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# Young People's Education and Skills Work Experience Study

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Report prepared for  
London Councils

July 2017

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**LONDON  
COUNCILS**

**YouGov**<sup>®</sup>  
What the world thinks

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## Foreword

London is a leading global city, responsible for driving 30 per cent of the national economy, and there is no doubt that booming businesses across the capital are fuelling economic growth and innovation. Businesses know that employing the right mix of people is vital to their development and continued success, with most seeking to hire skilled young people as part of their recruitment strategies.

London businesses have access to a fantastic local talent pool – the region is the highest performing at GCSE level and 94 per cent of the capital's schools are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted – but not all of them are making the most of it.

Providing a range of work experience opportunities enables businesses to build relationships with young people while they are at school. Work experience opportunities help young people understand routes into employment; become familiar with what it is like to work in a particular sector and environment; and focus on getting the skills and qualifications they need to compete for jobs.

Gaining these experiences is crucial in London as the labour market is undergoing a huge shift. Demand for jobs in professional services is set to rise in the next few years; the impact of leaving the European Union will create both challenges and opportunities for businesses; and there are likely to be skills shortages in industries such as technology, financial services and construction.

London Councils commissioned YouGov to ask businesses across the capital about how they perceive young people and their attitude towards offering them experiences of the world of work. YouGov's research shows that the majority of business leaders in the capital are incredibly positive about the benefits of employing young people and a significant number do offer work experience placements and other opportunities. But they could be doing more to help young Londoners build meaningful experiences of the world of work, which the London Ambitions Careers Offer highlights as crucial to them making informed career decisions. This research also clearly demonstrates that there is considerable scope for London boroughs, the Mayors' Office and schools and colleges to help businesses overcome barriers and provide further support and assistance.

London businesses need skilled and talented employees, and young people in London need an understanding of the working world and career opportunities. Work experiences create a bridge between these two groups and allow mutually advantageous relationships to flourish.

With renewed effort from stakeholders across our world-class city, large corporations, hard-working SMEs and lean start-ups alike can all experience the benefits of opening their doors to the next generation of skilled Londoners.

- **Cllr Peter John OBE, Deputy Chair of London Councils and Executive member for Business, Skills and Brexit**



## **Executive summary**

### ***The current landscape***

- 2.1.1 Four out of ten London employers currently offer work experience opportunities to young people 13-19 years of age – with large employers being much more likely to offer these opportunities than SMEs.
- 2.1.2 The skills that London employers seek in young people above all else – whether school/college leavers or recent graduates – are related to communication and attitude. The attributes they most often look for when recruiting for an entry-level position are communication skills, attitude to work, work ethic and an interest in the role/industry. Employers are much less likely to prioritise relevant work experience, business awareness or qualifications obtained.

### ***The case for creating work experience opportunities***

- 2.1.3 There is little disagreement among London employers that providing work experience is a good thing. They are in strong agreement that it is important that young people have opportunities to experience the world of work and that offering work experience programmes can improve the employability of young people for everyone.
- 2.1.4 A significant proportion of London employers believe work experience to be effective in developing the employability skills of young people, and notably, this perception is particularly prominent among those who currently offer work experience opportunities to young people.
- 2.1.5 There are various perceived benefits to organisations of offering work experience, but these differ for large and smaller organisations. Large employers highlight the benefits related to the improved reputation of their organisation, while SMEs are more likely to relate to the benefits of the energy and optimism of young people that could be brought to their organisation, as well as fresh ideas and approaches.

2.1.6 However, despite the overall positivity towards the concept of providing work experience, there are areas where employers are more sceptical about the value of providing such opportunities. These concerns relate to a perceived impact upon the organisation as a whole, a perception which must be addressed to encourage more organisations to offer work experience.

***Barriers to offering work experience opportunities***

2.1.7 London employers indicate that the biggest barrier to them offering work experience to young people is the perception of having a lack of tasks suitable for their level. This opinion is especially prevalent among SMEs. Closely tied to this thinking, a significant proportion also say that they prefer to rely on more experienced or senior workers.

2.1.8 One third of London employers believe that work experience programmes are not beneficial to most organisations because young people do not have the knowledge and expertise to contribute effectively. This finding very much echoes the top reported barrier: not having tasks suitable to the level of young people.

2.1.9 The time and management investment perceived to be required in offering work experience is also a prominent barrier, expressed by organisations of all sizes. More generally, another important reason London employers give for not offering work experience is that there is simply not a need for it in their organisation.

***Incentives and practical support for increasing the number of work experience opportunities***

2.1.10 London employers feel that more support should be available to them regarding work experience.

2.1.11 Assistance with sourcing good candidates would be a prominent incentive for London employers to work with their local council, although they also commonly mention that more information about the benefits to their organisation of offering work experience and information about local employability schemes would encourage them to work with their local councils.

- 2.1.12 For more than a quarter, improvements in the quality and number of the applications they receive from young people would encourage them to offer more work experience opportunities to young people aged 13 to 19.
- 2.1.13 Large employers tend to see more benefits to offering work experience, particularly in boosting their reputation and meeting corporate social responsibility targets. Smaller enterprises, meanwhile, focus more upon the benefits work experience students can bring to the internal running of the company.

## **Calls to action for key stakeholder groups**

### ***Large organisations***

1. Over half of large employers in London don't offer any work experience opportunities. Increasing the number of large employers who do offer these opportunities would provide a significant number of young people in London with experience of the world of work. Larger organisations are much more likely to believe that it is their responsibility to offer experiences of work to young people, and that it should be part of all organisations' strategies to offer work experience.
2. The business case for offering work experience needs to be made stronger within large organisations. Targeting key stakeholders to promote the benefits of work experience across large organisations would have a positive impact.
3. A relationship between corporate social responsibility and offering work experience for large organisations presents itself throughout the research. Targeted messaging around the business case that stakeholders can make should focus on these areas:
  - The most frequently acknowledged benefits are the enhancement of their reputation among young people and the improvement in the overall image of their organisation for being seen to respond to public concerns about youth unemployment.
  - The positive experience that many large employers have of employing young people and the contribution they can make to organisations.
4. Large organisations could be considered the 'low-hanging fruit' when it comes to building connections between businesses and the education system. They are much more likely than SMEs: to have worked with local schools or colleges in London over the last 12 months; to think that employers should have more involvement in education; and to say their organisation is likely to increase the amount it works with local schools/colleges in the next year.

5. Large employers should be encouraged to develop more links with local schools and colleges to build upon existing relationships. This is a two-way relationship and information should be made readily available by schools and colleges that employers can access to give them a clear understanding of how they can engage in work experience opportunities. This can be achieved through the London Ambitions Portal.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)***

1. SMEs make up 99% of all businesses in the UK. A valuable opportunity to increase the number of SMEs who offer work experience has also been revealed through this research. However, in order to accomplish this, there are some important hurdles to overcome.
2. SMEs who do not engage in work experience programmes could be encouraged to do so through understanding the positive experiences of other SMEs. Targeted messaging within the SME population could focus on:
  - Recognising the potential for fresh ideas and new approaches as a benefit of offering work experience, as well as the motivation, energy and optimism it could bring.
  - The positive benefit of additional support during busy periods.
3. SMEs are faced with some significant barriers to offering work experience that could be overcome through education and information sharing. Education could focus on the positive experiences of employers in similar sectors and professions so that other SMEs can understand the types of tasks young people can undertake and the level of support that is needed. In particular targeted messaging should address the following concerns:
  - SMEs who do not offer work experience opportunities to young people aged 13-19 indicate that a central reason for this is that they lack tasks suitable for their level.
  - Another barrier that is especially prevalent among SMEs is a perceived lack of need for work experience in their organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://londonambitionsportal.london.gov.uk/>



- Nearly half of SMEs believe that offering work experience programmes takes away from valuable time that staff can spend contributing to the success of the business.

***Policy-makers, Government and education authorities***

1. There is an expectation among London employers that education authorities should play a prominent role in creating and enabling work experience programmes for young people. Overall, they place the most accountability for this on schools, colleges and teachers.
2. More than half of London employers feel they do not have enough or any support for offering work experience opportunities to young people. Furthermore, nearly half believe that Government/policy-makers as well as local councils could be doing more to support employers offering work experience placements. This could present an opportunity for governmental authorities to provide compelling information and support to London employers.
3. Policy-makers and education authorities should focus information and guidance on addressing employer concerns in the following areas:
  - General advice and guidance on what meaningful work experience looks like.
  - How to receive support in accessing schools/colleges and their students.
  - Practical guides on how to set up a work experience scheme.
  - Information and guidance about making work experience meaningful.
  - The business case for engaging with young people.
4. On a more practical level, policy-makers could provide resources and support to employers for assistance with sourcing good candidates – possibly through local employability schemes.
5. Additionally, to address the significant barrier of the amount of time and management required, it could be valuable for government authorities to offer support that is tailored towards easing the management burden for organisations. This could take the form of financed resource that employers can share/access rather than pure financial incentives to take part.

6. Opportunities for providing advice and promoting the benefits of work experience are likely to present themselves with the introduction of formal technical pathways – proposed through the Sainsbury Review. Work placements will be a required element of the pathways and many more employers will be needed to supply them.

## Introduction

### 3 Policy context

- 3.1.1 Youth employment in London is lower compared with the all-age employment rate, even though unemployment has decreased significantly over the past 18 to 24 months. Employers advise that a barrier to employing young people is often their lack of work experience, yet few UK businesses (approximately 30%) currently offer work experience placements to young people. Work experience is an excellent way of encouraging young people to develop and prepare for the working world: broadening their knowledge of career opportunities, gaining skills, learning the behaviours expected by employers and growing their self-confidence.
- 3.1.2 Employers are being encouraged to engage with young people in many ways to inform young people about their industry, the opportunities available and possible routes into employment. Current research (e.g. the CBI annual survey, the UKCES employer survey) is focused on the national level of support being offered by employers, yet more information is needed to assess the progress in London boroughs and explore ways of offering more support to businesses in London.
- 3.1.3 The City & Guilds Great Expectations report 2015<sup>2</sup> highlights the concern that some industries may not be visible to young people and therefore may struggle to attract candidates to meet future demand, whereas other industries will likely be very competitive as they appear more desirable. Employers from all sectors can help counter this by providing young people with examples of careers available in a variety of industries.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cityandguilds.com/~/\\_media/Documents/Courses-and-Quals/Apprenticeships/EMSI%20reports/cggreatexpectationsonline%20pdf.ashx](http://www.cityandguilds.com/~/_media/Documents/Courses-and-Quals/Apprenticeships/EMSI%20reports/cggreatexpectationsonline%20pdf.ashx)

- 3.1.4 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Learning to Work survey 2015 found that Apprenticeships and work experience placements have increased since 2013, but that the level of engagement in education among employers differs by size of organisation. The report found that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need more support to offer these opportunities to young people as only 38% of SME employers worked with schools or provided volunteer support, compared with 70% of larger organisations.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.1.5 The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Workforce Survey 2014 found that stronger links need to be formed between educators (schools, colleges and universities) and business to better prepare young people for work. Findings from the survey of almost 3,000 companies found that more than three-quarters (76%) report a lack of work experience as one of the key reasons young people are unprepared for work. Over half (57%) said that young people are lacking basic ‘soft’ skills, such as communication and team working, to succeed in the working world.<sup>4</sup>
- 3.1.6 Government policy has focused on wide ranging education reform, with recent changes to careers advice, the raising of the participation age, widespread qualification reform and continued investment and growth of Apprenticeships.
- 3.1.7 Within this landscape, the objective of this work is to move away from a focus on the mismatch between young people and employers and move the debate to a more positive discussion of how employers can (and are) contributing to developing young people’s potential.
- 3.1.8 London Councils’ Young People’s Education and Skills Board has set out in the annual statement of priorities for 2016/17 the need to “radically reform careers work” across London. This research will be an important stepping stone in this journey by providing insight direct from London’s employers on how they can best be incentivised and helped to offer more experiences of the world of work to young people in London.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/learning-to-work\\_2015.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/learning-to-work_2015.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/young-people-need-more-support-to-make-transition-from-education-to-work,-says-bcc.html>



## 4 About the survey

- 4.1.1 This report presents the key findings from a survey of over 600 employers from London, representative of the business population by size and sector. The survey explores the views of London employers towards offering work experience to young people in their operations across the capital.
- 4.1.2 The report aims to describe the current picture with regards to the provision of opportunities for young people and provides insight into how we can make the case to increase the number of young people in London gaining experience of the world of work.
- 4.1.3 The survey was carried out online with 607 senior managers and/or individuals with HR decision making responsibility who were responding on behalf of their organisation's operation in London. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th October and 3rd November, 2016.

