



Cisco Pathways Social Impact Report 2014-2024

10 years of impact



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Introduction



The Cisco Pathways programme developed by Cisco UK & Ireland, first launched in 2014 with a work experience called Pathway To Your Future for key stage 4 and 5 students. 4 years later in 2018, in partnership with Connectr Early Engagement, we developed the Cisco Pathways Partner School programme; an offering for key stage 3 students which reaches students before they make key decisions such as choosing GCSE subjects.

Our programme across all pillars is collectively known as Cisco Pathways and targets young people from low-socioeconomic areas, diverse ethnic backgrounds, and those who identify as female and non-binary, raising their career aspirations and inspiring them to pursue careers in technology. Pathways is our answer to tackling the lack of diversity in the sector.

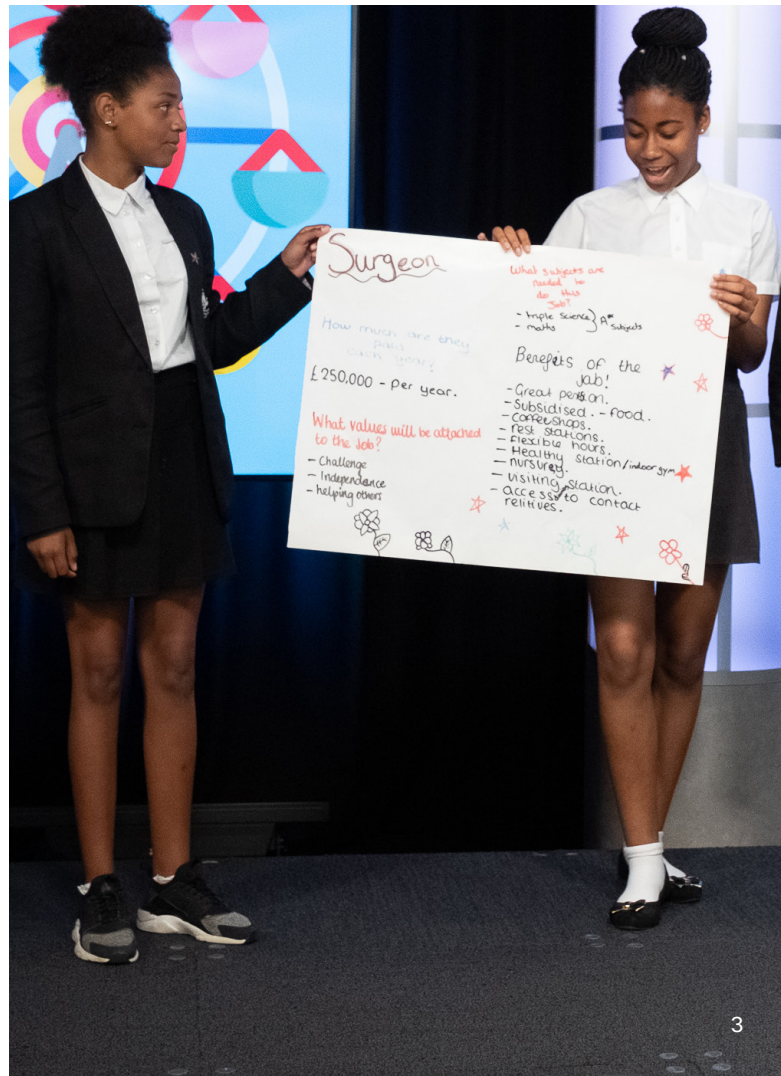
In 2016, Cisco set an inspired goal to positively impact one billion lives worldwide by 2025. This goal was exceeded in 2024 – 1 year early. One of the social impact areas within this goal was ‘Learning and digital skills’ aiming to open career pathways for underrepresented individuals, and Cisco Pathways sits underneath this global goal.

This year Cisco Pathways celebrates its 10th birthday and 10 years of impact. This report showcases the story of Pathways’ success in diversifying the Cisco talent pipeline. The programme has created a diverse talent pipeline for Cisco UK & Ireland, alongside adding to the diverse workforce for the wider industry. Long term partnerships have been key to Cisco Pathways success. Our Partner School programme started with seven partner schools, of which 75% have now been working with us for 6 years. This long-term approach has created a culture of honest feedback through strengthened relationships, which in turn has driven meaningful growth.



Sarah Walker,
Chief Executive
- UK & Ireland

“Celebrating 10 years of the Cisco Pathways programme is a moment of great pride for Cisco – from one off local events to long term partnerships with schools that have now impacted over 5500 students. We are delighted by the progress made in inspiring young people from diverse backgrounds to explore careers in technology and I am excited to continue this journey of nurturing talent and promoting inclusivity within our industry.”

