



BRIGHT FUTURES

YOUNG INVESTORS

IMPACT REPORT



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bright Futures Leeds brought together students (Young Investors), entrepreneurs, and professional investors with a vision: to show that when young people are given a platform to engage seriously with business leaders, they rise to the challenge and open doors to their own future, their communities, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The audience included ambitious young people aged 13 to 14, regional entrepreneurs, and professional investors, collaborating through live business engagement, evaluating real pitches, practising professional communication, and building new networks.

Despite Leeds' growing business community, many young people lack exposure to investment, entrepreneurship, and innovation as real career paths. Bright Futures Leeds addressed this gap by giving students hands-on experience, real-world feedback, and visible role models.

Across the day, students demonstrated critical business thinking, built networking skills, and challenged entrepreneurs to sharpen their messaging. Investors discovered the potential to create a stronger, more inclusive innovation community. Bright Futures Leeds showed that talent already exists. What is needed is to connect it to opportunity.



2. KEY OUTCOMES

Bright Futures Leeds helped accelerate young people's entrepreneurial thinking and created unique value for the regional entrepreneurial and investment community.

KEY OUTCOMES

YOUTH IMPACT

20

Students from one of the 10% most deprived areas of the UK participated

77%

of students reported increased confidence.

75%

of students agreed that because of Bright Futures, they now have a clear understanding of the investment industry.

94%

reported they were likely or very likely to consider becoming entrepreneurs, with students demonstrating critical business thinking during live pitch sessions.



ENTREPRENEUR IMPACT

Feedback from students led founders to reassess their pitches and improve their clarity and storytelling. As one founder put it:

"When you strip back what you're trying to say, you connect with people quicker. No need for big fancy words."

All founders, five total, were impressed by the depth of students' questions, especially their human perspective, such as asking: ***"Has there been a time where the stress has become too much?"***

The early-stage entrepreneurs used the environment to practise their pitches in preparation for other investment opportunities.



INVESTOR ENGAGEMENT

Investors were uniformly impressed by the high calibre of their peers attending Bright Futures Leeds, noting it was rare to find such a strong, like-minded group outside of formal industry events.

Although many attended to support students, investors reported gaining unexpected professional value, making new connections and identifying opportunities for future collaboration.

The informal networking that continued after the event reflected Bright Futures' growing reputation as a platform for both youth engagement and professional community-building in Leeds.

REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM IMPACT

Bright Futures:

- Reinforced that although Leeds is a leading UK city for business growth, early and equitable exposure to entrepreneurship remains critical to fully realising its innovation potential.
- Exposed the visibility gaps that risk losing talent to larger cities if left unaddressed.
- Created a proof of concept that early exposure can strengthen Leeds' future innovation economy.
- Catalysed investor interest in building a longer-term, community-driven support network.
- Highlighted the need for ongoing collaboration between schools, entrepreneurs, and investors to promote and sustain growth locally.

3. WHY BRIGHT FUTURES LEEDS EXISTS



BARRIERS FACING YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEEDS

Young people today are filled with drive and energy. Yet their exposure remains limited to traditional career paths, hampering their aspirations instead of empowering their ambition.

This was powerfully underlined during Bright Futures Leeds, where Lord Mayor Abigail Marshall Katung directly addressed students, emphasising the critical role young people will play in shaping the city's future innovation economy.



Traditional education rarely provides students with direct experience of investment, entrepreneurship, or the innovation economy. As a result, too many young people are unaware that entrepreneurship and investment are genuine career paths open to them, not just distant possibilities for others.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

Traditional education prepares young people for familiar career paths, but rarely for entrepreneurship, investment, or the innovation economy. Despite their ambition and creativity, students are often unaware that founding or funding businesses is a realistic option for their futures.

Official UK Government standards for career guidance focus on conventional professions, with little visibility of entrepreneurial or investment careers. Without early exposure to these pathways, young people may never consider them viable, limiting their ability to contribute to regional innovation. Bright Futures Leeds helped bridge this gap, giving students direct experience of entrepreneurial thinking, critical questioning, and investment decision-making, skills rarely practised in the traditional classroom.

THE REGIONAL INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Leeds is a city where businesses can thrive, and young talent can flourish. Yet without greater visibility of local entrepreneurial opportunities, ambitious young people often feel they must leave for bigger cities like London to succeed. Bright Futures Leeds challenged this assumption by showcasing successful entrepreneurs who have built businesses within the city, demonstrating that innovation and leadership can happen here.

