



DEVELOPING LEADERS.
DELIVERING SOCIAL IMPACT.



WELCOME TO OUR IMPACT REPORT FOR 2025

Social Mobility in the UK is stagnant. A young person born today has no more chance of escaping their background than someone born in 1970. Post-pandemic, the crisis has deepened: ten years of progress in closing educational inequalities has been effectively wiped out.

Today, disadvantaged students find themselves over 19 months behind their peers by Key Stage 4, while 36% of young people grow up in poverty. This is more than a social tragedy; it is an economic failure.

A modest increase in UK social mobility could boost annual GDP by 2%. For businesses, the “class ceiling” remains a barrier to accessing the broadest possible talent pool.

LEADERSHIP: THE HIGH-LEVERAGE SOLUTION

Traditional initiatives often provide temporary boosts, but systemic change requires a stronger foundation.

Research shows that a high-quality school leader can uplift GCSE results by two grades, providing the strongest possible link to better socio-economic outcomes.

School leaders in deprived areas are under unprecedented pressure, often operating in isolation. By connecting senior business figures with these education leaders through our unique peer-mentoring programme, we bridge the gap between corporate “insulation” and community reality.

This reciprocal relationship transforms both parties: business leaders develop adaptive leadership, empathy, and strategic resilience, while school leaders gain renewed inspiration through the objective sounding board they need to move from reactive management to visionary leadership.

UNRIVALLED IMPACT: THE 2026 VISION

In 2025, Inspiration for All saw a 25% increase in partnerships, with the programme now reaching over 500,000 students across 76 local authorities. The data makes the business case for 2026 undeniable:

- 93% of participants reported becoming more effective as leaders.
- 93% of business leaders have become internal champions for social mobility.
- 2 in 3 school leaders are more likely to stay in their roles, ensuring the stability needed to deliver better outcomes.

This is a “no-brainer” investment in your people and your community. By strengthening leadership, you create a ripple effect that transforms entire organisations and thousands of young lives.

The time to act is now. Ignite your leaders. Transform the future.



SARAH CATON
*Business Lead,
Inspiration for All*



PAULA KENNEDY
*School Lead,
Inspiration for All*



“Inspiration for All is a programme that drives meaningful change in the communities that need it most, whilst utilising the skills and expertise of our people at KPMG. Each session offers a valuable, mutually beneficial opportunity for reflection, motivation, and shared learning.”

Roisin Sharkey, Head of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, KPMG

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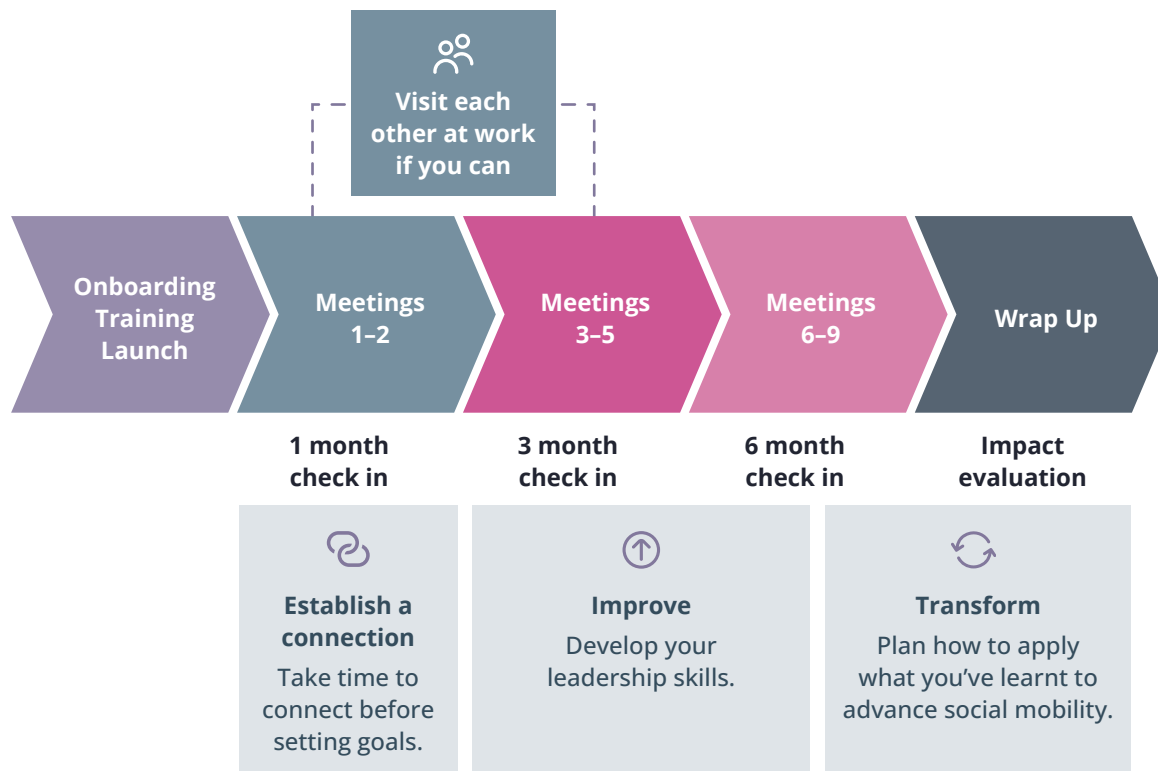
WHAT WE DO

