

# Equipping young people for a fair chance at a bright future

The PA Foundation Impact Reporting Series  
March 2025



## The PA Foundation

The PA Foundation aims to develop and inspire people facing disadvantage, through improved access to education, skills and, employment opportunities.

Our work focuses on developing social and human capital, and future-proofing skills and careers, particularly in STEM-related fields. We are committed to helping people who experience inequitable access to opportunities, tools and resources within society by increasing their access to networks, role models, and mentors, and raising their confidence and self-esteem.

To date, we have funded projects aiming to reach over 21,000 people across the UK, US, Netherlands, and Nordics. We have supported 56 charities and non-profit organisations where there are opportunities for the skills and experience of PA people to make a real difference. We have distributed over £5.3 million in funding and, importantly, PA people are giving their time and expertise to the charities and non-profits that we fund.



£5.3m

funding distributed



21,000

people reached



56

charities and non-profits supported across the UK, US, Nordics, and Netherlands

# Introduction

For many young people around the world, their future is not determined by their potential but by their background. Children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds often lack access to the education, skills, and opportunities they need for future qualifications, employment and security.

Very few economies around the world have the right conditions to foster social mobility.<sup>1</sup> This means that ambition and talent can be overlooked, and success can be shaped by factors that are not in an individual's control, such as where you are born, grow up, or go to school.

Acquiring the right skills can break the cycle of poverty and support greater social mobility and equality. To thrive in the future job market, young people will need a blend of technical, soft skills, and digital skills. This includes critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. Having this broad skill set will help them adapt to change and remain employable throughout their careers. Skills in areas like science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are also increasingly important for employment and in new and developing technologies. Whilst some of these skills are covered in school curricula, many are not, and young people can face an uncertain future.

The PA Foundation believes that every person should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. It works in several ways to break down socio-economic barriers and develop and inspire people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through its work with a number of charitable organisations, it is providing students with high-quality tools and resources, developing essential life skills, and building networks with advisors and mentors to guide them on their educational and career journeys. To date, the Foundation has distributed over £5.3 million of funding, working

with 56 organisations globally to support 21,000 disadvantaged young people directly, with a particular focus on STEM-related initiatives.

This report looks at the challenges faced by young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they navigate their options and make (sometimes daunting) decisions about their futures. As part of the development of this report, The PA Foundation surveyed a broad group of young people about their specific concerns and the requirements that they believe they need – and may be lacking – as they reach adulthood. It highlights how unprepared many of them feel for the world of work and, importantly, 'real life'.

The report also outlines the support that is being offered to young people by five organisations: The Social Mobility Foundation, MyBnk, Ada (the National College for Digital Skills), The Economist Educational Foundation, and Coding Pirates. It highlights the impact that these organisations are having and the contribution that The PA Foundation is making to their vital work.

You will also read, in their own words, the perspectives of students who have been supported by these organisations and those who are working with them to ensure they are as prepared, confident, and excited as they can be about their futures.

<sup>1</sup> [Global Social Mobility Report, 2020, World Economic Forum](#)

# The challenge

The young people who responded to The PA Foundation's survey highlighted areas where they felt they needed more knowledge and skills to be prepared for their futures.

Many of the students stated that they felt unprepared for the real world: they were worried about surviving and coping. The skills they felt they needed included: personal finance and management (taxes, mortgages, and managing bills); understanding the world of work and career options (different roles and what to expect from a job); and getting a job (how to apply and networking). Over three quarters

of them thought that STEM subjects would be important for their future career.

Importantly, they also highlighted soft skills that they felt they needed. Overall, the three essential skills young people thought were most important for their futures were problem solving, listening, and teamwork.



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I want to have more work experience and talk to more people to understand and decide fully on my path and how to approach it.

Aalieyha  
Year 12 student

Which of these essential skills do you think are the most important for your future?\*



\* 76 young people, aged 11-17, took part in our survey identifying their top three essential skills for the future.

Despite a growing recognition of the need for these competencies, and improvements in school curriculums, there are still several reasons why young people might not be getting the skills they need for their future.



#### → Digital divide

Many young people lack access to digital tools, limiting their ability to acquire the skills that are increasingly important in today's job market. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills estimates that around 518,000 additional workers will be needed to fill the roles available for the three highest skilled occupational groups in the digital sector by 2032. This is three times the number of computer science graduates this nation has produced in the past decade.<sup>2</sup>



#### → Education system gaps

There is often a disconnect between what is taught in schools and the skills that employers need. Traditional education systems are not keeping pace with the rapidly changing job market.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 highlighted that 63 percent of employers identify skills gaps as the biggest barrier to business transformation between 2025 and 2030.<sup>3</sup>



#### → Economic and social barriers

Economic disparities and social issues can prevent young people from accessing quality education and training opportunities. This is particularly true for children from low-income families. People from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds remain underrepresented at senior levels across many sectors.



