

# Geographical variation in access to work placements and work inspiration: data from the Employer Perspectives Survey 2014

## INTRODUCTION

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For the first time, using local enterprise partnership (LEP) data from the *Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, we can see that individuals are exposed to a postcode lottery of opportunity when it comes to accessing work experience opportunities or benefitting from other employer engagement with their school or college. However, this is not in the sense that everything is down to luck but because the opportunities available will vary significantly depending on which parts of England they live in. It appears that this is driven by the varying composition and performance of local labour markets.

Areas which perform better on economic indicators such as Gross Value Added per head (GVA), which is a productivity measure, youth unemployment and recruitment levels, and those with high levels of Knowledge-Intensive Businesses (KIBs), also tend to have a higher proportion of employers offering work experience and/or 'work inspiration' opportunities, a term to describe a bundle of activities where employers are involved in preparing students for work, from carrying out mock interviews to helping design coursework. KIBs are businesses that are heavily reliant on professional knowledge, including many in Financial Services, Architecture and Computing. Conversely, those with a more constrained economic performance, and with higher representation of certain sectors, such as Manufacturing, tend to perform less well. Having said this, there are a number of notable areas that

buck this trend. One such example of this is Liverpool City Region, which stands out as performing highly relative to other areas on both measures despite high levels of unemployment and low GVA per head.<sup>1</sup>

Other areas that perform well when it comes to both the proportion of employers offering work experience and the proportion offering 'work inspiration' activities include Cheshire and Warrington, London, and areas of East Anglia in the New Anglia LEP. Cumbria, Humber and York and North Yorkshire, meanwhile, are falling behind on both measures. While individuals in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Thames Valley are less likely to be offered work experience, they have a higher likelihood of being offered work inspiration activities; the same can be said for Dorset.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the survey cannot fully explain such differences, it provides some interesting food for thought to stimulate further debate, research, and enhance our understanding, so that moving forward we can work to improve opportunities for all. Although the *Employer Perspectives Survey* covers the whole of the UK, this short commentary focuses on geographical variation across England. Our local data is available publicly at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/Employer-Perspectives-Survey-2014-England-and-local-data> for all to use, along with national data and a survey report providing the key findings from the *Employer Perspectives Survey*.

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1. Economic activity, unemployment and employment rates, 2013-2014: NOMIS 2015, *Annual Population Survey*, July 2013-June 2014 data; Office for National Statistics, *GVA for Local Enterprise Partnerships 1997-2012*, (April, 2014)

2. Data from *The Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, (UKCES). The data is available publicly at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/Employer-Perspectives-Survey-2014-England-and-local-data>

# WORK INSPIRATION

## Employers offering work inspiration in the last 12 months, 2014 (%)

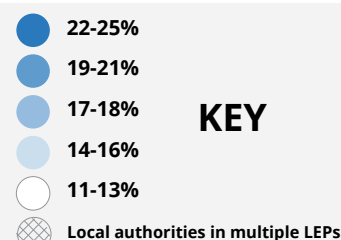
Work inspiration is defined as employers being involved in one of the following:

- organising site visits for students;
- undertaking careers talks;
- providing one-to-one mentoring support;
- conducting mock interviews;
- helping design or set coursework
- sponsoring, supporting or participating in enterprise competitions

**17** per cent of employers across England had offered some kind of work inspiration activity in the previous 12 months

Employers tend to offer work inspiration activities in regions with a higher proportion of knowledge-intensive businesses and low youth unemployment

### KEY



The Humber and Tees Valley both have low levels of employers engaging in work inspiration but high youth unemployment and low GVA (gross value added) per head.



Liverpool City Region has high levels of employer engagement in work inspiration despite having high unemployment and low levels of GVA (gross value added) per head.

Cheshire and Warrington has low youth unemployment and high levels of employers engaging in work inspiration.

Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Thames Valley both have low youth unemployment and high levels of employers engaging in work inspiration.

1 Black Country	11 Gloucestershire	20 Leeds City Region	30 South East
2 Buckinghamshire Thames Valley	12 Greater Birmingham and Solihull	21 Leicester and Leicestershire	31 South East Midlands
3 Cheshire and Warrington	13 Greater Cambs and Greater Peterborough	22 Liverpool City Region	32 Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire
4 Coast to Capital	14 Greater Lincolnshire	23 London	33 Swindon and Wiltshire
5 Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	15 Greater Manchester	24 New Anglia	34 Tees Valley
6 Coventry and Warwickshire	16 Heart of the South West	25 North Eastern	35 Thames Valley Berkshire
7 Cumbria	17 Hertfordshire	26 Northamptonshire	36 The Marches
8 Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire	18 Humber	27 Oxfordshire LEP	37 West of England
9 Dorset	19 Lancashire	28 Sheffield City Region	38 Worcestershire
10 Enterprise M3		29 Solent	39 York and North Yorkshire

To access the underlying data used on these maps please go to:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/Employer-Perspectives-Survey-2014-England-and-local-data>

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 EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

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The first map shows the percentage of employers by LEP who had been involved in 'work inspiration' activities in the 12 months prior to the survey. 'Work inspiration' is an umbrella term to describe a variety of types of employer engagement with educational institutions, which in the survey comprised: holding site visits for students; undertaking careers talks; providing one-to-one mentoring support; conducting mock interviews; helping design or set coursework; sponsoring, supporting or participating in enterprise competitions.