AN HOUR A MONTH. A LIFETIME OF IMPACT.

Inspiration for All matches school leaders and business leaders in unique peer-mentoring partnerships that create fresh perspectives, enhance leadership skills and drive social mobility.

Meeting once a month over nine months, participants learn first-hand from an impressive leader in different contexts. School leaders benefit from invaluable time and space to reflect on their leadership challenges. And business leaders gain unique insights into challenges faced by the future talent pipeline. Together they can help level the playing field for the young people who need it the most.

This is how the Inspiring Partnerships programme is structured:



Our participants tell us it's an easy and effective way to share their skills and develop new ones:
just one hour a month for a lifetime of impact!

OUR STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY PANEL

Throughout 2025, we've been supported in our strategy by a wonderful panel of experts who represent our key stakeholder groups. Together they provide input and advice from a range of perspectives so we can leverage their expertise in sales, marketing, technology, finance, people and more.



CAROLINE MCCARTHY-STOUT

Panel Chair



GREG BAKER

Linklaters



ANDREA DAUBNEY

Manchester City Council



DR KAREN EDGE

UCL



PAULA GAY

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation



JOE GUY

Lift Schools



MIKE HODGES

Oxygen Consultancy



BRIAN O'NEILL

KPMG



LYNN PETERSON

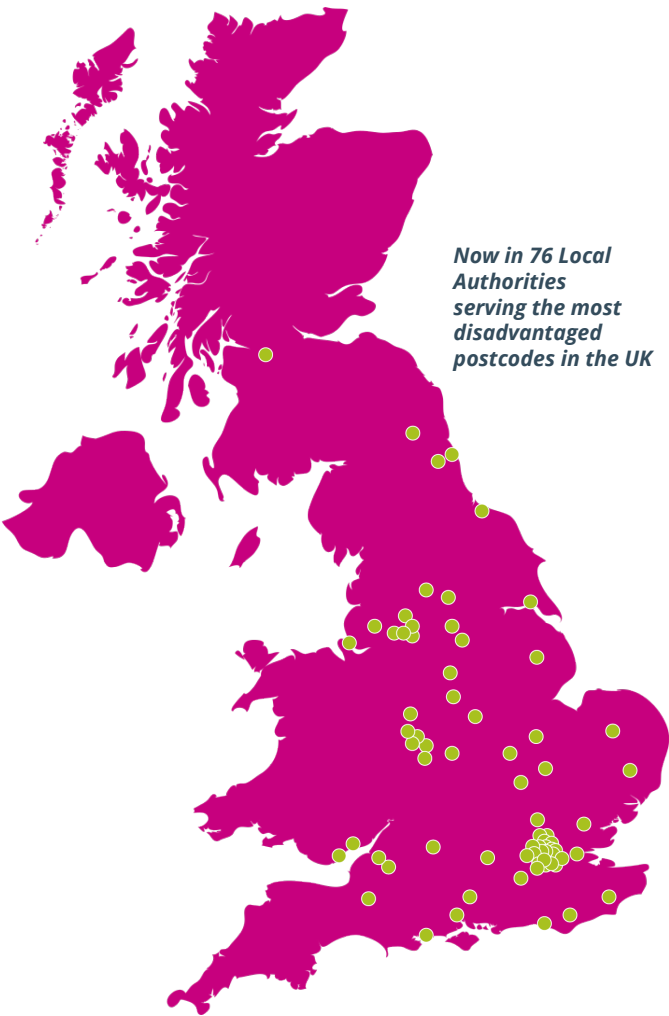
Worshipful Company of Saddlers

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Our biggest year yet, in 2025 we had 25% more partnerships between schools and businesses completing the programme while growing our impact.