## 5 Guidance on interpreting this analysis

- 5.1.1 The findings are presented on the basis of all London employers surveyed, and where there are statistically significant differences between different types of employers these are discussed in more detail. There is a particular focus throughout the report on how experiences differ between Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and large employers.
- 5.1.2 The data presented for London employers as a whole is representative of the business population in London. In places throughout the report the data presented has been rebased to exclude those respondents who did not know so that the conclusions are based on those individuals with an informed view.
- 5.1.3 The report illustrates the most significant findings. Where data does not add up to 100% the remainder answered neutrally i.e. "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied", or "don't know" in a single option question, or were asked to choose multiple answer codes.

## 6 Sample profile

6.1.1 The survey data has been weighted to be representative of the London business population by size and sector. The table below provides a summary of the sample profile.

**Figure 1: Summary of the weighted sample profile**

Variable	Proportion
<b>Sizeband (employees)</b>	
Micro (1-9)	14%
Small (10-49)	15%
Medium (50-249)	13%
Large (250+)	58%
<b>Sector</b>	
Private	86%
Public and Voluntary	14%
<b>Location</b>	
Inner London	79%
Outer London	21%
<b>Industry</b>	
Manufacturing, construction and production	9%
Retail, hospitality, leisure and the arts	9%
Professional services	42%
Transport and communication	7%
Admin and other services	20%
Public/voluntary sector	14%

## Section 1: Current offerings

The first section of this report looks at the current picture regarding the provision of work experience by London employers.

### 1 Just over a third of London employers offer work experience placements

- 1.1.1 We find that 36% of London employers currently offer work experience opportunities to young people aged 13-19 years. National research from UKCES conducted in 2014 highlighted that two-fifths of all employers (38%) had taken on individuals on to a work placement in the last 12 months.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.1.2 Large employers are significantly more likely to offer work experience opportunities to young people than SMEs. But there are no differences in the proportion of London employers surveyed from the public (35%) and private sector (37%) who offer work experience opportunities to young people.
- 1.1.3 This means that close to two-thirds (64%) of London employers are not currently providing an opportunity for young people in London to gain experience of the world of work. This demonstrates the size of the opportunity that exists to engage more employers across all sectors in providing work experience opportunities to young people.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/373769/14.11.11\\_EPS\\_2014\\_-\\_Main\\_Report\\_full\\_V2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/373769/14.11.11_EPS_2014_-_Main_Report_full_V2.pdf)

**Figure 2: Proportion of London employers who offer work experience opportunities in their London-based operations**



**Base: All London employers (All n=584; Large n=186; SMEs n=398)**

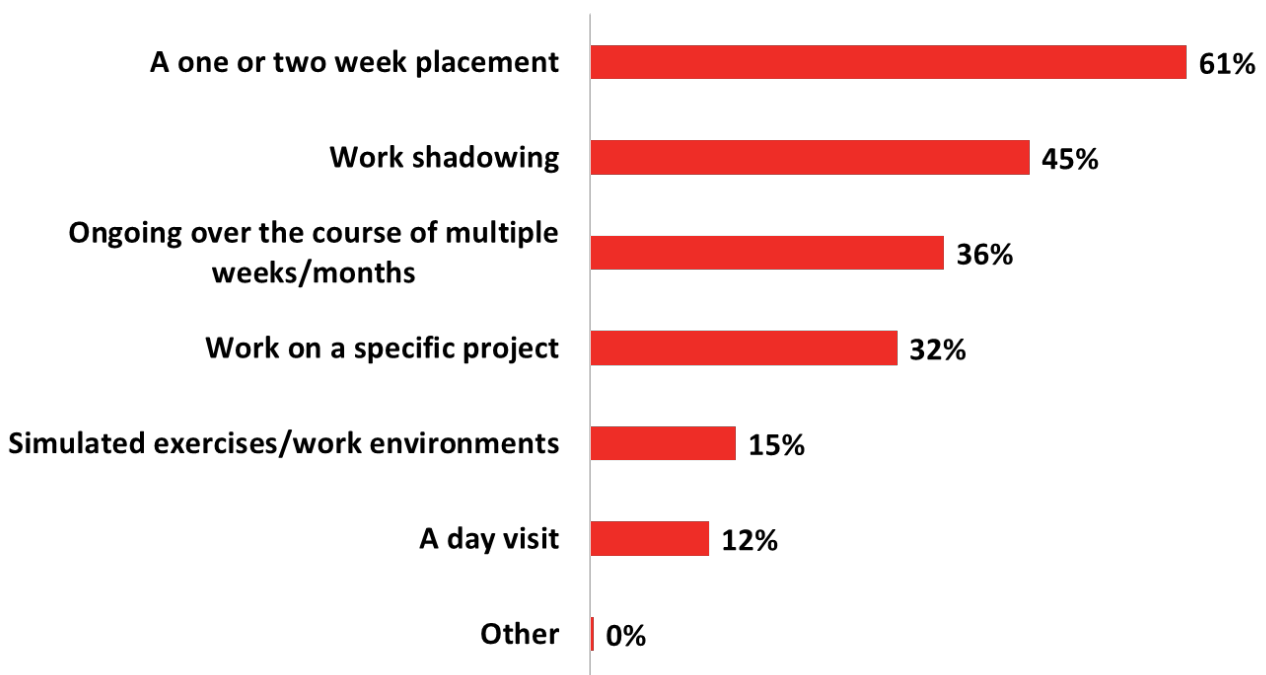
- 1.1.4 Where employers are providing work experience opportunities to young people, on average each London employer has provided 30 places. This varies significantly by employer size, with large employers being able to offer on average 41 places per year on work experience programmes, and SMEs an average of three places over the past 12 months.
- 1.1.5 As over half (55%) of large employers in London report that they do not offer any work experience opportunities, increasing the number of large employers who do offer these opportunities would provide a significant number of young people in London with experience of the world of work.

## 2 London employers do have diverse views of what work experience can look like

2.1.1 When asked to reflect on what their organisation considers work experience to be, six out of ten see work experience as a more formal one or two week placement. There are, however, a range of other views, with close to half (45%) of London employers considering work experience to be work shadowing and over a third (36%) considering work experience to be on-going over the course of multiple weeks/months.

2.1.2 Large employers are more likely than SMEs to consider work experience to be ongoing, working on a specific project or work shadowing. These findings demonstrate the breadth of opportunities employers may be willing to offer young people through a work experience scheme.

**Figure 3: London employers' perceptions of what they consider work experience to be**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=555)



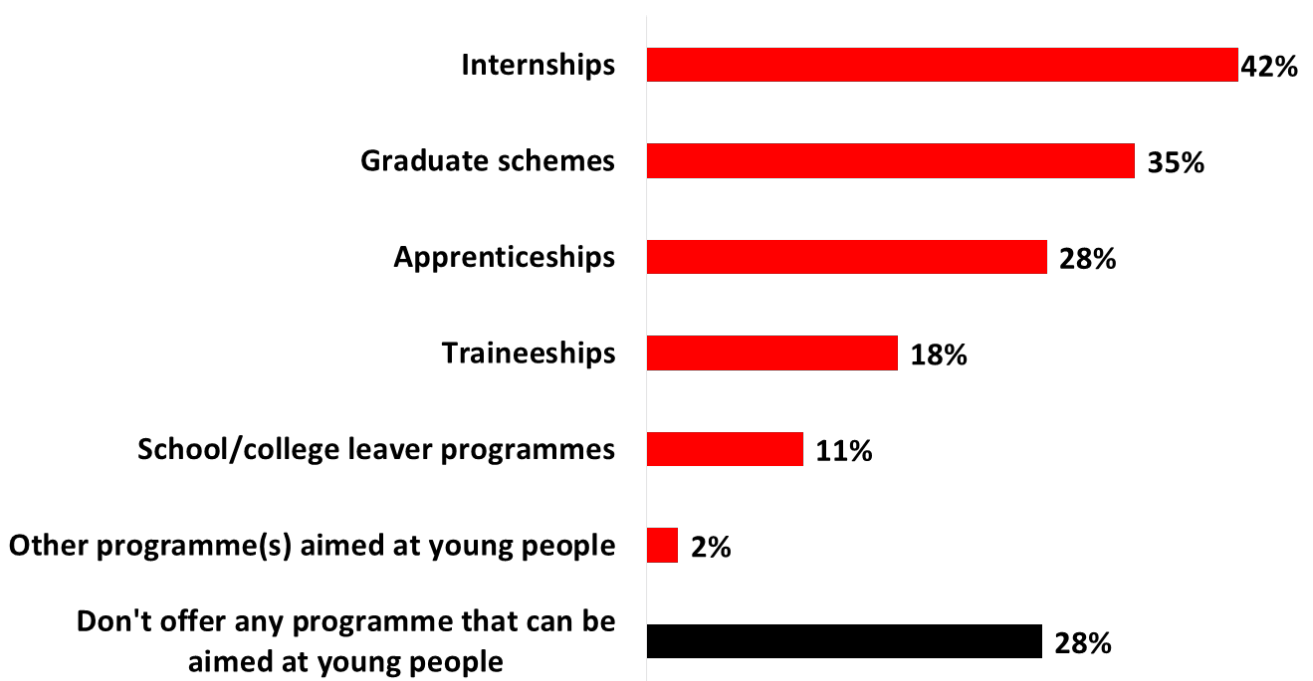
### 3 Three out of ten London employers do not offer any form of programme aimed at young people

3.1.1 Work experience is by no means the most common form of opportunity offered by employers looking to recruit young people. Internships are the most used programme, with four out of ten (42%) London employers offering internship programmes.

3.1.2 However, this research finds that three out of ten (28%) London employers do not offer any programme at all which can be aimed at young people.

3.1.3 The size of the organisation is a significant factor here. Half (49%) of SMEs don't offer any programmes that can be aimed at young people, with this rising to 70% of micro organisations. More positively, just 11% of large employers do not offer any programme at all that can be aimed at young people.

**Figure 4: Proportion of London employers who offer various programmes**



Base: All London, employers excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=584)

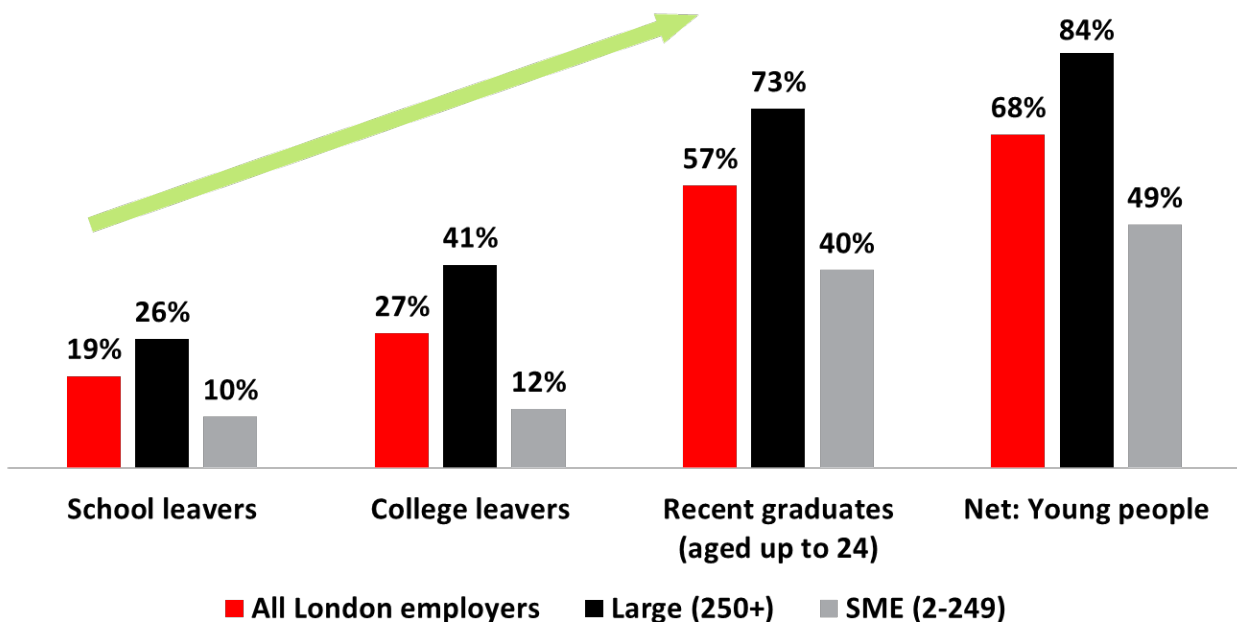
## 4 Recruitment of young people

4.1.1 The demand for young people to enter the workforce is high among London employers. Seven out of ten (68%) London employers have recruited a young person aged up to 24 into their London operations in the past 12 months.

