

Work Experience Insights: Year 1 equalex pilots

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Context	1
1.2 Data on work experiences	2
1.3 Year 1 - equalex pilots	3
1.4 Learning insights approach	4
2. The equalex pilots	6
3. Summary of findings	9
4. Conditions for success	12
4.1 Clear quality work experience standards via the equalex framework	12
4.2 Strengthened Careers Hub role in coordination	19
4.3 Better, more efficient engagement for employers of all sizes	24
4.4 Increased and equitable access to meaningful work experiences	32
4.5 Enhanced school and provider capacity to deliver	39
4.6 Early evidence of positive experiences and outcomes for learners	46
5. Implications	50
 Appendix A: Logic model – learning from the equalex pilots	 52
Appendix B: Work experience insight questions	53
Appendix C: Revised high-level logic model	54

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Updated statutory guidance from the Department for Education (May 2025) requires schools, colleges and providers to meet revised Gatsby Benchmarks. All institutions should adopt the updated benchmarks from September 2025. The [Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance](#) support the Government's vision for 2 weeks' worth of work experience¹ for every young person by the end of year 11. The intention is to raise quality and drive equity for young people in their work experience, particularly those who face disadvantage. **Benchmark 6** includes the expectation of multiple, meaningful and progressive work experiences.

Gatsby Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces

Every learner should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks. **For schools:** by the age of 16, every pupil should have had meaningful experiences of workplaces

Work experience plays a central role in preparing learners for the world of work, helping them make informed choices and build the knowledge, skills and behaviours that underpin career readiness and employability. To support this, The [Careers & Enterprise Company \(CEC\)](#) has developed [equalex](#), a framework of progressive learning outcomes supported by learner-level objectives. [equalex](#) is designed to ensure work experiences are purposeful, high-quality and measurable, providing a consistent structure for schools, specialist settings, employers and careers delivery providers to adopt.

[equalex](#) provides a solution for the Government's [new guarantee](#) of two weeks' worth of work experience for every young person from 2025. The guarantee reflects an ambition to build a modern, equitable system of work experience that goes further than simply one-off placements. It is rooted in progressive and meaningful encounters, aligned with Gatsby Benchmark 6, and aims to ensure every young person, regardless of background, can explore a range of industries, build confidence, and develop skills valued by employers. The **work experience guarantee** includes two stages enabling young people to access workplaces throughout their secondary school learning journey: one weeks' worth of provision in Key Stage 3, with multiple and varied employer-led activities in various industries; and a second week's worth of placements in Key Stage 4, to be matched to the learner's interests, allowing them to develop workplace understanding, knowledge and behaviours.

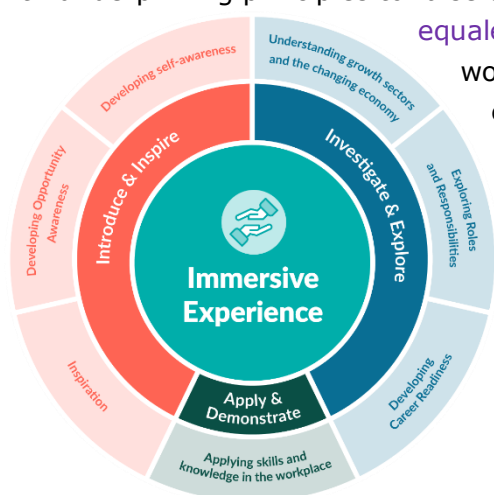
What is modern work experience?

A programme of modern work experience should:

- Prioritise young people who are missing out and provide targeted support	- Start early, allowing access to multiple, different industries and occupations
- Include experiences that are employer-led in their design	- Be underpinned by learning outcomes, to ensure a progressive high-quality approach
- Enable meaningful relationships between the employer and young person	- Offer meaningful experiences as defined in updated Gatsby Benchmark 6

¹ Work experience is used throughout in this report, and is the same as workplace experiences as defined in Gatsby Benchmarks.

To support this ambition, CEC is offering equalex as a practical solution to embed the guarantee, with underpinning principles to raise quality, start early and ensure system wide cohesion. The



equalex framework enables high-quality, targeted and multiple work experiences throughout secondary education. It drives equity and enables a progressive approach tailored to individual needs. Young people are supported to gain the skills, knowledge, and behaviours they require to make informed decisions to take their best next steps. The **equalex framework** defines learning outcomes and objectives across three phases of activity to facilitate a programme of **modern work experience**.

1.2 Data on work experiences

CEC **national data** shows encouraging progress in students' access to and participation in work experiences before the end of KS4. In 2024/25:

- 77% of mainstream schools (+1%pt from 2023/24) reported the majority of pupils had an experience of a workplace by the end of Year 11 – a 21%pts improvement since 2021/22 (56%).
- In special schools, 78% of pupils had an experience of a workplace by Year 11 (+1pt from 2023/22) - a 19%pts improvement since 2021/22 (59%).

Operational data collected from 44 Careers Hubs across England in 2024/25 (based on responses from 3,149 schools)² shows:

- Work experiences are mainly **delivered** through longer "block" placements (47%), followed by shorter (under 1 week) placements (21%) and employer visits (9%), showing scope for a more flexible approach, widening the potential pool of employers.
- Most block experiences are **planned** 6 to 12 months in advance (45%). Other work experiences generally require less lead time, with the majority planned 2 to 6 months ahead (41%), again demonstrating scope for more flexible embedding within the curriculum.
- Work experience activities predominantly occur in **Year 10** (84%), followed by Year 12 (58%), Year 11 (44%), and Year 9 (42%), indicating potential for early intervention.
- 87% of work experiences take place in the **summer/spring term**.
- The top three approaches to finding work experiences are: schools' own networks (70%), **learners self-organising** (63%), and **parental support** (56%), which suggests access is not equitable for learners.
- Schools most frequently **engage parents/carers on:** consent requests (88%), overview/introductory information (86%), and requests for support to secure experiences (68%).

² 65% of all schools

- The main ways institutions **engage with employer** partners are: contact when opportunities arise (61%), invitations to in-person events (51%), and requests for placements (37%), indicating scope for a more systematic approach.
- 71% of schools have work experience **budgets** of under £2,000 per year.
- The main **barriers** for students accessing work experience are: not being ready due to behaviour, mental health, confidence, needs, or disability (34%), followed by lack of employer supply and/or funding (29%).
- Schools generally **prioritise access** for young people with SEND (61%), economically disadvantaged learners (54%), and looked-after children (43%).

This picture underscores the importance of adopting a more structured, flexible and progressive model, starting early and integrated into the school journey. equalex directly addresses these gaps by providing clarity on what outcomes should be achieved, how progress should be measured, and how a more flexible set of experiences can be arranged with employers, distributed across year groups, and where possible linked to the curriculum.

In the Year 1 pilot of equalex the focus has been on testing and embedding the framework within the established careers education system. Early results show that when outcomes are clearly defined, barriers are reduced, delivery is more consistent, and impact is more measurable. This is particularly important for learners experiencing disadvantage.

The equalex framework helps create a careers system where every young person benefits from meaningful, progressive work experiences, and where barriers to implementation are systematically identified and removed. The approach will be critical in ensuring the Government's guarantee achieves its full potential, raising both quality and equity for young people across England.

1.3 Year 1 - equalex pilots

Delivered through Careers Hubs, the equalex framework was **piloted in 2024/25** within four combined authority areas and across five multi-academy trusts (MATs). The work with Careers Hubs and employers was funded through a variation agreement from DfE and the work with multi-academy trusts took place within a national community of improvement. Alongside this, the CEC worked with partners to test an approach to engaging small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and a large employer collaborative model for modern work experience.

Place-based pilots with Careers Hubs

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)
West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCR)
West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)

Multi-academy trusts (MATs)

Coop Academies Trust
The Priory Federation of Academies Trust
Lift Schools
Three Spires Trust
Hartlepool Aspire Trust

Employer pilots

KPMG UK and The Talent Foundry – Mace, HSBC, Canary Wharf Group, United Airlines, Salesforce
SME engagement events (West Midlands and Liverpool)

York Consulting LLP (YCL) were commissioned to support insight generation from the pilots, alongside developing and testing the logic model for the equalex framework. The aim was to support the CEC with observations and evidence to address these research questions:

- How does the equalex approach (through Careers Hubs) facilitate implementation of two weeks' worth of high-quality work experience for all students, focusing on learner outcomes, by the end of Key Stage 4?
- How can barriers to successful implementation of the equalex approach best be removed?

1.4 Learning insights approach

Over the period from February to July 2025, YCL worked with the CEC and the pilots as a learning insights partner. An initial set-up phase of activity involved:

- Scoping interviews and document review.
- Design of an overarching equalex pilots logic model for the equalex pilots (see Appendix A).
- Development of a framework for gathering work experience insights (see Appendix B).
- Workshops with pilot project teams to refine and develop logic models and delivery plans at pilot level.

In acting as the insights partner York Consulting has worked in partnership with CEC to utilise evidence collected from a variety of sources including primary data (collected by York Consulting) and secondary data (collected by pilot areas and evidence from CEC staff). The report has been co-authored by York Consulting and CEC.

The logic model demonstrated a set of activities, outputs and intended outcomes, leading to the intended impact. Outcomes identified the '**conditions for success**' required to deliver the policy intent for modern work experience using equalex as a supporting quality framework. The **insight questions** sought to understand whether the equalex framework is fit for purpose, the 'what and how' of implementation, and the implications and recommendations for roll-out to other areas.

Subsequently, the evaluators engaged regularly with the pilots over the summer term to gather insights and reflections, through:

- Regular check-in meetings with project teams.
- Participation in pilot level communities of practice (which brought together schools, employers, and Careers Hubs).
- Review of evidence gathered from the range of stakeholders (Careers Hub and combined authority staff, local authorities, schools, providers, employers and young people) - such as trackers, surveys, focus groups, case studies, and insight/evaluation reports.
- One-to-one interviews and focus groups with school staff, employers and young people.

These mechanisms enabled an iterative process for the evaluators to develop an understanding of equalex implementation, gathering insight into the steps necessary to achieve the 'conditions for success', the models and resources used, the essentials for success and challenges faced.

At the same time (and building on emerging evidence and discussions with pilots), CEC undertook an exercise to refine the equalex national logic model. This new high-level logic model (Appendix C):

- Defines the conditions for success into six main themes.

High-level conditions for success:

- Clear quality work experience standards via equalex framework
 - Strengthened Careers Hub role in coordination
 - Better, more efficient engagement for employers of all sizes
 - Increased and equitable access to meaningful work experiences
 - Enhanced school and provider capacity to deliver
 - Early evidence of positive experiences and outcomes for learners
- Relates each level in the logic model to each of the key actors (young people, employers, schools/educators, providers, Careers Hubs, parents/carers and the national system).
- The remainder of this report sets out the key messages arising from the research as follows:
- Section 2 provides an overview of the equalex pilots, describing what and who was involved.
 - Section 3 presents a summary of findings.
 - Section 4 outlines insights in relation to each of the revised conditions for success, referencing the role of Careers Hubs, implementation steps, example approaches and stakeholder feedback on value, successes, and challenges.
 - Section 5 concludes with implications in relation to each of the insight questions addressed.

2. The equalex pilots

Each of the place-based, MAT or employer equalex pilots had a unique focus for their testing and exploration of effective modern work experience delivery. The combined authority pilots linked with place-based priorities; the MATs developed approaches to adopting the equalex outcomes; and the employer projects explored collaborative approaches and engagement.

	equalex pilot focus	Student year groups
GMCA	equalex as keystone of Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) ³	Year 9 and 11
LCR	Local growth sectors and cluster stakeholder engagement	Year 9 and 10
WMCA	Engaging disadvantaged students	Years 7 to 11
WYCA	Provider commissioning and delivery	Years 7 to 10 (some Years 12 to 14)
MATs	Trust/school curriculum models to test equalex approach and the validity of the learning outcomes and objectives	Years 7 to 11
Employer projects	Collaborative work experience delivery model SME engagement in work experience	Year 9

The placed-based pilots were managed by a mix of Careers Hub and combined authority staff and the national CEC team led the MAT and employer projects. Delivery stakeholders included local authority staff, a specialist education leadership consultant, schools, providers and employers.

