



# Portsmouth

## CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY  
PANEL

**REVIEW INTO WORK EXPERIENCE**  
**OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN**  
**PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL**

Date published: 26 February 2025

Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.

## PREFACE

As Chair of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny panel, I am pleased to introduce our report into the provision of work experience opportunities for young people and young adults aged 14 to 25 within Portsmouth City Council. Our future goal is to ensure that no young person is left behind due to their background or circumstances, and that all have the chance to develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed in the world of work.

The aim of this review was to identify the barriers that may be limiting access and explore how the council can enhance both the availability and accessibility of work experience across all directorates.

Throughout the year we have gathered evidence from several sources, which have been used to draw up a series of recommendations to submit to the Cabinet.

It has been a pleasure to chair this panel, and I would like to give my thanks to all the officers and witnesses who have contributed to making this review a success.

Councillor Hannah Brent  
Chair, Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.

Date: 26 February 2025

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## **Aims of the Review**

To review the current extent of work experience opportunities for young people / young adults 14 - 25 within Portsmouth City Council, what the barriers are and what more we can do as a council to increase the availability and accessibility to a range of opportunities across all directorates. The work will extend to other opportunities that can provide a stepping stone to sustainable employment e.g. apprenticeships and internships.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. That every directorate within the council are made aware of the different options for work experience, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships by officers and are encouraged to offer flexible work experience/taster days/information interviews for young people which could be as little as a weekly two-hour slot. This will inform young people of the opportunities available within the council and give an insight into different roles. Each directorate will be held accountable for this, and officers will prepare a quarterly report to the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education to report on progress.**
- 2. That directorates nominate a lead contact for work experience opportunities and the leads are supported to attend the Employability Academy so that officers can do some co-ordinated matching with the young people looking for experience and the opportunities available. Directorates should be supported with a 'how to'/crib sheet with what they need to consider when taking on a young person.**
- 3. That all existing and new contractors/ partners with the council are encouraged to offer work experience opportunities for young people and this is written into contracts and local agreements. They should also be encouraged to ring fence several roles for care experienced young adults.**
- 4. That consideration be given to employing an additional part time member of staff within the council dedicated to helping care experienced and vulnerable young people find work experience both within the council and externally. Opportunities to identify external funding should be sought to fund this post.**
- 5. That young people who have completed an apprenticeship at the council are supported to visit schools and colleges to talk about their experiences and encourage young people to think about starting an apprenticeship. The feedback stories of young people should also be shared more widely to promote the good work the Council are doing to raise aspirations.**

6. **That the immersive days continue, and young people be given an information pack.**
7. **That a mapping exercise takes place across the council to establish who is IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) trained who could then assist with undertaking risk assessments for young people working within the council.**

### **Background**

Many of the young people and young adults that the council work with are struggling to access work experience opportunities. These include young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), care experienced young adults, those in the youth justice process, young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET, children we care for, etc. Work experience opportunities are essential if they are going to progress in education, training and employment.

The council already offers work experience opportunities in a variety of guises, but the potential exists to significantly increase the offer.

This topic was agreed by the Scrutiny Management Panel on 22 July 2024.

### **List of witnesses/contributors**

- Sarah Daly, Director of Children, Families and Education
- Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education
- Sam Bushby, Deputy Director, Children & Families
- Amanda Percy, Post-16 Skills and Campaigns Manager
- Clare Poyner, Principal Social Worker
- Lauren Bumstead, Team Leader, Careers & Progression
- Portsmouth Youth Cabinet
- Young People
- Representatives from PCC directorates:
  - Ian Maguire, Economy Transport and Planning
  - Donna Hoyle, Adult Social Care
  - Helen Atkinson, Public Health
  - Natasha Edmunds, Corporate Services
  - Chris Ward, Finance and Resources
  - Jo Bennett, Housing
  - Claire Watkins & Rachel Richardson, Culture and Regulatory Services
- Jessi Wilson, Unloc/Shaping Portsmouth
- Steff Jones, Shaping Portsmouth
- Sarra Gravestock, Biscoes
- Kev Sadler, Solent Careers Hub

## **The national context**

Ensuring that young people have appropriate work placements is a national issue and disadvantaged young people are more likely to miss out than others. Work experience opportunities for young people who are NEET are a particular challenge as these young people need to increased support to build confidence in the workplace.

