Artswork’s Breakthrough Programme

What is it?

Breakthrough is a 6-month (26 weeks) training and work-based learning programme, which is in part, funded by Arts Council England. For some employers this will mean that the young person’s wage, employer NI contributions and autoenrollment pension contributions are part paid for. Employers need to contribute between 20% – 100% of wages, dependent on their financial circumstance, plus £1500 towards training and mentoring costs.

Running between 28 September 2026 – 26 March 2027, the programme provides entry routes into the industry for 18 - 25-year-olds, who are struggling to find meaningful employment. Many of these young people are lacking different forms of advantage or privilege. All have great potential; none have yet been given the chance to prove it.

As an employer, this is an opportunity to diversify your workforce and utilise youth voice in your organisation. You will gain additional hands-on support and the fresh ideas that young employees bring, in exchange for giving talented young people the initial steps towards a rewarding creative career.

Our supportive and effective approach provides employability training to candidates and mentoring and advice to both the employer and the young person.

Who is it for?

Employers

Any arts or creative organisation may apply to be part of the 20 strong Breakthrough cohort. You will need to provide a workplace mentor and have an entry level job post. This can be anything from workshop assistant, marketing support, admin, etc.

We will be prioritising organisations who are based in or work in the south-east. Employers will be measured against the following eligibility factors:

- A meaningful job opportunity, ready to start in September
- Support and guidance available to new employees.
- Organisation's match to Artswork’s and Arts Council England’s values and priorities

Breakthrough Young People

The programme is aimed at brilliant young people who are struggling to find purposeful work due to some disadvantage or lack of opportunity. It will give capable young people entry routes into a career in the arts.

We will encourage applications from neurodivergent and disabled candidates, those with underrepresented characteristics, a lower socioeconomic status, those who suffer with mental health issues, and under-confident young people. We won't ask for specific qualifications from applicants but rather be looking for young people with talent, creativity and passion for the arts.

The Breakthrough programme is not linked to gaining a particular qualification but will boost underprivileged young peoples' career skills and confidence, and potentially prepare them for an apprenticeship, employment or further education.

How does it work?

After an initial induction day with the employer, on Monday 28 September, the programme continues with a 2-week employability training course. The young person then has a chance to settle in with you and their work placement, whilst being invited to monthly top-up training and sharing sessions.

Ongoing individual mentoring and coaching sessions are then available throughout the programme for both the young person and the employer, as and when needed.

As their placement nears the end, Artswork and the employer will offer the young people support with career planning, goal setting, and exit interviews.

Recruitment

Once a host organisation has completed a job description template, there is a joint responsibility with Artswork to promote the job opportunity.

Artswork will shortlist candidates eligible for the programme and forward their submissions to the host employers.

After a simple interview process, conducted by the host organisation, you will select the right young person for your organisation.

The Breakthrough participant will be contracted by the employer and an agreement, outlining how the wage grant will be reimbursed, will be sent by Artswork.

This placement is for 25 hours a week e.g. 4 days a week for 7 hours (45 min lunch break) or 5 days a week for 6 hours a day (1 hour lunch break).

Artswork provides	Employer provides
Job description templates, recruitment materials, job advertisements. We assess candidates and then share the shortlist.	Meaningful, entry level job. Local job promotion. Interviews for shortlisted candidates and making final appointment.
Up to approximately 80% of wages for 25 hours a week @ £12.71 per hour (National Living Wage) for 26 weeks, plus employer national insurance contributions, plus minimum pension autoenrollment contributions where eligible.	£1500 plus approximately 20% - 100% wage contribution, any IT equipment, and enrolment checks. % contribution is dependent on organisational size and funding – further description below.
2 week training programme and 5 x monthly top-up and check-in sessions.	A work email address and workplace specific induction when the placement begins.
Coaching support for young person and employer as required.	A workplace mentor who can offer career advice and support.
Career advice and planning sessions for next steps.	A contract with the young person and an agreement to report any areas of concern or safeguarding to Artswork within 24 hours of observation.

Contribution tiers

To enable all sizes of organisations to benefit from this offer a tiered contribution from employers has been designed to cover the full cost of the programme. The following quotas are needed:

Employers are asked to submit an expression of interest to be part of the programme and select which tier they fall under using the descriptions below. Artswork are open to meetings with organisations to confirm tiers for those who are unsure.

Tier 1: Organisations will each receive a grant of £2,550 in three instalments October, December and March from Artswork, towards wage costs. These organisations will contribute approximately 20% of the wages costs for their participant(s) and be those with a small workforce and a turnover (including funding received) of £250k or less. These organisations will not be in receipt of NPO or other guaranteed annual funding. Typically, these organisations are focused very much within their local area and will work on a few projects specific to their local communities. A maximum of 10 employers needed from this tier.

Tier 2: Organisations will each receive a grant of £2,232 in three instalments October, December and March from Artswork, towards wage costs. These organisations will contribute approximately 30% of the wages costs for their participant(s) and will be organisations with a turnover (including funding received) of £250k-£500k. They may well be in receipt of NPO or other guaranteed funding at a lower tier rate. These organisations may work on multiple small and medium sized projects, have a support network, and be well established in the local area. At least 6 employers needed as a quota from this tier.

Tier 3: Organisations will each receive a grant of £1,914 in three instalments October, December and March from Artswork, towards wage costs. These organisations will contribute approximately 40% of the wages costs for their participant(s) and will larger organisations with a larger permanent and consultant/freelance workforce and a turnover (including funding received) of £500k or more. They may well be in receipt of NPO or other guaranteed funding at a top tier rate. Example organisations would be Local Authorities/Councils, larger cultural venues/organisations. These organisations will be working on multiple large projects and have a wide support network. At least 4 employers needed as a quota from this tier.

Tier 4: Organisations will pay 100% of wage costs for their partipant(s) and will be commercial organisations or those in receipt of direct funding from DCMS. A maximum of 10 employers needed from this tier.

Please note that the above contributions are in addition to the £1500 contribution towards training and mentoring.

Interested?

Please apply here **by Monday 18th May:** Breakthrough Programme 26/27 Expression of Interest – Fill out form

You will need to include information about:

What type of organisation you are
The number of placements you would like to offer
Where you are based and the geographic areas you work in
A short description of the job placements you are proposing
Information about the support you plan to offer young people including a workplace mentor, support with job-based skills and advice for long-term work goals.

Need more information? Please contact the team to arrange an online conversation about the Breakthrough programme by emailing AnnaBrown@artswork.org.uk

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