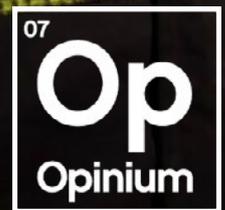


# Career Ready at 18

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How employer engagement boosts local social mobility, attainment, and wellbeing for young people



# About this report

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We were founded in 2002 by leading business figures with a mission: to boost social mobility by empowering young people and giving them access to a network of workplace opportunities and support.

Through our network of employers, volunteers, schools, and colleges, we provide young people with a structured, programme built around experiences of the world of work. Students on our programme receive a paid four-week internship, the support of a mentor, skills masterclasses, and workplace visits. To mark our 18th year, we have worked closely with Opinium, thanks to the support of Citi and the Citi Foundation, to evidence the impact this programme has made to young lives over the years and discover how we can best support even more young people - now and in the future.

For this research, Opinium took a multi-stage and multi-methodology approach, using a combination of desk research, an online quantitative survey and semi-structured telephone interviews with the alumni of our programme. This approach was chosen to set the research in context, provide robust measures to evaluate performance, and provide a depth of insight to illustrate key features of participation and develop case studies. The survey was conducted with 411 Career Ready alumni aged 18-35 across the United Kingdom over a period of 6 months from November 2019 to April 2020. The data from this was matched against a control survey of 500 people who were demographically matched to the alumni but did not take part in the programme.

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# Case study

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## Daniel Clarke, a 2006 Career Ready alumnus from East London who now works for Amazon

I grew up in a big family, living in Stratford in East London with my parents and six older siblings. I had a good family life, but Stratford was a 'difficult' area back then, not like it is now. I went to a school that had a poor reputation, but it was the most convenient option, especially as my parents were working.

Education was never my strong point. When I was in Year 5, I realised that all the other kids could read an entire book while I was struggling to read at all. I started to feel isolated and somewhat jealous of them. Back then, no one talked about dyslexia or mental health, and I didn't feel able to talk to my parents about my difficulties at school as all my siblings had done well at school and gone to university. I didn't get much support at school so I just gave up on learning. This led to me getting mixed up with the wrong crowd, skipping lessons and ending up in detention. I ended up with only one GCSE.

Failing my GCSEs gave me a new-found focus and, with a bit of luck, I got into college to do GNVQ Business Studies where I heard about Career Ready. The internship aspect really stood out to me – it seemed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

My first year of college was all about taking classes and studying independently, while the second year was spent preparing for my internship, buying a suit, and then applying for

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five companies I wanted to do an internship with. I was so proud when I was successful in getting one with Citi. It gave me a new-found sense of self-belief and I was also shocked by the amount of support I received without judgment.

When someone supports you and they don't know you - they just believe in you because you're a young person who's trying to do better, it's just such an amazing feeling.

After I completed the programme and left college, I went on to study BA Business Management at university, leaving with a first-class degree. I now work as a Recruitment Manager for Amazon. My responsibilities include stakeholder management, forecasting and making decisions regarding hiring. For the next few years, I see myself continuing working at Amazon. However, in the longer term, my goal is to go into charity work, so I can give back and support young people who find themselves in similar situations I was in fourteen years ago.

# What we found

By connecting young people aged 15-18 to the world of work we are able to make a real difference at a crucial point in their education: boosting their confidence and empowering them to reach new heights in education and the workplace. The four key findings of our research were:

## 1. Enhanced social mobility and capital at a local level

We root young people in their local area, giving them the support networks and workplace opportunities to experience social mobility in their community.

While there is naturally some change in where Career Ready alumni live now compared to where they grew up, this is not much more than would otherwise be expected in the population at large. Where students did move out of the local area, it was predominantly to go to university rather than employment. Given the higher post-16 attainment of our alumni compared to the control group, this provides an interesting and achievable solution to the issue of talent drain in regions across the UK.



**72%** of alumni said it helped them build a local network who could support them with future career opportunities



**43%** of alumni had not moved out of their local area

## 2. Increased academic and career attainment

Working with our network of employers and educators, we enhanced the post-16 education attainment and career prospects of our alumni, achieved primarily through our paid four-week internships. Despite lower levels of attainment at GCSE or Scottish National 5 level, alumni are more likely to be in full-time education compared to their non-programme peers, with two thirds of 18-21-year-old alumni in full-time education.