4.1.2 Hiring recent graduates is the most common way of recruiting a young person, with six out of ten (57%) London employers having done this in the past 12 months. A much lower proportion of London employers have recruited a school leaver, but still we find that a fifth (19%) have done so. National research from the UKCES in 2013 highlighted that 16% of UK employers had recruited a school leaver<sup>6</sup> – showing comparable data with the research conducted here.

4.1.3 As with the provision of work experience opportunities for young people, large employers are much more likely than SMEs to have recruited young people in the past 12 months.

**Figure 5: Proportion of London employers who have recruited a young person into their London-based operations in the past 12 months**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (All n=551; Large n=156; SME n=395)

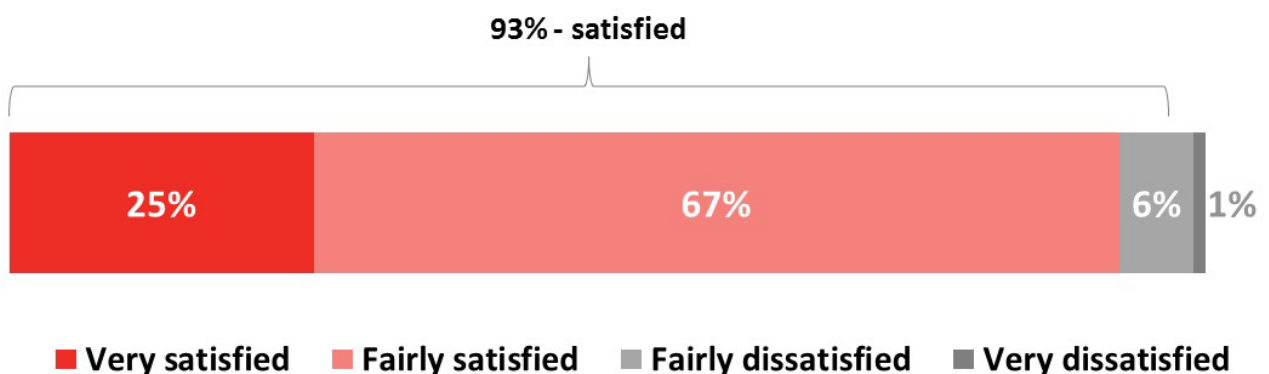
<sup>6</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/327492/evidence-report-81-ukces-employer-skills-survey-13-full-report-final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/327492/evidence-report-81-ukces-employer-skills-survey-13-full-report-final.pdf)

- 4.1.4 There is a clear link between the provision of work experience opportunities and the recruitment of young people. Those employers who do offer opportunities for young people to experience work are significantly more likely to have recruited a school leaver in the past 12 months than those employers not offering any opportunities (38% compared with 9%). Employers who offer work experience opportunities are also more likely to have recruited college leavers and recent graduates.
- 4.1.5 This shows that for certain types of employers the suitability of work for young people and the capacity to provide opportunities for young people is higher. The later sections of this report discuss what can be learned from the experiences of those who offer work experience, and what can be done to engage more employers in providing opportunities for young people.

## 5 The vast majority are satisfied with young people they recruit – but skills and attributes are the focus for employers

- 5.1.1 Although not all employers recruit young people, the experience of those who have done is very positive. Nine out of ten (93%) London employers who have recruited at least one young person report that they are satisfied with those they have recruited – just seven percent were dissatisfied.

**Figure 6: Levels of satisfaction with 16-24 year olds recruited in the previous 12 months**

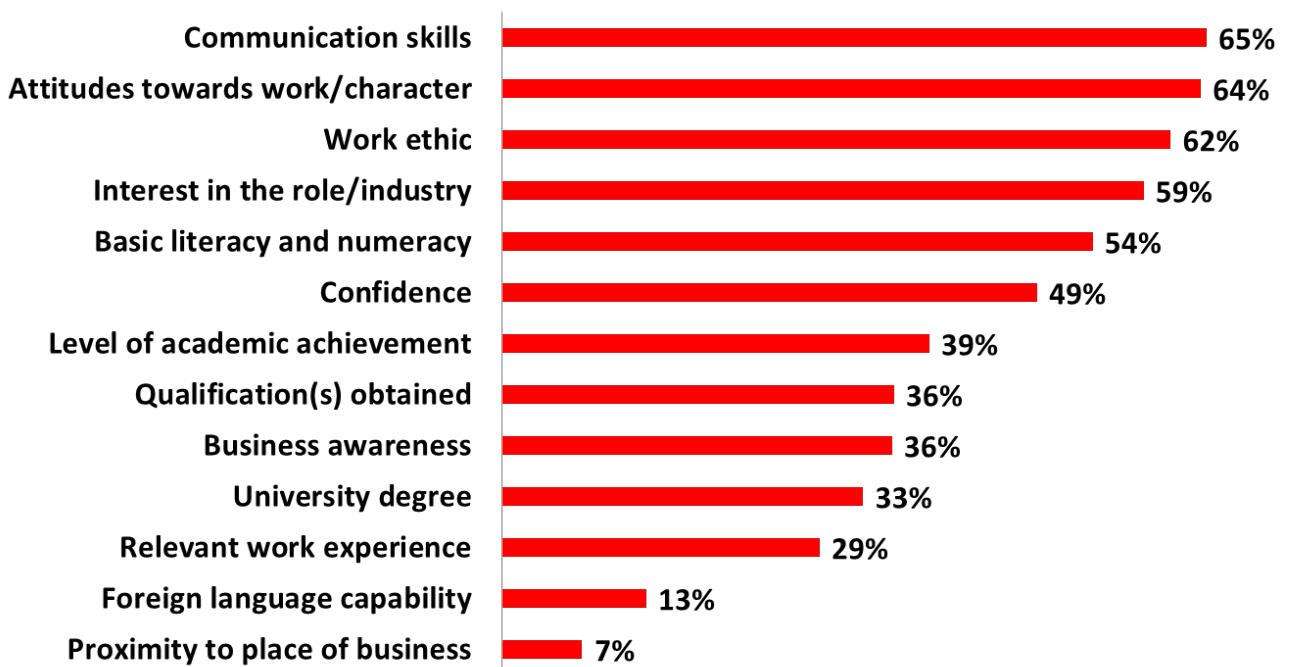


Base: All London employers who have recruited a young person in the past 12 months (n=287)

5.1.2 London employers are clear that the skills they look for in young people are related to communication skills and positive attitude. The most frequently mentioned skills that London employers look for are communication skills, attitude to work, work ethic and an interest in the role/industry.

5.1.3 Employers in London are less likely to put a focus on relevant work experience, business awareness or qualifications that young people have obtained.

**Figure 7: Skills London employers look for when recruiting young people for entry level roles**



Base: All London employers (n=607)

5.1.4 The findings here echo the findings of the 2016 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey conducted nationally. This research emphasised the overwhelming importance of young people’s attitudes to work in determining their job prospects and future success. This factor ranked much higher than others such as work experience or business awareness – findings supported by our research with London employers.

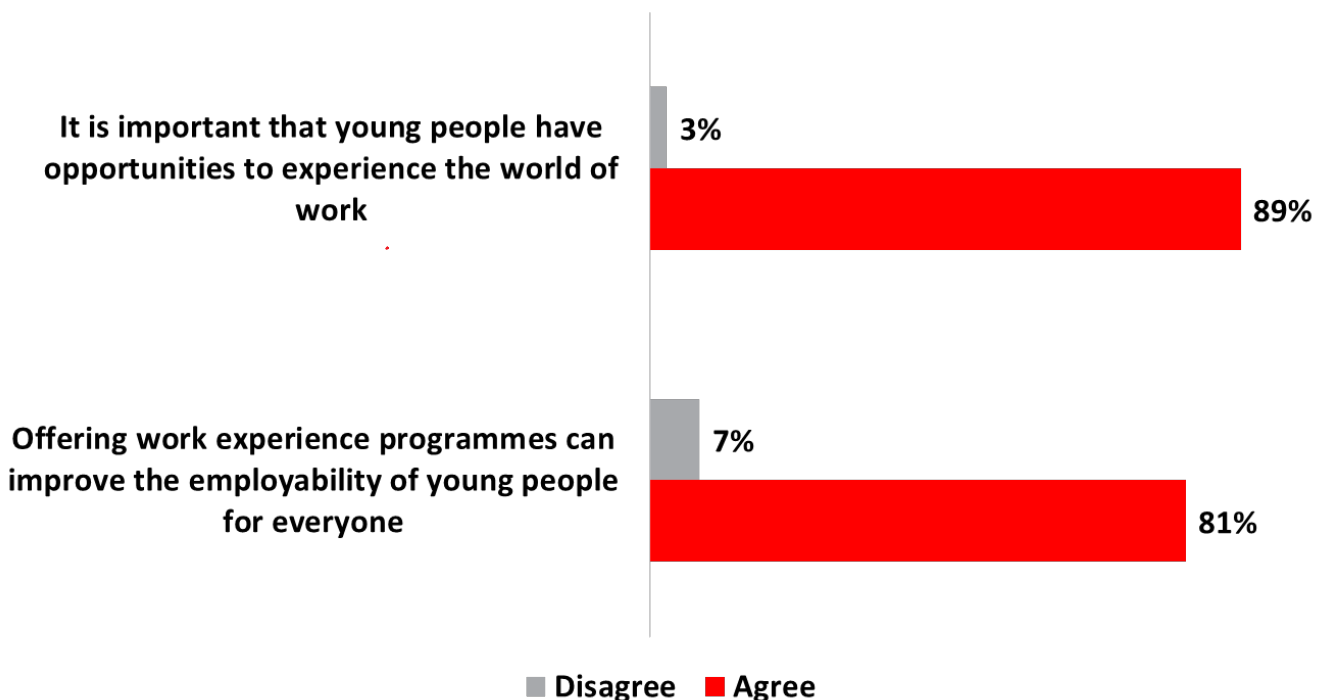
## Section 2: Making the case for increasing work experience opportunities

The second section of this report looks at employer perceptions of work experience, and how these can be used to support the case for greater engagement.

### 6 London employers are positive about the concept of providing work experience

- 6.1.1 There is little disagreement from London employers that providing work experience is a good thing. London employers are in strong agreement that it is important that young people have opportunities to experience the world of work.
- 6.1.2 There is consensus among London employers that providing work experience can benefit the wider business community, with 81% in agreement that offering work experience programmes can improve the employability of young people for everyone.

**Figure 8: London employers' support for work experience programmes**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=571)



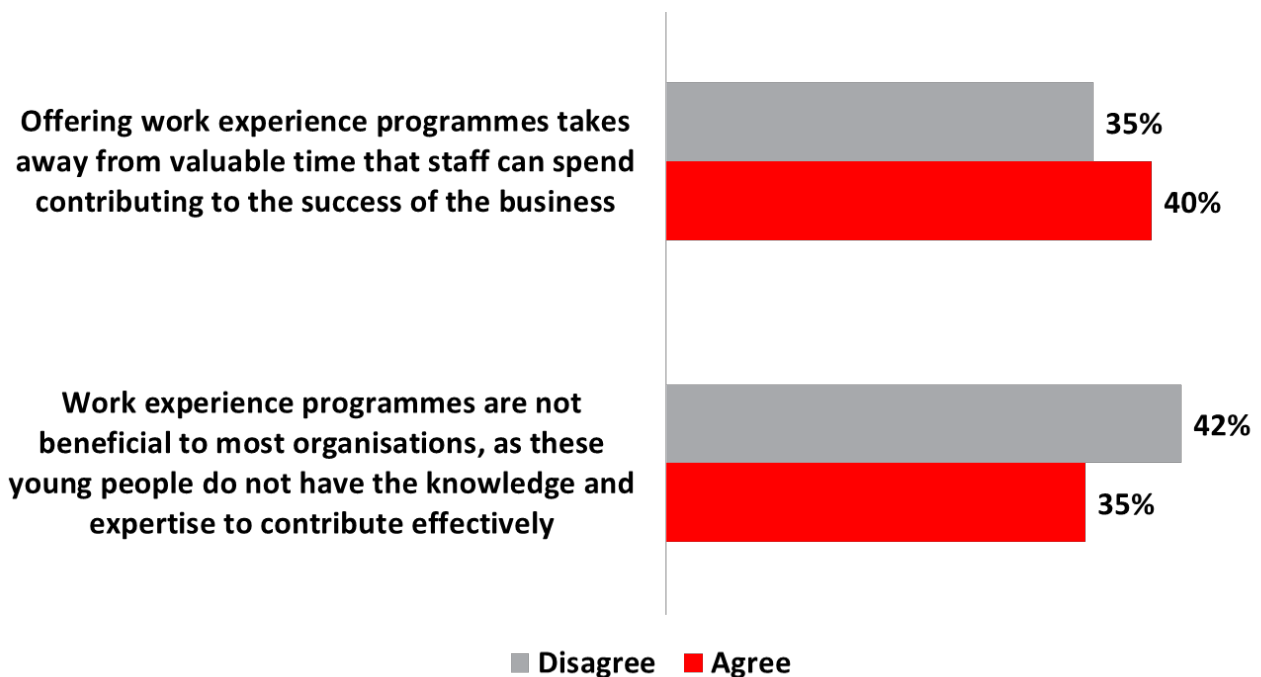
6.1.3 Supporting these positive views, only a relatively small minority of London employers (18%) feel that offering early exposure to the workplace does *not* make a difference for young people in the long run. In other words, the vast majority believe that work experience has a long-term benefit for young people. This is a consistent view across the different types of organisations located in London.