OUR IMPACT	Created in 2020-25	Completed in 2025
Unique peer-mentoring partnerships	473	101
Participating schools	259	76
Students on Free School Meals*	39%	39%
Total students reached	507,274	138,427

* In 2024-2025 in England, on average 25.7% of students were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). By working with schools with a high FSM data we are reaching the students who need it the most and having an outside impact on social mobility.



“Inspiration for All has been an amazing partner. Collaboration over the past six years has helped Hackney shape its approach to developing future leaders. By using peer mentoring we have grown skilled headteachers and principals who can help the pupils and students under their care reach their potential and succeed.”

Anton Francic, Principal Secondary Adviser, Hackney Education

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOOL LEADERS

Connect



100%

valued the connection

99%

found their partner inspiring

Improve



100%

became more self-aware as a leader

95%

improved their leadership skills and now feel more capable

Transform



85%

improved their understanding of the workplace

79%

feel better equipped to improve outcomes for young people

2 in 3

are now more likely to stay in a leadership role

BUSINESS LEADERS

Connect



96%

valued the connection

97%

found their partner inspiring

Improve



92%

learnt valuable new leadership approaches

88%

are now a more effective leader

89%

improved their coaching skills

Transform



93%

are more motivated to champion social mobility at work

85%

are now a more vocal advocate of social mobility at work

89%

encourage people at work to volunteer more to advance social mobility



Linklaters

"Inspiring Partnerships is a phenomenal programme which offers senior leaders at Linklaters the opportunity to engage in accessible, high impact volunteering, generating meaningful outcomes and advancing social mobility."

Jonathan Tait, Corporate Responsibility Senior Advisor, Linklaters

WHO WE WORK WITH

OUR BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

We work with businesses that want to:

- Invest in and develop their leaders
- Deliver social impact in the communities they work in
- Advance social mobility outcomes for young people

The biggest sectors we work with are Law, Professional Services and Financial Services though we have participants from a wide range of companies.

In 2025, we worked with people from over 20 organisations.



Linklaters

wtw



> A BNY MELLON COMPANY™



Osborne Clarke



XL Insurance Reinsurance



BNP PARIBAS

ward
hadaway



WESLEYAN



DLA PIPER

HOWDEN

citibank

Sage



THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF
SADDLERS



EASTERN CITY

Opencast



OUR SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Targeting schools in social mobility coldspot areas means we can have the biggest impact on the people who need it the most.

We have partnerships with local authorities (LAs) and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) who serve these areas and that want to:

- Invest in their leaders as part of a retention strategy
- Deliver better outcomes for young people
- Make connections with employers in the local area

In 2025 we worked with leaders from 15 LAs and MATs.



Harris Federation



WESLEYAN

"This programme is an excellent peer mentoring scheme that has benefitted our participating leaders, not only in developing their own leadership skills, but also in gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges within education."

Kristy Rowlett, Head of People Development & Culture, Wesleyan



Harris Federation

"We've now had over 35 leaders on the programme, focused on developing female leaders across our schools. What's brilliant is the rare, safe space to "download" with a non-judgmental peer who isn't your line manager. Gold dust in school leadership."

Rebecca Hickey, Secondary Director, Harris Federation

LAW

The legal sector is very well represented in the Social Mobility Index of companies showing strong alignment with our purpose. Law firms want to be reflective of their customer base so their advice and guidance has been developed through inclusive teams and practices.

Key highlights include:

- 50 partnerships with Linklaters since 2021
- Osborne Clarke returning for a third cohort
- Four new partners in 2025: Norton Rose Fulbright, Squire Patten Boggs, Muckle and Ward Hadaway



“Our leaders help school leaders tackle their challenges with fresh perspectives and in turn they gain a deeper understanding

Linklaters of how to address challenges faced by young people as they come into the workplace. We’ve been thrilled with the impact and we’re excited to continue this partnership into the future”

**Matt Sparkes,
Sustainability Director, Linklaters**



“It gets you thinking about things you wouldn’t normally have time to consider because work is so frantic. Our discussions about social mobility opened up connections and discussions that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.”

