



Over the spring and summer, students across our Pathways suite of programmes took part in work experience hosted by our brilliant community of employer partners and supporters. After reading through student feedback at the end of the academic year, we were thrilled to see just how much students enjoyed and gained from their placements. Feedback on employer partners was extremely positive across the board, but we were particularly struck by the lovely comments made by students who undertook placements with our partners at [NatWest](#), who consistently fed back that they had dramatically improved their team working skills thanks to the excellent group sessions run by the team- not easy when delivering placements digitally!

We caught up with the NatWest team to ask them a little more about their experience hosting placements and what their secret was to success!

What was your experience like hosting placements this year?

We had two very successful placements during 2021, the first held in March and the second in August. Due to the pandemic this all had to be organised and hosted by us virtually. We were aware of how challenging it may be to keep our young people engaged during the weeks but have had amazing feedback from all involved. To be expected with the second placement we had a drop in numbers due to lockdown being lifted but managed to work around this and still host the Insight Week for those attending.

How did you go about organising your placements?

We have quite a strong relationship with our partners and are in contact regularly. At the start of each financial year we like to discuss our engagement with them for the upcoming year, when these conversations happen we discuss programmes and workshops we have capacity to host. Once numbers of young people and dates have been agreed we then start to move onto planning with our internal bank staff, what speakers can we have? Who can we introduce the young people to? What sort of jobs would we like to show them etc.

Why do you think students rated your group activities and team work so highly?

With the pandemic we've seen a lot of young people being unable to socialise let alone network with peers they wouldn't have otherwise met without the programme. By giving our students the opportunity to go into breakout rooms with new people it gives them a chance to experience working with others and seeing how their voice can be heard and appreciated. With our group work we gave our young people all the responsibility, after the brief it was up to them to create

something to present. This meant that each voice and idea was valued and given power to speak up on issues we asked them about.

Any other tips for successful digital hosting?

Digital hosting can be challenging. We always asked ourselves if the students were engaged, did they have enough free time, did they enjoy the sessions. Our top tips would be to proactively ask for that feedback. Have a check-in in the morning and afternoon after all sessions and simply ask them how their day was. We had a lot of honest responses from this and ended up changing the way we ran some sessions. We would also encourage presenters to be themselves when speaking to young people, we know virtual life is hard so if the cat walks by behind you make a joke, keep things light-hearted. We're all doing the best we can and the young people can see that too!

Who can our partners reach out to if they have more questions or would like to connect with you?

Feel free to connect with our colleague [Amy Shuttleworth](#) who is responsible for working with our Social Mobility Partners and organising Insight Weeks.