The extent of activity delivered through the place-based pilots across the four combined authority areas and five multiple-academy trusts is set out below:

66 Schools	4 Providers
114 Employers	Over 2,500 Young People

A range of inception and scoping activities were delivered across the pilot projects from January 2025 onwards, with most of the work experience planning and delivery taking place over the Summer Term 2025. The available timeframe limited the scope and scale of insight. However, the

³ The MBacc is a proposed new technical qualification that students could opt to study in Year 9, with each student expected to complete 50 hours' work experience between Year 9 and 11. It aims to guarantee every young person growing up in the city-region has a clear path and line of sight to the good jobs and training opportunities in Greater Manchester. It places technical education on equal footing with academic routes and connects young people directly to the fastest-growing sectors shaping the regional economy.

first pilot year provided a valuable foundation and generated evidence of promise, highlighting opportunities for year 2. Delivery activities across the Year 1 pilot projects included:

School and educator engagement

- Conducted interviews to build trust and secure buy-in from school leaders and representatives from businesses/organisations.
- Delivered continuing professional development (CPD) for Careers Leaders, senior leadership teams (SLT), and teachers.
- Mapped all existing work experience provision, including within the curriculum, against the equalex framework.
- Embedded experiences into the curriculum.
- Designed multi-year programmes and tested delivery and recording models.

Employer and partner collaboration

- Engaged with cornerstone employers.
- Hosted community of practice (CoP) meetings with employers, school Careers Leaders, and Careers Hubs.
- Facilitated partnerships between schools and employers.
- Employers mapped and evolved their work experience offers.
- Schools and employers co-designed activities to align with student needs and curriculum links.

Learner experience

- Developed examples of what two weeks of progressive, high-quality work experience delivered through the equalex framework can look like for years 7–11.
- Organised parent communications and events.
- Developed preparation and reflection resources.
- Ran feedback sessions, focus groups, and surveys with students, teachers, and employers.
- Delivered more than 85 codesigned work experiences to over 2,500 students in years 7–11 across the place-based pilots, including many disadvantaged students who would not normally participate.

Tools, resources and evaluation

- Produced process maps, checklists, discussion planners, and student preparation/reflection documents to support future piloting and wider rollout
- Collected feedback through stakeholder events, CoPs, surveys, focus groups, and videos to inform continuous improvement and assess impact at both programme and individual experience levels.

The range of work experiences developed and tested across the pilots supported outcomes across the three equalex phases, including:

- **Introduce and Inspire** – early exposures through multiple and varied employer encounters and experiences to develop a broad knowledge of career opportunities.

- **Investigate and Explore** – deeper development of essential skills and knowledge of local labour markets and potential opportunities.
- **Apply and Demonstrate** – more focussed experiences enabling young people to demonstrate their skills and articulate them to potential employers.

3. Summary of findings

Clear quality work experience standards via the equalex framework

There was **universal support for the equalex framework** amongst stakeholders engaged with the pilots. Schools, employers and providers variously described the equalex framework as a clear, practical and inclusive approach for improving the equity and quality of work experiences, aligned with real-world skills needs. Stakeholders valued the equalex framework as a model for achieving an **equitable and intent-driven approach to work experience tailored to young peoples' skills development needs**.

The equalex learning outcomes and objectives offer a **structured and consistent approach**, supporting young people to develop the **skills required to access, engage with and reflect** on work experiences. Stakeholders further highlighted that the framework:

- Enables **inclusive and equitable access** to work experience, **meeting individual needs and engaging disadvantaged** young people furthest from the opportunities.
- Supports **wider school improvement by embedding work experience within the curriculum**, enhancing the relevance and purpose of learning, and motivating students.
- Drives **connections between schools and workplaces**. Enables **flexibility for employers** to offer work experiences in different ways to suit business need and address skills shortages.
- Promotes the development of **embedded curriculum-based models** adding value and context across subjects.
- Supports a **progressive approach** exposing young people to work and careers through a **variety of meaningful experiences**.

Strengthened Careers Hub role in coordination

Through the pilots, Careers Hubs delivered valuable strategic support, place-based coordination and partnership building to further system-wide cohesion, including:

- **Raising awareness** of the equalex framework and its strategic purpose amongst education leaders and employers and staff development to support implementation of an equalex approach across schools, employers and providers.
- **Facilitating relationships** between employers and schools, at individual and network levels – supporting the development of a 'one front door' approach for employers.
- **Using data to support targeted and co-ordinated approaches to improve equity** for disadvantaged students who would not normally have access to work experiences.
- **Supporting schools to review their capacity and map** existing provision of work experiences, building on the equalex framework as a mechanism for guided reflection of outcomes and skills development within the curriculum.
- **Developing an understanding of gaps** across schools and supporting networks of employers and providers to meet these needs.
- Through **communities of practice**, enabling Careers Hubs, MATs, schools and employers to share practices and develop partnerships.

Better, more efficient engagement for employers of all sizes

The **equalex framework provides a response to the need to widen the pool of employers** making it easier for them to engage with schools in more flexible and efficient ways to support higher quality outcomes for young people.

Employers involved in the pilots **responded positively and valued** the opportunity through equalx to shape future talent, engage with more (and a broader range of) young people at an earlier stage, and contribute to growth sectors and address skills shortages.

Careers Hubs have a critical role to play in enabling employer involvement. The pilots delivered and tested approaches to engaging employers. This resulted in **new employer partnerships or existing ones exploring different ways of delivering** (shorter, more structured and earlier work experience opportunities).

Careers Hubs have **connected employers and schools**, enabling collaborative approaches to meet employer and learner needs and support skills development and outcomes for students.

The CEC and Careers Hubs also **developed understanding and provided support** for national organisations, cornerstone employers and existing sector partnerships. They delivered development and awareness raising opportunities for schools to advance their employer engagement strategies and employer partnerships.

Increased and equitable access to meaningful work experiences

The Year 1 place-based pilots and collaborative employer project tested some elements of equitable access, design and delivery. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that it was not possible within the timescales (over summer term 2025) for stakeholders to fully develop strategic and curriculum-embedded approaches to increasing equitable access to meaningful work experiences across all student year groups.

Careers Hubs **supported schools and employers to co-design work experiences** delivered across the pilots. Stakeholder feedback identified important features and effective practices for equitable access, design and delivery:

- **Experiences were mapped to equalx learner outcomes**, delivered across student cohorts, and linked to the curriculum. The **equalex framework drives high-quality and meaningful activities**, and helps to engage those needing the most inclusive support.
- **Planning and preparation meetings between school and employer** staff, supported by the equalx learning outcomes, enabled codesigned and intent driven activity.
- Effective **communication with parents/carers to understand the new approach** for modern work experience were enabled through the equalx framework.
- **Facilitating access for disadvantaged young people** and parents/carers, who are furthest from the opportunities.
- **Use of the equalx learning outcomes to scaffold student journeys**, offering wrap around guided reflection across pre-experience preparation, engaging with employers and the experience, and reflecting on learning and skills.

Enhanced school and provider capacity to deliver

Careers Hubs have an important role in supporting schools and providers to build capacity for the equalex solution for modern work experience. This is within the wider context of the Careers Impact System, which is also driving a new focus on whole school approaches to careers activity, raising the strategic profile within education and the bar for careers leadership and capacity within the system. The place-based pilots and MATs identified some core elements for developing an embedded curriculum and progressive approach:

- **Encourage a whole school approach** characterised by senior leaders that champion inclusive school improvement, set the vision for curriculum-embedded careers and work experience, and allocate sufficient resource and accountability.
- **Engage all staff to deliver a progressive and embedded model** for experience of work and careers, with clear expectations for contributions to an intent-driven approach tailored to young peoples' skills development needs.
- Offer **targeted development and engagement for education leaders, governors, Careers Leaders and wider staff** to understand the equalex framework, improve knowledge of local labour market needs, and develop employer relationships.
- Enable schools to **audit existing provision** against the equalex phases and learning outcomes, **integrating work experience** meaningfully across subject areas, and scaffold student knowledge and skills development through **guided reflection**.
- Ensure work experience **delivery providers use the equalex framework to develop employer partnerships and intent-driven** work experiences tailored to young peoples' skills development needs. Providers can also help reduce the burden for schools through staff development, mapping and readiness assessments.
- Support sustained **collaboration and school/employer partnerships** to drive inclusive, high-quality careers education that prepares young people for the world beyond school.

Early evidence of positive experiences and outcomes for learners

With equalex designed as a progressive programme delivered over a longer time period, any evidence of impact on young people resulting from work experiences delivered as part of these initial 6-month pilots is limited. Nevertheless, there are some early indicative views of positive experiences and student, teacher, and provider feedback suggests some skills development linked to equalex learning outcomes. This includes:

- Predominantly **positive reflections from young people** regarding the work experiences they participated in. This includes video footage capturing young peoples' views prior to and after visits – [equalex Pilot One Show](#).
- Student, teacher, and provider **reports of skills development linked to employability and career-related knowledge**.
- Engagement of some **young people who would not normally have access** to or participate in work experiences.
- Observation of **"life changing" experiences** for individual students which has impacted on attitudes and investment in their potential future career direction.

4. Conditions for success

4.1 Clear quality work experience standards via the equalex framework

There was universal support for the equalex framework amongst stakeholders engaged with the pilots. Schools, employers and providers variously described the equalex framework as a clear, practical and inclusive approach for improving the equity and quality of work experiences, aligned with real-world skills needs. Stakeholders valued the equalex framework as a model for achieving an equitable and intent-driven approach to work experience tailored to meet individual needs.

The equalex learning outcomes and objectives offer a structured and consistent approach, supporting young people to develop the skills required to access, engage with and reflect on work experiences

Stakeholders highlighted that the structured learning outcomes and objectives within the equalex framework provided clarity and focus for planning and delivering work experience. This approach was valued by schools as it ensured that activities were intentional, skills-focused, and aligned with student needs, while supporting young people to develop the skills required to access, engage with, and reflect on their experiences. One Careers Leader highlighted the usefulness of the equalex framework, noting that:

"The framework provided through equalex gave a clear structure and learning focus, which really supports schools in preparing learners effectively for their work experience." (Careers Leader)

This structured approach was evident across the pilot, where activities were not confined to a single phase but spanned across three phases in ways that often overlapped. High-volume opportunities within Introduce & Inspire provided broad exposure and raised awareness across whole cohorts. More targeted activities within Investigate & Explore and Apply & Demonstrate created space for pupils to pursue areas of interest in greater depth.

Together, these three complementary phases enabled both wide-reaching engagement and more bespoke, tailored experiences aligned to learners' emerging skills, motivations, and aspirations. Reflecting on the design of the pilot, a Careers Leader acknowledged how the equalex framework balanced breadth and depth of engagement:

"The high-volume activities in Introduce and Inspire provide a broad range of experience for potentially whole cohorts of students. The Investigate and Explore and Apply and Demonstrate Themes allow more bespoke, in-depth opportunities matched to pupil apparent interests. The framework provides opportunities for multiple experiences rather than the traditional weeks of experience at one place of work." (Careers Leader)

Stakeholders emphasised that equalex is a framework which not only helps them plan experiences with intent but also to quality assure what they are doing and validate existing good practice. As two MAT stakeholders explained:

"It's important to note that equalex is not the solution but a framework that helps schools to implement the right solution for them." (MAT Senior Careers Leader)

"It has helped us think about the order in which we're doing things on our careers programme to make sure they're delivering maximum benefit for the students." (MAT Senior Careers Leader)

The equalex framework also helped foster a shared sense of purpose among students, educators, employers, and parents. By aligning aspirations and expectations, it created a common direction that strengthened partnerships and enhanced impact. As one employer explained:

"By aligning the goals of students, employers, and educators, the framework ensures that all stakeholders are working toward a shared vision." (Employer)

"The equalex framework also facilitates meaningful communication with parents and carers, helping them understand and support the intended outcomes of the experiences." (Careers Leader)

The equalex framework enables inclusive and equitable access to work experience, with a focus on meeting individual needs and engaging disadvantaged young people and those furthest from the opportunities

The framework was recognised for its role in widening access to work experience for all learners, including those with SEND, disadvantaged young people or those who may have missed out on work experience in the past. With a focus on meeting individual needs, learners from Years 7 to 11 have the potential to gain valuable and meaningful experience of the workplace.

Example of best practice: adopting equalex in a SEND school

A SEND school used the equalex framework to embed clear learning outcomes into work experience for the first time. This positioned work experience alongside other parts of the curriculum, with a progressive model that ensured pathways were intentional and outcomes measurable.

In practice, staff worked collaboratively to map equalex learning outcomes against existing curriculum goals, adapting them to reflect individual needs and aspirations. Employers were engaged early to co-design placements that reflected learners' strengths and aspirations, while parents were regularly updated through structured communication that linked work experience to personal development and long-term transition planning.