6.1.4 Half (49%) of employers in London agree that work experience programmes can help to bring new thinking into organisations. This is another positive message that can be used to make the case for the greater provision of work experience opportunities.

## 7 Perceptions related to the impact on the operation of the organisation are barriers to be overcome

7.1.1 Despite the overall positivity towards the concept of offering work experience, there are areas where employers are more sceptical about the value of providing such opportunities. These concerns relate to a perceived impact upon the organisation as a whole, a perception that must be addressed to encourage more organisations to offer work experience.

**Figure 9: London employers' concerns about work experience**



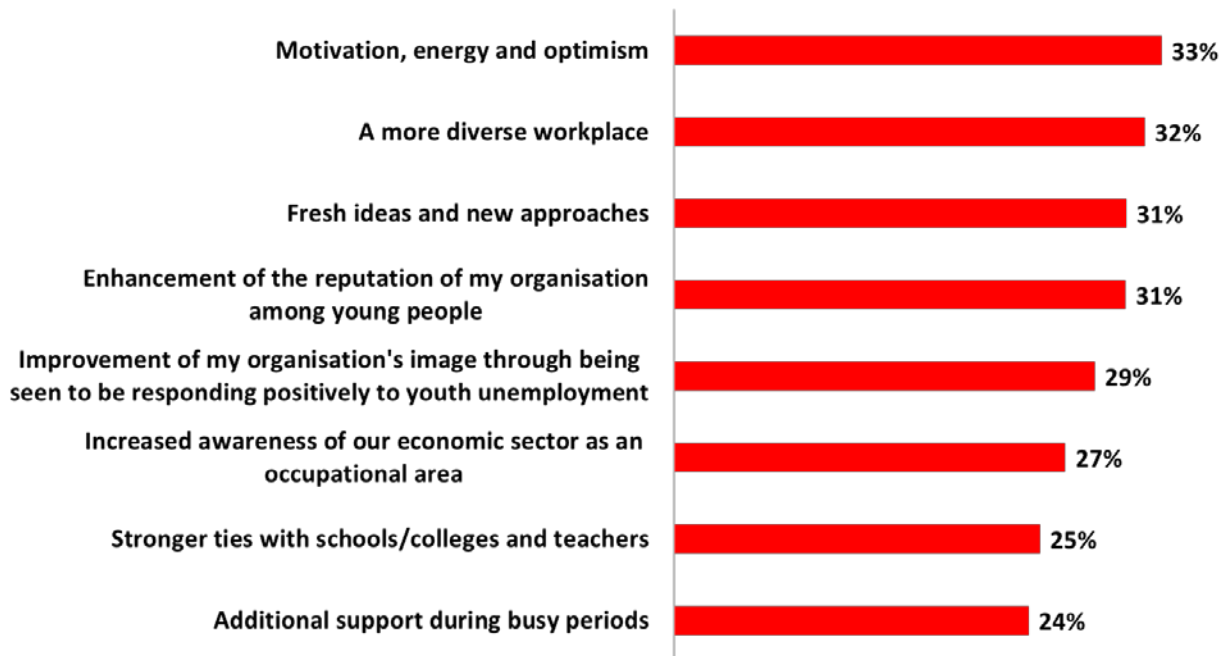
**Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=571)**

- 7.1.2 Four out of ten (40%) London employers agree that offering work experience programmes takes away valuable time that staff can spend contributing to the success of the business. This is a bigger concern for SMEs than larger organisations who have greater capacity to invest in these programmes – with half of SMEs (49%) agreeing that providing work experience programmes would take away valuable time from staff, compared to a third of large organisations.
- 7.1.3 Coupled with these concerns around using valuable staff time, a third (35%) of London employers agree that work experience programmes are not beneficial to most organisations, as the young people do not have the knowledge and expertise to contribute effectively. Again large organisations differ from SMEs on their views of the contribution young people can make Large employers (50%) are more likely than SMEs (32%) to disagree that work experience programmes are not beneficial to most organisations, as the young people do not have the knowledge and expertise to contribute effectively. Four out of ten SMEs (38%) agree that it isn't beneficial to offer work experience opportunities as the young people cannot contribute effectively.
- 7.1.4 Interestingly, this perception is greater among those London employers who do not offer work experience opportunities, with 38% agreeing that young people on work experience placements are unlikely to be able to contribute to the business effectively. In comparison, only three out of ten (28%) London employers who provide work experience opportunities agree that this is the case.

## **8 There are various perceived benefits to organisations of offering work experience but these differ for large and smaller organisations**

- 8.1.1 London employers see the potential benefits to their organisation that can be reaped from offering work experience programmes. Motivation, energy and optimism, increased diversity, fresh ideas and an improved reputation are benefits mentioned by three out of ten London employers.

**Figure 10: Proportion of London employers stating each is a benefit to their organisation of offering work experience opportunities**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=542)

- 8.1.2 Differences are, however, apparent when the data is analysed by company size and it should be remembered in this analysis that large organisations are also more likely to provide work experience opportunities.
- 8.1.3 Employers at large organisations highlight the benefits related to the improved reputation of their organisation. While they do list a range of benefits, the most mentioned are enhancement of the reputation of the organisation among young people and improvement in the overall image of the organisation for being seen to respond to public concerns about youth unemployment.
- 8.1.4 SMEs are more likely to relate to the benefits to their organisation of the energy and optimism of young people and fresh ideas and approaches. Additional support during busy periods is also a perceived benefit to them, a message that could be used to engage with more SMEs.

**Top 3 benefits to an organisation of offering work experience opportunities**

Large employers

1. Enhancement of the reputation of my organisation among young people (42%)
2. Improvement of my organisation's image through being seen to be responding positively to public concerns over youth unemployment (40%)
3. A more diverse workplace (39%)

**9%** - I don't think there would be any benefits to offering work experience to young people aged 13-19

SMEs

1. Motivation, energy and optimism (32%)
2. Fresh ideas and new approaches (28%)
2. Additional support during busy periods (28%)

**29%** - I don't think there would be any benefits to offering work experience to young people aged 13-19

8.1.5 As the figure above shows, there is still some way to go to engage more SMEs in providing work experience opportunities. This is a difficult task, as three out of ten SMEs in London report that they do not think there would be any benefits to offering work experience to young people.

## Section 3: Barriers

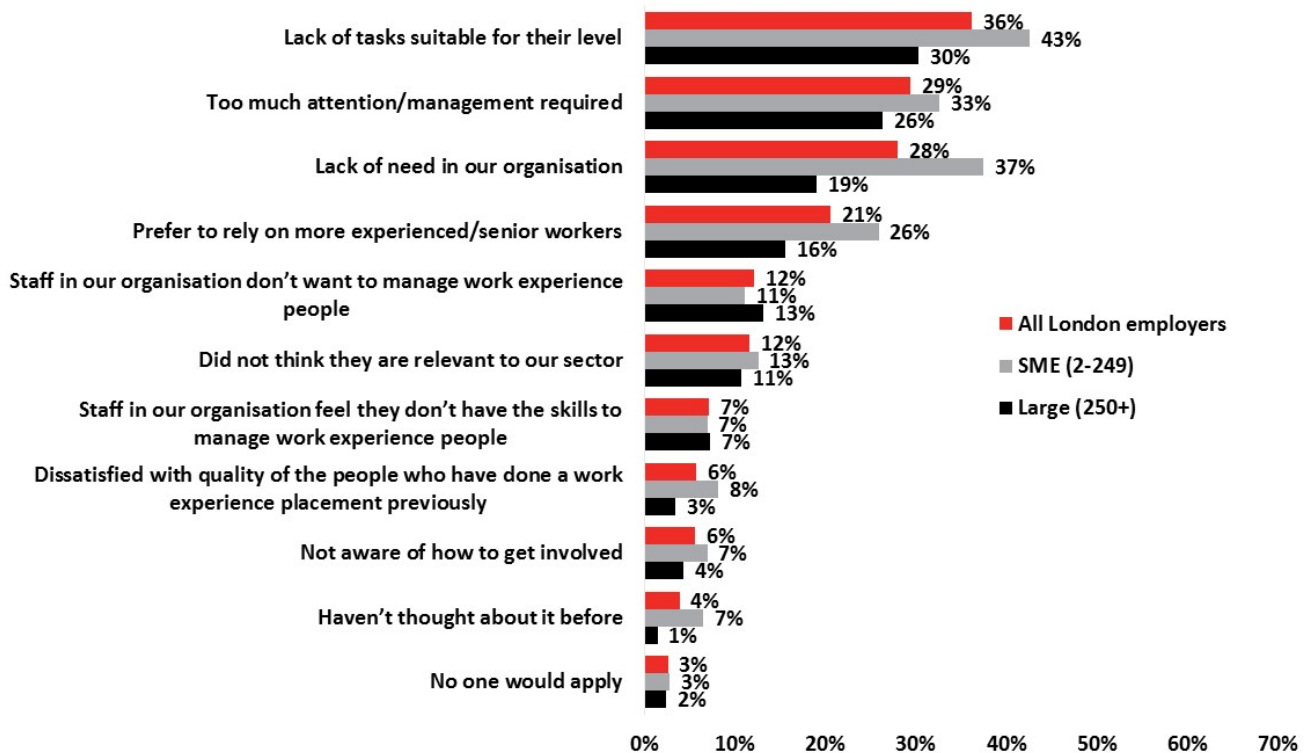
The third section of this report looks at London employers' hesitations regarding work experience, and barriers to them offering these opportunities to young people.

### 9 London employers indicate that the biggest barrier to them offering work experience to young people is a perceived lack of suitability

- 9.1.1 Among those who do not offer work experience opportunities to young people aged 13-19, more than a third (36%) report that having a lack of tasks suitable for their level is a reason for this. This perception is particularly prevalent with SMEs, among whom close to half (43%) state that this is a barrier, in comparison with 30% of large organisations.
- 9.1.2 Closely tied to this, one-in-five London employers (21%) who do not offer work experience opportunities say this is because they prefer to rely on more experienced or senior workers. SMEs (26%) are significantly more likely than large organisations (16%) to hold this belief.
- 9.1.3 Another prominent reason London employers give for not offering work experience opportunities is that it requires too much attention or management. This is reported by nearly a third (29%) of employers, and is broadly consistent across organisations of various sizes.
- 9.1.4 More generally, a significant proportion of employers also say they do not offer work experience because there is not a need for it in their organisation. Twenty-eight percent state this to be the case, and it rises to more than a third (37%) among SMEs. Large organisations are somewhat less likely to report this as a barrier, with roughly one-in-five (19%) stating this.



**Figure 11: Reasons why organisations do not offer work experience opportunities to young people aged 13-19**



Base: All London employers who do not offer work experience (All n=429; Large n=119; SME n=310)

9.1.5 A lack of knowledge or understanding of the process of offering work experience among employers does not prove to be much of a barrier; only a very small proportion report not being aware of how to get involved (6%) or not having thought about it (4%) as a reason why they do not offer this experience to young people.