The introduction of T Levels which require a significant number of work placement hours has increased the pressure on employers and impacted on the placements they can offer for general work experience. T Levels are an alternative to A Levels that focus on vocational skills. Each T Level includes an in-depth industry placement that lasts at least 45 days and will be linked to a project.

The Careers and Enterprise Company is currently piloting a work experience programme on behalf of the DfE. Equalex is a new approach, that is designed to support two weeks' worth of high-quality work experience for every young person. It is currently being piloted in partnership with four Mayoral Combined Authorities. The 10 days work experience. The 10 days of work experience will be offered across the secondary phase building to 5 days in year 10. A review is of the pilot will be shared in 2025 and this may become a national programme.

## **The local picture**

The local picture reflects the national picture with the additional impact of the high number of SMEs in the City.

Schools in the City take different approaches to work experience that includes paying a 3<sup>rd</sup> party provider (which is increasingly unaffordable), asking families to organise placements and school arrangement placements.

Post-16 providers are concerned about the opportunities for T Levels. The Careers and Progression Service support young people or are NEET, children we care for, care experienced young people and young people with SEND to access work experience and support them to participate. A lack of suitable placements has a major impact on this work.

A conference organised by the council and the Solent Careers Hub, will explore these issues and look at creative ways to support young people with experience of the world of work will be held at the Solent Hotel on the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

## **Evidence and Conclusions**

The Panel heard from Amanda Percy, Post-16 Skills and Campaign Manager, that Portsmouth City Council (PCC) track every young person who is leaving year 11 at school and those who have a college or training placement are prioritised and offered support. In year 11 there is a 'risk of NEET' programme which is jointly funded by the council, schools and colleges. Where young people are identified most at risk of becoming NEET and an advisor will work with them from the Spring term in the school and in the Summer term take them to enrolment. Those referred to the team will often need work experience during that time. There is a drop-in

service based on the ground floor of the Civic Offices where families and young people can drop in when it is right for them, and this is making a big difference. Although the council is very good at tracking these young people, the challenge is that the numbers who are NEET are increasing which is a concern. More placements for the young people would make a big difference but it was also important to be creative with these.

There are approximately 200 vulnerable young adults that the council are working with at any one time. For many of the young people, the council is the only organisation who are able to help them find placements as they don't have the links or networks to find placements. The young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET should be the ones to prioritise. Many of the young people are not in a college placement and school work experience programmes vary considerably.

#### Care experienced young people

Keeley Mitchell, Head of Adolescents and Young people said a care experienced young person will be allocated a Personal Advisor (PA) from the age of 16 and have access to them until the age of 25, unless aged 21 (or over) or they do not wish to receive this support. It is a statutory requirement to support care experienced young people until they are 21. Between the ages of 16 and 18 the PAs will work alongside the allocated social worker and focus on growing the young person's independence and will complete a pathway plan with them. The 16-18 age can be a very difficult transition period for young people, and it can be difficult to focus primarily on education or employment when they also must look at their housing and other areas. Sam Bushby, Deputy Director Children, Families & Education added that the team does a lot of work to support young people but there is more that can be done to identify opportunities within and outside of PCC. Sarah Daly said that the Children, Families and Education Directorate offers apprenticeships to young people with various backgrounds and have had excellent experiences with this and the young people have taught the team various new skills. It was hoped that other directorates within the council would offer more apprenticeships to young people who may have had a more challenging background.

#### Progression Advisors

Young people who are NEET have an allocated careers progression advisor who will mentor them through their journey, which might involve a return to education. They also work with the HIVE for workplace and volunteering opportunities and work closely with the King's Trust who have short programmes to boost young people's employability skills.