Staff valued the equalex framework as a tool to support pathway design tailored to individual SEND learners and a means of ensuring work experiences were inclusive, equitable, and fully embedded within the curriculum. Additionally, the learning outcomes were used to track functional and vocational progress. As the CEO at the multi-academy trust working with a special school for students with SEND explained:

"Learning outcomes help with pathway design for students with special educational needs... the equalex framework provides a progressive model where outcomes ensure pathways are intentional, progress is tracked, and all stakeholders are guided." (CEO at multi-academy trust)

Additionally, learners from Years 7 to 11 gained access to these targeted and purposeful experiences, with evidence showing increased engagement, motivation, and skill development.

"equalex feels like a brilliant and timely pilot, one that's very important for shaping future provision and ensuring that all learners, regardless of background, have fair access to high-quality, meaningful careers experiences." (Careers Leader)

The equalex framework supports wider school improvement by embedding work experience within the curriculum, enhancing the relevance and purpose of learning, and motivating students

The framework enables meaningful, curriculum-linked experiences that help learners see the practical application of their studies, while also raising aspirations and engaging those who are hardest to reach.

Stakeholders reported that when work experience is intentional, skills-focused, and connected to curriculum objectives, it contributes to broader educational outcomes, including improved engagement, attendance, punctuality, and progression. By linking experiential learning to the classroom, equalex helps schools deliver a cohesive, intent-driven approach to education that aligns with whole-school improvement priorities. For example, Careers Leaders highlighted:

"Seeing the curriculum come alive through meaningful experiences motivates students, particularly those who struggle to engage in the classroom. It gives them a goal and shows the relevance of what they are learning." (Careers Leader)

"Delivering the framework will improve student motivation as they explore careers and pathways and set goals. It can be a driver for improved attendance, punctuality and academic achievement." (Careers Leader)

This shows that embedding work experience within the curriculum through equalex not only enhances engagement and motivation but also supports tangible improvements in student outcomes and contributes to whole-school improvement priorities.

The equalex framework drives meaningful connections between schools and workplaces and enables flexibility for employers to offer support in different ways to suit business need and address skills shortages. Stakeholders reflected that the framework helped to drive connections between schools and workplaces, encouraged school engagement with a broader range of employers, and facilitated employer involvement. The learning outcomes were valued by employers as they made it easier for them to contribute effectively and ensure their time was used purposefully. As one Careers Leader described:

"Employers know how to get involved in a way that makes a difference – they are offered clear expectations and support, making it easier to communicate with them and more meaningful use of their time." (Careers Leader)

Example of best practice: Employer engagement through the SME campaign

The SME campaign helped expand the pipeline of employer-led activity. After the event, more employers engaged with schools and showed greater willingness to collaborate.

How it worked:

- The campaign was designed to make it easy for SMEs to participate by offering them clear expectations, tailored guidance, and flexible options for involvement.
- Events were co-hosted by schools and local business networks, creating low-barrier entry points for SMEs to connect with education providers.
- Employers were introduced to the equalex learning outcomes, which gave them a shared language to plan activities and tailor experiences to students' needs.
- Schools followed up with structured communication, ensuring that initial engagement led to sustained relationships rather than one-off interactions.

As a result, employers reported greater confidence in linking experiences to intended learning outcomes, which led to higher-quality planning and more impactful experiences for students. 14 new Employer Network members were recruited directly during the campaign and post-event. Since then, LCR have welcomed an additional 41 new members (including some non-SMEs), indicating momentum following the campaign. One employer reflected:

"Sometimes within every organisation you can become complacent, stay stagnant. Having these students in brings a different outlook and perception — their honesty, their enthusiasm. We've seen students grow from quiet and reserved to motivated and eager to progress. That's the type of culture change you want in an organisation. These students help us shape our culture, our future missions, and our values." (Employer)

The learning outcomes and objectives were also valued as it enabled a common language which set expectations for all stakeholders, supporting an intent driven approach focused on young people's skills development. Equally, the framework enables flexibility for employers to offer support in different ways to suit business needs. As one Careers Leader mentioned:

"In relation to work experience, this means preparing young people effectively before they spend time with an employer and working closely with employers to co-create those experiences. The equalex framework helps us to sequence these experiences and encounters as part of a coherent careers programme, while also enabling employers to contribute in ways that suit their business needs." (Careers Leader)

Together, these elements showcase how the equalex framework not only drives stronger school-workplace connections but also enables employers to engage effectively, enhancing the quality, relevance, and impact of work experience opportunities.

equalex promotes the development of embedded curriculum-based models adding value and context across subjects

The equalex framework offers a strategic approach to embedding skills development and experience of work and careers within the wider curriculum. Several MATs and schools said the framework had – as an additional benefit - provided a catalyst or facilitator for refreshing and developing their careers offer. It supports taking a more focused and efficient approach, enabling careers education to become part of the curriculum rather than a stand-alone activity, thereby adding value and context to subjects. Schools are also able to identify and address delivery gaps by mapping against the clear, progressive outcomes. As one Senior Leader reflected:

"equalex is a fantastic framework because for the first time ever, we've got clear learning outcomes for experiences of the workplace... It gives you a progressive framework with a clear ambition for what students should get out of the experiences, which we've never had before." (Director of academy trust)

Another MAT described how equalex is being actively embedded into curriculum planning:

"What we're trying to do is map the equalex learning objectives against the good practice already happening across our academies. This ensures work experience, trips, and visits sit alongside those objectives so we can measure them and make sure all students have the opportunities they deserve." (Director of academy trust)

Example of best practice: Embedding careers within the curriculum

The equalex framework has enabled schools to strengthen and embed careers provision within the wider curriculum, ensuring that work-related learning is no longer treated as a stand-alone activity but as a coherent part of subject learning. It provides a more focused and efficient way to improve careers education, adding value and real-world context to classroom learning.

One school, prompted by its Careers Governor and a Careers Impact System Peer-to-Peer review with the CEC, used the equalex pilot to reintroduce off-site work experience for the first time in over 10 years. By mapping against the clear, progressive outcomes, the school was able to identify delivery gaps, set goals, and develop consistent, meaningful work experiences from Key Stage 3 onwards.

"equalex gives us a framework/system for work experience which we didn't have before and helps us to set goals." (Careers Leader)

equalex supports a progressive approach exposing young people to work and careers through a variety of meaningful experiences

The framework also promotes broader career exposure via shorter, modular experiences and encourages progression throughout the three phases of: Introduce and Inspire, Investigate and Explore, and Apply and Demonstrate.

"The model is built on a 'broad brush' approach initially (Introduce and Inspire) before filtering into the next stage (Investigate and Explore) - and then, if possible pathways

still appeal, the final application (Apply and Demonstrate).....the end result is students with genuine interest in a role/sector being connected to suitable employers and institutions with future opportunities to offer.” (Careers Leader)

Feedback from one work experience delivery provider highlights the effectiveness of equalex in:

“...providing space for students to develop essential knowledge for the working world, equipping them with work-ready skills such as communication and problem-solving. Furthermore, it promotes personal development by encouraging self-reflection and career exploration, ultimately shaping well-rounded individuals who are better prepared to thrive in various work settings. This tiered approach not only benefits the students but also contributes positively to the workforce by nurturing a generation of informed and motivated individuals ready to take on the challenges of the ever-evolving job market.” (Provider)

The progressive approach enables a variety of meaningful quality experiences aligned with student and real-world skills needs. Feedback from school Careers Leaders shows that the framework encourages those designing work experiences to consider the “start, middle and end points” of an activity. It helps to develop meaningful experiences through shaping “purposeful conversations” with employers, linking experiences to students’ interests and enabling “learners to be more reflective” of their experiences.

“Traditionally, as an employer, our focus has been on informing students about career pathways within our enterprise. However, this framework shifts the emphasis toward helping students understand a broad range of job roles and the transferable skills they can develop through engagement with our business and its people.” (Employer)

Crucially, equalex also supports a forward looking, place-based approach. Stakeholders reflected that by exposing young people especially at an early stage to important local sectors, the framework can contribute to local skills base development and help address skills shortages. As one school leader explained:

“It also brings work experience into the 21st century. At Three Spires, we’re really keen to ensure children are not only well educated about the sectors that exist today but are also looking ahead to the careers of the future — even as far as 2050. Through the equalex framework, we can help them explore those opportunities early on, particularly in important local sectors. This not only broadens their horizons but also supports the development of the local skills base, helping to address skills shortages in line with the UK’s Industrial Strategy.” (MAT Senior Careers Leader)

“Employers will have a pool of future employees who are passionate about their career.” (School Careers Leader)

“Employers love it because they get young people who are ready for the workplace, with skills that matter.” (Employer)

Case study: Designing and delivering high-quality work experience using the equalex framework

Kings Leadership Academy Hawthornes worked with Keepmoat, Sterling Plastering Limited at their SPL Change Academy, and Hilton Hotel to deliver structured work experience aligned with the equalex framework. The school serves a mainstream cohort with a mix of backgrounds, including SEN and Pupil Premium students. The aim was to provide equitable access while linking work experience to the curriculum.

This project was developed in partnership with the Liverpool City Region Careers Hub, acting as a convener and enabler across multiple priorities. This ensured alignment with both local employer needs and the school's vision for high-quality careers education, while also connecting to the broader ambition around technical and vocational education (TVE).

Activity:

- Construction pathway (Year 9, 14 students): Careers Leaders, the Liverpool City Region Careers Hub, and employers co-designed a day of activities across the Introduce & Inspire and Investigate & Explore phases. Parents and students were engaged early through briefings and baseline questionnaires. Selection reflected interest, SEN, and Pupil Premium status. The day included company overviews, skills workshops, health and safety sessions, and hands-on activities, with structured pre- and post-work linked to equalex outcomes. Activities were delivered by Keepmoat in collaboration with Sterling Plastering Limited at their SPL Change Academy.
- Hospitality pathway (Year 10, 43 students): Hilton Hotel and school staff co-designed activities tied to GCSE Hospitality and Catering lessons. Students completed pre-work in class and post-work reflection with Heads of Department. Activities gave immersive exposure to the sector while strengthening curriculum alignment.

Impact:

The pilot demonstrated clear progress against equalex learning outcomes. Students developed career readiness, sector awareness, and an understanding of roles and responsibilities, while engaging meaningfully with local employers. Teachers reported improved motivation, engagement, and attendance, particularly for students who struggle in the classroom. Employers highlighted the value of structured experiences and gained access to a motivated, career-aware talent pipeline.

4.2 Strengthened Careers Hub role in coordination

Careers Hubs leading the pilots delivered a range of strategic support, coordination and partnership building focused on developing system-wide cohesion. There was strong coordination and communication between stakeholders. Regular steering group meetings, shared planning documents and live action trackers helped maintain momentum and accountability.

"The Careers Hub has been incredible! There has been a raft of support from the team and the resources produced have been of excellent quality." (Careers Leader)

Careers Hubs delivered activities to raise awareness of the equalex framework and its strategic purpose; and staff development to support implementation of an equalex approach across schools, employers and providers

Careers Hubs played an important role in communicating with education leaders, governors and Careers Leaders, improving understanding of equalex as an inclusive solution for progressive and embedded careers and work experience.

Through the pilots, introduction meetings took place with educators and employers, alongside in-depth interviews with senior and Careers Leaders to explore commitment, understanding, and plans for change.

"These sessions took the form of coaching-style workshops and proved to be pivotal. They facilitated a noticeable deepening of understanding and commitment from careers leaders." (LCR pilot evaluation report)

This shows that structured facilitation from Careers Hubs can move schools and leaders from awareness to active commitment, creating the foundations for sustainable system-wide adoption of equalex.

Equally, the pilots delivered a range of development activities for Careers Leaders, wider school staff and employers. This targeted awareness raising of equalex, employer engagement, co-design of work experiences, school readiness assessments, teacher knowledge of local labour markets, and employer partnership development. Further details and examples are cited in later sections of this report.

Careers Hubs facilitated relationships between employers and schools, at individual and network levels – supporting the development of a 'one front door' approach for employers

Through the employer engagement events, facilitation of networks, one-to-one interviews, and collaborative planning, the Careers Hub pilots have brokered relationships between stakeholders, connecting employers with education. Some Careers Leaders reflected:

"The Careers Hub is a vital resource for facilitating continuous engagement between all parties involved and acting as brokers between schools and employers. They are vital in ensuring that there is better access to work placements, in particular where there are gaps in the skills sectors." (Careers Leader)

"Careers Hubs are well placed to broker relationships between institutions and employers, ensuring consistent relationship management that is sustained and prioritised. Hubs can support both parties to align workplace encounters to the equalex framework, to embed the shared language to improve the access to experiences and outcomes for all young people." (Careers Leader)

Employers also recognised the value of working with intermediary organisations like Careers Hubs to broker relationships and ensure alignment with their goals.