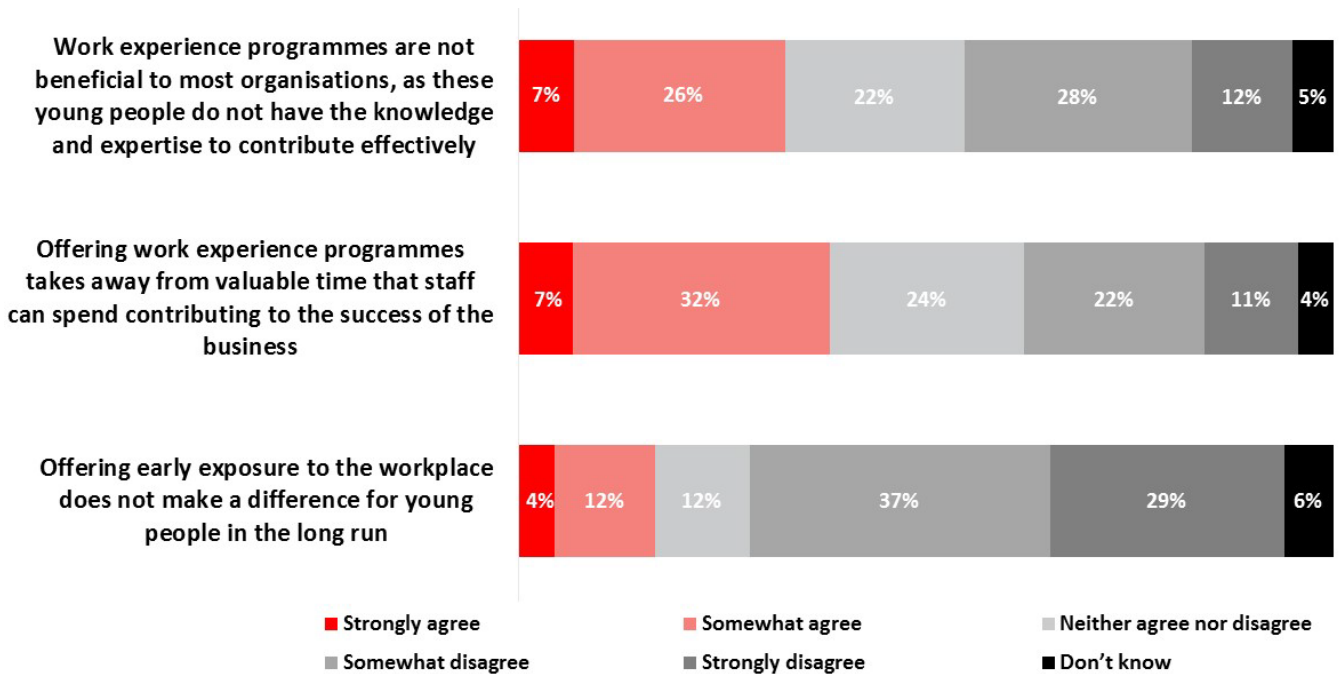
9.1.6 The findings presented here on the barriers that London employers report to offering work experience opportunities are supported by the view from employers nationally. National research from the UKCES in its Employer Perspectives Survey 2014 has also found that having no suitable roles and not having the time/resources to manage the process were the main reasons given for not offering work experience opportunities to school students.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/404997/15.02.18\\_Youth\\_report\\_V17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/404997/15.02.18_Youth_report_V17.pdf)

## **10 Perceptions of a lack of suitability present themselves when employers consider the wider benefits of work experience as well**

- 10.1.1 One third (35%) of London employers believe that work experience programmes are not beneficial to most organisations because young people do not have the knowledge and expertise to contribute effectively. Agreement with this statement is relatively consistent across organisations of various sizes and sectors. This finding very much echoes the top reported barrier to offering work experience: not having tasks suitable to the level of young people.
- 10.1.2 Also consistent with one of the most prominent barriers – the idea that work experience requires too much management – two in five (40%) feel that offering work experience programmes takes away from valuable time that staff can spend contributing to the success of the business. This rises to nearly half (48%) among SMEs, in comparison with 31% of large organisations.
- 10.1.3 Furthermore, although only a minority, nearly one-in-five London employers (18%) feel that offering early exposure to the workplace does not make a difference for young people in the long run. This could present an opportunity to educate employers of the many benefits it can have, both in the short and long-term.

**Figure 12: Perceptions of work experience**

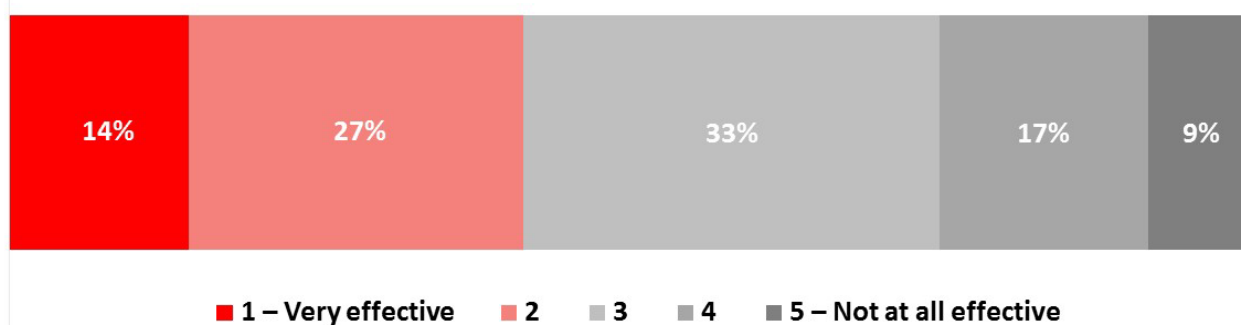


Base: All London employers (n=607)

## 11 A significant minority of London employers are not convinced of the effectiveness of work experience

- 11.1.1 One-in-four (25%) indicate that they believe work experience to be ineffective in developing the employability skills of young people.
- 11.1.2 Notably, this perception of ineffectiveness is significantly lower among those who offer work experience opportunities (16% in comparison with 31% of those who do not). This could be seen as evidence that employers who do offer work experience are seeing the benefits it can have for young people, while this is harder to conceive for those who do not already offer these opportunities.
- 11.1.3 More commonly, however, employers believe work experience to be effective in developing the employability skills of young people, with 41% reporting this. In line with other findings, those who offer work experience to young people are significantly more likely to believe it to be effective (48% compared with 37%), as well as those who have recruited school or college leavers in the past 12 months (51% compared with 37% of those who have not).

**Figure 13: Perception of the effectiveness of work experience in developing the employability skills of young people**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=512)

11.1.4 Comparatively, the programmes for young people most often considered to be effective in developing their employability skills are Apprenticeships (73%) and graduate schemes (71%).

**Case study:** *A success story of an SME offering work experience*

## **Section 4: Employers' perceptions of their role in education and enabling work experience**

The fourth section of this report looks at employers' perceptions of their role in education and enabling work experience.

### **12 London employers place the most accountability on education authorities to create and enable work experience programmes for young people**

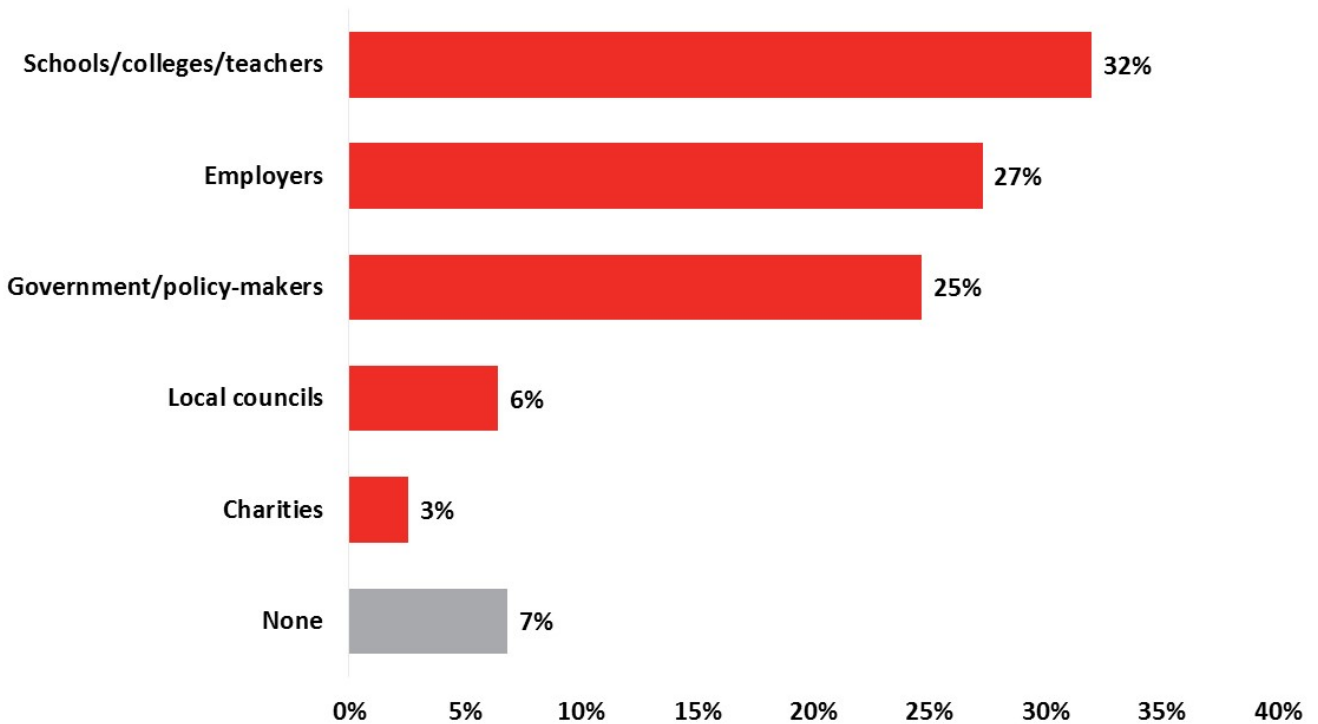
12.1.1 Roughly one third (32%) think that schools, colleges and teachers should have the most responsibility for creating and enabling work experience programmes for young people aged 13-19. Seventeen percent rank schools/teachers as number one and 15% give colleges the top ranking.

12.1.2 However, London employers take a fair amount of accountability for their own role in providing work experience to young people as well. Just over a quarter (27%) believe employers should have the most responsibility for creating and enabling work experience programmes for young people. They rank themselves as number one more often than they do other organisations or institutions, with the exception of schools/colleges/teachers.

12.1.3 Following very closely behind, 25% of employers expect Government and policy-makers to have the most responsibility for creating/enabling work experience programmes. Micro organisations with 2-9 employees are particularly likely to feel government authorities should have the most responsibility for this, with one third (33%) ranking them as number one.

12.1.4 A significantly smaller proportion (6%) think that local councils should have the most responsibility, and this is very consistent across organisation size and sector.

**Figure 14: View of the organisation/institution who should have the most responsibility for creating/enabling work experience programmes for young people aged 13-19 (proportion who ranked first)**



Base: All London employers (n=607)

12.1.5 Employers whose organisations offer work experience opportunities to young people are significantly more likely to acknowledge the accountability of employers in creating and enabling work experience programmes for young people, with 34% among this group ranking employers as number one compared with 24% of those whose organisation does not offer work experience. These employers rank themselves as number one as often as they do schools/colleges/teachers (33%). This finding indicates that a partnership approach to developing and delivering work experience opportunities could be highly effective.

### **13 A majority of London employers believe that employers should have more involvement in education**

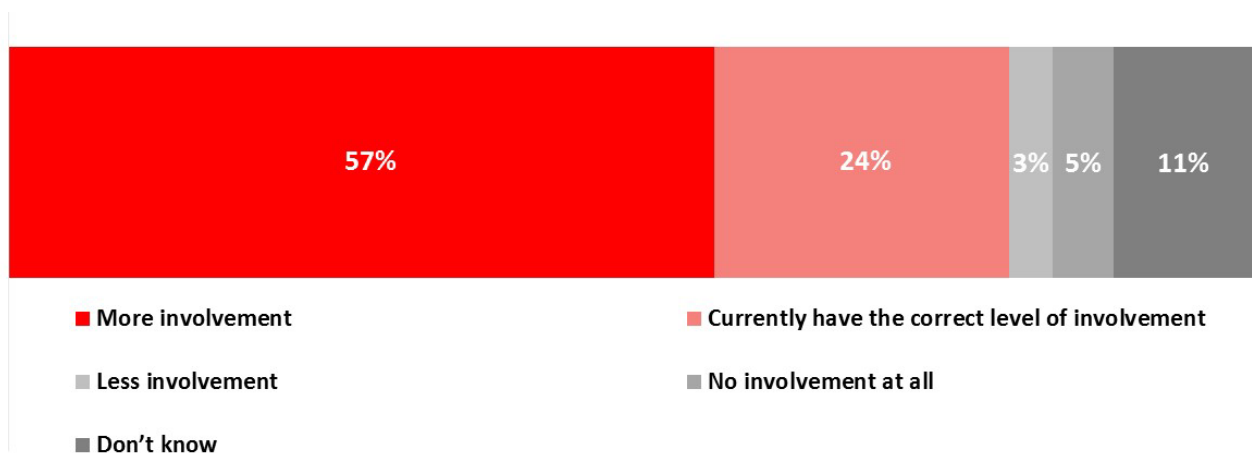
13.1.1 More than half (57%) state that they feel employers should have more involvement in education, and this is particularly pronounced among medium (60%) and large (60%) organisations.

