

A young boy with light brown hair, wearing a dark blue school blazer, white shirt, and a striped tie, is smiling at the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting with green and yellow elements.

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South Midlands Careers Hub Work Experience Provider Showcase

Thursday 25 June 2026

Work Experience Employer Showcase

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Agenda:

- Hannah Bladen – Head of Community Development @ MK Dons Community Trust
- Equalex case studies – Olivia Dams

Session objectives:

- To support Career Leaders' and employers with the planning and implementation of modern work experience
- To explore a variety of meaningful models of work experience linked to the Equalex framework

Time	Agenda
3.30 – 3.35	Introductions to session
3.35 – 3.50	Hannah Bladen @ MK Dons Community Trust
3.50 – 4.15	Olivia Dams: WEX Updates, tools & case studies
4.15pm	Q&A and next steps



Speaker:

Hannah Bladen

Head of Community
Development @
Milton Keynes Dons
Community Trust

Applying equalex in practice: Learnings & case studies



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The equalex framework

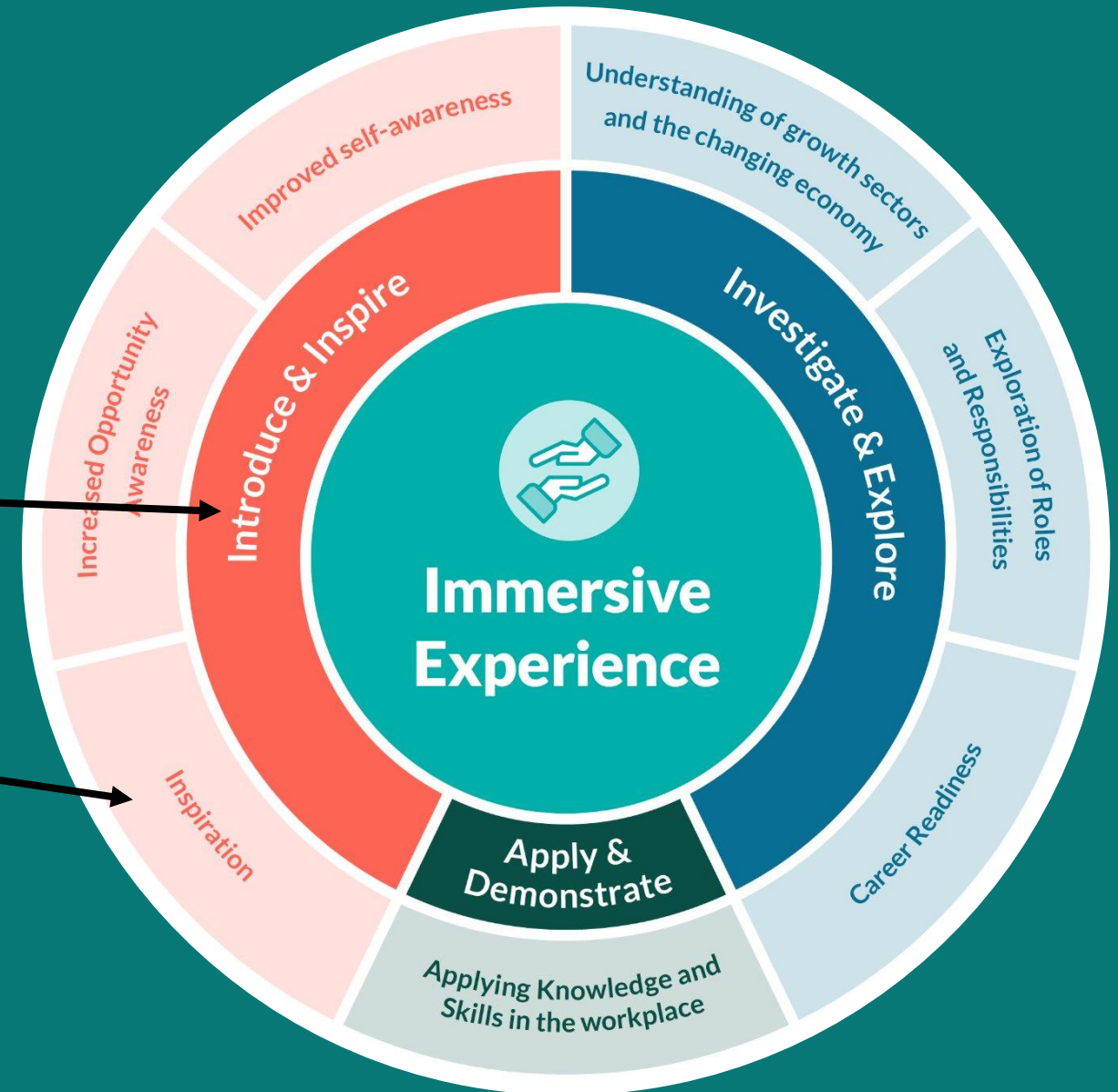
A progressive framework of learning outcomes & objectives to help both schools and employers to deliver high quality, meaningful workplace experiences.