Jamie Gamble, Partner, Ward Hadaway

**ward
hadaway**

CONNECTING CLASSROOMS AND CAREERS: KATE AND RACHAEL’S STORY



Linklaters

Hackney

Kate Richardson, Director, Diversity & Talent Linklaters and Rachael Adediran, Secondary Vice Principal, Hackney had an instant connection that sparked a lightbulb moment.

“It was so good to get out of the hustle and bustle of the everyday busyness and think about what is going on in a bigger way. It made me realise how much I love my job and how that can get lost.” noted Rachael.

Kate agreed: “It was brilliant, I loved it. It made me realise the importance as a leader to strike the balance between being an authority and the caring role.”

By visiting each other at work, they both gained a powerful insight about the gap that exists for young people between school and work: “It was interesting to see how students were when I was with Kate. Walking around the school together and seeing those interactions with young people – they were curious but they hardly ever get to speak with professionals like Kate.”

Kate learned so much from the visit: “It opened my eyes to the challenges in school and the important

role of teachers in giving students the opportunity to learn. Seeing the lack of provision and how easy it is for students to get lost in the system, made me realise the need to support people coming into the workplace.”

LEADING WITH EMPATHY AND BALANCE: CATHERINE AND CAROLINE’S STORY



NORTON ROSE FULBRIGHT

**Southwark
Education
Learning and
Achievement**

Catherine Wigington, Head of Commercial Management at Norton Rose Fulbright and Caroline Bannister, Primary Deputy Headteacher, Southwark talked about learning from another leader being a powerful development tool.

“It’s a really good lesson to always put yourself into other people’s shoes, regardless of who you’re talking to and whatever circumstance.” said Catherine. “It helped me realise that not everybody’s on the same page so understanding what their priorities are is so important.”

They found a lot of commonality looking at work life balance, as described by Caroline: “Catherine gave me lots of really good advice about managing my workload in terms of the jobs that I have to do and prioritising them in terms of how important they are. These are things that you don’t necessarily receive training about as a teacher.”



“Our conversations have made us both a little more brave to do things that we knew we wanted to do, but were for one reason or another holding ourselves back.”

Catherine Tsang, Operations Director, Osborne Clarke

**Osborne
Clarke**

FINANCIAL SERVICES

In financial services firms, there is an acute awareness of the need to foster an inclusive future talent pipeline in order to meet customer needs and better reflect the people they serve, so it's no surprise to see so many of them adopting our programme.

Key highlights include:

- Over 60 partnerships created with Financial Services firms
- Our third year of working with AXA XL and WTW, two powerhouse firms
- New partners, London and International Insurance Brokers Alliance (LIIBA), Insight Investment and BNP Paribas created more powerful connections

These partnerships are opening up opportunities and pathways for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.



LIIBA

"The feedback throughout our first year has been fantastic – the programme makes a real difference in an innovative and impactful

way. LIIBA are committed to improving social mobility and we're looking forward to creating more inspiring partnerships this year."

Jacqueline Girow, Executive Director, LIIBA

CREATING CAREER PATHWAYS: MARK AND SHIRLEY'S STORY



Harris Federation

Mark Rose, Partner at Lockton and Shirley Twist, Secondary Vice Principal from Harris Federation gained new leadership skills and approaches from working together.

Mark reflects: "I've learned a lot, especially around the importance of listening." A powerful skill for any leader.

And they used the conversations to develop Shirley's team: "We talked about team motivation ... I shared some of the ideas we've been using to develop closer bonds and a better understanding of each other's strengths, allowing us to better support each other."

The pair then decided to involve the students to help build aspiration:

Mark says: "We brought the students into our apprentice workshop. They met with new apprentices to hear about their journey into the insurance industry and their day-to-day roles. I was surprised that a few students initially thought working in the city wasn't possible for them, so it was fantastic to hear that afterwards they could see the career opportunities available to them, and most importantly they were excited by their future prospects, which was incredibly rewarding."

The students were inspired, as was Shirley: "Some applied to the apprenticeship programme at Lockton. It was such a great day. It opened my eyes to how much it meant to them to go into that environment. Getting students out is just as important as getting speakers in."

BUILDING EARLY ASPIRATION: PHIL AND JAMEELA'S STORY



XL Insurance
Reinsurance



Phil Whittingham, Chief Risk Officer, AXA XL partnered with Jameela Bhayat, Primary Headteacher in Tower Hamlets.

Phil's had clear motivations for taking part: "We have a talent issue and need to broaden access so I wanted to understand the barriers for young people coming into insurance."

