spring 2026** | Full delivery of work experience activities and employer-school collaboration |
| **Summer 2026** | Evaluation, sharing learning and planning future growth |

The pilot began in Autumn 2025 with an open invitation to schools across Greater Essex. Schools wishing to participate submitted expressions of interest and committed to a series of expectations, including senior leadership support, participation in peer learning opportunities and engagement with evaluation activities.

Following initial conversations with pilot schools, activity progressed from awareness raising into delivery planning, with schools and employers beginning to identify opportunities for meaningful work experience

Throughout the summer term, attention turned to evaluation, sharing learning and planning future growth. Schools and employers came together through networking and events, identifying opportunities to expand activity and strengthen collaboration in the years ahead.

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# KEY FINDINGS

**The pilot demonstrated that meaningful work experience can be successfully delivered through a progression model that begins at Key Stage 3 and develops over time.**







## Key findings included:

- Schools were more willing to engage when encouraged to enhance existing activity rather than create entirely new programmes.
- Employers responded positively to flexible engagement models, particularly small-group experiences, workplace visits and industry insight activities.
- Earlier exposure to the workplace helped students build awareness of career pathways before making important education and training decisions.
- The Equalex Framework provided a clear structure
- for planning experiences and shifted conversations towards learner outcomes rather than simply participation.
- Stronger collaboration between schools and employers created more accessible and sustainable work experience opportunities.
- The pilot demonstrated that a progression-based approach to work experience can increase engagement, broaden career awareness and create more meaningful pathways between education and employment.

## Stakeholder perspective:

> ***"For all of us at Railscape, it was a proud reminder of the role businesses can play in supporting young people.***
>
> Railscape Group

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# IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

## Student outcomes:

A significant outcome of the pilot was the expansion of work experience opportunities to Key Stage 3, enabling students to engage with the world of work earlier in their educational journey. This provided opportunities for young people to explore a wider range of industries, occupations and career pathways before making key decisions about their future education and training.

Feedback from participating schools indicated that students responded particularly positively to experiences that were interactive, practical and employer-led. These activities helped students make clearer connections between curriculum learning and future employment, while supporting the development of career awareness and confidence.

**Reported outcomes for students included:**

- Increased exposure to a broad range of industries and workplaces.
- Greater awareness of career pathways and progression opportunities.
- Improved understanding of the relevance of curriculum subjects to employment.
- Increased engagement through hands-on and industry-led experiences.
- Greater confidence when discussing future aspirations and next steps.



## Stakeholder perspective:

> ***To put it in a sentence - it's the most efficient, effective and accessible way of providing work experience to the largest possible number of pupils.***
>
> ***The pilot with Forest Hall school was very successful, enabling us to work with 15 pupils rather than one.***
>
> Charlotte Pratt, Learning and Outreach Officer, Saffron Walden Museum

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# IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

## Employer outcomes:

The pilot demonstrated strong employer appetite for work experience models that are flexible, scalable and aligned to business capacity. Many employers reported that small-group activities, workplace visits and industry insight sessions enabled them to engage with young people in a meaningful way while reducing the resource requirements associated with traditional placements.



The introduction of alternative delivery models enabled a broader range of employers to participate, including organisations that had previously been unable to support work experience provision.



**Reported outcomes for employers included:**

- Increased opportunities to engage with young people through flexible delivery models.
- Reduced operational demands compared with traditional one-to-one placements.
- Stronger partnerships with local schools and education providers.
- Greater awareness of their organisation, industry and career opportunities among young people.
- Opportunities to contribute to the development of future talent pipelines.

## Stakeholder perspective:

> ***Supporting SEND students through this project was a privilege.***
>
> Tim Hyde, Royal Mail

> ***It's wonderful to hear that some are now considering a future career in the NHS.***
>
> Kate Green, NHS Essex Health & Care Academy Manager

# IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

## School outcomes:

The pilot provided schools with a practical and sustainable approach to expanding work experience provision without significantly increasing staff workload. By building on existing activities and employer relationships, schools were able to introduce meaningful work-related learning opportunities while maintaining flexibility within their curriculum offer.

The programme also strengthened the relationship between careers education and curriculum delivery, supporting a more integrated approach to preparing students for future education and employment.

