



BETTER WORK EXPERIENCE REPORT

BY

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE YOUTH
PARLIAMENT

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Introduction

This report provides a brief summary of a consultation exercise carried out by Central Bedfordshire Youth Parliament (CBYP). The aim of this consultation was to find out whether young people agree that work experience in schools should be made compulsory, and to encourage young people to put forward ideas on how work experience can be improved.

From our research, we found that not all schools in Central Bedfordshire offer work experience, as this is no longer mandatory as the Government removed it from the curriculum in 2011. Amongst the schools that do offer work experience we have received mixed views from young people on how effective their work placements are, ranging from very effective to not appropriate / fit for purpose.

Last year, through the Make Your Mark campaign 876 young people from Central Bedfordshire voted for better and meaningful work placement opportunities. The overall consensus regarding this matter is that all young people living and learning in Central Bedfordshire should be given the opportunity to take part in meaningful work placement opportunities if they are to stand a chance in successfully competing in the job market or raising aspirations.

Methodology

CBYP designed an online and paper based questionnaire that collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Alongside the Young People's survey, we also ran a survey for local businesses to find out how they can get involved in providing meaningful placements.

Sampling Methods

The target age range for the survey was 14-17: **(Yr. 9- Yr. 12)**

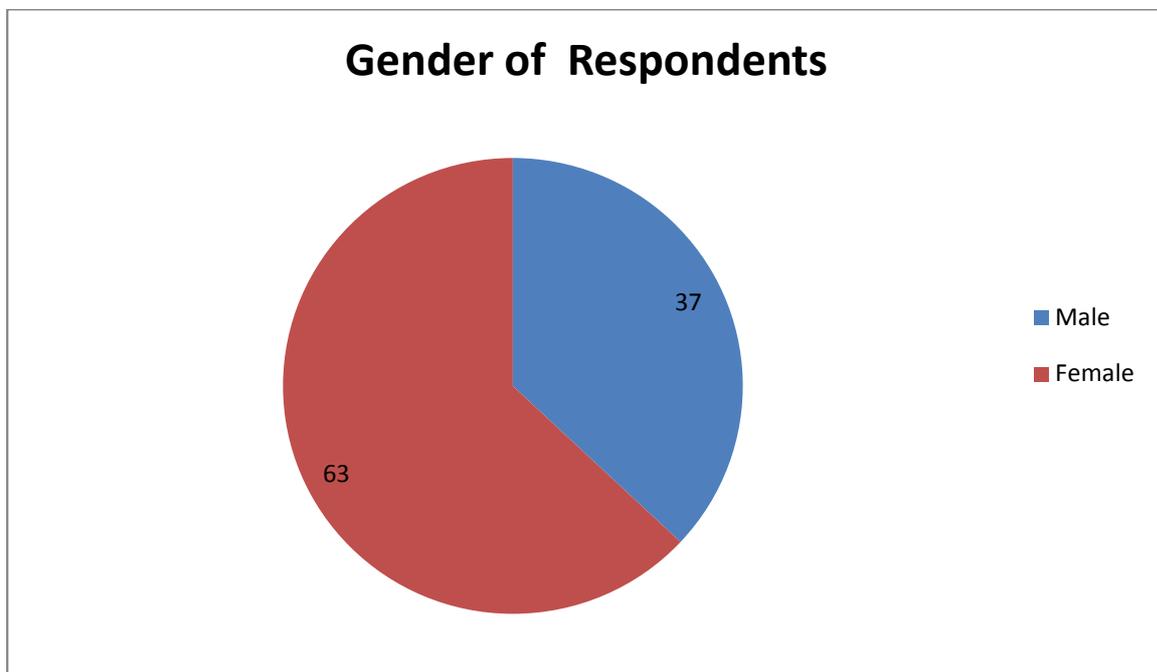
Due to the high usage of social media networking sites by young people, CBYP decided to use the snowballing sampling method. This is quick, accessible and a cost effective method of consulting with young people.

Results

n = number of respondents who took part.