13.1.2 Although micro and small organisations are somewhat less likely to believe employers should have more involvement in education, this view is still held by a significant proportion (45% and 51% respectively).

13.1.3 Experience of employing school and/or college leavers increases the perception that employers should have more involvement in education. Employers whose organisation has recruited young people at these transition points in the past 12 months are significantly more likely to believe employers should have more involvement (68% compared with 52% of those whose organisation has not recruited these young people).

13.1.4 Only a very small proportion of London employers (8%) feel that employers should have less or no involvement in education; otherwise one quarter (24%) feel employers currently have the correct level of involvement and the remainder (11%) are unsure.

**Figure 15: Views on the amount of involvement employers should have in education**



Base: All London employers (n=607)

## 14 A minority of London employers have worked with local schools or colleges in the past year

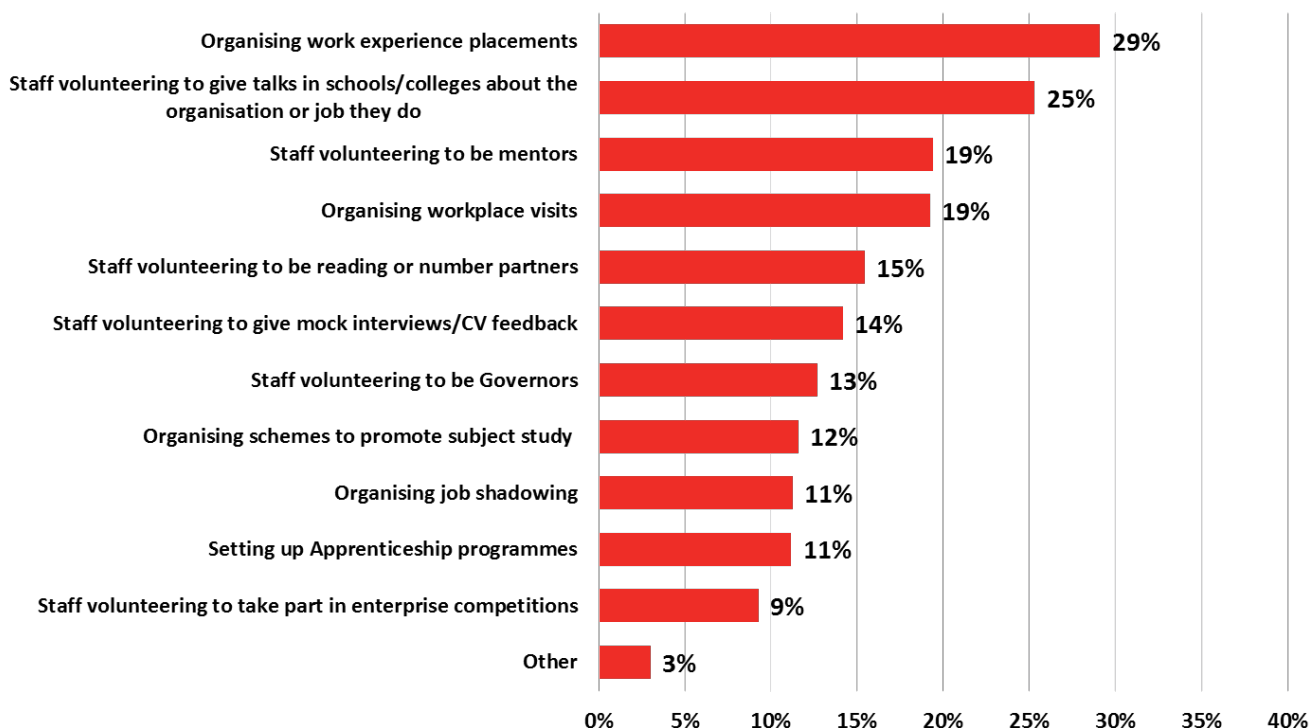
14.1.1 Two in five employers (39%) report that their organisation has worked with local schools or colleges in London over the last 12 months.

14.1.2 Among those who have worked with local schools in at least one way, the most common interaction has been for the purpose of organising work experience placements, with nearly a third (29%) reporting this.



14.1.3 Another common reason for London employers having interacted with local schools is to arrange staff volunteering. This volunteering takes place in a variety of capacities, including giving talks about their organisation or the job they do (25%) and volunteering to be mentors (19%) or reading/number partners (15%).

**Figure 16: Ways in which organisations have worked with local schools or colleges in London over the last 12 months**



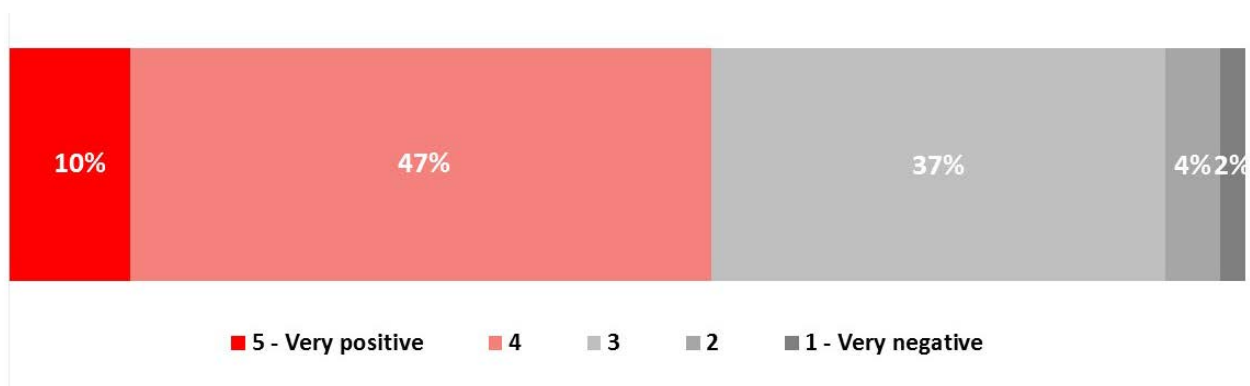
**Base: All London employers who have worked with local schools or colleges in London in at least one way over the last 12 months (n=316)**

14.1.4 Consistent with their increased likelihood to offer work experience, large organisations are considerably more likely than SMEs to have worked with local schools or colleges in London in at least one way over the last 12 months (46% compared with 29%).

## 15 London employers report a positive experience overall of working with local schools and colleges

15.1.1 Among London employers who have worked with local schools or colleges over the last year, more than half (57%) report that it was a positive experience. Notably, only a very small proportion indicate that it was negative (6%); it is much more common that employers provide a neutral rating (37%).

**Figure 17: Impression of their organisation's overall experience of working with local schools/colleges in London over the last 12 months**

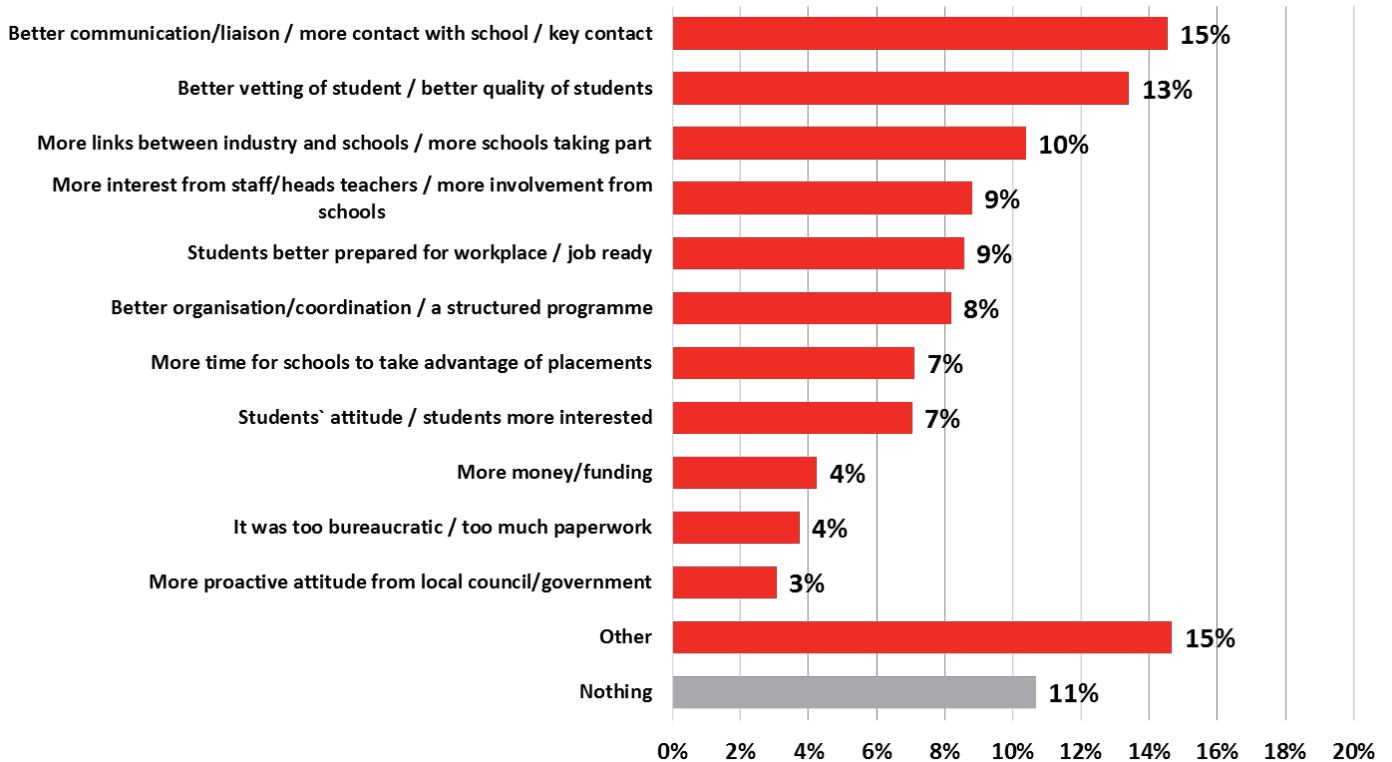


**Base:** All London employers whose organisation has worked with local schools or colleges over the last year, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=185)

15.1.2 On an open-ended basis, employers who report it being a positive engagement were asked what worked well for them. One of the top responses is related to experience, with employers stating that it gave the student experience as well as them as an organisation the opportunity to share their experience. Another response commonly provided is that working with local schools or colleges was a positive experience because it was interesting.

15.1.3 Additionally, regardless of their experience, all employers who have worked with schools/colleges in London in the past year were asked what could have been improved. Better communication and more contact with the school was mentioned most frequently, with 15% of employers stating that this could be a point for improvement. Secondly, 13% say that their experience could have been improved with better vetting/quality of students.

**Figure 18: What could have been improved in employers' experience of working with local schools and colleges in London over the last 12 months**



**Base:** All London employers whose organisation has worked with local schools or colleges over the last year, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=82)

15.1.4 Notably, only a relatively small proportion feel that working with local schools/colleges was too bureaucratic or involved too much paperwork (4%).