This shows that Careers Hubs are not just conveners, but strategic system leaders, creating a single, trusted gateway for employers, reducing duplication, and ensuring young people benefit from sustained, high-quality experiences aligned to equalex.

Careers Hubs use data to support targeted and co-ordinated approaches to improve equity for disadvantaged students who would not normally have access to work experiences

Careers Hubs are using data to identify gaps in access and participation, enabling schools and employers to focus support where it is most needed. This targeted approach helps ensure that disadvantaged young people who would not normally access work experience are given meaningful opportunities.

Example of best practice: Using data to widen access to work experience

In the WMCA pilot, Careers Hubs applied diversity and inclusion criteria to select students least likely to participate in work experience. Schools and employers co-designed activities that were inclusive and adapted to meet different needs, including those of students entitled to free school meals, young carers, students with SEND, and those at risk of becoming NEET.

"Using the targeting criteria has had quite an effect – it took students a while to realise this is an opportunity for them but they now recognise this and were keen to get involved." (Careers Leader)

The impact was positive - 240 out of 265 targeted students successfully participated in 16 tailored work experience sessions. The cohort included 145 students entitled to free school meals, 97 with low attendance, 52 with disabilities or SEND, 136 from underrepresented ethnic minority groups, 4 young carers, 10 with mental health diagnoses, 8 at risk of offending, 3 in the care system, 11 at risk of becoming NEET, and 88 from low-income backgrounds.

This shows that data-driven targeting through Careers Hubs, supported by the equalex framework, can remove barriers, build employer confidence, and make work experience more equitable.

Careers Hubs support schools to review their capacity and map existing provision of work experiences: building on the equalex framework as a mechanism for guided reflection of outcomes and skills development within the curriculum

Through networking and one-to-one meetings with school Careers Leaders, the Careers Hub pilots encouraged schools to review capacity and map existing provision of work experiences, using the equalex framework as a mechanism for guided reflection on outcomes and skills development within the curriculum. In one pilot, the lead school worked alongside their MAT to map and develop a work experience strategy and learner model:

"The curriculum must also be intentionally designed so that it links directly to equalex learning objectives, particularly the application and demonstration of knowledge and skills, scaffolds preparation beginning in KS3 with PSHE, form time and assembly sessions around growth sectors and offers multiple careers opportunities." (Careers Leader)

"equalex helped schools visualise a progressive journey and encouraged them to embed work experience into the broader curriculum." (Careers Leader)

This demonstrates the value of the Careers Hubs acting as catalysts for whole-school change, helping schools move from ad-hoc activities to a structured, progressive model where work experience is embedded in the curriculum and aligned to learner outcomes.

Careers Hubs develop a placed-based understanding of gaps across schools, supporting networks of employers and providers to meet these needs

Careers Hubs played a pivotal role in identifying gaps in provision across schools. They used labour market information, destination data, and school-level audits to surface disparities, with a particular focus on disadvantaged cohorts or those at risk of missing out. By convening schools, employers, and providers, Hubs coordinated targeted interventions, ensuring resources were directed where they would have the greatest impact.

Example of best practice: Using ILR and peer-to-peer reviews to reflect on work experiences

Careers Hubs supported schools to use the Careers Impact System Internal Leadership Review (ILR) and Peer-to-Peer reviews to reflect critically on how work experiences are planned, delivered, and embedded within careers provision. These reviews helped institutions consider whether experiences were:

- Planned and progressive, forming part of a structured careers learning journey.
- Inclusive and equitable, ensuring underrepresented or disadvantaged learners had meaningful access.
- Informed by evidence, including impact evaluation, learner needs, and school improvement priorities.

Through these reflective processes, Careers Hubs identified gaps, particularly for disadvantaged students, and coordinated with employers and providers to address them. Schools could then make targeted improvements to strengthen equity, curriculum alignment, and quality.

This demonstrates that ILR and Peer-to-Peer reviews provide a practical mechanism for embedding equalex, ensuring inclusive, high-impact work experiences across the school system.

Hubs developed a system-wide picture of where gaps existed in access, capacity and quality. This enabled targeted support and alignment of employer and provider networks to address these gaps.

Example of best practice: Careers Hubs addressing provision gaps through targeted employer collaboration

Careers Hubs identified gaps in provision and coordinated targeted solutions with employers. In Liverpool City Region, schools reported limited access to early careers awareness and subject-linked encounters, particularly for students with additional needs or limited networks. The Hub responded by facilitating the following activities:

- At Meols Cop, teachers received CPD on local labour market information to strengthen curriculum links.
- St John Plessington trialled a pupil evaluation framework to measure and improve employer collaboration.
- Bank View and Belvedere used alumni and family networks to bring in SMEs where access had been limited.
- Kimpton Engineering supported a cluster wide “Introduce & Inspire” event giving students structured exposure to STEM roles.
- Bachem UK in St Helens collaborated with St Cuthbert’s Catholic High School to deliver a Health and Life Sciences-focused “Introduce & Inspire” event, giving students structured exposure to industry roles and career pathways.

These interventions show that Careers Hubs bridge provision gaps. By mobilising employer partnerships, they help schools widen access, link careers to the curriculum, and build sustainable models of engagement.

Through communities of practice, Careers Hubs enable schools and employers to share practices and develop partnerships

Hub level and national communities of practice were facilitated alongside delivering the Year 1 equalex pilots. These have been key to enabling Careers Hubs, MATs, schools and employers to share learning about the implementation of equalex and to develop partnerships.

"We valued the work of the Careers Hub who brokered relationships and ensured alignment with employer goals." (Employer)

"It was great attending community of practice events working with a team of Career Leads and employers – sharing ideas – very often as a Careers Lead you are working on your own." (Careers Leader)

"The format used was successful in building a community of invested stakeholders. The Careers Hub acted as the 'axle of the wheel', bringing the group together, maintaining momentum and guiding progression in the same direction, albeit with each party working in their own area of expertise. The communities of practice events were vital

in maintaining pace and keeping all parties motivated; they provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to come away from their workplace (enabling complete focus on the pilot) to share experiences, and consequently, created a sense of not wanting to be left behind.” (Employer)

Case study: Strengthening coordination through Careers Hub support

Three Spires Trust engaged three schools in the equalex pilots. Of these, the school that was also being supported by the WMCA Careers Hub showed notably faster progress. This highlights the critical role of Careers Hubs in providing strategic facilitation, coordination, and partnership building to embed equalex across schools.

Activity:

- The Careers Hub worked with school leaders to position equalex as a framework for long-term curriculum integration rather than a standalone project. This helped drive SLT buy-in and consistent messaging to staff and employers.
- The Hub acted as a single point of contact, aligning employer engagement across the Trust and streamlining opportunities through a ‘one front door’ approach.
- Careers Leaders were supported to review existing work experience provision, map it against the equalex framework, and identify gaps. This guided development of new activity aligned to outcomes and skills within the curriculum.

Impact:

The WMCA-supported school demonstrated faster adoption of equalex practices and greater readiness to deliver structured, equitable work experiences compared with the two schools only receiving support from the Trust. Staff reported clearer understanding of how equalex linked to curriculum outcomes. Employers valued the streamlined coordination, and disadvantaged learners accessed opportunities that would otherwise have been unavailable. This reinforces the importance of Careers Hubs in ensuring system-wide cohesion and accelerating progress across schools.

4.3 Better, more efficient engagement for employers of all sizes

The equalex framework provides a response to the need to widen the pool of employers, making it easier for them to engage with schools in more flexible and efficient ways to support higher quality outcomes for young people.

Careers Hubs have a critical role to play in enabling employer involvement, building on the business benefits and success stories emerging from the pilots. This includes engaging employers, offering support to address potential barriers (especially for SMEs), and clarifying expectations of working in partnership with schools and providers.

Employers involved in the pilots responded positively and valued the opportunity through equalex to shape future talent, engage with more (and a broader range of) young people at an earlier stage, and contribute to growth sectors and skills shortages

Employers valued the opportunity to shape future talent and contribute to their communities. Many involved with delivering tailored and meaningful work experiences through the pilots were keen to continue and saw potential for scaling the programme.

"It's been refreshing... to develop future practice which is fit for purpose for the current and coming generations. To equip young people of our region to recognise the skills they have and can develop to make themselves ready for work. To ensure sustainable talent pipelines for the industry... and to bridge the knowledge and communication gap between education and industry." (Employer)

"equalex really helps across the board. Meaning, better student performance and more trust in the system. Employers love it because they get young people who are ready for the workplace, with skills that matter. And for young people? It boosts confidence, opens doors and makes sure their efforts actually lead to real opportunities." (Employer)

"Being part of equalex supports one of our key objectives focused on addressing health inequalities, with these students being those that we would want to bring into our future workforce anyway." (Employer)

Example of best practice: engaging employers to raise sector awareness

The pilot gave employers the chance to connect with young people and showcase career opportunities. In West Yorkshire, this raised awareness of advanced manufacturing, a key growth sector for the region.

Targeted activities helped challenge outdated views and present manufacturing and food production as attractive career options. By using the equalex framework, employers linked experiences to relevant skills, while schools gained access to meaningful encounters.

"Manufacturing & the food sector has a challenge in attracting younger people, so it gives us the opportunity to promote ourselves as a viable career option and helps start to break down outdated preconceptions." (WYCA pilot impact summary)

This shows how Careers Hubs can broker purposeful employer engagement, connecting growth sectors with students and bringing labour market insight into careers education.

Some employers cited benefits associated with allowing more young people to get out to the same employer, where in the past businesses have struggled to accommodate one-to-one visits.

"We would normally have a few students from the same school for the whole week – but through this pilot we had lots of different students from different schools involved." (Employer)

Employers said that the equalex learning outcomes enabled a much clearer focus on skills development and clarity on intent and purpose behind the activities.

"Traditionally, as an employer, our focus has been on informing students about career pathways within our enterprise. However, this framework shifts the emphasis toward helping students understand a broad range of job roles and the transferable skills they can develop through engagement with our business and its people. By aligning the goals of students, employers, and educators, the framework ensures that all stakeholders are working toward a shared vision." (Employer)

"The benefits for us of having student learning outcomes within the equalex framework are that we can finally structure high-impact work experiences. We can go to employers and say, 'These are the outcomes we want from the experience,' and then design the activity together to deliver against them. Afterwards, we can reflect, measure the impact, and refine our offer moving forward." (Careers Leader)

The Careers Hubs pilots delivered and tested approaches to engaging employers. This resulted in new employer partnerships or existing ones exploring different ways of delivering (shorter, more structured and earlier work experience opportunities)

The CEC and Careers Hub pilots engaged national and local cornerstone employers through awareness raising, networking events and one-to-one interviews. Employer engagement was aligned with local growth sectors to capitalise on existing relationships, networks and priorities.

Example of best practice: widening employer engagement through equalex pilot events

The equalex framework addresses the need to widen the pool of employers and make engagement with schools more flexible and efficient. Through nationally coordinated pilot events in WMCA and Liverpool City Region, SMEs were supported to offer meaningful work experiences and connect with schools in structured, practical ways.

Key features of the approach included:

- Events provided clear guidance, templates, and facilitated workshops to make participation straightforward for SMEs.
- Employers could see how to align placements with equalex learning outcomes, helping them design high-quality experiences that develop student skills and knowledge.
- Pledge cards and group discussions encouraged commitment, while one-to-one support from Enterprise Advisers addressed potential barriers for first-time participants.
- Follow-up communications ensured engagement was sustained, turning initial interest into delivered experiences.

"The pilot demonstrated that events guided by the equalex framework can make employer engagement more efficient and inclusive, particularly for SMEs. Employers could offer flexible, high-quality experiences, while students gained exposure to a wider range of careers and transferable skills." (Employer)

This shows that the equalex framework, combined with structured pilot events, enables schools and providers to engage a broader pool of employers efficiently, improving outcomes for young people and creating sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships.

Pilot stakeholders:

- Presented at business champion and cornerstone employer meetings to promote understanding of equalex.
- Celebrated success stories and case studies to create momentum and bring others on board.
- Facilitated networking events connecting employers and educators to support employer/school partnerships for the development work experiences.
- Encouraged employers to use the equalex framework to review existing work experience delivery.
- Encouraged employers to promote and engage with their supply networks.
- Coordinated lists/a bank of employers setting out clear expectations and levels of commitment.
- Identified the potential for local authorities, schools and other public sector organisations to explore the social value element of new commissioned contracts as a route to encouraging employers to engage in the provision of modern work experience.
- Encouraged schools to develop their own links and partnerships.