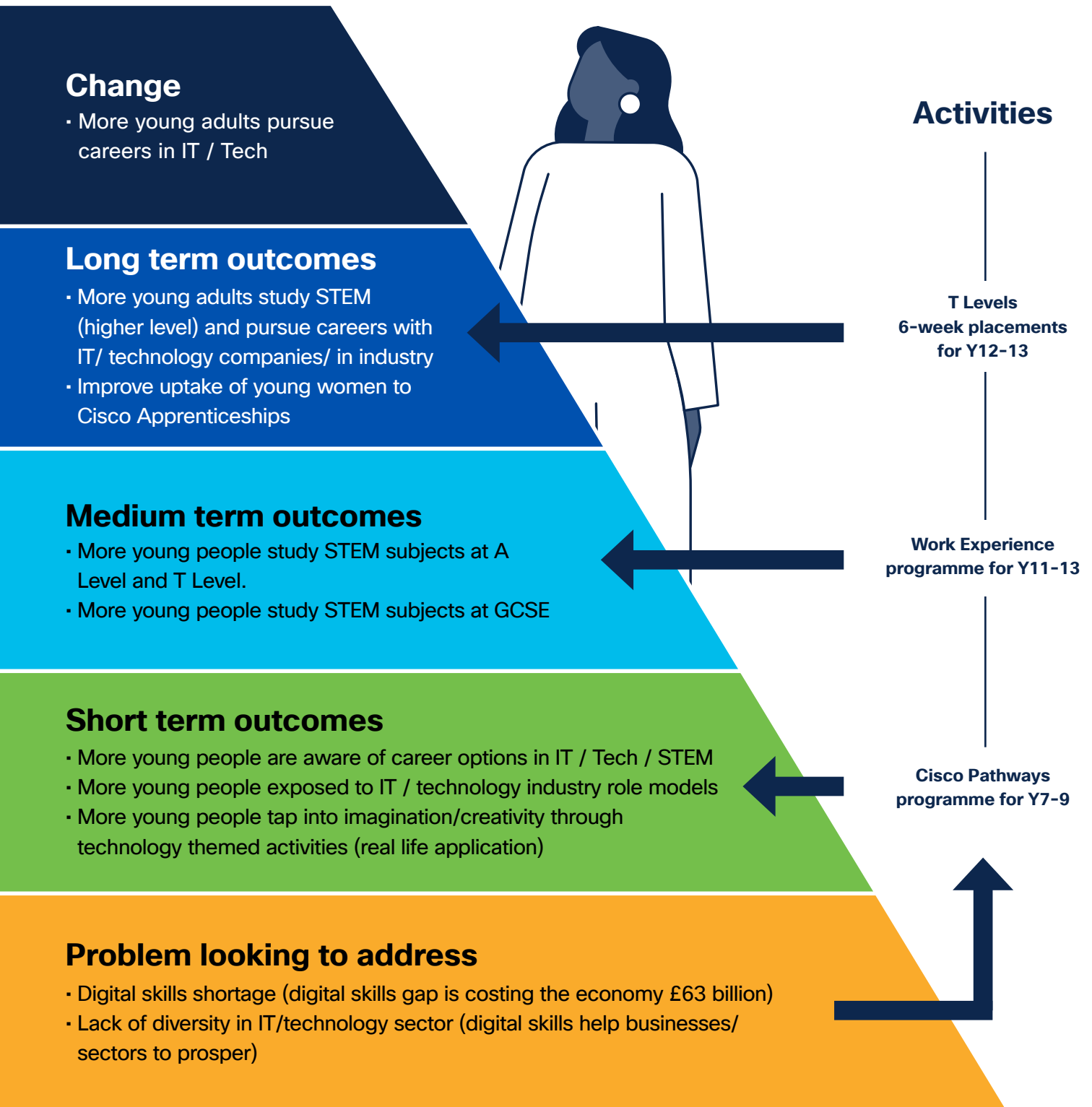


Creating a Pathway to Digital Diversity



In a previous Cisco Pathways social impact report, published in 2020, we highlighted the change that Cisco wants to see, which directly feeds into our wider goal of more diverse young adults pursuing careers in IT and tech. It sets out how to tackle the lack of diversity in the tech sector and the digital skills shortage, which is costing the economy £63 billion¹.

Below is an illustration of the change that Cisco wants to see and how Cisco Pathways helps to achieve wider goals, sector goals and much needed societal change.



1. House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, Digital skills crisis, Second Report of Session 2016-17

Programme components and evolution



Cisco Pathways celebrated its tenth year in 2024 and has impacted **5619** students since its inception, but it started off as a work experience week for a cohort of 75 students across 2 locations.