#### → Lack of financial education

While some elements of financial education appear in different parts of the national curriculum, there is not a consistent nor deeper approach to how these subjects are taught.



#### → Lack of career guidance

Many young people are not aware of the skills they need for future employment or how to acquire them. There is a need for better career guidance and mentorship programmes to help them navigate their educational and career paths.



#### → Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and disrupted education systems. Many young people have fallen behind in their learning and skill development due to school closures and related challenges.

<sup>2</sup> [UK Tech Competitiveness Study, 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> [WEF, The Future of Jobs Report, 2025](#)

# The response

**The PA Foundation has an ambitious social mobility programme to develop and inspire people from disadvantaged backgrounds to be the innovators and leaders of tomorrow.**

It addresses socio-economic inequality by supporting those facing disadvantage (primarily those from low-income backgrounds) through activities, including mentoring and work placements, that promote human and social capital. It aims to develop and inspire people in the areas of education, skills, and employment, with a focus on STEM.

The PA Foundation is PA's charity partner and works alongside it to support communities across its footprint. While the Foundation provides transformative grants, PA people offer their time, dedication and expertise to amplify funding and increase the impact collectively.

The Foundation funds high-quality training in employability skills and career insight experiences for 12 to 17-year-olds from low-income backgrounds. In partnership with The Social Mobility Foundation in London, PA provides a one-week residential work placement for students aged 16 to 18. In Cambridge, a two-week experience course for students aged 14 to 18 is offered. Springboard students (see more below) develop essential skills through workshops and work experience, working in small teams, to address a 'client problem' connected to one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. In 2024, 60 students joined the Springboard work experience programme, with 94 percent saying they developed new skills and 100 percent

saying they had grown in confidence. Through interventions such as this, and other out-of-school interventions, the Foundation has reached over 6,000 young people through £1.8 million of funding to date.

Through UK-wide partnerships, PA helps to empower young people from diverse backgrounds by providing long-term mentoring experiences, career events, and masterclasses. To date, the Foundation has provided £1.2 million of funding towards these initiatives, reaching over 10,000 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2024, over 300 Sixth Form students took part in mock interviews, career insights, and workplace visits aimed at developing essential skills and raising aspirations. The quality of these interventions has been externally accredited, with PA's workshop series on essential skills achieving a Level 3 kitemark from The Skills Builder Partnership.

The partnerships that The PA Foundation has developed both with PA and with the organisations outlined in this report, has expanded its educational impact, strengthened its global outreach, and enhanced its ability to inspire and empower the next generation.

# Making a difference

Who do we support and what is the impact?







## → The Social Mobility Foundation/Springboard

The Social Mobility Foundation works for a society where people from all social backgrounds can thrive in education and the workplace, and where all young people can explore their talents.

Through their Aspiring Professionals Programme, which gives young people access to higher education, work experience, and career opportunities, they help to unlock opportunities for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. They also campaign for systems change to break down the barriers that young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face in higher education and in work.

Since 2018, PA and The Social Mobility Foundation have partnered to support over 350 young people through PA's flagship work experience programme, Springboard.

In 2024, 35 students aged 16 to 17 came from across the UK to take part in a week-long placement hosted by PA in London. The placement offers ambitious students who face structural barriers in accessing work the opportunity to undertake a high-quality work placement.

During the placement, students from across the UK explored how PA operates, gained workplace skills, learned more about recruitment practices, and gained support and insights from their mentor. Students worked with PA experts

throughout the week to facilitate client calls, project planning, solutions brainstorming, and the development of final presentations, which were pitched to each group's real-life client and PA leaders on the last day of the work experience

The students were supported throughout the week via training sessions in fundamental consulting skills, such as building relationships and teamwork, creating and selling innovative technology-driven solutions, and presenting and delivering ideas. The students were also provided with several opportunities to network and develop their professionalism and presentation skills in preparation for pitching their final solutions to their client.

The depth and breadth of the Springboard work experience had the most pronounced effect on students' work-related skills and professional competencies, including their speaking and listening skills, and the ability to make the most of networking opportunities.

The Springboard programme has a Level 2 accreditation from the Skills Builder Partnership, recognising its impact towards supporting students with transferable skills needed for life-long learning.