Example of best practice: innovative approaches to school–employer engagement

Pilots tested new ways to make employer engagement purposeful and sustainable. Schools and Hubs broadened the employer base, improved clarity in partnerships, and built collaboration for the long term.

Examples included:

- Using supply chains through social value in contracting.
- Engaging families and alumni to connect with local SMEs.
- Onboarding new employers with clear expectations and co-design frameworks.
- Forming school clusters and place-based consortia to share resources.

"The LA procurement team now includes work experience in social value element of new commissioned contracts." (WMCA pilot project manager)

These approaches show how Careers Hubs can build strategic, lasting partnerships, with equalex as a shared framework for planning and delivery.

Example of best practice: alumni networks to connect with local SMEs

In one pilot, a Careers Hub helped a school use alumni and parent networks to engage SMEs. Many alumni and families ran local businesses but had little previous involvement with schools.

The Hub provided structure and facilitation. It helped map contacts, design communication templates, and frame conversations using the equalex framework. It also brokered introductions through wider employer networks, ensuring relationships lasted beyond one-off events.

Alumni shared career stories, hosted visits, and advised on valued SME skills. Activities were co-designed with the Hub to link directly to equalex learning outcomes, making encounters purposeful and curriculum relevant.

Outcomes included:

- The school building lasting links with local SMEs that had not engaged before.
- Alumni giving authentic insights into local careers, inspiring students and challenging stereotypes.
- Hub support ensuring activities were mapped to equalex, creating consistency and impact.

This case shows how Careers Hubs can turn networks into structured, sustainable partnerships with SMEs.

The Careers Hub pilot and MAT activity has resulted in new employer partnerships being developed and formed, alongside existing employers engaging in different ways to meet the equalex framework intent and link with the learning outcomes:

- Three Spires Trust did not previously have much of a business directory or large network of employers. As a result of their business development activities, they now have 120 employers on their books.
- Understanding the potential to deliver work experiences in different ways to both support multiple experiences and suit business need.

*"Lincolnshire Co-op are planning to broaden out their work experience offer to include other areas of their business (not just head office), e.g. funerals and other areas."
(MAT Senior Careers Leader)*

"The police have transformed their work experience offer on the back of equalex. They've been 'empowered by it'. They've looked at the outcomes and said 'this is how we'll help young people achieve them'." (MAT Senior Careers Leader)

"The initial equalex meeting I was invited to opened my eyes about different ways in which we could support work experiences, particularly linked to the Inspire and Engage phase. Working with one of the pilot schools we were able to design an experience tailored to the needs of a group of Year 9 science students." (Employer)

Looking forward, dedicated support for Careers Hubs will be vital to sustaining and scaling effective employer engagement strategies. Hubs are uniquely placed to turn school-level ideas into system-wide practice, for example by helping schools translate informal alumni or parent networks into structured partnerships with SMEs. With this support, Hubs can embed consistent, scalable approaches that modernise the system, ensuring careers education reflects labour market needs and prepares young people for the jobs of the future.

Careers Hubs play an important role in connecting employers and schools, enabling collaborative approaches to meet employer and learner needs and supporting skills development and outcomes for students

Hubs developed resources and supported employer engagement in co-design discussions, enabling employers and partners to see the part they can play through the equalex learning outcomes and objectives. They supported stakeholders to understand that this can be shaped to meet business need and capacity. This included planning templates and staff development focused on engaging employers and enabling them to review, develop and jointly plan work experiences with schools and providers.

Examples of best practice: supporting connections between employers and schools

A WMCA resource 'Reinventing work experience' supports strategic planning, encourages early and sustained engagement and helps stakeholders understand how to deliver impactful experiences that build confidence, career readiness and real-world skills – especially for students in areas of high youth unemployment or disadvantage.

The GMCA pilot delivered training with schools focused on how to engage and develop effective relationships with employers to support the modern work experience offer.

Employer Engagement: Building on Success	
Strengthen Existing Partnerships	Regular communications – Good news stories and newsletters are a great tool to maintain regular communications with employers, collaborate on this with your EA who can provide an industrial perspective. Creation of a feedback loop – Make sure evaluations and assessments have an employer's voice
Expand Your Network	Recognise and Reward – Recognise and appreciate the contributions of your employer partners through events, awards or public acknowledgements (LinkedIn). Enterprise Adviser – engage your EAs they can provide valuable insight and connections.
Scaling Opportunities	Geographical Mapping – Using a similar model to that on the next slide can really help to visualise which employers are on your doorstep, this also goes a long way to inform decisions on the logistics of activities. (see next slide) Utilise your existing network of parents and Alumni – they may have connections to local businesses or be business owners themselves. Variety of opportunities – offering a range of activities can be attractive to employers. This allows employers to enter the space they are comfortable with and if nurtured it can lead to engagement in more activities. (Consider tailoring these to the individual businesses – use your exposure and standing in the community as a point of attraction)

(GMCA Employer Engagement slides)

"Relationships have been established which will allow for sustained partnerships to develop in keeping with the philosophy that underpins the new framework for modern work experience." (LCR equalex evaluation July 2025)

"When a project is built the basic materials can then be shared with other schools to adapt. These are to be built from the business and then adapted by the school." (Careers Leader)

Involving curriculum leads in co-design discussions with employers has been central to embedding a whole-school approach. As one senior leader explained:

"Involving curriculum leads in these co-design discussions with employers has been pivotal. So the most exciting thing about modern work experience is the fact that equalex works alongside us to create actual modules that we can build in and interweave within our curriculum right from Key Stage 3 until they leave in Key Stage 4... equalex are able to give us specific ideas and specific things that we can then embed within our curriculum and teach our young people regardless of their

experiences of the workplace, which is immensely important.” (Senior Leader, multi-academy trust)

This highlights how curriculum integration strengthens the impact of work experiences, enhancing teacher engagement and providing structured, meaningful encounters that enrich classroom learning.

Careers Hubs developed understanding and provided support for national organisations, cornerstone employers and existing sector partnerships

The CEC and Careers Hub pilots delivered a range of activities with employers and networks to improve understanding of equalex and provide development opportunities for those seeking to deliver modern work experience, including:

- Introductory and review meetings with local cornerstone employers (in the LCR and GCMA pilots) helped to develop employer awareness of equalex and to build trust and gain buy-in to the aims of the pilot. They also supported the brokering of relationships with schools and co-designed work experiences.
- Working with employers such as Lloyds and Atkins Realis to audit their existing provision against equalex and develop the quality and purpose of their offer. This process identified opportunities to enhance inclusivity, learning outcomes, and alignment with curriculum objectives. Post-audit, these employers redesigned placements to include more progressive skill development and reflective activities for students.
- Providing practical support for employers, particularly SMEs, to engage in work experience (supporting safeguarding and consent processes, for example).

At a national level, the CEC also worked with partners to pilot the collaborative employer project which provides an example of the value of cross-sector collaboration to improve access to meaningful modern work experience.

Case study: Improving access to meaningful modern work experience through cross-sector collaboration

KPMG UK, working with the CEC, The Talent Foundry, and five major employers (Mace, HSBC, Canary Wharf Group, United Airlines, Salesforce), led a pilot to test how cross-sector collaboration could improve employer engagement while expanding access to meaningful modern work experience for Year 9 students in high-deprivation areas.

A total of 92 Year 9 students from five schools in London took part in work experience days, engaging with professionals from across multiple industries and working on real-world projects. Collaboration between the Careers Hubs, Talent Foundry and schools ensured that the students who attended were those who had the most to gain from access to work experiences – often attending schools in areas of high deprivation or with fewer personal networks to secure such opportunities.

Activity:

The pilot focused on equalex Tier 2: Investigate and Explore, with structured challenges designed and delivered by employers. Students planned a sustainable hospital build with Mace, created healthcare transport tech solutions with KPMG UK, and gained exposure to finance, aviation, real estate, and technology careers. By working collaboratively, employers pooled resources and shared delivery, creating a low-burden, high-value engagement model for schools.

Impact:

The case study evidences better, more efficient engagement for employers of all sizes, as multiple large employers were engaged in a coordinated way that reduced duplication and simplified access for schools.

The pilot delivered strong outcomes for students, teachers, and employers, showing how collaborative approaches can increase both equity of access and quality of experience. For students, the experiences-built confidence, awareness, and motivation:

- 83% reported being more aware of their skills and talents.
- 92% said they better understood the skills employers are looking for.

Employers valued the collaborative approach, noting that the shorter, skills-focused format was easier to manage and created meaningful engagement:

- Activities were interactive and team-based, giving students the chance to practice problem-solving, communication, and collaboration.
- Employers observed noticeable improvements in student confidence, teamwork, and presentation skills.
- Collaboration reduced duplication, created efficiencies, and widened the pool of young people reached.

This model demonstrates how collaborative, efficient employer engagement can deliver impact at scale while improving equity of access for learners.

4.4 Increased and equitable access to meaningful work experiences

The Year 1 place-based pilots and collaborative employer project tested some elements of equitable access, design and delivery. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that it was not possible within the timescales (over summer term 2025) for stakeholders to fully develop strategic and curriculum-embedded approaches to increasing equitable access to meaningful progressive work experiences across all student year groups.

Careers Hubs supported schools and employers to co-design work experiences delivered across the pilots. Stakeholder feedback identified important features and effective practices for overcoming barriers to access.

Example of best practice: equalex facilitates equitable access

Careers Hubs support schools to turn the equalex framework into practice. They help leaders use data to spot which groups are underrepresented in work experience and target activities to those who need them most.

Hubs also train staff, share planning tools, and provide templates so that experiences are consistent, structured, and linked to curriculum subjects. By coordinating local employers, they ensure opportunities are co-designed, inclusive, and relevant to growth sectors.

Through this practical support, Careers Hubs enable schools to deliver high-quality experiences at scale, making equitable access a reality rather than an aspiration.

Experiences were mapped to equalex learner outcomes, delivered across student cohorts, and links made with curriculum subjects

Considerations for design included the definition of 'meaningful', meeting employer and student needs, making links with curriculum subjects, and exploring sectors of interest for the cohorts of young people. The latter helped to ensure the work experience is matched to areas of interest or can provide insight/opportunities into sectors they were not aware of.

"I have encouraged Heads of Department (Arts, Design and Technology) to engage directly with the employers to develop plans with employers and work with them to prepare for the work experiences." (School Careers Leader)

The **definition of 'Meaningful'** for Gatsby Benchmark 6 includes:

- Have a clear purpose, which is shared with the employer and the young person.
- be underpinned by learning outcomes that are appropriate to the needs of the young person.
- Involve extensive two-way interactions between the young person and employees.
- Include opportunities for young people to meet a range of different people from the workplace.
- Include opportunities for young people to perform a task set by the employer or to produce a piece of work relevant to that workplace.
- Include the employer providing feedback to the young person about their work.
- Be followed by opportunities for the young person to reflect on the insights, knowledge or skills gained through their experience.

Examples of best practice: linking to the curriculum

- Employer Atkins Realis met with school staff to both learn about the students and their needs prior to the experiences and identify areas of the curriculum they could link to through the work experience. They identified English, maths and arts design as themes they could help to demonstrate the value of. For example, maths was an important element when discussing some major infrastructure programmes.
- Students engaged in meaningful activities with the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) which explored health inequalities via interactive sessions, aligning with the curriculum area Health and Social Care. The NHS ICB also provided lesson plans which were tailored to SEND students.
- Hilton Hotel co-designed activities with teachers that connected directly to the GCSE Hospitality & Catering curriculum, including food preparation and customer service assessments.
- Keepmoat Homes worked with teachers to design a construction workshop that linked health and safety to PSHE and science, reinforcing both workplace safety and classroom learning.
- Alumni SMEs collaborated with schools to deliver career talks and site visits, linked to English (presentation/report writing) and business studies, while challenging stereotypes about local jobs.

Modern work experience also presents a good opportunity to engender teacher buy-in. Teacher encounters for those involved with supporting the work experiences enhance their own development and understanding of how the local labour market and employability links to the curriculum.

Example of best practice: engaging teachers through modern work experience

Modern work experience offers teachers valuable professional development while linking curriculum to local labour market insights. In the Liverpool City Region (LCR) equalex pilot, Careers Leaders reported that co-design sessions with employers helped staff understand sector trends and integrate real-world examples into lessons:

Key approaches included:

- Teacher encounters shaping lessons and ensuring workplace learning complemented classroom teaching.
- CPD sessions for teaching and pastoral staff embedding careers knowledge across the school.
- Introduce & Inspire sessions connecting teachers with employers, providing first-hand insight into careers and transferable skills.

This shows that involving teachers directly in modern work experience not only enhances student outcomes but also builds staff confidence, knowledge, and ownership of careers education across the school.