Strengthening these local connections is essential: retaining entrepreneurial talent will be critical to Leeds' long-term economic growth and innovation resilience

WHY BRIGHT FUTURES

Bright Futures was designed to unify the present and future of entrepreneurship in cities like Leeds.

By giving Young Investors exposure to local business founders and the platform to engage critically with real businesses, Bright Futures shows young people that their insights and voices are valuable today, not just someday.



At the same time, Bright Futures challenges the entire entrepreneurial community to ask:

How are we showing up to make sure Young Investors have the opportunities they deserve, both for them and for the long-term sustainability of the region?



4. BRIGHT FUTURES: A UNIQUE MODEL

REAL EXPERIENCE, NOT THEORY

Young Investors worked directly with real investors to assess live business pitches, moving quickly from scripted questions to genuine critical discussions. Observations showed growing confidence throughout the day, with 77% of students reporting increases in confidence.

Bright Futures Leeds gave students not just exposure to entrepreneurship, but real-world participation in it.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Students' direct, unscripted questions challenged entrepreneurs to explain their businesses clearly and meaningfully. As one founder reflected, "You can learn a lot from pitching to a younger audience. You want to connect with people, and you don't need big fancy words to connect with people."

Bright Futures Leeds showed that critical engagement has the potential to sharpen not just students' skills, but entrepreneurs' thinking too.

REGIONAL TALENT DEVELOPMENT

For many Young Investors, Bright Futures Leeds was their first direct experience with real entrepreneurs and investors. Seeing successful Leeds-based founders showed students that ambition does not have to mean leaving the city.

Building visible pathways to opportunity will be vital for retaining and growing Leeds' own entrepreneurial talent.

PRACTICAL SKILL-BUILDING

Bright Futures Leeds gave students the chance to practise leadership, critical thinking, and professional communication through real engagement with investors and entrepreneurs.

Observations noted students quickly moved beyond prepared questions to lead dynamic, thoughtful discussions.

COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE

Bright Futures Leeds mobilised entrepreneurs, investors, and students to invest in the next generation's success.

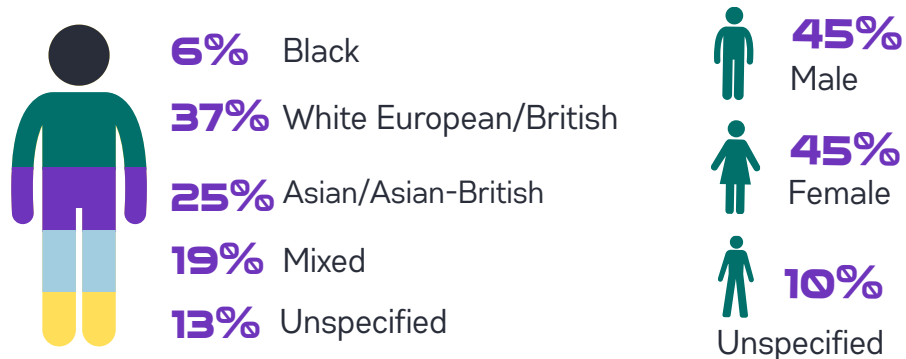
Lord Mayor Abigail Marshall Katung's personal commitment to attend and speak highlighted the shared recognition that early engagement is essential for Leeds' future economy.

5. THE PITCH DAY EVENT

THE AUDIENCE

On 5 March 2025, 20 Young Investors, 10 investors, and 5 entrepreneurs gathered at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds for the Bright Futures Pitch Day Event.

Young Investors: Aged 13-14-years-old



Their role:

- Support the investors in assessing the investment potential of the pitches.
- Network with investors and entrepreneurs.
- Collaborate with each other and investors to determine the best pitch.

Investors

Senior figures across venture capital, private equity, and angel investing.

Including Costas Kalisperas, founder of In Tune Executive Coaching; Nzube Ufodike, Investment Director at Amoo Venture Capital Advisory; Patricia Hamzahee, Co- Founder at Black Funding Network and Director at Extend Ventures.

Their role:

- Introduce Young Investors to the reality of investing as a career.
- Guide the Young Investors through the decision-making process of assessing pitches.

Entrepreneurs

Senior figures across venture capital, private equity, and angel investing.

Leeds-based entrepreneurs representing innovation in sectors such as Digital Marketing, Social Impact, and Energy.

Their role:

- Networking with the Young Investors.
- Pitching to the panel made up of adult and Young Investors.
- Answering questions from adult and Young Investors.