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The young people that join us for Springboard have astonishing potential but without programmes like this they often don't get the opportunity to demonstrate it. Having been involved in the programme since it started in 2018, it's been fantastic to see it evolve and grow. With the support of the PA Foundation and working closely with the Social Mobility Foundation, it is having an even bigger impact for even more young people. The students that participate couldn't speak more highly of PA, the people they meet here, and the skills and experience they develop, which is testament to how welcoming and supportive our colleagues are. Seeing first-hand the innovative solutions they develop in just one week is hugely impressive.

Olly Peppiatt  
PA public sector expert,  
PA Springboard lead



**Art competition**

- A key part of increasing awareness is to reach a younger demographic
- We believe this is best accomplished through an interactive challenge such as an art competition

**Advertising in schools**

Ages 7 - 11, would take part in a logo design competition for WaterAid

Ages 11 - 18, would complete a piece of artwork in the theme of the slogan "hydrate her dreams". These would be judged separately to have a winner and runner ups for each competition

**WaterAid**

Bintay Shahid



## PARTICIPANT VOICES →

## Students who participated in Springboard

### Reese, 17

School has of course taught me the basics of skills I need and the details of the subjects that would be covered within my desired career. But Springboard – through its skills sessions – has genuinely developed my transferable skills and given me new perspectives on how to approach using and developing them further within my professional career.

Similarly, Springboard has given me a truly invaluable hint of experience in the corporate world of work. Not only what to put down on a CV and help with interviews but also as a useful piece of experience for my own personal development. It is because of the Springboard programme I know I am well suited to a corporate work style, especially work similar to that of a consultant.

### Hope, 17

Teamwork and leadership were a big part of the Springboard experience. We don't regularly do group projects at school where you have to set a goal and work things out together in a short space of time. I gained a lot of self-confidence, being able to speak in front of a group of people, problem solving skills, and listening to other people. Those are the sorts of things that you know are important, but you might not get through the normal academic channels.

It was really good being able to talk to professionals. We each had a facilitator in our group who was an employee at PA. They were with us all day, giving us advice and helping us with our projects. It was great to get exposure to the work environment, to understand the things that might be expected of you.

### Skye, 17

I don't do public speaking and presentations in school, so doing this with Springboard and presenting to a big cohort of people in a proper work environment was really good. I definitely built confidence doing that. The experience that I got with PA and the skills we gained will be transferable for university as well as work. Meeting new people and having to work with them on group projects feels less of a worry now.



## → MyBnk

MyBnk is a financial education charity dedicated to creating a financially fluent population and is the UK's leading financial education charity for young people in need. Poor financial literacy is central to many problems people face today, including rising mental health issues, homelessness, and unemployment. Almost two-thirds of young adults do not recall receiving any financial education at all,<sup>4</sup> and 53 percent are worried that they will never be financially secure.<sup>5</sup>

MyBnk works with over 50,000 young people and adults across the UK every year, empowering them to take charge of their financial futures by bringing money to life. Their priority group is young people from disadvantaged backgrounds such as young people leaving care, facing poverty, at risk of homelessness, and/or living in communities with low social mobility index.

MyBnk delivers a suite of expert-led, impactful programmes to young people on topics such as saving, debt, and student finance in schools, colleges and youth organisations. Their financial education workshops help form positive habits such as saving and delayed gratification, connect the dots between public and personal finance, and arm young people with practical money skills. This teaches them how to navigate the system and make informed decisions.

Funding from the PA Foundation has supported financial education sessions in schools and in PA's offices, reaching over 5,000 young people aged five to 18 living in areas of high deprivation.

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**At MyBnk, we believe that financial literacy is a vital life skill that complements the analytical and problem-solving mindset fostered by STEM education. Whether it's calculating interest rates or budgeting effectively, these are critical skills young people need to navigate their financial futures and manage their money with confidence. What's more, the skills gained in understanding your own personal finances are transferable into all workplaces and therefore setting the next generation up for professional success too.**

**Our partnership with The PA Foundation has enabled us to reach over 5,000 school pupils this year, and their generous support is helping us bridge the financial education gap and advance our mission of creating a financially fluent population.**

**Leon Ward**  
CEO of MyBnk

<sup>4</sup> MyBnk and Compare the Market, 2023

<sup>5</sup> Prince's Trust NatWest Youth Index, 2024

PARTICIPANT VOICES →

## MyBnk programme member

Lily

I learned a lot about things I didn't know, like taxes. Before I didn't know all the details of how it works and all the different percentages. I also learned more about borrowing, like the legalities and how you often have to pay back more than you borrowed.