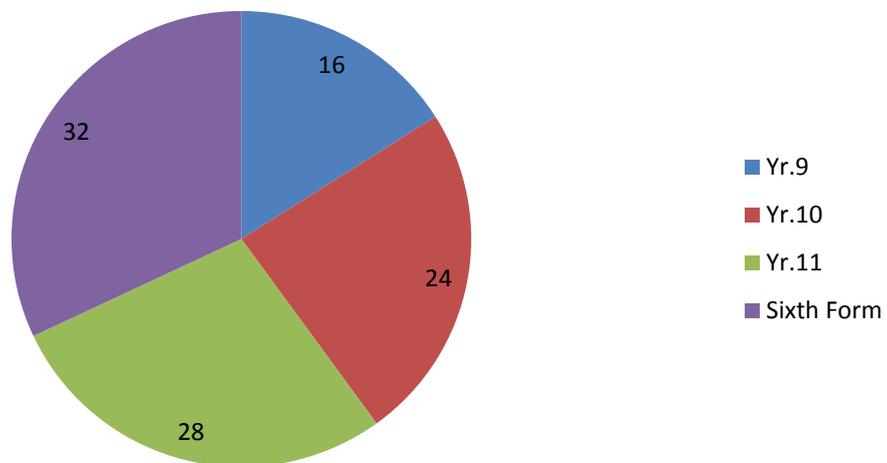
270 respondents took part in this survey. n=270

Profile of respondents



The graph above shows that more female respondents than males took part in this survey.

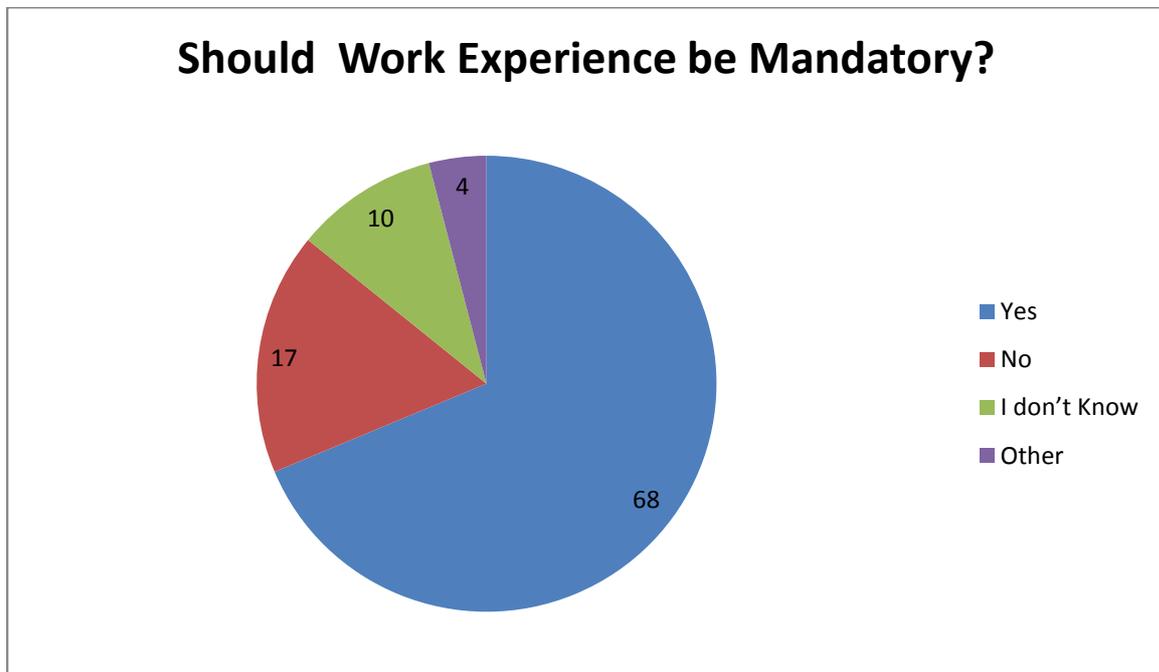
School Year of Respondents



The graph above shows that Sixth Formers were the highest respondents at 32%. Year 10 and 11 students had a relatively high response rate, with only a 4% difference amongst them. Year 9 students had the lowest respondents.