Some of these young people have had a difficult background so may need extra support and mentoring in the workplace so employers need to be empathetic and patient with them. Amanda Percy said another thing that benefits the young people they work with is being paired with a younger member of staff who may have been through a similar experience. This can have a positive effect on the young people.

#### Employability Academy

The Employability Academy supports vulnerable young people, including those on alternative provision, into employment and aims to give young people the chance to meet people in a working environment, understand the opportunities available, receive informal mentoring and raise aspirations. This is a new programme, and one small cohort has gone through this so far and a second cohort is about to commence. This will be a 10-week programme in which they will attend a weekly workshop covering sessions such as CV writing, mock interviews and identifying their skills. Throughout the course they will have pathway discussions to discuss their aspirations, and staff will try to match them to a workplace opportunity and support them in the workforce. If they are not successful in that time, they will continue to work with one of the advisors who will support them until they are successful in obtaining a placement.

The Employability Academy is working closely with council departments and also Shaping Portsmouth to tie into those companies working with them to see what opportunities are available. These could be a couple of hours a day to start with as some of the young people will not be ready for a full day or week placement. They will then hopefully gain the confidence to work up to more days.

There is some very good support developing with internships and apprenticeships, but many of the young people they work with have never had experience of a workplace. It is not always about the traditional two-week work placement; often they are looking for opportunities for a young person to spend some time in a workplace to build on their confidence, start to develop a knowledge of the workplace and gain skills that might make them employable. A high proportion of the young people who are NEET have never had an introduction to employment, and these are the ones that need the most support.

#### Solent Careers Hub

The Panel heard from Kev Sadler, Solent Careers Hub Lead. The Hub consists of Portsmouth, Southampton and IoW local authorities, with Portsmouth as the lead. He explained that his main role was to act as a conduit to bring schools, colleges and employers together to make sure that careers education is high quality and consistent across the region.

Amanda Percy added that the Solent Careers Hub recently went to Miltoncross Academy as part of a pilot programme taking place in 2025 to develop a project week where employers will offer projects where the young people have a project to deliver over five days within school. Kier Construction London & Southern were the first business to sign up to this and they have asked a group of year 10 students to design a new café and classroom. This will involve the architect having a conversation with the young people, someone to talk about green and sustainability and a communications person. At the end they have an immersive day at Bournemouth where Kier is developing a site for a college. They will then be taken to Southampton Solent University to look at some courses available relevant to this project. The aim is to have several employers across different sectors willing to do this so young people get experiences of the world of work, rather than work experience. This was an exciting project, and it was hoped this would go live across the city in 2026. Information interviews, where people have a conversation with someone currently doing a role, are also a valuable tool for a young person to find out about a role.



Amanda Percy said that the next step would be training for employers, so they have the confidence and skills to help support young people in their workplace who are care leavers. Another event is taking place in two weeks to co-produce with young people who are care experienced, to work out the support they need. They have noticed that young people need a lot of support through the early weeks and months as this works. What they really want is for more businesses to ringfence posts for care experienced young people and get involved with the Employability Academy to offer visits, so the young people have a choice.

Kev added the Hub has an initiative asking employers to 'give an hour' and this is for young people to have a workplace encounter. Amanda Percy said this is something that the council could run a campaign on.

#### Supported Internship Programme

Supported Internships provide individuals with a job coach, who teaches young people to undertake the tasks and provides social support. This removes the complexities for managers to be able to support these types of initiatives.

The council recently ran an event with suppliers who are contracted with the council along with beneficiaries and young people, some who have learning disabilities. This was an immense success and welcomed by all of the attendees. The workshop gave the opportunity for young people to talk about the barriers they faced with gaining work experience and employment. Employers who employ young people were able to share their experience with other suppliers about overcoming some of the barriers in terms of recruiting and supporting young people in the workplace. This sharing has resulted in suppliers actively looking to recruit people and participating more widely in the supported internship programme. More work is planned to focus on other groups such as care experienced young people as well as other groups who struggle to gain work experience and employment. The links to suppliers made a huge difference and two of the council's organisations - Voi scooters and Mountjoy - are now on board with this. The council try to focus on those suppliers based in the city. There is a list of all suppliers through procurement and the council have good relationships with all of the contractors so they reach out to them through procurement colleagues.