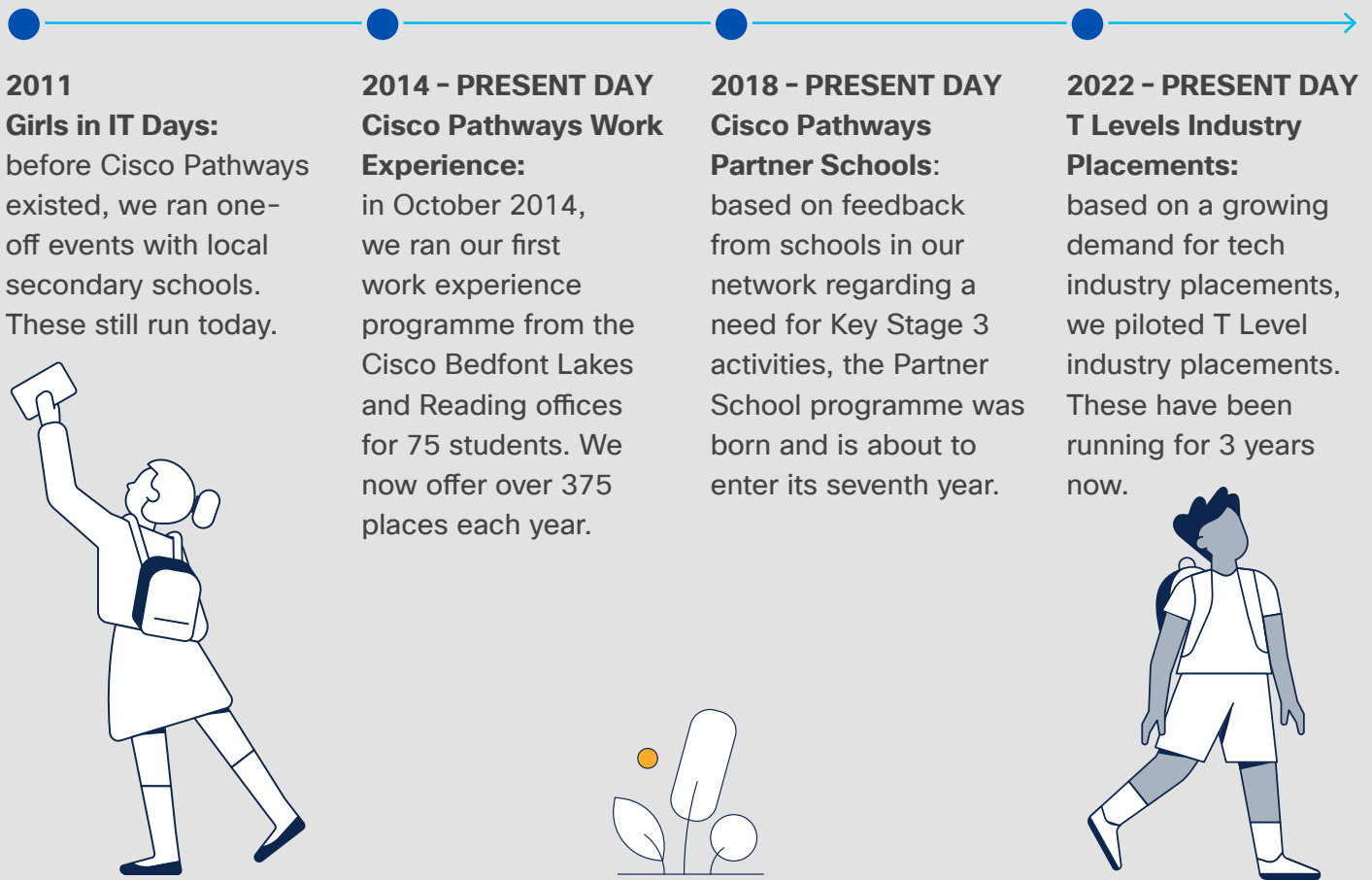
The programme has grown over time with the following ambitions driving that growth:

- We wanted to strengthen their relationships with the schools and offer more touchpoints during students' academic journey.
- We wanted to reach more students and inspire them to pursue technology and STEM.
- Shaped by teachers.

Below is a timeline of the various programmes that currently sit under the Pathways umbrella.



Timeline of Cisco Pathways



Key Stage

3

Pathways Partner Schools

Objectives:

Inspiration, introduction to technology industry, skills development, support Gatsby Benchmarks.

Components:

- In school technology workshops
- Hosted visits to Cisco offices
- Teacher resources designed by teachers which can be picked up and delivered
- 6 guaranteed work experience places per year per partner school

Key Stage

4-5

Pathways Work Experience

Objectives:

Attract students to Cisco and the sector, deepen understanding of paths available, engage with Cisco role models.

Components:

- 1-week placements for years 11-13 in February & July
- Programme for those who identify as women or non-binary

Key Stage

5

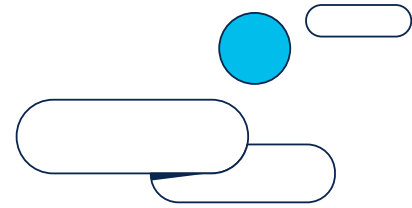
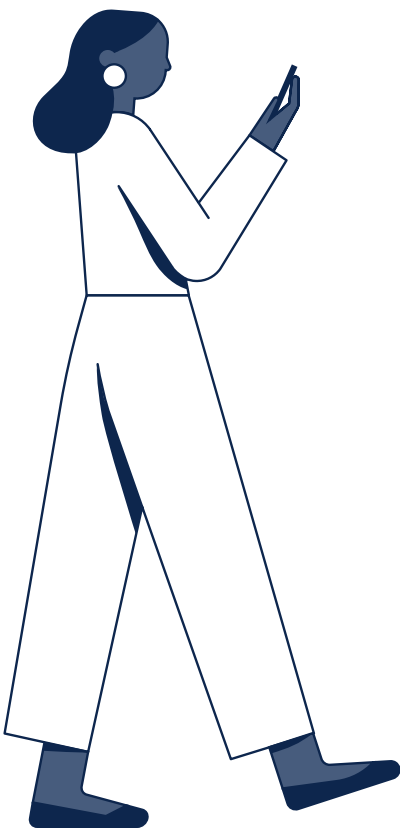
Pathways T Levels Industry Placement

Objectives:

Attract students to Cisco, enhanced skills development and exposure to Cisco role models, deepen understanding of roles available.