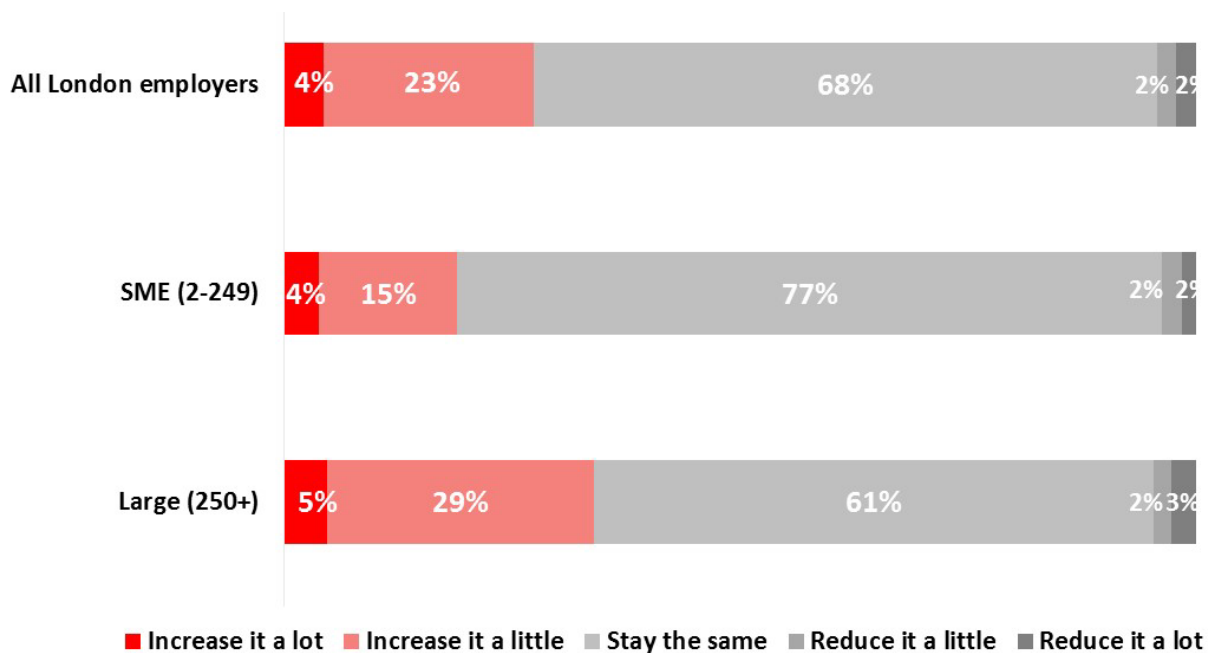
**16 The majority of London employers expect that the amount their organisation works with local schools and colleges will stay the same in the next year**

16.1.1 Although one in four employers (27%) say they are likely to increase the amount they work with schools/colleges in London in the next year, for the majority (68%) it will stay the same.

16.1.2 Large organisations significantly more often than SMEs say their organisation is likely to increase the amount it works with local schools/colleges in the next year (34% compared with 19%). However, SMEs are no more likely to reduce the amount they work with them; they are simply more likely than large organisations to intend to maintain their existing level of engagement (77% compared with 61% of large organisations).

16.1.3 Those who are particularly engaged with the employment of young people through offering work experience opportunities or having recently recruited school/college leavers are also more likely to expect they will increase the amount they work with schools in London (39% and 41% respectively).

**Figure 19: The extent to which organisations are likely to change the amount they work with schools/colleges in London in the next year**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (n=482)

## **Section 5: Information and support**

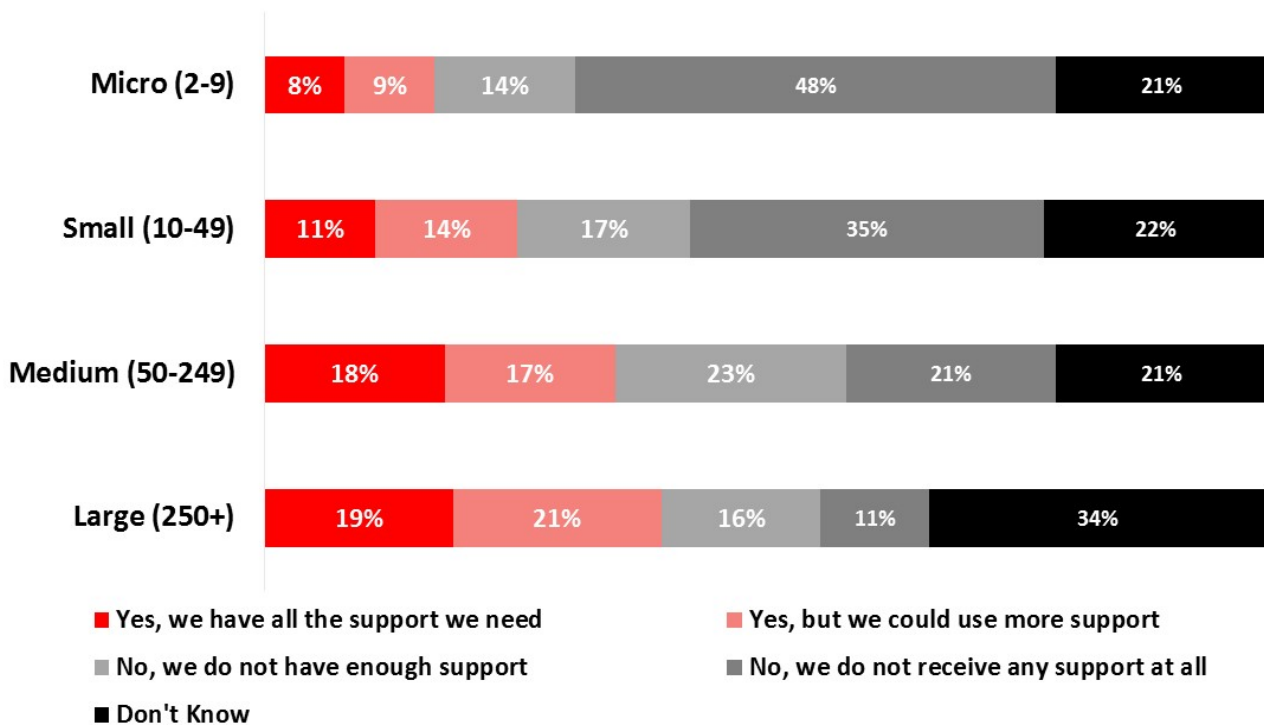
The fifth section of this report looks at London employers' perceptions of the assistance available to them for offering work experience to young people, and the forms of support they feel would be most useful to them in this effort.

### **17 London employers feel that more support should be available to them regarding work experience**

17.1.1 More than half of London employers (53%) feel they do not have enough or any support for offering work experience opportunities to young people, and another quarter (25%) say they do have enough support, but that they could use more. Slightly less than a quarter (23%) feel they have all the support they need.

17.1.2 Stark differences emerge between large organisations and SMEs, with employers from the latter being far more likely to state that they do not receive any support at all for offering work experience (45% compared with 16% of large organisations). Among micro organisations this proportion increases to more than half (61%), with only 10% feeling they have all the support they need.

**Figure 20: Perception of whether or not their organisation currently has enough support to offer opportunities to young people aged 13-19 to experience the world of work**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (All n=461; Micro n=124; Small n=115; Medium n=85; Large n=137)

17.1.3 Forty-four percent of London employers believe that the Government/policy-makers could be doing more to support employers offering work experience placements, closely followed by colleges and local councils (both at 40%). Only 6% of employers felt that no institution needed to do more to support them in this effort.

**18 If necessary, employers would look locally for further guidance on work experience – but from schools and colleges rather than councils**

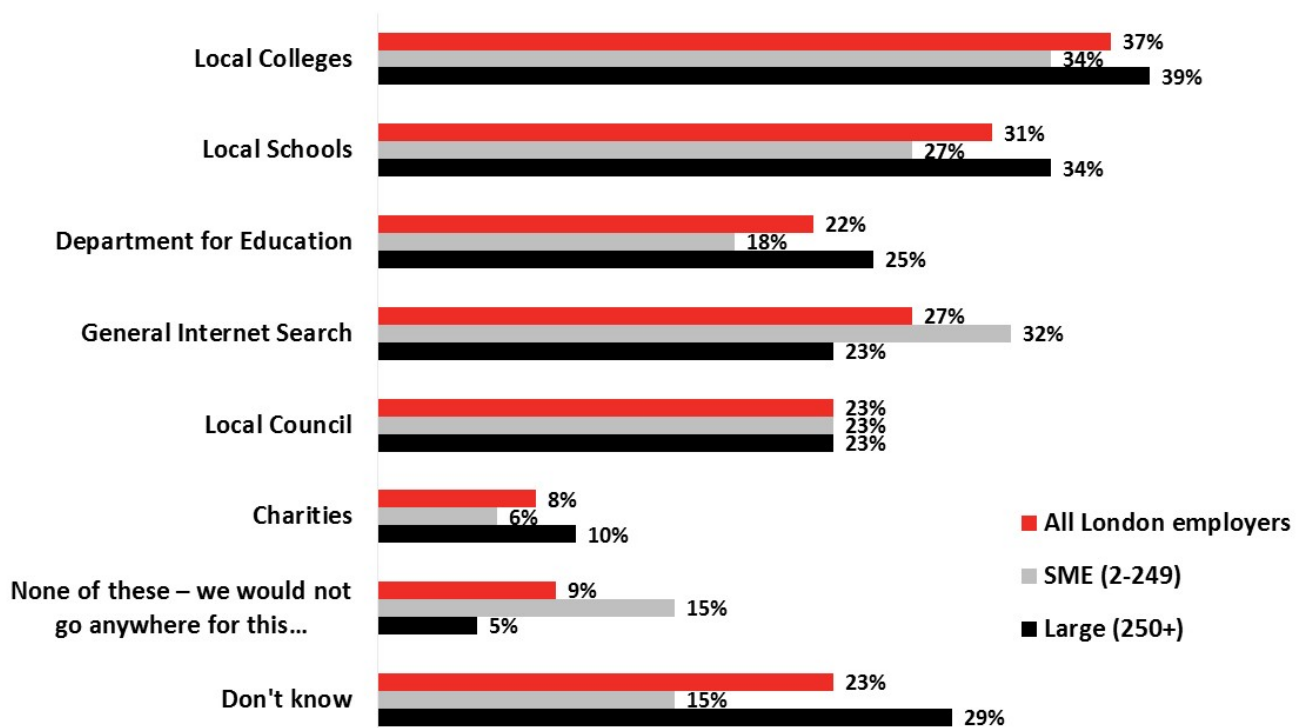
18.1.1 Employers would be most likely to go to schools or colleges in their local area (31% and 37% respectively) for information if they wanted to get involved in offering work experience.

18.1.2 Twenty-seven percent say they would undertake a general internet search, more than the 23% who say they would consult their local council for more information. Employers in the public and voluntary sectors are significantly more likely than those in the private sector to

consider asking their local council for information (32% compared with 22% among private sector organisations).

18.1.3 Notably, nearly a quarter of London employers (23%) do not know where they would go if they wanted to get involved with offering work experience to young people aged 13-19. Among large organisations, this figure rises to 29%.

**Figure 21: Where organisations might look for information if they wanted to get involved with offering work experience to young people aged 13-19**



Base: All London employers (n=607)

18.1.4 When asked what support would be most helpful to them, general advice/guidance (including what meaningful work experience looks like) comes out on top (26%), followed closely by support in accessing schools/colleges and their students (24%) and guidance on how to set up/run a high quality and successful work experience programme (24%).

18.1.5 Employers from organisations which do not currently offer work experience placements (25%) most often report that they would be interested in information on how to set up a

scheme, while employers who already offer work experience most often express interest in information about making work experience meaningful (32%).

18.1.6 Employers from SMEs are more than twice as likely to state that no further support or advice would be helpful to their organisation (29% compared with 12% of employers from large organisations).

## **19 Many employers believe that they should get financial support for offering work experience placements**

19.1.1 When asked unprompted what one recommendation their organisation would make to the government to halve youth unemployment by 2020, the most common response is to provide financial support to businesses offering training/employment. This response is mentioned by almost a quarter (22%) of those employers currently offering work experience, and was significantly more common among employers in the public/voluntary sector than in the private sector.

19.1.2 Other common responses focus around the teaching of work skills and ethics (11%) and of more general life skills, including discipline and communication (8%).