The Panel learned that some directorates have offered aspirational taster sessions and work experience opportunities. Service partners are also keen to support this and are working directly with Lauren Bumstead, Careers & Progression Team Leader.

#### Shaping Portsmouth

Steff Jones, explained that Shaping Portsmouth is a Community Interest Company, formed and funded by local businesses. There are 70 plus partners, and they have surveyed them as to what they feel are the barriers to employing young people, focussing on the 14-17 year old age groups. Many said that they find the legislation around employing young people confusing and also worry about their capacity and time to train a young person. With regard to CV writing, Shaping Portsmouth have gone out to the businesses again. Biscoes have helped by providing some template CVs on what employers would like to see and these are available as an online resource on their website. Steff agreed that Mountjoy and Commserve are hugely supportive as are Biscoes and Carrington West. They have all supported the

apprenticeship bus programme where apprentices are put on the bus which visits schools and they talk to pupils about to leave school.

#### Sarra Gravestock, Biscoes

Sarra explained that she works closely with care leavers and was asked by Shaping Portsmouth to lead on the care leavers employability programme with the idea being that children's services get the young people ready for employment and the academy work with the businesses to make sure they are care leaver ready. Biscoes are ringfencing a role for a care leaver and encouraging other businesses to do that.

### **Portsmouth City Council Directorates, what are the barriers?**

The Panel heard from most of the directorates within the council about what they perceived to be the barriers for taking on young people for work experience. There were some common themes:

#### Capacity/Financial constraints

Opportunities for work experience are occasionally funded from external sources such as the Arts Council. However, for longer term opportunities there is often not the budget for this. The Panel learned that often a senior member of staff has to be taken off their usual work to support and host a days work experience along with a junior member of staff so the work experience student has someone to interact with. As a result a lot of staff time/production is lost. Holistically this is worth doing however this work will need to still be covered. If they wanted to do more placements, more management capacity would be needed.

The work in some directorates is very deadline orientated with intense activity at various points which would make it hard to support a work experience student.

#### Safeguarding and GDPR

Bringing someone in for a short placement creates the same amount of work as a new member of staff. If they need access to servers to carry out any work, those servers will give them access to information that they may not be allowed to access and there are complicated procedures around that. Whilst these issues are resolvable it is all officer time and cost to the council and is one of the hidden costs that appear in service budgets.

#### Complex needs of some young people

Some managers do not have the necessary training to deal with a young person who may have complex needs which can make them reluctant to take on work experience students. Some of the needs of the care experienced young adults are significant so it was important to look at how they support employers with this alongside them getting the job completed.

#### DBS checks

Any staff undertaking lone working with a young person require DBS checks to be carried out. This can take a considerable amount of time to progress through the system (4-5 weeks lead in time). Enhanced DBS checks take longer. There is a significant backlog which is affecting multiple areas around recruitment. Lauren

Bumstead added that it can be a further issue with those who are care experienced and have moved multiple times to obtain five years of address history with a letter each time and felt that the onboarding process needs to be more flexible for young people.

If the council were to offer short tasters to shadow someone then these checks would not be needed. Amanda Percy said they are looking to put together a package offering support to departments and preparation work such as the young person coming to a session in the Civic where they receive support before coming to do some visits. The representatives from directorates said if there is a co-ordinated process and barriers are removed this would help get staff on board and volunteer their time to help a young person interested in doing work experience with them.

#### Attracting young people to want to work at the council

The other barrier is attracting young people to come and complete work experience in the council as it is not always seen as the most interesting option and people do not always realise what a local authority does. There is therefore work to be done around promoting the vast opportunities within the council. The supply chain opens out the opportunity for work experience across a broader range of areas of work that might be more attractive to young people. She felt that if directorates knew more about the careers that young people are interested in, they could facilitate more opportunities within the council and across the city.