Core themes:

1. Introduce & Inspire
2. Investigate & Explore
3. Apply & Demonstrate

Learning outcomes

Learning objectives



Core Theme: Introduce & Inspire

Learning Outcome	Learning Objectives
Increased Opportunity Awareness Learners have a broad knowledge of a range of career opportunities which enables informed decision making.	Learners understand that there are different types of workplaces such as, offices, warehouses and home working, and that there are different types of employment such as, self-employment, freelancing, and full-time employment.
	Learners can recall a range of different sectors and jobs, and describe the characteristics of the workplaces these jobs might take place in.
	Learners can identify links between the curriculum and essential skills needed within the workplace and can give examples of careers linked to subject areas.
Improved Self-Awareness Learners are aware of their passions, skills and work preferences and understand how these could inform their career choices.	Learners are aware of essential workplace skills and are able to self-assess their current skill level, aligned to the Skills Builder Universal Framework.
	Learners can identify their passions, interests and skills and consider how they might inform potential jobs or career pathways.
	Learners can describe their work style and ideal working environment and can give examples of workplaces that would and would not suit their preferences.
Inspiration Learners are inspired and motivated by careers opportunities which they may not have otherwise considered.	Learners can recognise and challenge stereotypes about career pathways and understand that their career aspirations should not be limited by them.
	Learners can identify career role models and articulate their early career aspirations.

Core Theme: Investigate & Explore

Learning Outcome	Learning Objectives
Career Readiness Learners have developed essential skills which will support them to transition to the workplace.	Learners can evidence the essential workplace skills they have developed, aligned to the Skills Builder Universal Framework.
	Learners can demonstrate essential skills applicable to different workplaces, including skills required when working in a remote environment.
	Learners can create, develop or design something based upon a brief set by an employer, and identify the essential skills they used.
Exploration of roles and responsibilities Learners have a deeper level of knowledge and understanding about the role responsibilities, and pathways of careers in areas of interest.	Learners understand the different routes into employment and understand the differences between pathways.
	Using real life examples, learners can describe the roles of different people within an organisation and talk about what they do.
	Learners can create, develop or design something based upon a brief set by an employer, and relate the essential skills they used to a potential career pathway.
Understanding of growth sectors and the changing economy Learners understand how the local and national labour market is changing and what this might mean for their career choices.	Learners can identify growth sectors within their local area and talk about the types of jobs within these sectors.

Core Theme: Apply and Demonstrate

Learning Outcome	Learning Objectives
Applying Knowledge and Skills in the workplace Learners can evidence when they have applied their knowledge and skills within the workplace, can articulate this to potential employers, and can use their experiences to make informed career decisions.	Learners can evidence when they have applied careers knowledge, essential skills and behaviour within a workplace environment, and have received employer feedback on their work.
	Learners can demonstrate what they have learnt as a result of their experience of the workplace and articulate how this will inform their future decision making.
	Learners can evidence when they have applied careers knowledge, skills and behaviour within recruitment processes, such as mock interviews or mock assessment centres.
	Learners can compare their experiences of different workplaces and evaluate the impact each has had on their career readiness and decision making.
	Learners can critically assess how their experiences of the workplace have challenged stereotypes and raised their aspirations.

Learnings from the Year 2 equalex pilot

Conditions for Success: what is driving effective implementation

- **Employer partnerships:** sustainable, diverse engagement that improves quality while reducing burden.
- **System change:** scalable approaches delivered through coordinated local models.
- **Hub capacity:** Careers Hubs acting as strategic facilitators, translating policy into practice and driving quality.
- **SLT commitment:** leadership ownership embedding work experience within whole-school strategy.
- **Curriculum planning:** experiences aligned to learning outcomes and integrated into teaching.
- **Equitable access:** barriers addressed so all learners have access to meaningful workplace experiences.
- **Learner development:** learners progressing in confidence, skills and career readiness.

What the case studies show:

How schools and partners are addressing key system challenges:

- **Access:** building learner readiness through staged experiences.
- **Quality:** embedding outcomes-based planning and co-design.
- **Scale:** delivering meaningful experiences at whole-cohort level.
- **Depth:** enabling learners to apply skills, receive feedback and progress.
- **Curriculum integration:** linking employer engagement to subject learning.
- **Employer engagement:** enabling SMEs to participate through coordinated delivery.

Progressive WEX for SEND & AP learners

Hub: West Midlands

The approach: a progressive, curriculum-linked model for students with low confidence and limited exposure to workplaces.

The model:

- Structured in-school activity to build learner readiness e.g. communication skills, self-awareness and understanding of workplace experiences. This was planned as part of curriculum delivery.
- Small-group employer-led encounters including practical tasks, tours, and staff interactions. Tasks were co-designed with employers to ensure they met the meaningful work experience criteria.
- Learners who were ready then progressed into further workplace experiences.
- Structured reflection and mock interviews built in after each stage for learners to recognise and articulate their skills.