BUILDING CONNECTIONS, NETWORKING AND INFORMAL ENGAGEMENT

Networking was a key part of Bright Futures Leeds, designed to give students real experience of professional communication.

Pre-event surveys showed that **50% of** students were most excited to meet and engage with entrepreneurs and investors, highlighting the interest in real-world connection with the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Leeds.

MORNING SPEED NETWORKING

During the structured Speed Networking sessions, students initially relied on pre-prepared questions but quickly gained confidence, moving into spontaneous and thoughtful conversations. Investors and entrepreneurs played an important role in encouraging quieter students to participate, helping to create balanced, meaningful interactions.

Key observations:

- One investor described an 'unbelievable change' in student confidence over the course of the morning.
- Students asked increasingly deeper, follow-up questions as the sessions progressed, moving beyond scripts.
- Observers noted that "every investor's conversation was full of kindness toward young people", creating a positive, supportive environment.

AFTERNOON HUMAN BINGO AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

In the afternoon, the Human Bingo game encouraged more informal networking by getting both students and adults moving around and interacting.

Although participants initially stuck to their own groups, the activity gradually broke barriers and created a more unified experience across the room.

Key observations:

- The format got everyone out of their seats and actively asking questions to complete their cards.
- Some investors did not fully participate, but the game still achieved strong engagement overall.
- Observers noted that Human Bingo was an ideal post-lunch energiser, successfully restarting conversation and connection.

Bright Futures Leeds showed that when given structured, supportive environments, young people can quickly build the confidence and communication skills needed to navigate professional spaces independently.



6. IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

LEADERSHIP AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Insight:

Bright Futures Leeds helped Young Investors develop confidence and emotional resilience through direct engagement with entrepreneurs and investors.

Observation:

Initially hesitant during early networking activities, many students grew visibly more confident by midday, engaging spontaneously with adults. During the pitch sessions, one investor noted, "By the third iteration they didn't even ask us if they could ask a question, they just asked the question. Without approval or validation from us. So I think the confidence built throughout our interaction with them."

What this means:

Structured real-world exposure allowed students to move beyond needing permission to speak, building independence and emotional resilience in professional environments.



ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

Insight:

Bright Futures Leeds sparked early entrepreneurial thinking by giving Young Investors realworld exposure to evaluating live business propositions. This is an experience they would not typically encounter through formal education.

Observation:

Throughout the pitch sessions, students moved beyond prepared questions to engage founders critically on issues like financial viability, reputational risk, and operational planning. Several Young Investors showed an instinctive curiosity about entrepreneurs' motivations and decision-making processes, indicating untapped potential rather than pre-existing business knowledge.

What this means:

Bright Futures Leeds revealed that when students are given structured exposure to entrepreneurial scenarios, they can quickly begin building real business analysis skills. This outcome reinforces the programme's mission to expand access to entrepreneurial thinking for young people who would otherwise remain disconnected from these opportunities.

FINANCIAL LITERACY AND INVESTMENT THINKING

Insight:

The Event introduced Young Investors to key financial and investment concepts by involving them directly in assessing business pitches. This encouraged students to think beyond surface-level interest and assess businesses more analytically.

Observation:

Students asked practical financial questions such as, "Is membership free and what does it entail?" and "What problem are you trying to solve?" Observations also recorded that students increasingly raised points about revenue generation and business model sustainability after hearing the pitches.

What this means:

This implies that early exposure to real-world investment discussions can lay the foundations for financial literacy skills in young people. Providing structured opportunities to question, analyse, and understand business models helps equip students with critical skills often missing from traditional education.



NETWORKING AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Insight:

Bright Futures Leeds provided Young Investors with early exposure to professional communication practices, helping to build foundational interaction skills.

Observation:

While many students initially relied on scripted prompts, observational notes recorded a steady increase in natural conversation, including students initiating unscripted discussions with entrepreneurs and investors.

What this means:

Bright Futures Leeds highlighted that even brief, structured opportunities can start to build the confidence and communication habits needed for future professional engagement. Developing these skills early supports broader access to career pathways beyond entrepreneurship.

7. IMPACT ON FOUNDERS AND INVESTORS

ENTREPRENEURS

Pitching to Young Investors forced entrepreneurs to focus on clarity, accessibility, and core business fundamentals without oversimplifying their ideas. Students' direct questions targeted critical aspects such as business safety, revenue models, and purpose.