Components:

- 6-week industry placements for the Technical Qualification in Digital Production, Design and Development offices

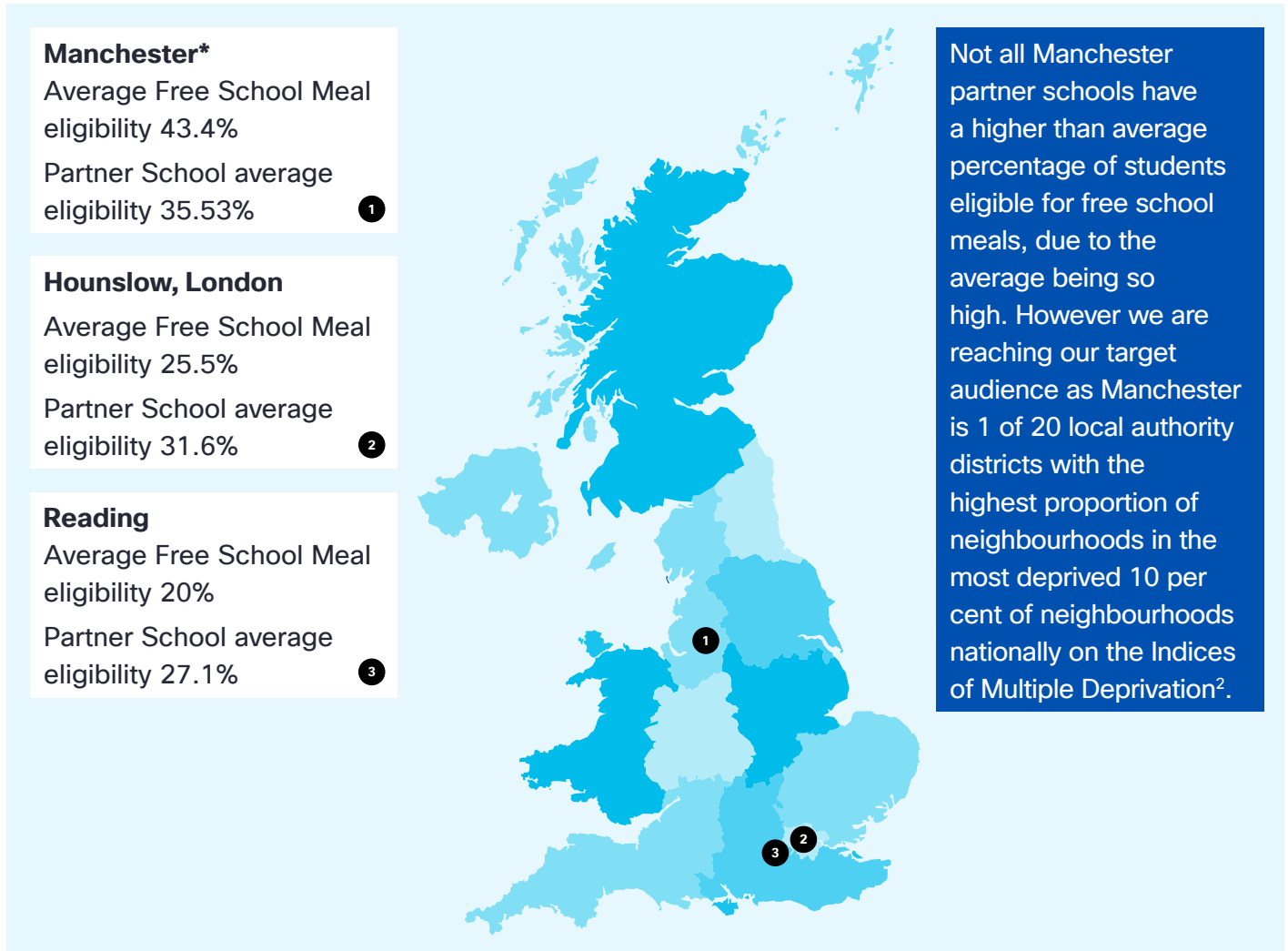


Social Mobility



Our programme runs in London (Feltham), Reading and Manchester, where Cisco offices are based.

London and Manchester are both cities with areas of low social mobility, which allows us to work with an increased number of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. The schools that Cisco work with have been profiled by school engagement experts Connectr, based on having an above average percentage of students eligible for Pupil Premium (free school meals).



*Two new Manchester partner schools were introduced to the Partner School programme in 2023, which triples the students impacted in the region.

Ambassador programme

In 2022 Cisco Pathways implemented an alumni Ambassador network to encourage other young people from our target schools to sign up to our work experience and T Level programmes. We give soft skills training to these Ambassadors, who talk about Cisco Pathways in their school.

Students hearing from role models close to their age are more likely to engage with the programme, allowing Cisco to have a longer-term relationship with previous participants who are interested in a career at Cisco or in the industry.

2. Ministries of Housing, Communities and Local Government, The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019)

Building capacity within the UK careers education system



Cisco Pathways is holistic and takes young people on a journey from Years 7–13.

We responded first to the early employer interventions that schools now widely request. We adopted a year-on-year partnership school model 6 years ago, which is a model now widely encouraged by The Careers and Enterprise Company, as a gold standard for employers.