Question1: Do you think work experience should be mandatory?

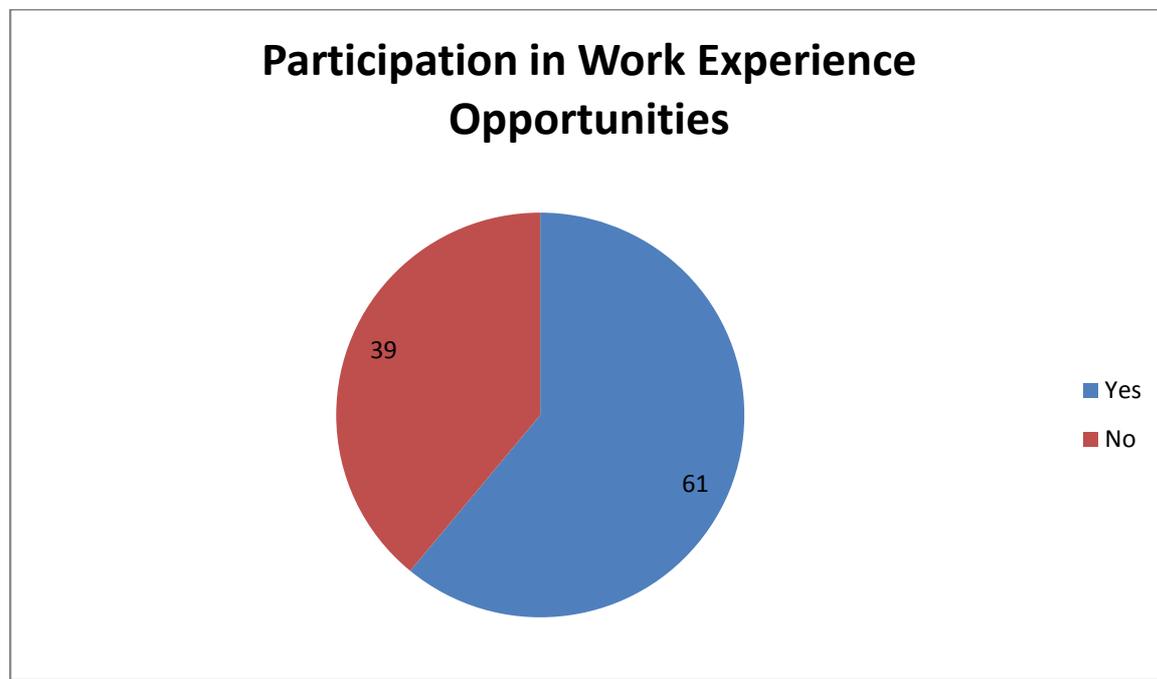
n =269 and 1 skipped the question.



68% of respondents said that work experience should be made mandatory whilst 17% disagreed. Some respondents suggested that work experience should be compulsory for under 16s and that work experience should form part of the educational curriculum. Contrary to this, other respondents have said that young people should be given the choice of whether to engage in work placement opportunities or not.

Question 2: Have you participated in any Work Experience opportunities?

n = 269 and 1 skipped the question.



The graph above shows that the majority of respondents have participated in work placements opportunities. Nevertheless, there is a relatively high percentage of young people who have not participated in work placement opportunities.

Among the respondents that have participated in work placement opportunities 59% of them rated work placement opportunities as being very useful or useful. Respondents said that work experience helped to raise career aspirations. On the contrary, 16% of the respondents found work experience not useful at all as they were often placed in working environments that were not relevant to their chosen career paths or placements lacked structure and the majority of their day was spent undertaking tasks such as filing, shredding or tea making.