#### Young People

The Panel heard from young people who are care experienced, some of who were now apprentices at the council, as well as from the Chair of the Youth Cabinet. When young people were asked about the challenges they had faced in gaining qualifications or work experience the common themes were:

- Lack of self confidence
- Moving around in different foster homes so difficult to make relationships
- Lack of qualifications and experience
- Emotional stress and having no support or encouragement
- Not knowing what opportunities were available
- Not knowing how to prepare for an interview, how to write a CV or what questions to ask

In terms of what had helped them overcome these challenges and be successful in gaining an apprenticeship the main themes were the support from an understanding manager who understood the challenges they may have faced, and the support of their PA to tell them about opportunities such as the Employability Academy and Youth Employment Programme.

#### Unloc and the Youth Cabinet

Jessi Wilson, Unloc/Shaping Portsmouth explained that Unloc is a social enterprise based in the Guildhall. They have four pillars, one of which is 'Youth Voice' and part of this is facilitating the Portsmouth Youth Cabinet. She has since started as the facilitator and programme lead for the Youth Employment Programme. The Youth Cabinet currently have 21 young people aged between 13-18 years old and several have signed up to the Youth Employment Programme. Unfortunately, the positions

for employment are not available for them currently and many have struggled to find jobs on their own. Unloc have noticed a gap in the skills of young people being able to create a CV, with interview preparation and formal email/telephone communication and they are able to help facilitate with this through some of their programmes.

The Youth Cabinet sent out two surveys within the past year:

- The Council of Portsmouth Students (CoPS) Survey, which had 656 responses from Year 7 - 13 students of students from all schools in Portsmouth:
  - 44.4% of young people said they had little knowledge on careers and the same percentage said they would like to know more.
  - 37.2% of young people said they would be interested in city wide careers fairs to discover the careers available to them.
  - 21.6% said they would attend (these career fairs).
  
- The second survey sent by the Youth Cabinet had 83 responses from 11 -18 year olds:
  - 91.5% have not had a paid job.
  - 65.4% have wanted a job but have been unable to get one.
  - 91.9% of young people said they would welcome more opportunities for paid employment.

**What more can be done as a Council to increase the availability and accessibility to a range of opportunities across all directorates**

The Panel heard from Amanda Percy who said she was keen for young people to come into the council to meet with staff to see what they do or have an 'information interview' where they ask a few questions of a manager to find out how they got into the role, what they like and do not like for example. This can sometimes be enough for young people to move on a step and decide if this is a career they want to pursue. The progression advisors have suggested holding an 'experience week' at the council where a group of young people can come in and receive some learning on the first day on protocols and health and safety. They will then spend a phased week with time in every directorate to see what interests them.

The Panel also received some written evidence from a careers and progression advisor who felt the following:

- General lack of opportunities for young people in the city in terms of employment and progression.
- The young people we are working with are becoming more complex and often presenting with lots of barriers around progression such as lack of engagement/attendance in education for significant periods of time.
- Education is not always the appropriate next step for our young people but equally they are not prepared for work or lack experience needed to compete in a competitive employment market.

- Opportunities for work experience are again lacking, with employers not wanting to commit to work experience due to various barriers such as time required, health and safety training, hybrid staffing arrangements.
- As a diverse employer, PCC could offer young people purposeful work experience in a wide range of areas to suit many needs to reinvest back into the city.
- Ideas could include, a rolling programme where all departments have to pledge a number of hours to the service.
- This would improve insight into different roles for young people and provide them with a credible reference to then add to job applications and CV's.
- Consider a pledge from each department to a number of hours per year?
- Young people could be offered an interview to make the process more formal and purposeful also?
- Overseen by the careers and progression team in terms of allocating students for interview and liaising with departments for availability.
- A calendar of three two week blocks over the year - open up to disengaged Year 10?

Several of the witnesses mentioned the main issue was a lack of opportunities and getting businesses on board who understood the prospect of employing young people. It would be great to get a few pilot businesses on board to help with case studies to showcase how simple and effective it can be to promote these young people.