In *Growth through People*,<sup>3</sup> UKCES set out a number of challenges for the future including:

1. That all "schools should have links with local businesses and use those links to inform and inspire young people about the breadth of career opportunities available".
2. That closer "collaboration between employers, colleges and universities is essential to ensure there are seamless opportunities to work and learn over the course of longer working careers".

*The Employer Perspectives Survey 2014* captures the extent to which this collaboration is already happening and how it varies by geography.

Across England, 17 per cent of employers had offered some kind of work inspiration activity in the previous 12 months. This varied considerably by geography, from 11 per cent in the Tees Valley to 25 per cent of employers in Cheshire and Warrington. The areas where people in education were most likely to be offered work inspiration activities are in a region surrounding Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; around Liverpool City Region and Cheshire and Warrington; and Dorset. This contrasts with the Heart of the South West LEP and the Tees Valley, where the proportion of employers engaged in work inspiration activities was lowest.<sup>4</sup>

Economic performance seems to be related to the level of work inspiration offered. In general, where youth unemployment levels are higher, the proportion of employers offering work inspiration is lower, and vice versa. Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire Thames Valley, Cheshire and Warrington, and Dorset all have low levels of youth unemployment but higher levels of employers engaging in work inspiration relative to the average. On the other hand, areas with higher levels of youth, and general, unemployment such as Humber and the Tees Valley are less likely to have high proportions of employers offering work inspiration.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the pattern does not hold for all, and the Liverpool City Region to name one area, bucks the trend. Despite having high unemployment, and performing less well on other economic indicators such as GVA per head, the proportion of employers offering work inspiration in Liverpool is high at 42 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

Economic performance seems to be related to the likelihood of employers offering work inspiration. Employers are more likely to offer work inspiration activities in regions with a higher proportion of knowledge-intensive businesses (KIBs). (This may be related to the fact that areas with a large number of KIBs jobs also tend to have a high measure of GVA per head). On the other hand, areas with a higher proportion of Manufacturing and other industrial jobs are less likely to offer work inspiration activities. This reflects trends in the relative likelihood of employers in different sectors to offer work inspiration across England as a whole. Sectors such as Manufacturing (13 per cent) and Construction (6 per cent) were less likely to offer work inspiration than Financial Services (18 per cent) and Business Services (19 per cent),<sup>7</sup> which are industries with a high concentration of KIBs. This helps explain the strong performance of Oxfordshire, London and the South East, as these areas have high levels of KIBs.

3. *Growth Through People: A statement on skills in the UK*, (UKCES, 25th November 2014)

4. Data from *The Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, (UKCES). The data is available publicly at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/Employer-Perspectives-Survey-2014-England-and-local-data>.

5. Youth unemployment, 2014: NOMIS 2015, Claimant Count, November 2014 data

6. Economic activity, unemployment and employment rates, 2013-2014: NOMIS 2015, *Annual Population Survey*, July 2013-June 2014 data; Office for National Statistics, *GVA for Local Enterprise Partnerships 1997-2012*, (April, 2014)