We support our partner schools and wider schools to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks. In line with the Good Career Guidance Benchmarks (first published 2013) by the Gatsby Foundation, for 10 years Cisco Pathways has provided secondary schools with careers activities to:

- Enable students to learn about the technology industry
- Build student's key employability skills
- Give student's exposure to and experience of workplaces

Gatsby Benchmarks

Cisco Pathways supports schools to meet six out of eight Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance and these are:

1. A stable careers programme ✓
2. Learning from career and labour market information ✓
3. Addressing the needs of each pupil
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers ✓
5. Encounters with employers and employees ✓
6. Experiences of workplaces ✓
7. Encounters with further and higher education ✓
8. Personal guidance

Careers and Enterprise Company

Cisco UK and Ireland support the Careers and Enterprise Company's careers education strategy and are a Cornerstone Employer, providing high quality careers outreach and opportunities for young people aligned to the local economy. Cornerstone Employer Groups work together within a geographical area to target disadvantage, promote pathways, upskill and inform educators, parents and carers and drive better outcomes for young people.

T Levels

As Cisco Pathways grows, it is important to us that we support the wider education system and reach young people who are on all education/qualification pathways.

Our digital T Level offering was launched in 2022 and supports the government's new qualification, ensuring students have industry placements and are work ready. In 2025 we will pilot a new model to increase the number of T level placements working with our supply chain.



Cisco's CSR report published in 2014 revealed that 77% of Cisco's workforce identified as Male, 54% identified as White, and only 3% identified as Black. Cisco Pathways was designed with the mission to increase diversity at Cisco and in the wider technology sector at its core.

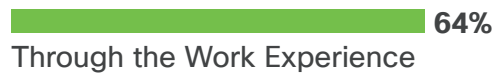
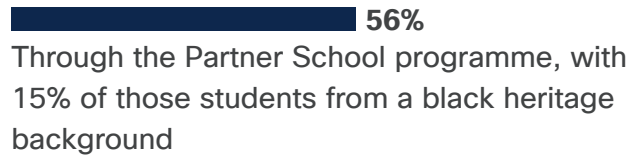
Timeline of Cisco Pathways

- 2014**
Cisco UK and Ireland launch Cisco Pathways work experience programme for year 10-11 students to inspire diverse young people into tech careers.
- 2016**
To address the lack of women applying to Cisco's Apprenticeships, Cisco pilot a work experience for those who identify as women/girls who are in year 12 and 13 and expanded the work experience to Manchester.
- 2017**
Measures are put in place to make the work experience programme more inclusive for young people with SEND. This includes reasonable adjustments at the application stage, and during the programme, such as introducing a quiet room.
- 2018**
Cisco launches a Partner School pilot programme with eight schools in London, Reading and Manchester, who all have an above-average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, and two of which are girls' schools.
- 2020**
An inner-city London partner school is introduced to the Partner School programme, to reach more black students. The Pathways programme became fully virtual during the pandemic – Pathways work experience still has a fully virtual cohort to enable students to take part across the UK & Ireland.

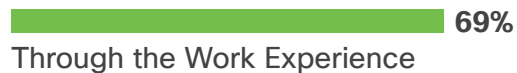
Pathways demographics

Due to carefully profiling schools to ensure we meet our objective of impacting diverse young people, we have managed to impact the following young people through our programmes:

Those from an ethnic minority background



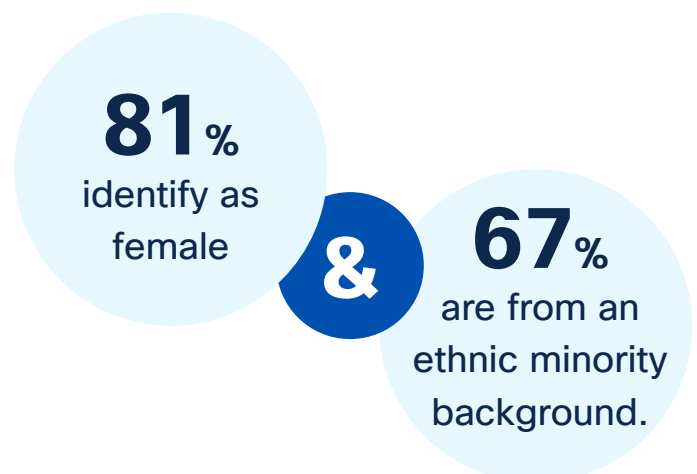
Those identifying as female or non-binary



Increasing our workforce diversity

Pathways is achieving its aim of engaging young people from underrepresented backgrounds and supporting us to increase diversity in our workforce.

Over the last 5 years we have **hired 21 Apprentices** who attended the programme;



46% of current female apprentices have come through one of the Pathways pillars including one who attended a school workshop, followed by the work experience, and was hired in 2020.

