

Compass Group UK & Ireland Launches 'Classroom to Careers' to Help Young People into Meaningful Work

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[Compass Group UK & Ireland](#) has launched its Classroom to Careers programme, to help young people develop the skills, confidence and opportunities they need to progress into sustainable and meaningful employment. This is part of its social mobility strategy – Our Social Promise, which is striving to positively impact one million lives by 2030.

Classroom to Careers is an innovative programme that brings together Compass' existing and newly launched early careers initiatives, with a focus on tackling left behind regions and supporting young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The programme follows the release of Alan Milburn's "Young people and work: interim report", which has highlighted a whole system failure in relation to youth unemployment. The report states that "without urgent action, the number of young people who are NEET – not in education, employment, or training – will rise from 1 in 8 to 1 in 6 young people within five years, representing 1.25 million young lives."*

Classroom to Careers provides a clear pipeline of opportunities in food and support services for young people, starting at 14-16-year-olds onwards.

Junior Chef Academy

Aimed at children aged between 14 and 16 years old, the initiative is not just about teaching cooking techniques, but also helps build confidence, foster creativity, and inspires the next generation of culinary talent. The 10-week programme helps aspiring junior chefs embark on a transformative culinary journey, honing their skills in mastering fundamental culinary techniques, plus crafting and creating a diverse range of delicious dishes. So far, the programme has reached more than 300 students, and there are plans to significantly expand the initiative to over 1,500 students in the next 2-3 years.

Virtual work experience platform

Earlier this year, Compass launched its first Virtual Work Experience module, in partnership with Youth Employment UK – which has been rolled out and made available to over 1,000 educators. The new online programme has been designed to help young people aged 14-18 years old, learn more about the breadth of career opportunities within Compass and the wider hospitality, foodservice, and support services sectors. Once completed, participants are then offered the opportunity to express interest for in-person work experience. The ambition is for this virtual and in person work experience to be rolled out to 3,500 schools from September 2026 – to encourage young people to have a career in food and hospitality.

Youth Guarantee

Compass is supporting the Government's Youth Guarantee, with a six-week pre-employability course for people who have been unemployed for 18 months or more. It allows candidates to build new skills and learn more about opportunities available to them, while supporting them back into the world of work and taking on a paid placement.

The business is also continuing to grow its apprenticeship programmes, as well as supported internships, Sector Work Based Academies and other pre-employability programmes. These initiatives are driving its ambition to help young people into work, with a focus on creating clearer pathways from education into the world of work.

Kirsty Adams, People Director Talent, Leadership, Learning & Inclusion at Compass Group UK & Ireland, said: "The recent publication of Alan Milburn's report is a sobering insight into the plight so many young people are facing as they look to enter employment. As one of the UK's largest employers we know we have the ability to make a difference and provide that crucial first rung of the ladder, along with opportunities where people can thrive.

"Classroom to Careers is about breaking down barriers and showing young people what's possible. By connecting education with real opportunities through programmes like our Junior Chef Academy and our new virtual work experience module – we're helping young people gain skills, confidence and insight, while supporting our wider commitment to social mobility."

Compass Group UK & Ireland will continue to evolve "Classroom to Careers" by working closely with young people, schools, colleges, community partners and charities, ensuring its programmes respond to the needs of young people and the future workforce, while creating lasting social impact.