**Reported outcomes for schools included:**

- More effective use of existing employer partnerships and networks.
- Reduced delivery pressures through the use of targeted cohorts and group activities.
- Stronger integration of careers education within curriculum planning.
- Increased confidence in delivering meaningful work experience opportunities at KS3.
- Greater awareness and engagement from senior leadership teams.

## Stakeholder perspective:

> ***Thank you again for facilitating such a valuable experience for our young people. The students really enjoyed the challenge, and it was a really valuable experience for them.***
>
> School representative

> ***An excellent event and opportunity for students to engage in something different.***
>
> School representative

# SUCCESS AGAINST OBJECTIVES

| Objective | Outcome |
|---|---|
| Increase KS3 opportunities | Achieved |
| Engage new employers | Achieved (82 new employers) |
| Expand employer participation | Achieved (23 existing employers expanded activity) |
| Introduce Equalex Framework | Achieved |
| Develop progression-based model | Achieved |

**All pilot objectives were successfully achieved, demonstrating strong engagement from schools and employers and validating the progression-based approach tested through the pilot.**






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# INTRODUCING EQUALEX

## A framework for meaningful work experience

One of the pilot's most significant developments was the introduction of the Equalex framework. Equalex is a planning and quality framework that helps schools and employers create meaningful work experience opportunities that support progression, skills development and positive learner outcomes. While traditional work experience programmes often focus primarily on participation, Equalex places greater emphasis on purpose, progression and impact.

Rather than simply asking whether a young person attended an activity, the framework encourages schools and employers to consider the knowledge, skills and behaviours students will develop, how each experience connects to future opportunities, and how learning can build over time.

Equalex quickly became a shared language across the pilot, shaping discussions between schools, employers and partners. It provided a consistent approach to planning, delivering and evaluating experiences, helping participants move beyond viewing work experience as a standalone event and recognise it as part of a wider learner journey.




Importantly, Equalex was not intended to re-label educational visits as work experience. Instead, it encouraged activities to be strengthened through employer engagement, clear learning objectives, structured reflection and defined learner outcomes. This ensured that every experience made a meaningful contribution to students' career development.

Through this approach, schools and employers were able to design experiences that were more purposeful, inclusive and aligned with the wider ambitions of Modern Work Experience. As the pilot progressed, increasing numbers of schools and employers adopted the framework for planning and evaluation, reinforcing its role as a key enabler of change across the programme.

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# WHAT MEANINGFUL LOOKS LIKE

## Meaningful work experience isn't just watching. It's **exploring**, **participating**, **learning** and **growing**.

To support the implementation of the Equalex Framework, a clear definition of meaningful work experience was promoted across the pilot. Meaningful experiences are purposeful, outcome-focused and provide young people with authentic workplace exposure, practical tasks, feedback and opportunities for reflection. This approach helps students develop skills, confidence and career awareness while ensuring every experience contributes to positive learner outcomes.




The approach provides young people with **purposeful**, **interactive** and **practical** opportunities to engage with employers, develop **skills and confidence**, **gain real workplace insight**, receive valuable feedback and reflect on their **future education and career pathways**.

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# EVALUATION INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

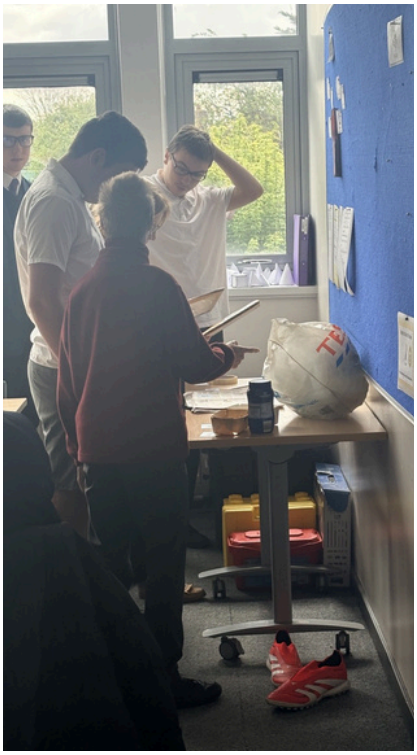
The pilot generated a number of important findings regarding the design and delivery of modern work experience. One of the most significant findings was that **meaningful change can be achieved through the adaptation of existing provision rather than large-scale programme redesign**. Schools were more likely to engage with the pilot when encouraged to build on established activities and partnerships, and evidence gathered throughout the programme indicated that small, manageable changes often resulted in substantial improvements to the quality, accessibility and scalability of work experience opportunities.