Planning for delivery across the academic year (not feasible within the timescales of this Year 1 pilot) was identified as a focus for future years' delivery. This aligns with the national data showing that most work experiences are concentrated in Year 10 and planned 2 to 12 months in advance, highlighting that planning delivery across a full academic year was not feasible within the Year 1 pilot but will be a focus for future implementation.

The equalex framework drives high-quality and meaningful activities, and helps to engage those needing the most inclusive support

The phased model of the equalex framework supports schools to integrate work experience meaningfully into subject areas. Stakeholder feedback from some of the work experiences delivered demonstrates the value of the equalex framework in driving high-quality and meaningful activities: providing structure, standardisation of language, articulation of intent, skills development, and engagement for those needing the most inclusive support. Employers found sessions immersive and well-structured.

"We took a different approach to work experience, planning shorter sessions that exposed students to the day job and they also had an opportunity to see what they would do in different settings." (Employer)

"The experience was well aligned with equalex learning outcomes and was immersive and well-structured." (Employer)

"We developed a more targeted programme for the site we based the work experience at – we used the equalex outcomes to build the structure and principles for the work experience, including interactive activities and tours." (Employer)

Teachers commented on student engagement, curriculum links, and employability skills development:

"Students were well-prepared and engaged, even those who usually struggle to participate: 'I can't do, but I did!' (student) who rarely spoke in groups successfully wrote notes and presented them, demonstrating confidence and readiness to contribute." (Teacher)

"The ICB sessions were relevant with strong student engagement and alignment with curriculum areas like Health and Social Care." (Teacher)

"The activities were age-appropriate and linked well to the curriculum, particularly to STEM and Gatsby benchmarks." (Teacher)

"The visit supported the development of career readiness and self-awareness." (Teacher)

"The visit was fantastic, with good structure, organisation and relevance of the activities." (Teacher)

Planning and preparation meetings between school and employer staff, supported by the equalex learning outcomes, enabled codesigned and intent driven activity

Planning meetings between school and employer staff were supported by the clear learning outcomes from the equalex framework, enabling codesigned and intent driven activity. Preparation meetings also helped to tailor sessions to employer capacity and student needs. This included making adaptations and reasonable adjustments (e.g. for SEND students) as appropriate.

"We had preparation meetings with each employer to discuss students, their interests and needs. It's good to have a named person to do this with." (Careers Leader)

"We worked with employers on language and terminology to use, alongside the outcomes they should be looking to achieve by the end of sessions." (MAT Senior Careers Leader)

"Pre-activity planning is essential to maximise the impact of employer engagement. Initial on-site school visits allow employers to connect with staff and see students in their everyday environment." (Employer)

"We met with schools prior to the work experience visits... with one SEN school it was important to speak with staff beforehand to see if what we had in mind would work for their students." (Employer)

Pilots produced a series of resources which support schools and employers with the design of and planning for meaningful experiences including an equalex visit process map and checklist developed by WMCA:

- **equalex visit process map:** Provides a structured, step-by-step guide for planning, delivering and evaluating work experience visits in collaboration with schools and employers.
- **equalex visit check list:** Ensures smooth coordination between schools, employers and central equalex staff. Provides a practical reference to ensure nothing is missed in the planning and delivery of meaningful and well-organised work experience visits.

Effective communication with parents/carers is needed to support their understanding of the new approach for modern work experience and the equalex framework enabling access for those furthest from the opportunities

The work experience guarantee is setting out a new way of working and affects delivery, the types of experiences on offer and the way that young people may access work experience. All parents/carers need clarity of communication to ensure that the intent, purpose and benefits of different approaches are well communicated and understood. The equalex framework is intended to enable access for those needing the most inclusive support and not rely on the social capital of parents to source inspirational and aspirational experiences.

"For some of us, we cannot open the doors ourselves, we need others to do it for us." (Student)

As such, there is a need for young people and their parents/carers to be more aware of and understand this different approach, alongside being fully informed and engaged prior to, during and following work experiences taking place.

"In one example, some young people on the actual day decided not to attend, with reasons linked to parents' anxieties and /or young people's anxieties and uncertainty. In future, we plan to speak with parents and provide video/picture footage of what to expect. This was previously done with SEND learners, which was found to be beneficial." (Careers Leader)

Through the pilots, a range of communications and support were delivered and considered for engaging disadvantaged students or those needing the most inclusive support.

"Persistence and open communication is required – you can't create this kind of change without this kind of push. We discussed daily in form time and made it a conversation and it was made very visible to parents through careers newsletters and parents evenings. It was also important for me to know the students and check-in with them/make phone calls as needed." (School Careers Leader)

"There is the potential to rethink the concept of parents evenings and allow space and time for careers education related conversations with parents and carers." (Careers Hub)

Example of best practice: Principles for engaging and facilitating access for young people furthest away from opportunities (WMCA pilot)

Build trust: Use consistent, empathetic communication and community liaisons who reflect the backgrounds of families.

Flexible access points: Offer home visits, virtual meetings, drop-in sessions and pre visits to the sites.

Youth voice: Involve young people in shaping their learning journey through student councils, focus groups, or peer mentoring. Understand their experiences and lessons learnt for other students.

Wraparound support: Collaborate with health, housing, and social care to address wider needs.

The equalex learning outcomes enable student journeys to be scaffolded, offering wrap around guided reflection across pre-experience preparation, engaging with employers and the experience, and reflecting on learning and skills

The equalex learning outcomes provide the reference point for students' guided reflection - an essential 'wrap around' for achieving meaningful work experience. This requires students to be guided with pre-experience work to introduce them to the framework and planned experience; and post-experience activities to support reflection, helping students to identify the skills they developed and how those skills transfer to real-life and future career goals.

To facilitate this process, pilot stakeholders developed equalex booklets, preparation sessions, evaluation forms, and feedback mechanisms, commonly using online digital platforms for students to record outcomes. Some pilot stakeholders developed tools to provide an equalex record or work experience passport for individual young people, with feedback that a qualification or accreditation of some sort would help make work experiences more meaningful for students.

Examples of best practice: approaches to scaffolding students' work experience journeys

One school involved in the LCR pilot sought to ensure that students were well-prepared, motivated and able to make informed decisions about their futures through:

- Tailored preparation resources, such as guides on workplace etiquette, application writing, and interview skills, to equip students with the knowledge and confidence to engage fully with placements.
- Employer feedback mechanisms for students to receive constructive, individualised feedback on their performance, helping build confidence and understand workplace expectations.
- Embedding careers learning into the KS3 curriculum, ensuring that careers awareness and skills development are not treated as standalone activities but integrated across subjects to help reduce gaps in knowledge, support progression for all learners, and reinforce the relevance of learning to real-world contexts.

One of the WYCA pilot providers scaffolds the work experience visits with a preparation sessions and de-brief to give students context for the visit and enable them to have time to reflect afterwards. This was key to making the visit meaningful. Feedback from one of the schools involved indicated they took this on board as one of their key learning points.

Case study: Empowering disadvantaged students through modern work experience

The West Midlands Careers Hub equalex pilot targeted six secondary schools in Wolverhampton to improve access to meaningful work experience for students facing significant barriers. A total of 265 students were identified based on social, economic, and educational challenges, of whom 240 participated successfully in 16 tailored work experience sessions.

The cohort included students entitled to free school meals (145), from low-income households (97), with SEND (52), underrepresented ethnic minority backgrounds (136), and those at risk of NEET, mental health issues, or involvement with the justice system.

Collaboration between the West Midlands Careers Hub, schools, and local employers (Atkins Realis, Jaguar Land Rover, McDonald's, NHS Black Country ICB, HS2, Tara Group, Weston Park, University of Wolverhampton NBI Facility) ensured inclusive, curriculum-linked, and meaningful placements.

Activity:

The pilot focused on equalex Tier 2: Investigate and Explore, with structured workshops and immersive experiences across multiple sectors, some examples of these are:

- NHS Black Country ICB (Years 9 & 10): Students explored health service planning, health inequalities, and non-clinical career pathways through workshops, presentations, and discussion with professionals.
- McDonald's (Year 8): Hospitality-focused activities included teamwork, customer service, and creative menu challenges.
- Jaguar Land Rover (Year 11): Full-day engineering placement exploring technician roles, employability skills, and site tours.

All activities aligned with Gatsby Benchmark 6, ensuring clear purpose, structured learning outcomes, two-way interaction, exposure to workplace roles, task performance, employer feedback, and reflection opportunities.

Impact:

The pilot showed that structured, inclusive work experiences can effectively engage disadvantaged students and build key skills.

- Students: 83% of students reported increased awareness of their skills and talents, and 72% felt more confident about their future and motivated in school. Participation also boosted teamwork and communication, with previously disengaged students actively contributing to tasks and discussions.
- Teachers: 92% of teachers noted improved student understanding of career pathways, while 76% highlighted reduced workload due to coordinated employer engagement. Teachers observed tangible gains in student confidence, motivation, and classroom engagement
- Employers: 76% of students felt confident they could work in sectors like those represented by the employers, while 100% of participating employers reported meaningful interactions with students. The pilot enabled employers to reach students who typically have limited access to work experiences, observing improvements in confidence, teamwork, and presentation skills.

The West Midlands Careers Hub equalex pilot shows that high-quality, inclusive work experiences can increase equity, raise aspirations, and develop practical skills among disadvantaged students. Embedding such activities within the curriculum ensures long-term impact for students, teachers, and employers alike, demonstrating a scalable model for meaningful modern work experience.

4.5 Enhanced school and provider capacity to deliver

Careers Hubs have an important role in supporting schools and providers to build capacity to use the equalex solution to embed modern work experience. This is within the wider context of the Careers Impact System which is driving a focus on whole school approaches to careers activity, raising the strategic profile within education and the bar for careers leadership and capacity within the system.

Through the pilots, stakeholders identified some core elements essential for developing capacity to deliver the embedded curriculum and progressive approach required for equalex.

Encourage a whole school approach characterised by senior leaders that champion inclusive school improvement, set the vision for curriculum-embedded careers and work experience, and allocate sufficient resource and accountability

Careers Hub pilots and MATs highlighted the need for a whole school approach, characterised by senior leaders that champion inclusive school improvement, set the vision for curriculum-embedded careers and work experience, and allocate sufficient resource and accountability.

"From senior leadership to classroom staff ensuring equity is embedded in the school's ethos and daily practice." (Careers Leader)

"Senior leaders must model and champion equity, allocate resources, and hold teams accountable. Whole school approach not just careers leaders." (Careers Leader)

"Careers education information and guidance (CEIAG) should be a central pillar (alongside curriculum and pedagogy)... recalibrate senior leader thinking around CEIAG as a fundamental to inclusive school improvement." (LCR Emerging themes Feb-Apr 2025)

Alongside the equalex pilots, the Careers Hubs have continued to encourage and support (Careers Impact System) Internal Leadership Reviews which enable schools to engage leaders, align priorities, and embed best practice for careers leadership and achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

"The recommendation to adopt a whole-school approach, including identifying where students engage with workplaces across the wider curriculum, conducting an Internal Leadership Review, and embedding the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), is intended to be both practical and impactful. By doing so, Careers Leaders can strengthen the visibility and value of the careers programme, ensuring it gains the support of senior leaders, the headteacher, and wider teaching staff." (Provider)

This demonstrates how equalex not only supports structured, progressive work experience but also showcases a model for building sustainable whole-school capacity, embedding careers leadership, and ensuring equity is central to school improvement.

Engage all staff to deliver a progressive and embedded model for experience of work and careers, with clear expectations for contributions to an intent-driven approach, tailored to young peoples' skills development needs

As part of a whole-school approach, pilot stakeholders also reflected on the importance of engaging all staff to deliver a progressive and embedded model for young peoples' experience of work and careers. They said there is a need for clear expectations for school staff contributions to an intent-driven approach to work experience tailored to young peoples' skills development needs. One of the Hub pilots outlined a vision for engaging staff in embedding careers and work experience within a school:

"In the best schools, where the most effective work is taking place, the Careers Lead becomes a 'broker', leveraging impactful activity from external sources and creating a network of Careers Champions at faculty level. They are supported by high quality Senior Leadership and Heads and championed across Trusts and at governance level. At this point, they genuinely lead a faculty of their own. This is where we need to get to." (GMCA Emerging themes from school visits, March 2025)

Examples of best practice: staffing models for equalex, within schools and across partners

Role	Engagement Strategy
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)/Governors	Lead vision, allocate resources, monitor impact.
Inclusion Leads/SENCOs	Coordinate interventions, train staff, liaise with families
Teachers & TAs	Receive CPD on inclusive practices, co-plan with specialists.
Pastoral Staff	Address barriers to learning, support wellbeing.
External Partners	Bring in expertise (e.g., youth workers, Careers Hubs, community mentors).
Parents/carers	Parent forums, parent evenings understanding parents' concerns and promoting the opportunities and benefits.
Employers	Drive and promote the opportunities across the business supporting their social values and recruitments for opportunities. Local people into local jobs

(Source: WMCA equalex pilot summary)



(Source: Three Spires Trust)

This shows that a coordinated, whole-school staffing approach is critical to delivering a progressive, intent-driven work experience model, ensuring every young person benefits from structured support, career exposure, and skills development across the school community.