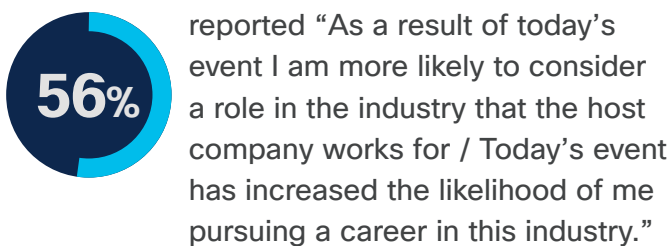
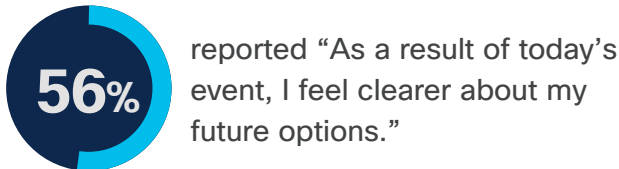
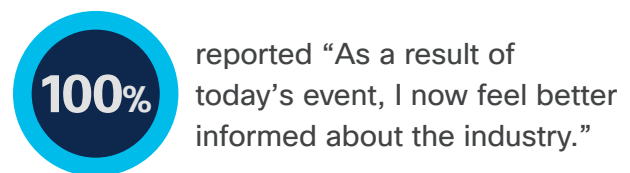
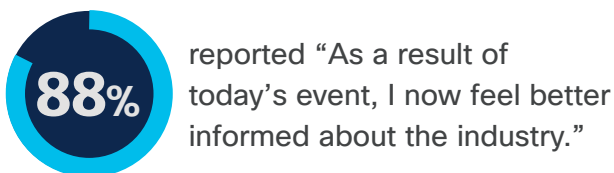
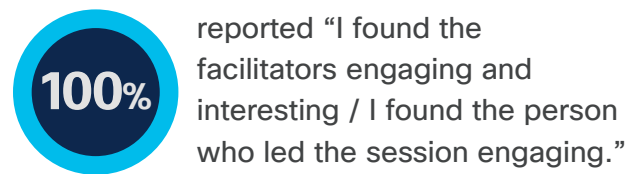
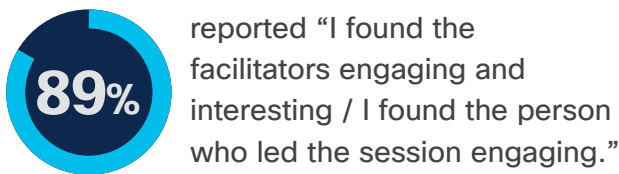
Partner Schools: Participant impact



Students who took part in Pathways in-school workshops and office visits to Cisco completed feedback questionnaires about the programme. The results have been consistently positive over the 6 years of the Cisco Pathways Partner School programme. Below are the results on the left hand column.

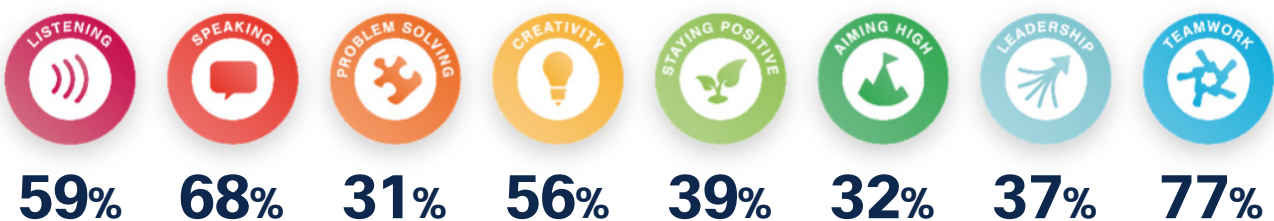
Multiple interactions

The Careers and Enterprise Company report that a young person who has four or more meaningful encounters with an employer is 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training (NEET). Since 2021, we have invited the winners from each in-school workshop from each Partner School to visit our offices in London or Manchester for a day of activities. After their second interaction with us, their survey responses are even more positive. See below on the the right hand column.



Skills development

After Partner School events, we also ask students to reflect on which employability skills they have developed in the sessions. We use the Skills Builder skills, which provide a universal framework for skills development and is widely recognised by schools and young people. The skills students report developing the most are teamwork, speaking, listening and creativity. See results below:



Work experience: Participant impact



Students who took part in Pathways work experience completed feedback questionnaires both before and after the programme, to measure the distance travelled. The results have been consistently positive over the 10 years. The results on the right hand column below are specifically from our programme for women and those who identify as female or non-binary, which runs once a year.

Survey results:

■ Before ■ After

How prepared for the world of work students felt before and after the Cisco work experience.



How prepared for the world of work students felt before and after the Cisco work experience.



How students perceived their **awareness of career opportunities in the IT sector** before and after participating in the Cisco work experience



How students perceived their **awareness of career opportunities in the IT sector** before and after participating in the Cisco work experience



How confident about their future students felt before and after the Cisco work experience.



How confident about their future students felt before and after the Cisco work experience.



Increased interest in Cisco careers

Before the work experience, we asked students if they knew about Cisco and the careers available, and if they would have considered an apprenticeship or job with Cisco before applying for the work experience. After the programme, we ask if they have been influenced or inspired regarding any future decisions? I.e. their career/ chosen subjects etc. and if they would consider an apprenticeship or job with Cisco. See the results below.

Do you know about Cisco and careers available?	Have you been influenced or inspired regarding future decisions? I.e. career or chosen subjects		Would you consider an apprenticeship or job with Cisco?	
	BEFORE	AFTER	BEFORE	AFTER
Yes - 65%	Yes - 80%		Yes - 38%	
	Maybe - 16%		Maybe - 34%	
	Yes - 75%		Yes - 75%	
	Maybe - 17%		Maybe - 17%	

95% of participants would recommend the programme to other young people

T Levels impact



Cisco Pathways has offered 6-week industry placements for the T Level Qualification in Digital Production, Design and Development since 2022, and provided 36 students with quality work placements to date.

