Work experience uncovered

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To celebrate the record number of young people doing work experience at its corporate partner companies, CEO and Urban Synergy founder Leila Thomas took a mental stroll down memory lane to her own first day at work.

"I remember vividly doing work experience at Reuters, a company I ended up working at later on in my career. Work experience helped me get into my career. Having some work experience can make you stand out from the crowd on applications for courses, training and jobs".

But what is the value of work experience, and why is it so important it's a lever for social mobility rather than family privilege?

Careers and Enterprise sum it up well in this quote:

“High quality work experience helps young people get ready for the world of work. When integrated into a structured careers programme - as defined by the Gatsby Benchmarks, work experience:

- Increases awareness of jobs and pathways like apprenticeships
- Builds confidence in key skills like speaking and listening
- Reduces the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) at 16 and 18.”

This year, the social mobility and youth empowerment charity Urban Synergy celebrated a bumper year of getting young people ready for and into work experience at leading organisations.

Our mentees (young people who’d been through the Urban Synergy programme) enjoyed work experience this summer at:

- Crown Prosecution Service
- Dynamic Planner
- HS2
- ITN
- Legal & General
- London Stock Exchange Group
- M&G
- PwC
- UK Power Networks (UKPN)
- WTW

"My thanks go to all our corporate partners, and especially to WTW, UKPN and Dynamic Planner, who were able to pay their interns," says Leila Thomas.

"We make sure we support our mentees with expenses such as bus fares, appropriate clothing and lunch money - if it’s what will make the difference between doing work experience or not."

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"My team is brilliant at preparing the Urban Synergy mentees for this experience, which can be the biggest event of their lives so far.

Thank you again to everyone who provides these opportunities and to the corporate partners - like Moodys - whose employees have a hand in preparing the young people through corporate insight days and speed mentoring.

Urban Synergy's Work Experience Lead, Semere Estifanos, explains that gaining work experience as a young person is valuable for several reasons:

- Skill Development: It helps build both technical and soft skills like communication and teamwork.
- Career Exploration: Allows exploration of different fields and roles, aiding in career decisions.

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- Networking: Provides opportunities to connect with professionals for future opportunities.
- CV Building: Enhances employability by showing practical experience.
- Confidence: Boosts confidence through responsibility and independence.
- Workplace Understanding: Teaches workplace norms and culture.
- Overall, it prepares young people for future employment and career success.

“It’s inspiring to see young people take charge of their futures by seeking out work experiences,” says Semere. “Their initiative in gaining real-world skills and exposure to different industries shows a level of maturity and ambition that’s truly commendable. Watching them actively pursue these opportunities gives me confidence that they’re not just planning for the future—they’re already shaping it”.

Dress for success is an old adage, but looking confident for your first day in the workplace is an honour and a privilege that we can all embrace.

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