One founder reflected, 'If you cannot explain your business to a 14-year-old, you don't have a business.' Entrepreneurs were pushed to distil complex concepts into clear narratives that could resonate across different audiences.

Many recognised the difficulty of connecting meaningfully with future consumer markets, particularly younger demographics that traditional outreach often misses.

The experience shifted entrepreneurs' perceptions of audience engagement. It highlighted that building sustainable businesses requires not only investor-readiness but also early, accessible communication strategies. Strengthening these local connections offers a critical opportunity to reinforce Leeds' entrepreneurial pipeline and anchor future growth within the region.



INVESTORS

For investors, the primary value of Bright Futures Leeds went beyond spending time with Young Investors. The event provided a rare opportunity to connect with a high-calibre network of senior financial professionals who shared a commitment to strengthening regional innovation.

Investors noted that Bright Futures attracted experienced participants, setting it apart from typical pro bono initiatives where engagement is often more superficial. The presence of both seasoned investors and ambitious entrepreneurs signalled a growing seriousness within Leeds' entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Rather than viewing the event in isolation, investors highlighted its potential to create longterm impact. Building a sustainable, community-driven network focused on nurturing young entrepreneurial talent offers an opportunity to anchor future economic growth within the region, reducing the need for talent to migrate to larger cities.

8. REGIONAL REFLECTIONS AND COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

WHAT LEEDS REVEALED

Bright Futures Leeds revealed a remarkable strength within the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem: a genuine, collective commitment to supporting the next generation. Senior investors, leading entrepreneurs, and civic figures, including the Lord Mayor, actively showed up to engage with young people and reinforce the future of entrepreneurship in Leeds.

This level of senior involvement reflects a maturing regional ecosystem, where building talent pipelines and fostering innovation are seen as shared responsibilities. Leeds demonstrated that when local leadership steps forward with serious intent, it can create the conditions for sustainable, community-driven growth.



SHOWING UP ACROSS REGIONS

Across Leeds, Liverpool, and Birmingham, a clear trend emerged: senior investors, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders are increasingly willing to actively show up for the future of regional entrepreneurship.

In Leeds, the personal involvement of the Lord Mayor, alongside senior investors, demonstrated a particularly strong community commitment to building the entrepreneurial pipeline. Liverpool also showed strong professional engagement, while Birmingham revealed a growing appetite for change, despite some delivery challenges.

This trend suggests that across major regional cities, there is a serious recognition of the need to invest early in young entrepreneurial talent. The willingness of leaders to show up signals not just support for individual events, but the early foundations of stronger, more resilient regional innovation communities.

9. VISION

SCALING

Bright Futures Leeds strengthened local connections between young people, investors, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders.

Early conversations have begun about expanding to more cities and hosting a larger national event.

Investors and entrepreneurs recognised the opportunity to deepen engagement across sectors.

Scaling Bright Futures means growing real-world networks that expand access to entrepreneurship and investment for young people in regions where opportunity has historically been limited.

CONNECTING THE ECOSYSTEM

As Bright Futures grows, so does its ambition to build a sustainable professional community, one that is as valuable for investors and entrepreneurs as it is for the Young Investors themselves.

Investors that attended the Leeds Pitch Day have already highlighted the unique professional calibre of their peers at Bright Futures events, and the shared commitment to "paying it forward" by supporting the next generation.

Bright Futures will continue to cultivate this ecosystem: not simply as a series of events, but as an enduring movement for regional innovation and opportunity.

FOR STUDENTS, WITH STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS

At its core, Bright Futures remains focused on its primary beneficiaries: young people. The programme exists to enable Young Investors to envision, and pursue, entrepreneurial and investment careers they might never have previously considered possible.

Over time, Bright Futures aims to contribute to stronger regional innovation ecosystems, greater diversity in entrepreneurial leadership, and new opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to access the future economy.

TOGETHER

Bright Futures is made possible through the commitment of visionary investors, entrepreneurs, educators, and funders who believe in the potential of young people.

As the programme looks to its next chapter, it welcomes partners who share the ambition to grow regional innovation, strengthen future industries, and build a new generation of entrepreneurial leaders.





DIVERSE LEADERS NETWORK

info@diverseleadersnetwork.org.uk

www.diverseleadersnetwork.org.uk

<https://linktr.ee/diverseleadersnetwork>



ULTRA
EDUCATION

info@ultra.education

www.ultra.education

<https://linktr.ee/theultrapreneur>



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