→ Ada

Ada is the National College for Digital Skills with a mission is to educate and empower the next generation of diverse digital talent. It is a specialist Further Education college, where every 16 to 19-year-old student takes Computer Science and all Higher Level and Degree Apprentices work in skills shortage disciplines in innovative, blue-chip companies.

The UK has 800,000 unfilled IT jobs and the digital skills gap is costing the UK economy an estimated £63 billion a year in lost GDP. However, young people are not being adequately supported to bridge this gap, with over 50 percent of secondary schools in the UK not even offering Computer Science. Ada seeks to fill this skills gap by ensuring young people are being equipped with the skills that industry actually needs. It is focused on helping young people from underrepresented backgrounds secure jobs in tech. In particular,

Ada aims to increase the percentage of Ada students from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds securing aspirational tech-focused apprenticeships.

Ada has been working with The PA Foundation for three years. The Foundation has provided grants that supports students internally, as well as work with alumni and local schools. PA people volunteer, working with Ada and other schools to coach students – providing one-to-one support on professional and communication skills – and guest lecturing in niche skills.

PA have also held Hackathons in partnership with Ada, including one with their students to develop their coding skills and another with PA's Women in Tech team for more than 50 women at Ada's London campus.



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The event was explicitly for our 12 Extended Diploma students with both PA and their partners actively supporting our (two teams of) students develop an impressive IoT/RC car environmental sensor-based survey system using modern programming and data analytic cloud-based tools.

The project had been incredibly well considered and a lot of the initial mechanical constructions fully completed so our students could focus (in their teams) on the core tasks of the challenge.

The technical and analytics team from PA and their partners (including Amazon Web Service) were phenomenally helpful and collaborative with our students - who gained immensely from their experience and insights. The students absolutely loved the session.

**Mark Campbell**

Assistant Principal, Head of Computer Science, Ada.  
National College for Digital Skills



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PARTICIPANT VOICES →

## Ada Student

Vanessa graduated from Ada in 2023. She completed a BTEC National Diploma in Computer Science and an A-Level in Graphic Communication. In April 2024, she started an apprenticeship as an IT Support Technician at Just Eat Takeaway.

Initially drawn to graphic design and art, Vanessa's interest in technology grew unexpectedly. At 13, she launched a successful food blog, teaching herself WordPress and web design. However, before enrolling at Ada, she was at an all-girls secondary school where computer science was unpopular and her post-GCSE options were limited.

At Ada, Vanessa was offered both graphic design and computer science. At first, she did not believe computer science could be part of her skillset, nor did she feel confident that she would be any good at it. However, she found the Ada environment very supportive.

“

I really struggled with imposter syndrome, and felt like I wasn't going to be as good as other people... [At Ada] I felt comfortable asking loads of questions, even basic and maybe silly ones... my imposter syndrome improved a lot since learning at Ada, particularly because the people were always encouraging and helpful.

Vanessa  
Ada graduate

Vanessa learned to code and participated in industry projects, including with PA. She developed her presentation, networking, and communication skills, and had a one-to-one coach for career planning. These experiences prepared her for her apprenticeship and the world of work. The exposure to various career pathways broadened Vanessa's horizons.



## → The Economist Educational Foundation

The Economist Educational Foundation aims to empower disadvantaged children with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate complex social and environmental challenges, misinformation, and polarisation. Supporting teachers, they enable children to join inspiring discussions about the news that teach them to think critically, communicate effectively, and understand the world.

They provide free lessons for schools, bringing together children aged 10 to 16 from around the world with global experts on topics including science and technology, politics and democracy, and business and finance. They aim to ensure that at least 50 percent of participants come from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds.

The PA Foundation partners with The Economist Educational Foundation to enable children to join high-quality discussions about science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) stories in the news. They combine teaching, journalistic and PA's business expertise to create engaging, high-quality content. Lessons go through an editorial process with input from PA volunteers (for example, a new resource on assistive technology).

Over 1,800 teachers have utilised this content to engage students in meaningful and informed debates. These discussions enable young people to develop essential skills such as speaking, listening, problem-solving and creativity - skills that will benefit them in their future careers.

PA employees have joined live global lessons and local school children have attended in-person workshops at PA's offices. To date, we have directly supported 175 young people in partnership with PA people and over 35,000 children were reached globally through the resources published.

PARTICIPANT VOICES →

## The Economist Educational Foundation

**Jack Virgin,  
Teacher at Brampton Manor**

In my view, the highlight for the students was having the opportunity to talk in small groups to professionals in the field. The group work gave them a chance to ask about the topic at hand and careers, and overall have conversations and obtain information and insights very difficult to garner in other settings.