Sam Bushby, Deputy Director of Children and Families, said in terms of the companies that the council contract with, more could be done to ensure it is in their contract that they must take on apprenticeships and this is something officers were keen to do. Amanda Percy added that Mountjoy and Commserve are very supportive of the work and have taken on supported interns and apprenticeships.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

An integrated impact assessment would be carried out when the Cabinet makes its decisions based on the recommendations set out in this report.

### Budget and policy implications of the recommendations

The following table highlights the budgetary and policy implications of the recommendations being presented by the Panel:

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
1	That every directorate within the council are made aware of the different options for work experience, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships by officers and are encouraged to offer flexible work experience/taster days/information interviews for young people which could be as little as a weekly two-hour slot. This will inform young people of the opportunities available within the council and give an insight into different roles. Each directorate will be held accountable for this, and officers will prepare a quarterly report to the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education to report on progress.	Amanda Percy/Sarah Daly	EET Strategy being reviewed/no budget	Officer time
2	That directorates nominate a lead contact for work experience opportunities and the leads are supported to attend the Employability Academy so that officers can do some co-ordinated matching with the young people looking for experience and the opportunities available. Directorates should be supported with a 'how to'/crib sheet with what they need to consider when taking on a young person.	Amanda Percy/Lauren Bumstead	EET Strategy being reviewed/no budget	Officer time
3	That all existing and new contractors / partners with the council are encouraged to offer work experience opportunities for young people and this is written into contracts and local agreements. They should also be	Sarah Daly	EET Strategy being reviewed/no budget	Officer time

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	encouraged to ring fence several roles for care experienced young adults.			
4	That consideration be given to employing an additional part time member of staff within the council dedicated to helping care experienced and vulnerable young people find work experience both within the council and externally. Opportunities to identify external funding should be sought to fund this post	Sarah Daly/Amada Percy	No budget/policy implications	No impact as external funding will be sought.
5	That young people who have completed an apprenticeship at the council are supported to visit schools and colleges to talk about their experiences and encourage young people to think about starting an apprenticeship. The feedback stories of young people should also be shared more widely to promote the good work the Council are doing to raise aspirations.	Amanda Percy/Lauren Bumstead	EET Strategy being reviewed/no budget	Officer time
6	That the immersive days continue, and young people be given an information pack.	Amanda Percy/Lauren Bumstead	EET Strategy being reviewed/no budget	Officer time
7	That a mapping exercise takes place across the council to establish who is IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) trained who could then assist with undertaking risk assessments for young people working within the council.	Amanda Percy/Sarah Daly	No budget/policy framework implications	Officer time

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1 - Timeline of meetings**

**Appendix 2 - Minutes 12 September 2024**

**Appendix 3 - Scoping Document**

**Appendix 4 - Minutes 26 September 2024**

**Appendix 5 - Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services  
Directorate written submission**

**Appendix 6 - Public Health written submission**

**Appendix 7 - Minutes 17 October 2024**

**Appendix 8 - Minutes 28 November 2024**

### **Appendix 1**

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Witnesses</b>
12 September 2024	Lauren Bumstead, Team Leader, Careers and Progression Lisa Morgan, Service Leader, Youth Offending Team Amanda Percy, Post 16 Skills and Campaign Manager Ian Maguire, Assistant Director, Economy Transport and Planning Donna Hoyle, Head of Regulated Services, Adult Social Care
26 September 2024	Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services Claire Watkins, Business Development and Projects Manager Rachel Richardson, Performance and Change Officer Helen Atkinson, Director of Public Health Chris Ward, Director of Finance Jo Bennett, Assistant Director Housing Need and Supply
17 October 2024	Young People, Tiffany, Jess, Omar, Kim Adam Murphy, Participation Officer Mackenzie, Portsmouth Youth Cabinet Careers and Progression Advisor (written evidence) Sarah Daly, Director Children, Families, Education Keeley Mitchell, Head of Adolescents and Young People Lauren Bumstead, Careers & Progression Team Leader
28 November 2024	Jessi Wilson, Unloc/Shaping Portsmouth Steff Jones, Shaping Portsmouth Sarrah Gravestock, Biscoes Kev Sadler, Solent Careers Hub
26 February 2025	Sign off meeting