Students who took part were surveyed following their placement and the results are below:



Evolution

Having delivered T Level placements for 3 years, we notice firsthand the transformative change in students from day 1 to completing their placement. As such, we are keen to offer the opportunity to more young people. Whilst our office capacity would not allow an increase, we are currently setting up a pilot for 2025 with organisations in our supply chain to enable more impact.

We will report on the results of this in a future social impact report.



Long term impact: Participant Case Studies



The following case studies are from Cisco apprentices or graduates who started their Cisco journey on the Pathways programme.



Cayla Bogle **First year Cisco Apprentice** **Took part in T Level Industry** **Placement in 2022**

“The sessions helped me to understand that you don’t need a technical background to work in the tech industry.”

Did your experience give you a better understanding of jobs in the tech industry, or help you learn about career pathways you weren’t aware of?

We had sessions with many employees from different career backgrounds. The sessions helped me to understand alternative career pathways someone early in their career could take. A degree apprenticeship was a great fit, as I wanted to gain practical experience alongside studying.

Did you learn or build any key skills during your Cisco activity?

I learnt that I should always showcase my soft skills because they are just as important as hard skills. Cisco taught me about always being my authentic self as everyone is different, as well as presentation skills and teamwork.

How did Cisco Pathways impact your career journey/plans?

If not for Cisco, I probably would not have chosen the path of a degree apprenticeship, as I did not know that was an option. I thought you either had to go to university or get a full-time job, I am so thankful for Cisco opening my mind up to new opportunities.

Please detail anyone at Cisco who inspired you during your time on the programme and how they did this.

Kimberly came into one of the sessions and showed us the degree apprenticeship 3-year plan, and the different pathways and certifications, alongside a structure of how to balance work life alongside university. The whole CSR team, Kathryn, Sam and Melissa supported me throughout the programme and showed me how to be confident within myself.

Long term impact: Participant Case Studies



Henry Gray
Third year Cisco Sales
Apprentice
Took part in Work
Experience in 2018

“It kick started my passion for technology and how it impacts and influences people and businesses all over the world, I knew I wanted to be a part of that.”

Did your experience give you a better understanding of jobs in the tech industry, or help you learn about career pathways you weren't aware of?

I was unaware of the industry before the work experience. It allowed me to learn about the different verticals of the industry and despite not being technical in my nature, there are so many different roles that play huge parts in making Cisco successful and a market leader. It allowed me to work with stakeholders, gain valuable tips and skills for interviews, setting me up for a future career.

Did you learn or build any key skills during your Cisco activity?

It allowed me to improve key interview skills which I utilised later for the apprenticeship. I took part in group activities where I practiced presenting to an audience. Engaging with a big group of completely new people was something I hadn't done before. Relationship building and expanding your network are important at Cisco, and the work experience is where this really began for me.

How did Cisco Pathways impact your career journey/plans?

It had a huge impact on my career plans. When the team introduced the Cisco Degree apprenticeship, I instantly knew this was the career direction that I wanted to take. The work experience had inspired me to work in tech and for Cisco and the apprenticeship was the first step for me in hitting this goal - working alongside industry experts, to build foundations for a successful career at Cisco.

Please detail anyone at Cisco who inspired you during your time on the programme and how they did this.

Sam was fantastic at breaking the ice at the start of the week, and making everyone feel comfortable throughout, and would drop what she was doing to help. The interviewers took time out of their day to interview me and provide helpful feedback.

Long term impact: Partner School Case Studies



The following case studies are from schools who have been Cisco Pathways Partner Schools for five years or more.

Kate Thomson
Careers & Employability
Skills Coordinator
Reading Girls School

“They help students realise that people working in Cisco and similar organisations are often people just like them and they can get there.”

What have the longer-term benefits been for your school? It is great to have the continuity of the programme. We get offered activities by other companies but often they are one-offs, so it is excellent to have the support of Cisco. The opportunity for students to apply for work experience is excellent, particularly as many companies don't offer it.

What is the impact of careers activities/ employer encounters happening in Key Stage 3?

These activities are superb for giving inspiration and raising aspirations. Awareness of jobs helps them choose GCSEs for the careers they are interested in. If they are aware of options for the future, hopefully they will commit to their studies and achieve well at school. These activities are fantastic for developing skills such as confidence, resilience, teamwork, creative thinking, problem solving, empathy.

Has there been an increased interest among Pathways students in the technology sector?

The programme has helped raise interest, and many students choose computer science, i-media, and/or business studies in their GCSE choices (and beyond). For example, there will be three classes of 30 students taking computer science next academic year.

Have you witnessed any changes in student's aspirations following Cisco Pathways activities?

Following the workshops, students are much more stimulated to achieve and more aware of what options there are for the future. The office visit is wonderful – they are so impressed by the facilities, and it motivates them.



Long term impact: Partner School Case Studies



Will Berryman
Head of Careers
Rivers Academy West London

“There are some who now want to work for Cisco, they have a clear career aspiration.”