Meeting with Jameela, Phil learnt: "The key to building aspiration is to set expectations early on, for the children and for their parents too. It was a real lightbulb moment for me to realise how early things get set in."

Jameela had a lightbulb moment too: "It was eye opening for me that you don't need a degree to work in insurance – our children are clever and bright but many are unlikely to go to university."

Together they devised a plan: "We brought the children into our offices along with their parents. You could see they'd not seen anything like this before. I saw one girl sitting on one of the sofas and really imagining herself working here – if we have inspired one child to want to work here then that's fantastic."

Jameela reflects on how this will have a ripple effect in the community for years: "I have learnt so much about what we can do to open the children's eyes to opportunity and to open business leaders' eyes to our talent. After the trip, one child said it was the best trip ever, another one talked about "when I grow up I want to work at AXA XL"."

LEADING WITH EMPATHY: CAT & EMILY'S STORY



XL Insurance
Reinsurance

Harris Federation 

Cat Pigott, Head of Actuarial Risk at AXA XL and Emily Smith, Primary Head at Harris Federation both valued the perspective that working with a leader in another sector brings.

Cat said: "It was really very powerful. And it made me realise how much you can learn from people outside your field."

Emily also found it a powerful experience: "It felt like a new perspective and the opportunity for reflection and self growth within that is different to any other course I've done before."

As a result of their discussions, Emily trained her team on having difficult conversations so they can work together more effectively. Cat reflects:

"It was trying to empower her as a leader to do the training so that she's become a leader, not just a manager and trying to push those skills further down..."

And Cat shares how AXA XL colleagues are collaborating through the experience: "There are a few of us now who have taken part in the programme and we're creating a network where we share ideas and insights."

STEPPING INTO HEADSHIP: SHIRLEY AND AMY'S STORY



wtw

Lift
Schools

Shirley Girling, General Counsel, Risk & Broking at WTW and Amy Knott, Secondary Vice Principal from Lift schools gained new perspectives and a mutual respect for each other's work.

Shirley found Amy's perspective refreshing: "There were management issues that I was working on that she had a perspective on based on her experience of dealing with all the stakeholders that she has to manage."

And Amy concurred: "To have the space to talk to another professional on a similar level was really refreshing - it allowed me to empty my mind of worries, and that in itself is a support system."

Shirley found the role of a school leader: "incredibly eye opening about just how much responsibility devolves upon schools."

And the programme helped Amy realise just how impressive she is as a leader: "I've learnt to value my worth more and the skill set I have. I'm now doing my NPQH. Shirley was a massive part of that—actually recognising that I could be a headteacher and starting that journey."



HOWDEN

"It's good to feel that you can make a difference to someone whose life is already focused on directing people and executing strategies in a sector that is so important to all our futures. It's reinforced the need to help kids see what's possible and not be hamstrung by what they've seen their peers do in the past.....we should keep doing more of it."

Andy Bragoli, Chair of Group Placement, Howden



LSP Lambeth
Schools Partnership

"It's important to look into the world outside education to be best placed to manage schools. I'm now shifting how I further design our vision and how that is used."

Andrea Parker, Executive Headteacher and Vice Chair of the Lambeth Schools Partnership, Lambeth



Tower Hamlets
Education Partnership
Inspiring Partners. Together.

"It was a great opportunity to stop and reflect, and having Jeff asking the right question at the right time was brilliant. The programme made me realise that the more strategic I can be - by carving out this time - the more impactful I will be."

Darren Rubin, Primary Executive Headteacher, Tower Hamlets

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Many of the participants from Professional Services firms are consulting and advising other organisations, so they have a wide range of skills to share with school leaders. That has delivered some of the biggest impact we have seen.

Key highlights:

- We work with 3 of the Big 4 firms: KPMG, EY and PWC
- This is our fifth year of working with KPMG with over 120 partnerships created
- We have worked with over 60 EY Partners



"It is fantastic to see how the programme has grown with over 500 partnerships now completed. Our participants finish the programme

with renewed energy, equipped with new insights that strengthen their leadership abilities and create meaningful benefits for all involved."

*Roisin Sharkey,
Head of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, KPMG*



GROWING TOMORROW'S LEADERS: MATT AND DAVE'S STORY



Dave Harvey, Director, KPMG and Matt Lawrence, Primary Headteacher in Manchester found the programme mutually inspiring.