## **Section 6: Motivations and Incentives**

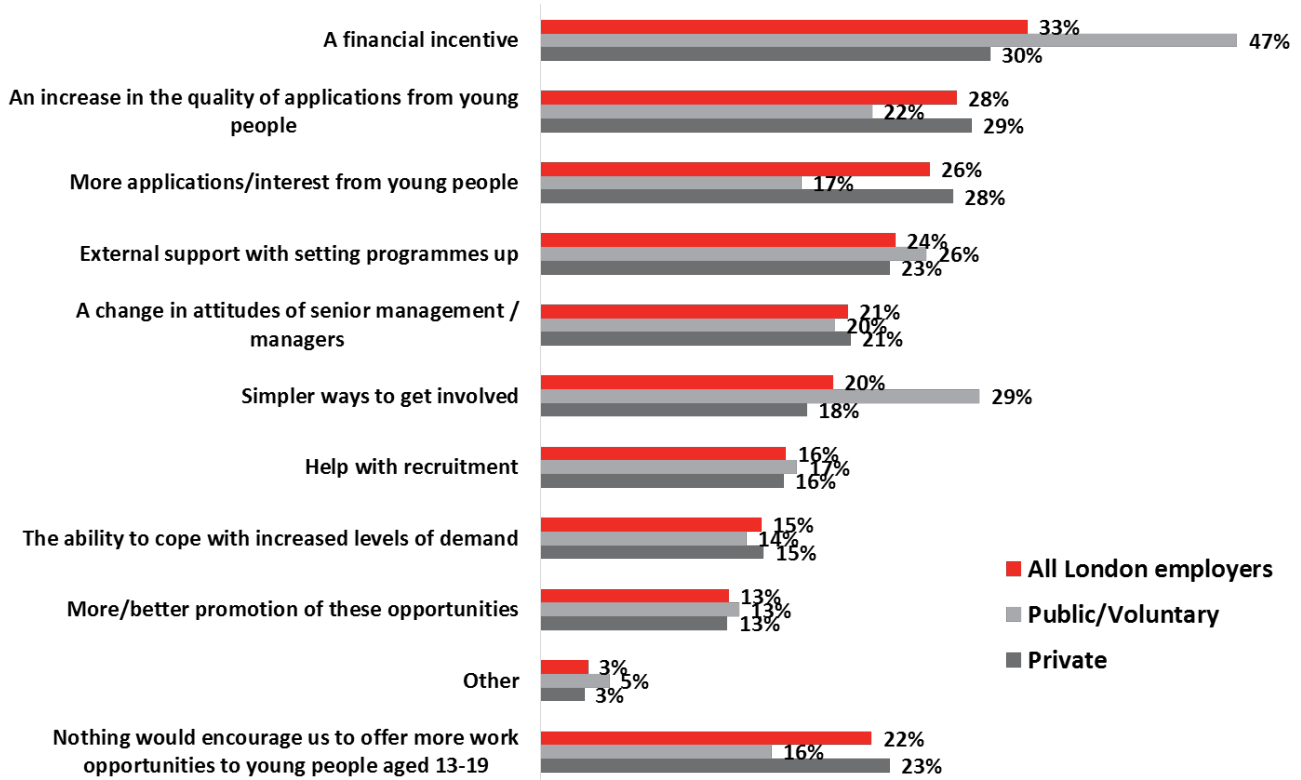
The sixth section of this report looks at the factors that would motivate London employers to establish or expand a work experience scheme, and the incentives for doing so. It then looks at the factors that would encourage organisations to work with their local council to boost the skills of local young people.

### **20 A financial incentive is most appealing to London employers when thinking about what would encourage them to offer work experience**

20.1.1 One in three (33%) employers say that a financial incentive would encourage them to offer more or any work experience opportunities to young people aged 13-19. This motivator is common among organisations of all sizes, and is particularly prominent in the public and voluntary sectors (47% compared with 30% in the private sector).

20.1.2 For more than a quarter of London employers, improvements in the applications themselves would also be a compelling factor. Twenty-eight percent report that they would be incentivised to offer work experience by an increase in the quality of applications, and 26% say that more applications or interest from young people generally would be encouraging.

**Figure 22: What would encourage/incentivise their organisation to offer more/any work experience opportunities to young people aged 13-19**

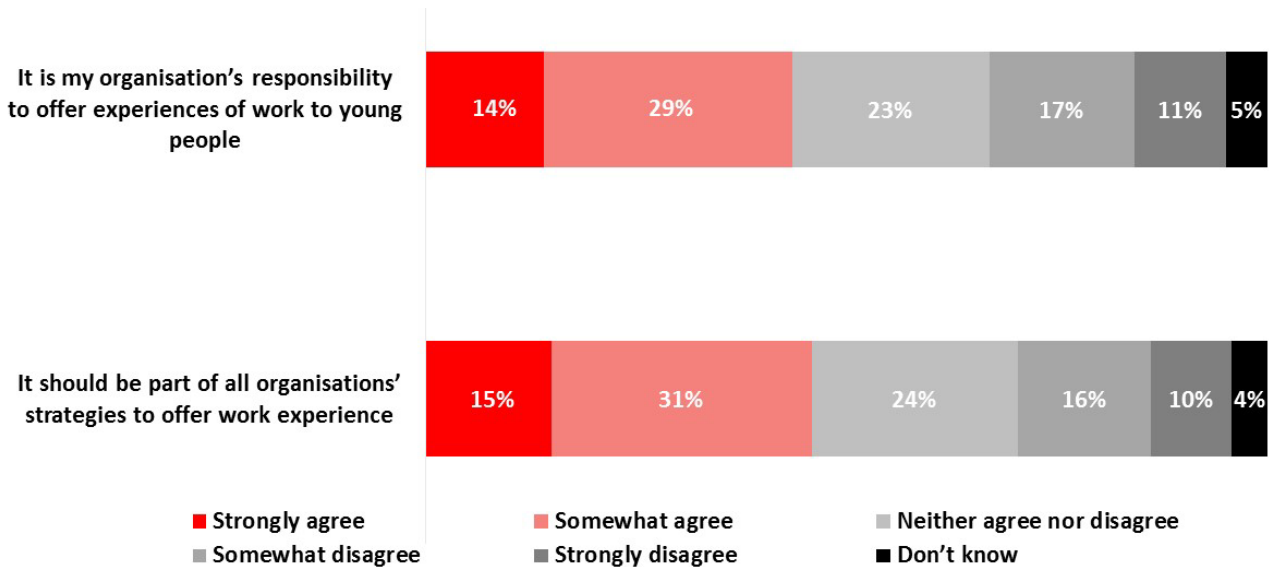


Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (All n=523; Public/Voluntary n=129; Private n=394)

## 21 Larger organisations see offering work experience as an opportunity to reach corporate social responsibility targets

21.1.1 Employers at large organisations are more amenable to offering work experience than their counterparts at SMEs. Notions of corporate social responsibility are a prominent factor contributing to this – one in two employers at large organisations agree that it is their responsibility to offer experiences of work to young people (52%), and think it should be part of all organisations' strategies to do so (51%).

**Figure 23: Perceptions of offering experiences of work to young people aged 13-19 – among employers at large organisations**



Base: All London employers who work at large organisations with 250+ employees (n=202)

21.1.2 Furthermore, two thirds (66%) of employers at large organisations who offer work experience cite corporate social responsibility as their reason for offering these placements to 13-19 year-olds.

21.1.3 As demonstrated in earlier findings, employers at large organisations tend to see more benefits to offering work experience, particularly in boosting their reputation and meeting corporate social responsibility targets. Smaller enterprises, meanwhile, focus more upon the benefits work experience students can bring to the internal running of the company.

21.1.4 Larger organisations state that the main change that would encourage them to expand or set up their work experience programme would be an increase in interest or applications from young people (25%). Support in organising or running a scheme was deemed less important overall.

## **22 SMEs are less likely to perceive any benefits or motivating factors in establishing a work experience programme**

22.1.1 London SME employers are twice as likely to say that nothing would encourage them to offer more work experience opportunities to young people (26% compared with 13% of employers from large companies).

22.1.2 Additionally, one third (33%) of micro organisations with 2-9 employees report that in general no incentive would encourage them to offer work experience opportunities to young people.

22.1.3 Fifty-six percent of SMEs offering work experience placements state that they initially established their programme to fulfil corporate social responsibility targets, yet few say that work experience actually does benefit their company in this way. Only a minority (16%) believe that offering work experience enhances the company's reputation among young people, and 13% say that such a scheme would improve the company's image for being seen to respond to youth unemployment in the local area. The smallest companies, micro organisations with less than 10 employees, are the most likely to think this way, with only 9% seeing the benefit a work experience programme could bring to their public image.

22.1.4 The only perceived benefit that SME employers were more likely to cite than their counterparts at larger organisations was the additional support that work experience students could provide during busy periods (26% compared with 18% of large organisations).

## **23 Assistance with sourcing good candidates would be a prominent incentive for London employers to work with their local council**

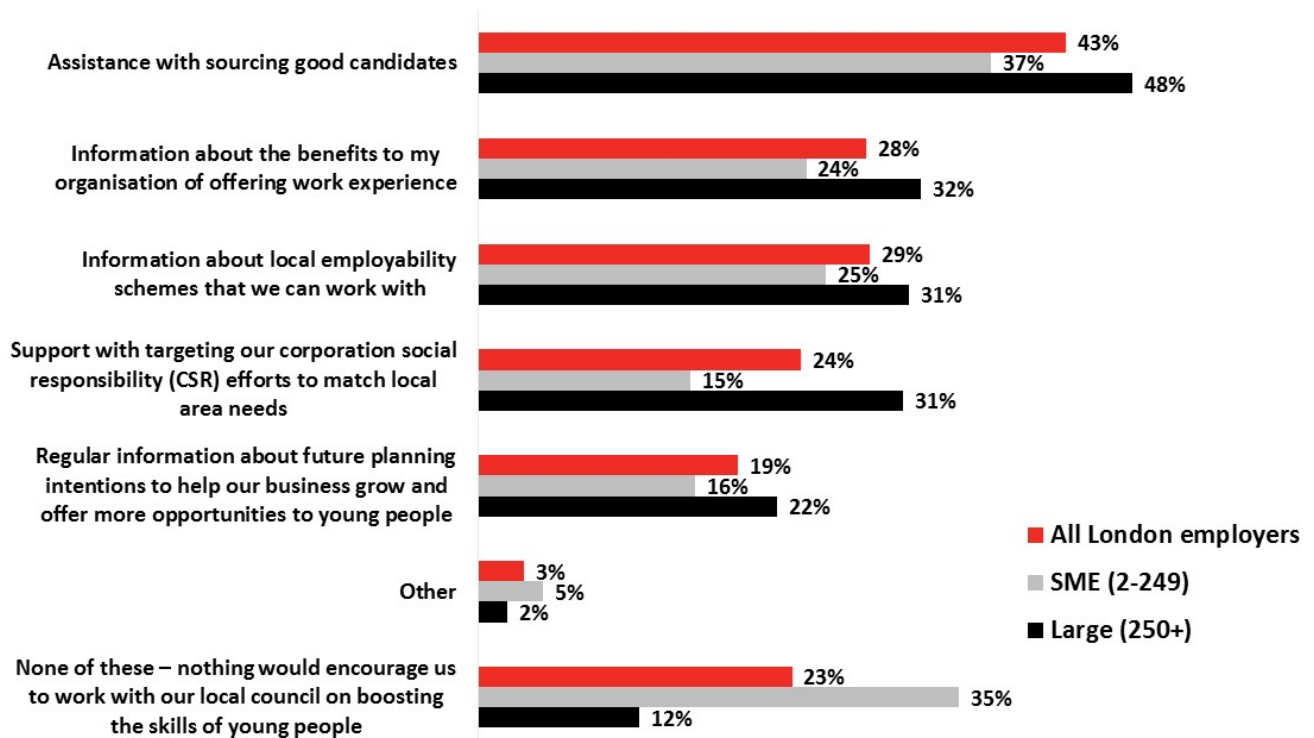
23.1.1 Thinking about what would incentivise their organisation to work with their local council to boost the skills of young people in the local community, assistance with sourcing good candidates comes out on top (32%) – and the public and voluntary sectors are particularly interested in this (42%).

23.1.2 Information about local employability schemes (22%) and the benefits to their organisation of offering work experience (21%) would also often encourage London employers to work with their local council.

23.1.3 Employers from larger organisations would be significantly more interested than SME employers (21% compared to 13%) in council support with targeting their corporate social responsibility efforts to meet local needs.

23.1.4 Findings indicate that large organisations are more open to working with their local council on boosting the skills of young people, with only 12% reporting that nothing would encourage them to do so, compared with more than a third (35%) of SMEs.

**Figure 24: What would encourage/incentivise their organisation to work with their local council in London to boost the skills of young people aged 13-19 in the local community**



Base: All London employers, excluding those who selected 'Don't know' (All n=488; SME n=348; Large n=140)

### **Concluding remarks**

- London employers recognise the value of offering work experience – for young people, the world of work, and their own organisation.
- However, some significant barriers exist for many, including perceptions of not having tasks suitable for their level, too much management being required, and a general lack of need.
- To assist employers with overcoming these barriers, it would be valuable to provide them with information, advice and guidance on:
  - What work experience should look like.
  - The benefits to organisations of offering work experience.
  - How to set up a scheme.
  - Making work experience meaningful.
- Support to offset the management burden could also be compelling.
- Local councils in particular could provide value by assisting employers with sourcing good candidates, and creating links with local schools/colleges and employability schemes.
- London Ambitions – London's unique careers offer for young people which takes account of the distinctive features of the city – prioritises experience of the world of work, stating that “Every young Londoner should have completed at least 100 hours experience of the world of work, in some form, by the time they reach the age of 16”. This aspect of London Ambitions could provide a significant campaign opportunity to get many more employers in London to offer work experience and other valuable opportunities to young people.