For those alumni not currently in full-time education, they are more likely to be in full-time jobs, while their non-programme peers often find themselves unemployed and are more likely to be in part-time work. Furthermore, our alumni have stronger key workplace skills and therefore better set to succeed in the workplace.



**95%** of alumni secured HE or FE qualifications, compared to 77% of their non-programme peers



Alumni had a better grasp of time management (63%) and planning skills (59%), cited by employers as a core skills

### 3. Wellbeing through workplace experiences

We also found that our support had a wider, more personal impact. Alumni had a more positive outlook on life, higher life satisfaction, and a more positive view of themselves.

This was instigated by their enhanced growth of skills, opportunities, and workplace experience. Young people who have had the benefit of going through the programme are much more likely than their non-programme peers to feel they are significantly or somewhat ahead of their peers when it comes to their career trajectory.



**87%** of alumni say that the programme had a positive impact on their life



Alumni are twice as likely to view themselves as hardworking after the programme, 62% vs 31%



**80%** of alumni said they have the things they consider important in life, compared to 72% of non-programme peers

### 4. The power of internships

Paid internships were found to be especially powerful in transforming young lives, enhancing social capital, and enabling localised social mobility.

The experience of a paid internship is the foundation of all the wider impacts the programme has: being the spark behind increased academic attainment, providing greater insights into the world of work, and rooting young people in their local communities.



**63%** of alumni said that they would not have the careers they now have without their internship



**59%** of alumni said their internships improved their planning, cited by employers as a key workplace skill

# What we recommend

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Based on these findings, we have three core recommendations for policy makers, employers, and other organisations working in education and the third sector. Each one is designed to boost social mobility, level up local areas, and provide much needed support for young people aged 15-18 at a crucial point in their education and life.

## 1. Employers need to invest further in paid internships

We are calling for employers to provide deeper investment in young people by expanding their paid internship provision, or introducing it, for young people aged 15-18.

Many employers are already providing high-quality opportunities for young people, however it is imperative that this is expanded further. 'The Young Person's Guarantee' in Scotland is a prime example of the level of expansion required. It is also crucial that we make it easier for employers to provide such support, so, in England, we are calling for the government to unlock the apprenticeship levy to give employers the flexibility to use it for pre-apprenticeship workplace activities such as paid internships.

As our research shows, not only will this equip young people with the core workplace skills they need in the workplace, with 63% reporting an increase in time management skills and 59% a boost in planning and organising skills, but it will help boost social mobility and level up areas across the UK.

## 2. SMEs as a gateway to boosting local opportunities

We need to boost the capacity of SMEs to provide paid internships in coastal and market towns, where SMEs are the backbone of the local economy. SMEs can be drivers of localised social mobility opportunities, yet they are often unable to provide paid opportunities due to limited resources.

One solution is to enhance the power of LEP Networks to give SMEs the financial support they need to provide paid opportunities for young people. A further creative initiative is Internship Investment Partnerships which would see two businesses split the cost of the paid internship, with the young person spending time between the two organisations over a four-week period. This model has been successfully used by Career Ready in Scotland for several years, aided by Developing the Young Workforce youth employment strategy and other bodies.

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### 3. Mentoring across every organisation

Employers need to ensure that they have a mentoring outreach programme for people outside and within their organisation on top of increased internship opportunities. Our research and experience show that the mentoring and paid internship combination acts as a tipping point in the development of young people.

To achieve this, first, we recommend that every employer provides mentoring to students at schools and colleges in their local area. As this research highlights, mentoring helps open up young people's skills, confidence, and future career opportunities, with 64% of our alumni saying they have a network who can help them find a job in the future.

Second, it is imperative that mentoring via social mobility champions is embedded within the workplace. The challenge of social mobility is not solved as soon as someone secures their role within a company, as an individual's background is often a limiting factor on their workplace progression. Both are initiatives which every employer can and should be implementing within their organisation.





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