

## Embracing the virtual experience



**N**o-one wants to start with a blank piece of paper, and that's how it felt when we realised that the only way to do work experience in 2020 was to go virtual. Capgemini has had a well-established work experience programme over a number of years, and we'd already completed many elements like promotion, selection etc. We rely heavily on our recruitment processes to make this work for us.

We also have business goodwill to do this and an understanding that this is something we can and should do – taking pride in what we achieve.

But we'd never compiled an online programme before, asked employees to run virtual sessions or shared online tasks so we weren't really sure what was involved. It seemed very daunting and a huge task but it did enable us to ask some important questions. What is work experience? What does it look like? And more to the point for my organisation, the students we work with and our employees.

Fundamentally it's about what you create. Virtual work experience is new territory for everyone with the traditional five days in the office no longer permitted. We therefore had much to consider in developing our virtual offering such as whether the usual five-day approach was still suitable, if we should transfer everything online or tailor elements to make the programme more engaging. In addition to work experience and working in tandem, the Education Team created an employability programme exposing the young people to aspects of Capgemini once a fortnight over three months.

My recommendation would be to start at the end and to consider what you want the students to get out of it from the outset. Start with the social value that you think your company can bring and work out how to achieve this in a meaningful way. Certainly don't be hamstrung by offering five days as one excellent day is

undoubtedly more beneficial than five average or poor ones.

And let's be honest five days online is enough to make the most senior of execs groan, let alone a 15 year old!

Increasingly as the pandemic has gone on it's been difficult for all of us, but many of our people feel they want to give back as they've seen how others have struggled especially young people. How can they get involved? If employees outside your core business want to engage – think about how they can do that. After all they may not be client-facing but they are still valued employees with lots to give. Ask them for ideas – don't restrict yourself to what you do in the office, the skills you've learnt on those fun family quizzes might come in handy.

For both your colleagues and the students alike, no-one wants to be online all day long so mix it up.

Could you ask the young people to spend an hour researching your company, or a job function and report back with a fun fact? Perhaps you could hold a myth-busting session and request those taking part to share what they think of careers in your sector and then have the experts share what's true.

Contemplate how you could work with a partner. We've also been fortunate that our

partners have run corporate insight programmes during the school holidays which we've been delighted to participate in. So if you aren't up for creating something of your own, you could consider supporting a client or supplier and joining forces that way.

If the plan is to undertake during the school year then start talking to schools and organisations with young people and work out what timings might suit and how best to interact with them. Also think about what you already have in place in HR, Marketing etc to attract and select the students.

And finally have some fun and enjoy it, you're about to make a huge difference to someone's life!

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