Offer targeted development and engagement for education leaders, governors, Careers Leaders and wider staff to understand the equalex framework, improve knowledge of local labour market needs, and develop employer relationships

As referenced earlier, Careers Hubs delivered activities to raise awareness and encourage senior leader commitment to equalex as a solution to support progressive and embedded careers and work experience.

Wider staff development activities (for Careers Leaders, heads of department, teachers and pastoral staff) also enabled awareness raising of the equalex framework and a focus on developing teachers' knowledge of local labour market information and sector needs. Some professional development delivered by Careers Hubs also focused on enabling schools and Careers Leaders to develop employer partnerships.

Enterprise Advisers (EAs) directly supported schools by connecting them with employers, helping match students to high-quality work experiences and guiding preparation and reflection activities. For example, at Bank View School, an EA brokered a partnership with JLR (Jaguar Land Rover), a Cornerstone Employer for the region, enabling inspirational site visits and structured experiences for SEND pupils. JLR engagement continues, with volunteers from JLR further developing the relationship between the school and employer. In addition, EAs facilitated employer talks, workplace visits, and enterprise challenges aligned with equalex outcomes, while Careers Hubs coordinated CPD for Careers Leaders and teaching staff to embed the framework across the whole school.

Examples of best practice: staff development activities

- **Teacher encounters** were built into the offer for equalex pilot schools. This focused on modern methods of work experience (the equalex framework) whilst introducing innovation sectors, matching careers with curriculum, and reinforcing the connection between classroom learning and the world of work. (LCR pilot evaluation report)
- As part of the **CPD offer, Careers Leaders** were invited to take part in one-to-one consultancy calls and attend an online information session. All schools involved in the pilot project across West Yorkshire were given the opportunity to book a consultancy call and attend the session. The consultancy calls aimed to gain insight into each school's current understanding of the equalex framework, review existing practices that align with the framework, and assess readiness to build on the pilot work going forward. (WYCA equalex impact summary)

Enable schools to audit existing provision against the equalex phases and learning outcomes, integrating work experience meaningfully across subject areas, and scaffolding student knowledge and skills development through guided reflection

The MAT pilots included systematic audits and mapping of their existing provision against the equalex learning outcomes, identifying existing work experience delivery and gaps across the curriculum. They developed learner models as planning tools to address gaps and embed work experience across the wider curriculum. These offer a forward planning tool for the design of modern work experience programmes, helping schools to visualise a progressive journey.

Example of best practice: approaches to embedding equalex across the curriculum (LIFT Schools)

The MAT pilots demonstrated effective approaches to integrating work experience across the curriculum by systematically auditing existing provision against the equalex phases and learning outcomes. Key approaches included:

- Providing clearly defined learning outcomes that give students, educators, and employers a shared focus and purpose for every encounter.
- Creating structured and integrated experiences that can be embedded across Key Stage 3 and 4, allowing students to develop workplace skills regardless of prior experience.
- Supporting effective pre-placement preparation, co-creation of employer experiences, and coherent sequencing of encounters to form a progressive careers programme.
- Aligning all stakeholders around shared objectives to enable sequential, meaningful experiences that extend throughout secondary education.

These approaches offer a forward-planning tool for schools, helping visualise a progressive journey of work experience and ensuring that learning is embedded, scaffolded, and consistently delivered across subject areas and/or wider curriculum areas.

Careers Hubs and MATs have encouraged and supported curriculum and careers leads to make links to the equalex learning objectives. The phased model supports schools to integrate work experience meaningfully across subject areas. Looking forward, schools will need support to undertake this mapping exercise, develop a more embedded approach to relevant work experiences across the curriculum, and ensure that student knowledge and skills development is scaffolded through guided reflection.

"Embedding the framework into curriculum design will be crucial to create capacity, shared understanding and structure to approach employer partnerships. Employers and teachers working together to codesign experiences linking to pinch points of the curriculum that the workplace could address will be a gold standard equalex opportunity. This will enable teachers to share stories in the classroom that inspire, motivate and provide context to life in the classroom and how it links to the world of work." (School Careers Leader)

"We plan to standardise the amount of reflection time in schools across the MAT - where students have more time for reflection, they are more likely to talk about skills development and aspirations, i.e., provide a fuller reflection of the experience. When they have less time for reflection, they tend to just relay the factual elements of what they did." (MAT Senior Careers Leader)

Ensure work experience delivery providers use the equalex framework to develop employer partnerships and intent-driven work experiences tailored to young peoples' skills development needs. Providers can also help reduce the burden for schools through staff development, mapping and readiness assessments

Work experience delivery providers used the equalex framework to map, review and adjust existing employer partnerships and activities enabling more intent-driven experiences tailored to young peoples' skills development needs. They also helped to reduce the burden for schools through staff development, mapping and readiness assessments.

"Sustained partnerships with a diverse range of employers is essential for offering varied and relevant work placements, this can be done through effective collaboration with external providers which can help meet placement demand and ensure quality assurance mechanisms." (School Careers Leader)

Through the WYCA equalex pilot, work experience delivery providers built on existing employer partnerships and activities, reviewing them against the equalex framework, adjusting content and timescales, and designing reflection logs tailored to the learning outcomes. They also supported schools with staff development, mapping and readiness assessments, and the development of employer relationships.

Examples of best practice: work experience delivery providers

- The Ahead Partnership reviewed existing provision to develop Phase 1, 2 and 3 activities. This included:
 - Spending more time planning 'speed networking' activities and employer visits to make sure they aligned with equalex.
 - Extending the time allowed for employer visits to ensure they cover requisite outcomes.
 - Designing learning logs for students, tailored to equalex outcomes.
- C&K Careers developed a series of employer experiences with local large employers, including:
 - McVitie's offered a "very hands-on" experience where students learned about the food industry and manufacturing.
 - Lloyds Bank focused the experience on developing students' understanding of their employability skills and being able to talk about their own strengths and weaknesses. Students also delivered a presentation offering advice to a business from a scenario set in Lloyds.
 - HSL Chairs included a tour of the premises and hands on activities. Students also met former pupils from their school who worked at HSL, including one in accountancy and one that had progressed from the factory floor to a managerial position

Support sustained collaboration and school/employer partnerships which can drive inclusive, high-quality careers education that prepares young people for the world beyond school

Careers Hubs have supported local stakeholders to develop some of the school/employer partnerships which are key to a school's capacity to offer varied, high quality, personalised work-related skills development for all learners across Key Stage 3 and 4. The pilots documented a range of practices and approaches to collaboration which support the development of sustained relationships.

"Successful collaboration requires clear conditions, mutual respect, and shared commitment underpinned by the equalex framework. When these conditions are met, employer engagement can be a powerful driver of inclusive, high-quality careers education that prepares young people for the world beyond school." (LCR Pilot)

"The opportunities to meet other Careers Leaders and discuss ideas has been invaluable and similarly, the fact that I have been able to meet employers face to face has created further capacity to develop links and plan future collaborations." (School Careers Leader)

Example of best practice: Conditions for Collaboration



Summary Table of Conditions and Roles

Condition	Employers (SMEs) Need	Schools Focus	Careers Hub Role
Curriculum & Context	Understand curriculum links & learners	Share curriculum & learner stages	Provide guidance and training
School Calendar Awareness	Plan around school calendar & own cycles	Communicate term dates & constraints	Coordinate planning and communication
Administration & Safeguarding	Simple, clear admin & safeguarding info	Streamline admin processes	Streamline admin processes
Flexibility in Delivery	Choose engagement suited to capacity	Offer varied engagement formats	Facilitate flexible and innovative models
Student Preparation	Expect informed and prepared students	Prepare students in advance	Support schools with pre-work tools
Understanding Learner Needs	Receive clear info to adapt delivery	Share SEND/disadvantage info sensitively	Train employers on inclusion
Support to Adapt Delivery	Receive support adapting sessions	Provide in-session or co-delivery support	Training and toolkits
Open Partnership & Communication	Be treated as valued partners	Foster respectful, ongoing employer relationships	Broker and sustain partnerships

(Source: LCR Pilot Conditions for Collaboration - Findings equalex COP2 21/5/25)

Case study: Three Spires Trust - Reimagining Our Curriculum

Three Spires Trust, a Church of England Multi-Academy Trust in Staffordshire, is committed to holistic education, aiming to empower young people academically, vocationally, and personally. The Trust identified a need to embed meaningful, progressive work experiences across the curriculum, particularly for SEND learners, to align with the equalex framework and prepare students for adulthood. In response, they designed a 12-hour, 2-tier community-based project linked to the Preparation for Adulthood Curriculum, alongside employer projects for Year 9 and structured work placements for Year 10 students, integrating experiences directly into curriculum areas and option choices.

Activity:

The Trust implemented a strategic plan co-designed with support from Edge Foundation and Deeper Learning UK (DLUK), ensuring that staff were engaged, informed, and empowered to innovate. Key activities included:

Delivering the 12-hour, 2-tier community-based project for SEND learners, providing real-world tasks linked to independent living, employability skills, and community engagement.

Embedding employer projects for Year 9 and placements for Year 10, aligned with curriculum areas and students' option choices, to give meaningful exposure to workplaces.

Conducting staff workshops and development sessions covering project-based learning, learner profiling, and holistic assessment approaches, ensuring a consistent understanding of the equalex framework across teaching and pastoral teams.

Partnering with local and national organisations to co-create employer encounters, real-world challenges, and reflective activities, allowing students to see tangible outcomes from their engagement.

Impact:

The integration of equalex principles within the Trust's curriculum led to:

Students actively participating in community projects and employer-led activities, developing confidence, independence, and employability skills.

Year 9 and 10 students gaining sector-specific knowledge and practical experience aligned to their curriculum pathways, helping to inform GCSE and post-16 choices.

Teachers and leaders reporting improved confidence in delivering work-related learning, with a clear structure to plan, monitor, and reflect on student outcomes.

Collaboration with employers and external networks, ensuring authentic, meaningful experiences and a consistent approach across the Trust.

Students evaluating their experiences, linking learning to personal goals and presenting tangible outcomes, reinforcing skills and resilience.

This approach demonstrates how a Trust-wide, structured implementation of equalex can embed modern work experience meaningfully into curriculum planning, providing inclusive, progressive, and high-quality career-related learning for all students, including those with SEND.

4.6 Early evidence of positive experiences and outcomes for learners

The Year 1 equalex pilots were delivered over a 6-month period and much of the focus on strategic planning and influencing. With equalex also designed as a progressive programme delivered over a longer time period, any evidence of impact on young people at this point is limited.

There are predominantly positive reflections from young people regarding the work experiences they participated in

Nevertheless, over the summer term some work experiences mapped to the equalex framework were delivered, with feedback collated from young people, teachers, and employers. This provides an early indication of positive experiences rather than substantive evidence of expected skills development and outcomes arising in general for young people.

Example of best practice: progressive work experience

In 10 selected schools, Year 9 MBacc students receive 15 hours of 'Raise Awareness' work experiences, while Year 11 students completed 10 hours of 'Apply Skills & Knowledge' activities. All Year 8 students accessed Meet Your Future virtual work experiences aligned to the seven MBacc Gateways. This staged approach builds awareness, practical skills, and confidence, helping students connect learning to future careers.

This staged, progressive approach ensures students gain early awareness, practical experience, and a clear understanding of opportunities, building confidence and skills in line with Gatsby Benchmark 6.

Evidence and feedback includes predominantly positive reflections from young people regarding the work experiences they participated in. This includes [video footage](#) capturing young peoples' views prior to and after visits.

Students, teachers, and providers identified skills development linked to employability and career-related knowledge

Students and teachers reflected on skills development across the equalex outcomes. Careers Leaders and providers identified improved confidence, communications skills and self-awareness, amongst others.