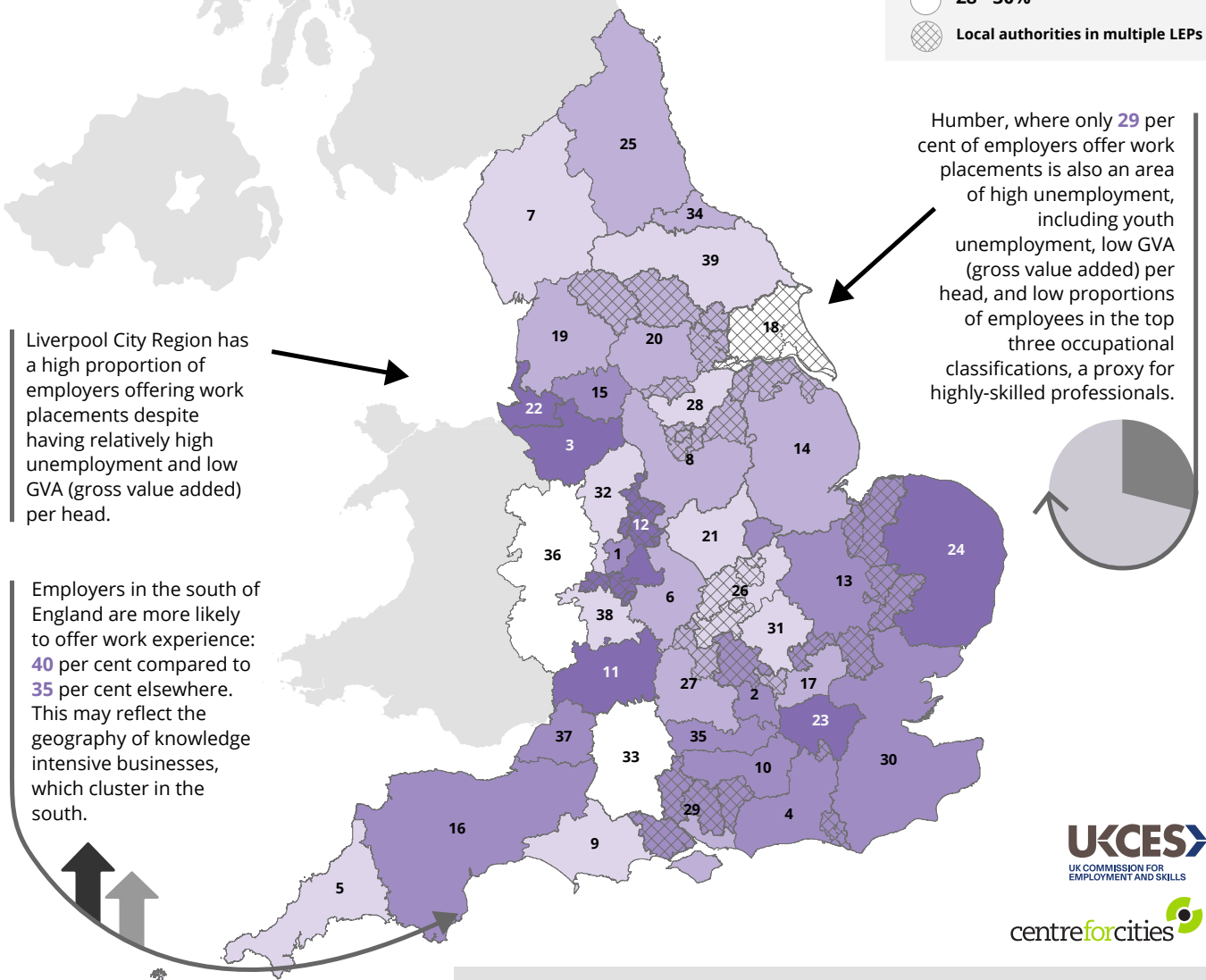
7. Data from *The Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, (UKCES)

# WORK PLACEMENTS

## Employers offering work experience placements in the last 12 months, 2014 (%)

Where you live influences your likelihood of accessing work placements; across England there is a postcode lottery of opportunity

**38** per cent of employers across England had offered a work placement in the last year



*Note: This map shows the proportion of employers by LEP offering all work placements, including adult placements, work trials and internships, as well as placements for those in education.*

To access the underlying data used on these maps please go to:  
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1 Black Country	11 Gloucestershire	20 Leeds City Region	30 South East
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The second map shows the proportion of employers by local enterprise partnership area (LEP) that had provided a work placement in the 12 months prior to the survey, which took place from April to July 2014. The definition of work placements used includes internships, work trials for the unemployed and other adult placements, and placements for students in education, which represents the largest proportion.

Where you live determines your likelihood of accessing work placements, which are vital to getting in to work.

In the *Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, 66 per cent of employers in England stated that work experience was either a critical or a significant factor they considered when looking at potential recruits. However, only 38 per cent of employers offered these opportunities,<sup>8</sup> creating a catch-22 for individuals looking to get a job.

*The Employer Perspectives Survey* enables us to look at how access to work placements, in terms of the proportion of employers offering work placements, varies across England.

Across England, 38 per cent of employers had offered a work experience placement in the 12 months prior to the 2014 *Employer Perspectives Survey*. There was wide variation by local area though, with 29 per cent offering it in the Humber but 46 per cent in London, and Cheshire and Warrington. On the whole, people in the south of England are more likely to be offered work experience: on average 40 per cent of employers in the south of England offer work experience compared to 35 per cent elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

The proportion of employers offering work experience also reflects performance on economic indicators to some extent, although it is not possible to claim an overall relationship between youth unemployment and work experience. Humber, where only 29 per cent of employers offer work placements is also an area of high unemployment, including specifically youth unemployment, low GVA per head, and low proportions of employees in the top three occupational classifications, a proxy for highly-skilled professionals.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, some areas of established high economic performance record higher proportions of employers offering work placements. London is one such example, as it has exceptionally high GVA per head (although relatively low employment), a high proportion of employees in the top three occupational classifications, and it also has a high proportion of employers offering placements. Cheshire and