A further key finding was the growing emphasis on **outcomes-based planning**. Traditionally, work experience has often been measured by participation rates and attendance. Through the pilot, schools and employers increasingly focused on the intended learning and developmental outcomes of each experience.




**This approach encouraged consideration of:**

- The skills, knowledge and behaviours students should develop
- The intended learning outcomes of each activity
- How experiences contribute to a student's broader career journey
- How opportunities build on previous learning and employer encounters







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# EVALUATION INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## What worked well:

Analysis of pilot activity identified several principles that contributed to successful implementation:

- Small adaptations can generate significant improvements in learner outcomes.
- Flexible delivery models are more likely to secure engagement from both schools and employers.
- Earlier exposure to employers and workplaces can enhance career awareness and support future decision-making.
- Learning outcomes should be central to the design and evaluation of work experience activity.
- The Equalex Framework provides an effective structure for progression and consistency.
- Sustainable employer partnerships are strengthened through collaboration and responsiveness to employer capacity.

The pilot also highlighted the importance of senior leadership engagement. As schools began to see the benefits of the approach for students, staff and employer relationships, support from senior leaders increased, helping to embed work experience more strategically within whole-school careers provision.



## Recommendations for future delivery:

The findings from the pilot provide a clear basis for future development and scaling.

Priority areas for future activity include:

- Expanding the Key Stage 3 model across a wider network of schools.
- Embedding the Equalex Framework within ongoing work experience provision.
- Ensuring all experiences are planned and evaluated against clearly defined learning outcomes.
- Strengthening curriculum-linked employer engagement.
- Developing clearer progression pathways from Key Stage 3 through to Key Stage 4 and post-16 transitions.
- Building and sustaining long-term employer partnerships.

# CONCLUSION



The Pilot has demonstrated that meaningful, high-quality work experience can be delivered through flexible, inclusive and progression-focused approaches. The pilot has shown that earlier engagement with employers can increase career awareness, strengthen the relevance of curriculum learning and support young people to make more informed decisions about their future education, training and employment pathways.



The programme has also demonstrated that employers are willing to engage when opportunities are designed around organisational capacity, delivered through flexible models and supported by clear learning outcomes. By moving beyond traditional placement-based approaches, the pilot has enabled a broader range of employers to participate and contribute to the development of young people's skills, knowledge and aspirations.



Through the adoption of the Equalex Framework and strengthened collaboration between schools, employers and partners, the pilot has established a shared understanding of high-quality work experience.

Central to this success was the role of the Greater Essex Careers Hub. More than simply coordinating activity, the Careers Hub acted as a catalyst for change across the local education and employer ecosystem. Through sustained employer engagement, strategic partnership working, support for schools and the promotion of innovative delivery models, the Hub helped challenge traditional perceptions of work experience and build a shared commitment to a more flexible, inclusive and outcomes-focused approach. In doing so, it has laid strong foundations for long-term change that will continue to benefit young people across Essex.

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# THANK YOU

## Schools:

WOODLANDS SCHOOL
PURSUE EXCELLENCE & SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES

ST MARTIN'S SCHOOL

The Gilberd School
Engage, Endeavour, Excel

AMBITION & OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL
THE FITZWIMARC SCHOOL

The Sandon School

The Ongar Academy

Moulsham High School
Sixth Form

Joyce Frankland Academy
Newport

The King Edmund School

PLUME
Maldon's Community Academy

The James Hornsby School
Together we excel

HELENA ROMANES

FHS

ST. CLERE'S SCHOOL

NHS

## Employers:

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

Royal Mail

a.r.u.

NHS
Essex
Integrated Care Board

Ipeco

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Braintree District Council

RAILSCAPE

COLUMBIA THREADNEEDLE INVESTMENTS

Chelmsford Theatre

BlueSerif