**Case Study: International Virtual Work Experience**

Bristol WORKS have taken the lead in exploring how traditional work experience placements can be meaningful, engaging and impactful both within Bristol City Council and with local Bristol employers. Due to Covid-19, many young people in Year 10 lost their work experience placements across the summer months and motivation was low amongst many of the students, especially due to uncertainty around GCSES and what careers may look like. For many, being at home was also an additional challenge whereby they were looking forward to the opportunity of planning for their future.

In light of this, during July 2020 WORKS collaborated closely with partner schools, Oasis John Williams and Bedminster Down, to pilot a virtual work experience programme for Year 10 students replacing the previously cancelled face to face placements. As part of this programme of activities, WORKS delivered a mixture of [real work challenges](https://www.bristol.works/realchallenges), [remote resources](https://www.bristol.works/remotelearning) and [insight films](https://www.bristol.works/remote-film-content) into the world of work, as well as recorded workshops and sessions around post 16 options, apprenticeships and building career confidence. Six students from both partner schools had work experience at Bristol Museum and The Bottle Yard Studios cancelled, WORKS facilitated a virtual workshop instead. Students were asked to complete a real work challenge and attend a Q&A session to meet and interview people from both organisations. They also experienced insight films from some of the staff members they would have worked alongside and had an opportunity to take part in virtual networking to gain information and guidance about opportunities at both organisations and beyond. The workshop was attended by the students, teachers from both schools and volunteer professionals, including a Retail Buyer, Business Manager, Arts and Events Apprentice, Head of Digital, Engagement Officer and the Digital Apprentice. The students asked some fantastic questions about the most exciting aspects of their of their careers, how to build resilience, skills needed for the workplace and where the employers saw themselves in five years time! One piece of advice was that ‘Everything is either a success or a lesson and taking risks and keeping options open is important as students move into their Year 11 studies’. One of the students reported “this is what I needed, it has been so tough and it’s been great to focus on something positive for my future and be reminded of the skills I need to get there”.

Taking some of the successes and learning from this and with future lockdowns, WORKS partnered with Bell Group UK and Black Professionals in Construction to plan a fully live virtual work experience programme for a targeted cohort of students. A particular focus for the profession was how to ensure more females and people from BAME backgrounds are provided opportunities to explore the construction profession and be given support to understand what a career in this sector may look like.

Running across a week, 26 students from Bristol (WORKS schools) and Plymouth (targeted schools) worked together in teams with young people from schools and colleges across Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe on an exciting, interactive, week-long construction challenge. Pupils were involved in all aspects of research, design, build and marketing and learnt from the guidance, input and expert advice from a range of industry professionals. Through live Q&A sessions, interviews and industry insider films there was a showcase of the vast range of careers available in the construction industry - from bricklaying to business development, from customer service to carpentry and from landscape architecture to logistics and supply - and students had the opportunity to learn and develop a range of technical abilities and key soft skills such as team work, problem solving, decision making and resilience. It was a great opportunity to be the pioneer and pilot something that had not been attempted and to utilise the virtual world to globally connect and provide a buddying scheme for students. All students who participated reported that they would recommend this to others and two of the students who participated shared their experience here - [A Week in the life of Virtual Work Experience — Bristol WORKS](https://www.bristol.works/newsblog/2021/2/15/muk4zjratydg1oy7ub743pfvtdx3kt)

Young person also reflected “***Thank you so much for taking the time, Growing up I didn’t get very good grades in my English and struggled to do well. It’s funny as I would have never thought I would be writing the way I am writing at the moment if I was looking at myself in years 5,6,7,8 and part of 9 as I just had no confidence in structuring even a sentence”.***

A parent also emailed saying *-* ***“Thanks very much for your email. I’m really pleased that he has been getting a lot out of this work experience. He has been ‘buzzing’ all week and I have seen his confidence growing, in the conversations he and I have been having since he started on Monday. It’s a very welcome ‘distraction’ at the moment, to be able to get stuck into something a bit different! Can I also take this opportunity to thank you for your support with this week. I know from chatting with my sonthat you have provided valuable support and advice”.***