The impact:

- Disengaged students participated meaningfully, increased confidence and improved understanding of the workplace
- Employers shifted their approach & demonstrated increased confidence working with SEND/SEMH learners
- Progressive, outcomes-based delivery built readiness and enabled learners with additional needs to access meaningful WEX over time.

Practical tips for implementation



- ✓ **Build learner readiness in the classroom:** deliver short sessions on communication, expectations and confidence before employer engagement.
- ✓ **Introduce employer engagement in small, supported groups:** begin with 2–6 learners per session to reduce anxiety and enable participation.
- ✓ **Co-design sessions with employers in advance:** ensuring clear purpose, tasks and learning outcomes.
- ✓ **Build a clear progression pathway:** plan next steps such as further encounters or mock interviews from the outset.
- ✓ **Use structured reflection after every interaction:** use simple prompts (e.g. what did you do, what skills did you use, what next?).

Structured co-design & leadership engagement

Hub: West of England

The approach: Senior leaders were brought into WEX delivery to observe employer engagement in action.

The model:

- SLT were invited to visit other schools and join a Community of Practice – this shifted WEX from a bolt-on activity to a shared priority.
- Hub introduced a simple structured co-design process to actively facilitate planning between schools and employers. The same set of questions were used to plan every interaction e.g. what is the purpose, what should students learn, how will reflection be built in.
- Employers were supported to adapt their offer from observational visits to task-based interactive experiences.

The impact:

- WEX delivery shifted from inconsistent and observational to more meaningful, interactive and outcome-led.
- Schools had increased confidence in planning and delivery aligned to equalex & GBM6.
- Employers experienced increased engagement from students through clearer expectations and support.
- Strong early evidence that the planning process itself drives quality.



Practical tips for implementation

- ✓ **Engage SLT through observation, not meetings:** invite leaders to observe delivery to make expectations clear.
- ✓ **Use a simple planning template for every activity:** define purpose, tasks, skills and reflection.
- ✓ **Facilitate a co-design meeting before delivery:** bring employers and schools together to plan activity.
- ✓ **Assign roles beyond the Careers Leader:** involve curriculum staff in delivery and planning.
- ✓ **Quality assure every experience:** against learner outcomes.

Scalable employer carousel model

Hub: West Midlands

The approach: A progressive, curriculum-linked model to tackle limited employer capacity and logistical constraints.

The model:

- Hub introduced a centralised employer carousel model delivered at a local FE College. Creating a simulated multi-employer workplace environment.
- Learners rotated through structured employer-led sessions with practical tasks, interactions with employers and exposure to workplaces.
- Employers prepared beforehand to design sessions around tasks & interaction rather than observation; ensuring consistency and alignment to BM6.
- Delivering in 1 location removed logistical barriers and provided equitable access.
- **Coordinating multiple employers into a repeatable format proved scalable.**

The impact:

- Learners gained insight to a wider range of careers and workplace environments. Schools could move from small-scale activity to whole-cohort participation.
- Employers, particularly SMEs were able to participate more easily through shared delivery.
- This model demonstrates how meaningful WEX can be delivered at scale through coordination.



Practical tips for implementation

- ✓ **Plan for whole-cohort delivery from the outset:** design logistics (space, timing, rotations) early.
- ✓ **Use a centralised coordination model:** one team manages employer engagement and delivery.
- ✓ **Design all employer sessions around tasks:** ensure sessions include active participation.
- ✓ **Use rotation groups to maintain quality:** keep groups small to support interaction.
- ✓ **Build in simple, scalable reflection:** use quick debriefs or worksheets after sessions.

Curriculum-integrated employer partnership

Hub: Devon, Plymouth & Torbay

The approach: Staged employer engagement for a rural school with limited employer access and low student awareness of local career opportunities/growth sectors.

The model:

- School partnered with local construction & sustainability employer to design a structured, staged programme; embedding engagement within curriculum delivery.
- Programme began with whole-cohort assembly for Yr9, to build early awareness and aspiration, embedding equitable access rather than just a self-selecting group.
- Learners with deeper interest progressed to employer-led experiences including construction challenge in-school and a workplace visit – all compliant with BM6.
- Activities co-designed with employer and linked to DT and Engineering curriculum subjects.

The impact:

- Learners demonstrated increased awareness of careers within the sector and increased confidence discussing career pathways.
- Teachers reported increased engagement in curriculum subjects linked to programme.
- The model shows how Benchmark 5 & 6 can work together to build readiness and progression.



Practical tips for implementation

- ✓ **Start with a whole-cohort entry point:** by reaching all learners through assemblies.
- ✓ **Plan follow-on experiences:** offer deeper learning for interested learners.
- ✓ **Link activity directly to curriculum subjects:** by working with subject departments.
- ✓ **Co-design activities using real projects:** use real examples to increase relevance.
- ✓ **Use classroom reflection to reinforce learning:** follow up experiences in lessons.

Next steps:

- CEC webinar – ‘Understanding the updated statutory guidance’
- Monday 29.06.26 3.45pm
- [Sign up here](#) (will also put the link in the Teams chat)

Thank you for listening & we'll see you for the next Showcase in the Autumn term (date tbc)