Statements from respondents

'In terms of chosen career paths it is very difficult to get work experience at places that might be helpful e.g. vets. Most people end up at schools or in retail for their work experience. Can be helpful for getting part time jobs though, and learning some basic skills.'

'At the time I didn't have a 'chosen career path'. It did give me an insight into the routine of a career but I didn't exactly participate in such a routine; I merely watched it happen whilst shredding paper.'

'It was a good experience and it showed me further opportunities. However, if I had had my work experience somewhere more ordinary, I don't believe it would have been so helpful.'

'Not useful in the career path I'm looking at but everyone needs to start somewhere and it gives people an indication of what work is like'

'Had to work in sales, want to be a judge (eventually) '

'It wasn't related to my chosen career path '

Question 3: How do you think Work Experience can be improved?

n = 207 and 63 skipped the question.

Young people agreed that for work placements to be meaningful they need to be involved in the planning and developing of the placements. Young people have stated that placements need to be based on their interests and desired careers paths as this will motivate and inspire them to want to do more.

Respondents suggested that more work needs to be done around raising awareness on what opportunities local businesses can offer. In addition to this, respondents suggested that there is a need to get more businesses/companies offering young people work experience opportunities.

'I think that each school should organise a careers fair where the different work experience opportunities may be advertised to young people, which may encourage them to participate more actively.'

Contrary to this; drawing information from our employers' survey, some employers stated there are restrictions to offering work placement opportunities due to the cost of insurance and time. Strategic plans need to be implemented to address this barrier and other barriers that may hinder young people from accessing effective work placements. For example travel costs have been identified as a barrier to accessing placement opportunities within surrounding Authorities, access to a greater variety of opportunities such as medical/vetinary placements.

'It could be more available for people who are considering a job in health such as midwifery'

Young people stated that work placements need to have a comprehensive plan/structure where they are given adequate responsibility to meet the targets of the team thus creating a sense of self-fulfilment.

'I think that there should be a set programme or activity that should be set in order to allow young people to see what it is like to actually be working in a full time and full paid job'

'Treated like a colleague to get a real feel for what the job is like'

'The ability to be just like the other employees and perform the exact same tasks. Not be the "person hanging around" who simply cleans and hands out leaflets and picks stickers. As was my work experience'

'Potential placement after the two weeks are over. Engagement with various departments within the placement. Work that isn't mundane or a 'oh great, we have someone volunteering to do everything we don't want to do'

'More interest from schools about the benefits. Given better structure. Follow up work after it has finished to prove that it wasn't a pointless two weeks.'

A common theme from the respondents was assistance from schools in finding work placements and for career advisers to invest more time in preparing young people for this experience.

'I think maybe suggesting career paths or the benefits of working in a certain place in the future. Many people do not know where to go, what to do and it's a sad fact, many teenagers become anxious and nauseated by such a responsibility with little direction on where to go. It's like planning for what and where you want to go but without knowing the customs or the geographical mapping of it. It's strange, new and can be stressing for young teens to go through with it especially if you're uncertain in what you decide.'

'Increased consultation with staff at the school during its organisation'

'We need to have more prep work on interviews, what to expect and how to write a letter/email on how to ask for a work placement'

'Encourage local companies to come in to school and talk about what they do to encourage students to look for more varied placements than the local lower school'

Young people suggested that work experience opportunities should be made longer as this will enable improved learning. Some young people suggested making work placement opportunities available to Year 9 students. Others suggested having work placements at a later age such as sixth form where it may be more valued. However, not everyone enrolls into sixth form, therefore making it available at an earlier age is more prudent.

Some young people have said that the timing of work experience is very crucial. That is, work placements should not be arranged when exams are nearing;

'More options, if you're young then some places won't accept you. Also at a better time of the year, mine was just before my exams last year and it wasn't helpful as I was missing out on study time'.

A small percentage of the respondents suggested using incentives to motivate the young people such getting paid or vouchers.

Question 4: What opportunities would you like from an effective work placement?

n=172 and 98 skipped the question.