Dave reflects: "I was staggered by the amount that I learnt and the amount of commonality between the roles such as the challenges around motivating a team and aligning them behind a common goal."

Matt adds: "I've learned a lot from Dave. Having someone on a leadership level that that gets it and understands it from a different angle is really important.

We've reflected together on our own strategic direction of our organisations, and what it takes to be an effective leader. It's been really useful."

The two of them talked about their shared responsibility for building aspirations for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Matt has taken action at school: "I've embellished the three-year cultural capital programme to think

strategically about giving children as many different experiences as we can so that they get just as much opportunities as everyone else." And Dave has taken back insights to his colleagues: "It shows how many obstacles you need to overcome.

Even just to get to the starting line. It's not a fair pitch. So it's important that we provide role models."

Dave sums up the power of the learning experience: "Understanding about the school is just something that I'm not going to forget. It's more than just social responsibility in terms of doing something different. It's an immense learning opportunity and for me, it's been invaluable."

These unique peer mentoring partnerships provide the opportunity for participants to learn from each other and create ripples of change for generations to come.



"There's an element of responsibility that's on him that's paramount. It's encouraged me to hit pause and think about the pressures that I'm under or I feel that I'm under and helped bring things into perspective."

Mandeep Baura, Partner, KPMG



"Instead of getting overwhelmed or getting into something that isn't purposeful or useful, this programme helps to take that step back, look at the bigger picture, figure out the why, and work from there as a starting point. It's that fresh set of eyes, and a different way of looking at things."

Marc Kirby, Deputy Headteacher, Haringey

CONFIDENCE CREATING A RIPPLE EFFECT: STEVE AND MARIA'S STORY



Lift
Schools

Steve Capps, a Partner at EY and Maria Amigot-Maza, Secondary Vice Principal from Lift Schools in Birmingham, quickly found common ground.

As Steve summarises: "Ultimately, leadership is about people - engaging and enabling change. Hearing and sharing perspectives on this has helped me develop a broader outlook."

Maria reflects on how inspiring those conversations have been for her: "It has worked because it has really strengthened my confidence in making strategic decisions and helped me redefine my leadership voice and presence. I'm making a much better impact now as a leader in school."

Steve also reflected on his own experiences at a state school: "What helped me was how the teachers inspired us to believe we could be whatever we wanted to be. If we can instil that same belief, that you can do

whatever you want to do, and that there's support behind you, it makes a huge difference. When you see what's possible, and meet people from similar backgrounds who've achieved it, that visibility of ambition really helps."

Maria can see the power of the programme in creating opportunities for young people: "It's about the ripple effect, when your skills are improving and you see the bigger picture in terms of what children can achieve. Actually, they can aspire to far more and by setting the bar really high for them and helping them to reach that bar, we are definitely going to create better opportunities for them. Whether it's by choosing the curriculum or by investing in staff retention, it's going to have a huge effect in the life of the students and in the future success chances."



"Working with Inspiration for All is incredibly rewarding. Our Partners often speak of how the experience broadens their perspective and deepens their understanding of social mobility. The insights they gain help shape their thinking and strengthen our firm's impact. This programme creates a ripple of meaningful change that we're proud to be a part of."

Amy Hood, Communications and Engagement Manager, and Inspiring Partnerships relationship manager for EY cohorts



"I found it so useful. Over the course of this partnership my role has developed and I've had a promotion. Through that process, Valerie's been key in supporting me and helping me understand that shift in dynamic when you step up to a new table, and not getting imposter syndrome."

*Andrea George-Samuels,
Associate Director of SEND for Lift Schools*



We explored how to open up aspirations for students in rural areas to the major employers and how you physically get from rural areas into a major urban area where there are a lot more career opportunities. That's about breaking a mental glass ceiling."

Nick Stevenson, Partner, PwC



"I felt energised after the visits in particular, both in terms of thinking what I can use from this in the work I do with clients, but also thinking about what could usefully be applied within my own organisation."

Laura Brooks, Principal Consultant, PA Consulting



"It's a tough job being a Headteacher, so we're looking to make sure we've got every opportunity to support our leaders in the best way that we can. Because the best leaders get the best outcomes for children."

Anne EtcHELLS, Lead for Teacher Development, Leadership and Governance, Haringey Education Partnership

JOIN US

It's easy to get involved – we do all the hard work and deliver the outcomes for you, so get in touch today:

For businesses: sarah@inspirationforall.org.uk

For schools: paula@inspirationforall.org.uk

