

United Kingdom: Inspiring the Future

Helping young people to develop informed, critical perspectives about the relationship between education and employment through an efficient national delivery model.

Launched in 2012, [Inspiring the Future](#) is a programme of Education and Employers, an independent UK-based charity. The programme provides secondary school students (ages 11-18) with opportunities to meet and interact with volunteers who work people in a wide and diverse range of careers and backgrounds – ‘from apprentices to CEOs, app designers to zoologists’ – to inspire and motivate them. These activities are hosted by schools and include informal career insight talks, job fairs, mentoring, job shadowing, interview practice and CV workshops.

The programme’s unique delivery model facilitates these interactions by connecting UK secondary schools for free to volunteers via a secure online match-making platform. The system is designed to allow prospective volunteers to easily register online, selecting geographic areas where they will be available to schools and the activities they would like to be involved in. Schools can then select from a large and diverse pool of volunteers to meet their needs.

One activity that is particularly popular with students is ‘[speed networking](#)’. In these events, students are separated into small groups, and take turns hearing from and informally speaking with a wide spectrum of volunteers about their jobs. After 10 minute intervals, the volunteers then rotate around the student groups, ensuring that students are given the opportunity to hear from a range of careers.

Inspiring the Future’s scope and national coverage also allows it to run a number of concurrent campaigns and themed weeks. One example is [Inspiring Women](#) – a national campaign with some 24,000 female volunteers, focused on breaking down gender stereotypes and challenging assumptions. In addition, there are Inspiring the Future campaigns showcasing occupations where knowledge of foreign languages is important ([Inspiring Languages](#)), and identifying potential candidates willing to serve on school governing board ([Inspiring Governance](#)).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Inspiring the Future began delivering [employer engagement activities virtually](#) as a safer alternative to its in-person activities. Prior to its rollout, Inspiring the Future conducted more than 200 meetings with schools and consulted with experts regarding best practices for online engagement. As a result, the programme has also produced and disseminated learning guides and resources for teachers, parents, and volunteers on virtual activities. The programme’s usual offerings of activities, such as classroom career talks and speed networking events, are now available online via videochat events, accompanied by polls and Q&A’s to ensure for an interactive and engaging learning experience.

As of 2019, 80% of secondary schools in England have signed up to Inspiring the Future, which has facilitated some 1.9 million interactions between young people and volunteers from the world of work.

To find out more, please visit inspiringthefuture.org.