**Student participant**

Topical Talk made lessons a lot more exciting as I was allowed to share my own opinions and read other people's from other places in the world.





## → Coding Pirates

Coding Pirates is a Danish organisation that creates leisure activities for children and young people to develop their technological skills and creativity. It brings together IT professionals, teachers, programmers, researchers, and entrepreneurs, to help children and young people explore technology at an early age, so that they are skilled and confident to use it in their future everyday lives, education, and jobs. They offer activities for both genders, but have a focus on engaging more girls and women.

Coding Pirates offers physical clubs and online clubs. The online clubs are for children who are unable to attend school due to psychological or physical problems, or who can simply not cope with an ordinary school environment. These children are often marginalised, and these clubs help to bring them back in contact with other children and teachers.

In collaboration with the PA Foundation, Coding Pirates has opened several associations in the Greater Copenhagen area, and they are working to create more and better participation opportunities for all children regardless of gender and background. The project offers girls more opportunities to participate, where they get the opportunity to play with technology and experience the special features of the Coding Pirates' community in some special courses just for girls and parents. In 2024, Coding Pirates and PA collaborated further to set up their own coding club at PA's offices in Copenhagen, bringing in PA experts to share their digital and coding expertise. There have been two cohorts of students aged eight to 14 completing the 12-week course, which promotes technological creativity through fun activities on programming, robotics, 3D modelling, 3D printing, and digital skills.

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By delivering coding clubs together with the Danish non-for-profit organisation Coding Pirates, we empower children and teenagers to develop essential coding skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. But our work is more than just teaching – it’s a two-way street. Their curiosity, passion, and fresh perspectives of the students we work with constantly challenge and inspire our team, reminding us why innovation and inclusivity matter. Seeing them tackle complex problems with enthusiasm and imagination fuels our own drive to push the boundaries of technology. Together, we’re not just building digital skills; we’re shaping a future where creativity and technology go hand in hand to make a real impact in Denmark and beyond.

Mads Bjørn-Møldrup  
PA Partner





## PARTICIPANT VOICES →

## Asia, a Coding Pirate, and her mother Farida

### Asia

Coding Pirates clubs are for both genders, but it has been challenging to get girls involved. Girls often believe that coding, technology, and electronics are only for boys. So, the team has focused on dispelling this myth.

Nine-year-old Coding Pirate Asia says that the girls do not think they can 'figure out' computers, but they can, and she encourages everyone to try.

“

I want girls to jump into it, regardless of whether there are boys or not. It's their choice and their lives.

### Asia's parents

For Asia's parents, it has not been a major decision that their twin girls and older brother should go to Coding Pirates.

“

We don't really distinguish between the girls and our boy. IT is a big part of everyone's everyday life, so it is really important to us that all our children learn something about it and gain insight into it. A bit like the fact that it is important to have biology to learn about the body and that you go swimming. In the past, you had IT training, where you learned to write in a document and use different fonts. So, Coding Pirates is today's computer education, digital education, programming, understanding of how algorithms work. For us, it is actually a matter of course that our girls are introduced to the IT world.

# Next steps

**Our engagement is having a tangible impact, but we want to do more.**

The PA Foundation is committed to maintaining its financial support for the charities providing vital work in this area. It will continue to encourage PA people to commit their time and expertise to support those whose futures are at risk. We aim to distribute a further £1 million to specifically

support young people facing disadvantage in 2025, as well as increase our efforts to focus on initiatives promoting STEM-related education and careers, particularly projects targeting positive outcomes for women and girls.



# Get in touch or donate

If you would like to know more about The PA Foundation's work including upcoming funding opportunities through our Ingenious Investment Fund, please visit our website: [www.paconsulting.com/the-pa-foundation](http://www.paconsulting.com/the-pa-foundation).

If you would like to make a donation to The PA Foundation, you can do this either through our dedicated JustGiving page: [www.justgiving.com/thepafoundation](http://www.justgiving.com/thepafoundation) or by e-mailing us at [enquiries@pafoundation.org](mailto:enquiries@pafoundation.org).

## Methodology

The PA Foundation works with thousands of inspiring young people each year who take part in many of our workshops, training and seminars. They always have a lot to say about what they want for their own future and regularly provide feedback on how we can improve our interventions, making them more relevant and engaging.

Between November and December 2024, we surveyed 76 students aged 11-17 directly through a short questionnaire which included both open and closed questions.

The students were all enrolled in an inner-city state school and taking part in one of our in-person workshops at PA's London offices delivered together with one of our charity partners.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals who have generously contributed their insights and stories to this report, particularly Hope, Reece, and Skye who provided valuable insights from their Springboard experience.

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