A common theme across most of the respondents was that young people wanted work experience opportunities to be relevant to their chosen career paths with access to professional career placements. Young people stated that they wanted to be placed in challenging environments where they were given real responsibility as this will aid them in developing a range of skills that they can transfer into adulthood.

'I would like new opportunities and challenges as well as an effective environment that would be much like working when older.'

Another common trend among the respondents was for placement opportunities to develop into apprenticeships over the summer holidays.

'Potential paid work experience placements in the summer for example, information on the career path, chance to get out and experience a real day in the life of the career'

The majority of respondents stated there was a need for intensive one to one support with their designated supervisor. Young people saw this as a necessity as not all young people are confident and some might be anxious going into a new environment. More importantly young people thought this could be a great opportunity to shadow a professional and learn from them.

A recurring theme throughout the response was a link between work experience and future apprenticeships and the opportunity to gain advice from the employer on how to get into the chosen field.

'Offers of a job or an apprenticeship'

Awareness of what is involved in the particular career, advice from the professionals and a chance to be as involved as possible.

Maybe offered a small job afterwards, valuable information on applying for jobs getting jobs. A write up to be able to put into your CV.

Networking opportunities, feedback for improvement in performance, etc. - opening gates for the future, really

Discussion

This section provides a cross analysis between the young peoples' survey and the local employers' survey. Unfortunately we had considerably fewer participants in our employers' survey, despite using local networks and Central Bedfordshire Councils Business and Regeneration Directorate to help us promote our survey.

From the results above it is clearly evident that young people have found work experience opportunities beneficial. Among the respondents that have not participated in work experience opportunities due to age restrictions there have been suggestions to lower the work experience age opportunities to year 9 thus making it widely available.

The majority of the respondents agree that work experience should be mandatory. This view is also shared by the majority of the respondents that took part in our local employer's survey. Both young people and employers saw mandatory work experience as a positive vehicle for engaging and inspiring disaffected or disengaged young people. If work experience opportunities are not made mandatory disengaged young people may never access these opportunities hence resulting in unemployment or anti-social behaviour. Nonetheless, although employers and young people feel that work experience should be mandatory young people should be given the opportunity to choose a placement of their choice.

As stated earlier, young people have found work experience beneficial. However, there is a need to **Get it Right**. Young people have expressed disappointment at being placed in inappropriate settings or made to do minor jobs such photocopying, shredding and feeling like a bystander.

In order to engage young people in effective and meaningful placements there is a need to develop access to professional jobs; involve young people in the planning and development processes of their placements; give them the opportunity to do more; and employers need to give young people more responsibility with regular supervision. Some of the above notions are supported by the local employers who took part in our survey;

'Providing adequate meaningful things for them to do or the guidance to keep them on track and learning something'.

'Time and expertise in working with young people, not just using them to make coffee, but plan a comprehensive training plan for them'

In terms of challenges that prevent employers from offering work experience placements the issues cited were, money, and proper structured work and outside support, time needed to support the young people and poor organisation by the schools and authorities.

Overall Recommendations

Given that 68.03% of young people surveyed believe that work experience should be mandatory Central Bedfordshire Youth Parliament will continue to campaign for 'Better Work Experience' on behalf of its constituents.

There was also research conducted by Barclays-backed education programme LifeSkills in 2013 this found that almost nine out of 10 (86 per cent) teachers think compulsory work experience placements should be brought back. The proposal was backed by an almost identical (87 per cent) proportion of the 14 to 25-year-olds surveyed as part of the LifeSkills Youth Barometer.

The CBYP team recommend that as the majority of teachers and young people feel strongly about the topic their voices need and deserve to be heard.

Better Work Experience Recommendations and Actions	
1.	To meet with DCS at CBC and the portfolio holder for Education and Skills
2.	Arrange meetings with local MP's to share findings
3.	Publish report and share with Schools
4.	Actively promote the benefits of undertaking work experience to young people, schools and employers
5.	Seek support from CBC to lead by example and offer work experience placements in all departments
6.	CBYP members to meet with their Headteachers

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