"Many students said the visit helped them gain confidence, communication skills and a clearer understanding of career paths in engineering, manufacturing and apprenticeships. Several students noted that the experience helped them step out of their comfort zones and better prepare for interviews." (Careers Leader)

"The work experiences were highly appropriate for Year 11 students and aligned well with the equalex learning outcomes, particularly in developing self-awareness, career readiness and applying knowledge in real-world contexts. The visit also supported curriculum links through interview preparation." (Careers Leader)

"The results of the feedback reveal a substantial and inspiring transformation in students' comprehension and work-related abilities following their engagement in the equalex programme. This positive change not only highlights a deeper understanding of working expectations and environments but also reflects an increased confidence among students in navigating their future careers." (Provider)

Students identified improvements, including in their self-awareness, ability to make links between careers and the curriculum, and understanding of their local economy.

Inspire <i>"Students fed back that they can now see in their mind potential opportunities for the future."</i> (School Careers Leader) <i>"I feel more engaged and open-minded about different jobs."</i> (Student)	Opportunity awareness: <i>"I got to know about the many jobs you can do and the many routes you can take to get these jobs, which was extremely helpful."</i> (Student) <i>"I have some ideas about what I might want to do as a career in the future."</i> (Student)
Self-Awareness: Students said they were more aware of their skills and talents: <i>"I felt like I was using teamwork and communication with my group well and it was very enjoyable."</i> (Student) <i>"I learnt a lot including communication skills and career building skills."</i> (Student)	Understanding growth sectors and the changing economy: <i>"It provided lots of information about the future and how AI is also connected to us."</i> (Student) Exploring roles and responsibilities: <i>"The volunteers helped me understand the different side of the offices like HSBC and KPMG UK."</i> (Student)
Links with curriculum: <i>"Yes because we already had lots of skills such as problem solving and calculating maths equations."</i> (Student) <i>"Maths has helped with the calculations and drama has helped with the teamwork."</i> (Student)	Developing career readiness: Students said they understand the types of skills employers are looking for: <i>"The activity made me think about different types of skills and qualifications people in the workplace have."</i> (Student) <i>"I really enjoyed the pitches, as they improve teamwork, problem solving and communication."</i> (Student)

Example of best practice: improved employability skills and career-related knowledge

Castleford Academy reported measurable improvements in students' employability skills and career-related knowledge, supported by the following data:

- There was an increase in assessment scores across all 19 key statements, reflecting enhanced opportunity awareness, self-awareness, inspiration, career readiness, understanding of roles and responsibilities, insight into growth sectors and the evolving economy, and the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the workplace.
- The academy recorded a 10% improvement in achieving Gatsby Benchmark 6.

The most significant gain was a 7-point increase (on a scale from 0 to 10) in career readiness, specifically in students' ability to create, develop, or design a response to an employer-set brief and to identify the skills they applied in the process.

(Source: WYCA pilot Impact Summary)

This shows that the equalex programme effectively develops students' employability skills, career awareness, and self-confidence. Students are better able to identify their strengths, understand employer expectations, and explore a wide range of career paths, while also connecting these experiences to curriculum learning. Feedback from students, teachers, and providers demonstrates that meaningful workplace engagement fosters practical skill development, aspiration, and preparedness for future education and employment opportunities.

There was some engagement of young people who would not normally have access to or participate in work experiences, and examples of life changing experiences

Stakeholders highlighted some engagement of some young people who would not normally have access to or participate in work experiences. There was also some observation of "life changing" experiences for individual students which has impacted on attitudes and investment in their potential future career direction.

"Students who wouldn't usually lead in discussion felt confident to take the lead in the work experiences." (Teacher)

"The Beechcliffe school's deputy headteacher remarked that the experiences for some of the students is 'life changing' particularly for their SEND students who all have EHCPs so to be involved in this was an amazing opportunity." (WYCA pilot impact summary)

"For one student, there was a profound change as a result of engaging with the experience – having previously had a relatively disengaged attitude to learning/school, they were really excited by this opportunity and asked lots of questions. The result was them being able to now clearly see a potential career route for them that they were not aware of before." (Employer)

"Some experiences have supported students who wouldn't normally access this kind of opportunity, which has contributed to the development of self-worth alongside skills – one student joked "Hey Sir, isn't this too posh for me, I'm only from [school name]." (Careers Leader)

Case study: Work experiences embedded into science curriculum with Bachem UK in St Helen's

St Cuthbert's Catholic High School in St Helen's partnered with Bachem UK, a global leader in health and life sciences manufacturing, to give Year 9 Triple Science students a direct experience of careers in science. The school, serving a community with many disadvantaged learners, designed the activity to connect curriculum content with real-world science applications.

Activity:

Students visited Bachem's modern workplace, beginning with a welcome and Q&A with staff before doing PPE for a guided factory tour. They interacted with scientists, apprentices, and senior staff, gaining insight into cutting-edge research and manufacturing. The programme was structured to align with equalex Tier 2: Investigate and Explore, giving students the chance to ask questions, reflect on learning, and see career pathways in STEM.

Impact:

Students returned "absolutely buzzing," reporting greater enthusiasm for science and clearer aspirations for future study and work. One learner shared they now wanted to study engineering at university, showing a tangible uplift in ambition and career intent. Teachers noted higher levels of engagement, and plans were made to replicate and expand the programme for future cohorts. Employers also reported the experience as authentic and rewarding: "definitely did not feel like a box-ticking exercise."

5. Implications

The observations in this report have given early indications of the value of the equalex approach, as well as responses to the two questions, as set out below.

How does the equalex approach (through Careers Hubs) facilitate implementation of two weeks' worth of high-quality work experience for all students, focusing on learner outcomes, by the end of Key Stage 4?

The equalex framework:

- Offers clear standards and expectations for inclusive, progressive and intent-driven work experience from Year 7 to Year 11.
- Provides a consistent framework for young peoples' skills development - providing a shared language for schools, employers and providers.
- Drives connections between schools and workplaces, enabling flexibility and efficiency for employers to offer work experiences in different ways to suit business need and address skills shortages.
- Encourages a whole school approach to developing progressive work experiences, embedded within the wider curriculum.
- Supports engagement of disadvantaged young people who would not normally have access to or participate in work-based experiences.
- Has facilitated positive reflections on outcomes, skills development and life changing experiences for individual young people.

How can barriers to successful implementation of the equalex approach best be removed?

This can be done in the following ways:

- **Careers Hubs:**
 - Raise awareness of the equalex framework, its benefits and its strategic purpose amongst education leaders and employers.
 - Encourage new and existing employer partnerships to engage with work experience in more flexible and efficient ways to support higher quality outcomes for young people.
 - Offer place-based coordination and partnership building to further system-wide cohesion – connect and coordinate local consortia and networks of employers, schools and providers.
 - Use data to target and co-ordinate approaches to improve access for disadvantaged students who would not normally have access to work experiences.
 - Provide strategic support to education and Careers Leaders to audit existing provision and develop whole school staffing and embedded curriculum models of careers and work experience delivery.
 - Support implementation of an equalex approach across schools, employers and providers, through practice sharing (communities of practice), resources and tools, and staff development.

- **Employers:**

- Share experiences and success stories to promote and engage their wider sector and supply chain networks to help shape future talent, engage with a broader range of young people at an earlier stage and contribute to growth sectors and address skills shortages.
- Use the equalex framework to review existing work experience delivery and develop different ways of delivering (shorter, more structured and earlier opportunities).
- Work in partnerships with schools and providers to co-design intent driven activity supporting skills development and outcomes for students.

- **MATs and schools:**

- Develop whole-school approaches engaging all staff to deliver a progressive and curriculum-embedded model for experience of work and careers.
- Audit existing provision against the equalex phases and learning outcomes to enable further integration of meaningful work experience across subject areas.
- Facilitate access for disadvantaged young people who are furthest from the opportunities.
- Work collaboratively with employers and providers to plan and prepare for experiences which drive inclusive, high-quality careers education that prepares young people for the work beyond school.
- Implement tools and practices which scaffold student knowledge and skills development through guided reflection.
- Make use of Careers Impact System and institutional level data (such as FSQ) where possible to ensure learner interest and reflection is supported over time.

- **Work experience delivery providers:**

- Use the equalex framework to develop employer partnerships and intent-drive work experiences tailored to young peoples' skills development needs.
- Help reduce the burden for schools through staff development, mapping and readiness assessments.

Appendix A: Logic model – learning from the equalex pilots

Logic Model: Learning from the Equalex Pilots				
Goal: Understand how the equalex approach facilitates implementation of 2 weeks' worth of high-quality work experience for all students, focusing on learner outcomes, by the end of KS4. How can barriers to successful implementation of the equalex approach best be removed?				
Context - Equalex goal and vision: Equalex should equip every young person with the skills, confidence, and exposure needed to succeed in the workforce through two weeks of impactful work experience, totalling 10 days, by the end of secondary education. By integrating multiple, varied, and targeted workplace experiences, young people will develop the work-readiness and employability skills essential to thrive in a rapidly evolving job market. These experiences will be aspirational, inspirational, and purposefully designed to spark meaningful engagement between employers and pupils.				
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes – Conditions for Success	Impact
• Funding • Equalex Framework • Existing resources/tools • Technology • Programme managers & support teams • Existing partnerships	• Test learning outcomes & objectives with MATs • Engage and support schools • Engage and support employers • Design and deliver WEX - activities, experiences, placements • Develop provider delivery/ approaches • Gather insight/evaluation activities	• Participation – numbers/proportions engaged: ◦ Young people ◦ Employers ◦ Schools ◦ Providers • Activities (planned/designed and) delivered • Resources developed/tested • Careers Hubs develop models for effective delivery of high quality WEX • Insights/feedback: 1. Delivery (inc. role of Careers Hubs) 2. Satisfaction 3. Benefits/outcomes 4. Evidence base of what works 5. Recommendations for roll-out	• Equalex framework – clarifies expectation and quality • Careers Hubs facilitate development of WEX system • Education institution capacity: ◦ Reduced barriers ◦ Trained Careers Leaders and Teachers ◦ Better prepared to deliver 10 day requirement • WEX programmes - recognised definition of quality WEX understood/implemented • Increased supply of quality WEX • Employer engagement – coherent pathway to delivery for employers • Provider capacity/quality • Partnerships • Young people experiences: ◦ Outcomes evidenced and recorded ◦ YP articulate value of experiences • Equitable access for all YP • Careers system better prepared for new statutory requirements	<u>Behaviour change</u> • Employers • Schools/educators • Providers • Learners • Partnerships <u>Experiences of the workplace delivered effectively and with purpose</u> • Quantity (employers, multi-experiences) • Quality (multi-employer, inclusive, meaningful (objectives achieved)) • Equity of experiences <u>Experiences of the workplace have recognised value</u> <u>Impact for young people</u> • Improved work readiness and employability skills <u>Impact for employers</u> • Better talent pipeline, skills gaps addressed, sector needs met <u>Impact for education institutions</u> • Effect on members of staff that have influence on young people's progression <u>Impact for parents/ carers</u> • Stronger relationships between child, parent and education institution to ensure it is embedded.
	Test/deliver across different contexts:			
	• Three equalex Tiers, seven outcomes and nineteen objectives • Institution types and localities		• Pupil backgrounds/needs • Employer type • Combined Authority priorities	
	Stakeholders to engage in the evaluation:			
	• Programme managers/support teams (CAs, Councils, Careers Hubs, Education Consultant(s)) • Education institutions, MATs – SLT/Careers Leaders, Educators		• Employers • Providers • Pupils	

Appendix B: Work experience insight questions

Evaluation aims:

- Understand how the equalex approach facilitates implementation of 2 weeks' worth of high-quality work experience for all students, focusing on learner outcomes, by the end of KS4.
- How can barriers to successful implementation of the equalex approach best be removed?

A. Is the equalex framework fit for purpose?	
1. Are the learning outcomes and objectives appropriate and fit for purpose?	
2. How does the equalex framework facilitate equitable access to consistent quality experiences?	
3. How does the equalex framework drive outcomes for institutions, employers and young people?	
B. What are the conditions for success to implement equalex?	
1. How does the framework enable delivery of 2 weeks' worth of high- quality work experience for all young people?	• Role of Career Hubs • Develop capacity of education institutions • Curriculum design (develop WEX programmes & experiences) • Employer engagement • Provider capacity • Partnerships • Young people's experiences
2. What key steps or changes are required?	
3. What are the key features or essentials for success (approaches that worked, benefits for key actors)?	
4. What are the challenges and how are they overcome?	
Pilot/project contexts and foci	
C. What are the implications and recommendations for roll-out to other areas?	
1. Is there/what is the improved evidence base of what works?	
2. What resources are needed to support roll-out elsewhere?	
3. What models of delivery are effective for different contexts?	
4. How can institutions be prepared for roll-out?	

Appendix C: Revised high-level logic model