Warrington is another example that performs well on GVA per head, and also on levels of unemployment, and similarly records a higher proportion of employers offering work placements.<sup>11</sup>

However, several key areas buck the trend. As for work inspiration, Liverpool City Region performs well relative to others when it comes to the proportion of employers offering work placements, and it is joined by others, including Greater Birmingham and Solihull in the Midlands. Although both of these areas have high general unemployment, they both have high proportions of employers offering placements.<sup>12</sup>

Turning again to the varying sector composition of different areas, as for work inspiration, it may be that the geography of knowledge intensive businesses (KIBs) plays a part in explaining patterns of employer involvement in work experience. Many KIBs cluster in the south, where employers are also more likely to offer work experience.

Levels of recruitment also seem to be related to the propensity of employers to offer work experience. Areas where more employers had registered having a job vacancy or recruited in the 12 months prior to the survey were also more likely to have higher proportions offering work experience. This may relate to the fact that nationally 28 per cent of those employers who had offered work placements in 2014 reported using it as a recruitment tool.<sup>13</sup>

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Economic activity, unemployment and employment rates, 2013-2014: NOMIS 2015, *Annual Population Survey*, July 2013-June 2014 data; Office for National Statistics, *GVA for Local Enterprise Partnerships 1997-2012*, (April, 2014); Youth unemployment, 2014: NOMIS 2015, Claimant Count, November 2014 data; Break down of employment by SOC Major Group, NOMIS 2015 *Annual Population Survey*, for 12 months to September 2014.

11. Ibid.

12. Economic activity, unemployment and employment rates, 2013-2014: NOMIS 2015, *Annual Population Survey*, July 2013-June 2014 data

13. Data from *The Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, (UKCES)



# A GEOGRAPHY OF DIVERSITY THAT WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND BETTER

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Individuals are exposed to a postcode lottery of opportunity when it comes to accessing work experience placements and benefitting from work inspiration activities. To some extent, economic performance, varying sectoral composition, levels of recruitment and levels of youth unemployment explain the variations by area, but there are also notable examples of LEPs performing counter to these trends. Even so, there is still a need to raise the bar across the country, as less than a fifth of employers have engaged with work inspiration activities across England.

This short analysis barely scratches the surface in terms of unearthing the trends that underpin employer behaviour when it comes to work experience indicators. However, it does begin to raise questions that need to be answered in order to help local areas improve the engagement between their employers, and education institutions and learning providers.

What is it that is happening in Liverpool City Region that makes it perform better than its peer group on wider economic indicators? How can other areas emulate it? Why do some areas, even in the affluent South East appear to have employers that engage with work inspiration and work experience to different extents? Oxfordshire, Dorset and Buckinghamshire Thames Valley, for example, have a higher likelihood of offering work inspiration activities than offering work placements. What could be done to encourage employers in these areas to widen their offer?

It also raises questions about how the changing motivations of employers to carry out work experience plays out geographically. At a headline level, between 2012 and 2014 the proportion of employers stating that they had offered work placements for altruistic reasons declined by four percentage points, whilst the proportion stating that they did so for reasons of corporate benefit increased.<sup>14</sup> How is this trend reflected at the local level and what is the effect on the quality of the experience being offered? Quality work experience is vital to giving individuals a healthy start in the world of work.

Finally, if access to work experience is being driven in part by the industrial make-up of the economy, as suggested by the potential link to the geography of KIBs, we need to find out more about the extent to which businesses in different parts of England are providing experience relevant to the jobs predicted

to be required in the future. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills recently published *Careers of the Future* and *The Future of Work*, which examine the predicted requirements for jobs and the future make-up of the economy. Our *Working Futures* models, which underpinned these outputs, can be accessed upon application, including data at LEP level.

Through a series of workshops, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills is working with analysts at the local level to introduce them to our data and encourage them to use consistent and comparable national sources to contextualise their own rich intelligence about local communities. If you would like more information about this programme, please email [info@ukces.org.uk](mailto:info@ukces.org.uk).

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## Sources Consulted

### Office for National Statistics

Economic activity, unemployment and employment rates, 2013-2014: NOMIS 2015, *Annual Population Survey*, July 2013-June 2014 data

Break down of employment by SOC Major Group, NOMIS 2015, *Annual Population Survey*, for 12 months to September 2014

Youth unemployment, 2014: NOMIS 2015, Claimant Count, November 2014 data

*GVA for Local Enterprise Partnerships 1997-2012*, (Office for National Statistics, 2014)

Business size, 2014: NOMIS 2015, UK Business Counts, 2014 data

### UK Commission for Employment and Skills

*Employer Perspectives Survey 2014*, (UKCES, 2014)

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14. Ibid.