What have the longer-term benefits been for your school? The programme is part of our careers strategy and Cisco are one of our key partners. It has allowed us to call upon Cisco for other involvement within the school E.g. judging a Trust competition. The 2 guaranteed work experience places are a big advantage of the programme. Pathways meets several Gatsby Benchmarks regarding encounters with employers and experiences of the workplace.

What is the impact of careers activities/ employer encounters happening in Key Stage 3?

It can have an impact on their choice of GCSEs, the information they learn through Pathways could help them decide a subject to study and help students to see if the industry or company is one that they wish to work in. It is my job to expose them to as many different job roles as possible, the earlier that they know what is out there and what careers are possible, the more likely they are to achieve them.



Long term impact: Cisco Volunteer Case Studies



The following case studies are from Cisco volunteers who have volunteered their time on Cisco Pathways, to help bring our industry to life for students.

Zoya Lodhia, Apprentice

Years volunteering: 3 years

Programmes Supported:
Workshops, Work Experience
and T Levels

“...students find their career aspirations as they get to discover new roles and pathways that they hadn't heard of before.”

What motivated you to volunteer for the Cisco Pathways programme?

I'm really passionate about encouraging more students into tech, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds and the Cisco Pathways programme allows me to do just that. Also, the programme offered me the opportunity to make direct impact in my community.

Do you notice any changes in students' aspirations or behaviour pre and post Cisco activities?

You see a lot of positive changes in the students after completing Cisco's programmes. You also see the boost in confidence from these students. I also think for a lot of students it gives them the ability to imagine themselves working at big corporations like Cisco, especially as for some students they may be the first in their family to pursue such a pathway and the programme allows them to have a sense of belonging and that it is accomplishable, despite having no prior familiarity with it.

How has volunteering on this programme benefited you personally?

Volunteering on this programme has developed my mentoring, presentation, and leadership skills. And the T Levels volunteering specifically has given me experience in management.

What have you most enjoyed about volunteering?

What I have enjoyed the most about the volunteering is getting to connect with and directly impact the students of the future. Getting to help students from different background break into tech has been really enjoyable and rewarding.



Long term impact: Cisco Volunteer Case Studies



**Lewis Frank Robertson,
Solution Delivery Manager**

Years volunteering: 3 years

Programmes Supported:
Workshops, Work Experience
and T Levels

*“I wanted to support students
in their transitions and demystify
the professional environment
for them.”*

What motivated you to volunteer for the Cisco Pathways programme?

Having recently transitioned from university myself, I clearly remember the uncertainty and challenges that come with leaving the academic world. I enjoy sharing my experiences and showing students that the workplace isn't as intimidating or formal as it may seem—it's about bringing your true self to the table.

Do you notice any changes in students' aspirations or behaviour pre and post Cisco activities?

Students always seem motivated both before and after the sessions. In conversations, they often express how much they've learned from the programme and mention having a clearer understanding of what we do. One student even told me that after our chat, they found the field of Solutions Delivery fascinating and were inspired to do more research into it.

How has volunteering on this programme benefited you personally?

Volunteering has been a learning experience for me as well. I've gained insights into how to better engage with younger students, and it has created some great memories and strengthened friendships within the workplace!

What have you most enjoyed about volunteering?

I've most enjoyed the interactions with students—seeing their surprised and intrigued reactions as they learn about my work is incredibly rewarding. I believe they find the sessions inspiring, and it's a joy to witness that. I also value the time spent with my teammates during these activities!



It is important to us to share our learning from delivering Cisco Pathways for 10 years, and we hope it will support likeminded organisations creating additional impact.

01

Don't be put off – start small and build programmes over time.

02

Engage your employees – a programme is easier to deliver if a lot of people do a small amount of work.

03

As with all events, for work experience we oversubscribe by 20% on student places because students will always drop out just before and even on the day.

04

Get innovative if you have a small office capacity by engaging your partners and supply chain to increase the spaces you can offer.

05

Map out your calendar before the academic year begins – we have fallen subject to all our events being concentrated in the summer term and then been short of volunteers available. Consider popular holiday times for your volunteers, and busy times for schools.

06

Choose partner schools based on your priorities (E.g. target demographic) but also on what is most practical for delivering your programme day to day. An example of a practical consideration is the distance to your offices, as this directly feeds into volunteer ease and uptake. If you live in a remote location – parking available at schools is important.

Looking forward

2024 marks 10 years of the Pathways programme. We plan to continue investing in Pathways, whilst we have seen an encouraging increase in diversity within the workforce at Cisco, diversity in the wider sector is slowly improving and the need for our programme remains.

Schools also continue to need employers' support to inspire career pathways and build their students' skills more than ever. They also need relevant labour market information, so they are best able to advise their students on the roles available in the technology sector and dispel common misconceptions that students may have about our industry.

Cisco Pathways continues to evolve, grow, and create impact with feedback from our school partners, students and volunteers. Summer 2024 marked our sixth Partner School programme teacher roundtable, where all our partner schools come together to help shape the next academic year's offering.

Recognising that T Level placements are a particular issue, we are looking forward to scaling our offering via our Partners with a T Level supply chain pilot starting in early 2025.

Volunteers are an integral part of Cisco Pathways and engaging new volunteers can be a challenge. Our apprentices are very engaged, and we have a pool of dedicated volunteers who are very willing but have a full-time job. We aim to grow our volunteer network even further, to help meet the demands of our growing programme.

Thank you.

