

Catalyst | Generation  
Innovation.



# Generation Innovation Impact Report 2024



# Big journeys start with small steps.

Generation Innovation energises the imaginations and aspirations of young people in Northern Ireland by developing a foundational, Design Thinking skillset for their future careers.

We empower students through 3 unique offerings: high-energy workshops, 'Impact Day' design sprints, and a core Work Experience Programme for 17–18-year-olds.

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Thank you



# Introduction

Catalyst is an independent, non-profit science and technology hub focused on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland. The epicentre of innovation in Northern Ireland, we provide everything that innovators and entrepreneurs need to reach higher and succeed faster – a home, a powerful community, enhanced by international networks of venture capital, and market development support.

Inclusivity is at the core of what we do at Catalyst, we are working to remove the barriers that prevent people from accessing opportunities in the innovation economy, such as access to entrepreneurship and learning the skills to innovate.

We invest, pro bono, all surplus profits from our property portfolio into nurturing a community-led innovation ecosystem that supports technology-focused startups, entrepreneurs, and innovators so they can create, scale, and flourish.

We're a force for good, bold in our approach, with integrity at our core, and passion in everything we do.

At Catalyst, we are passionate about investing in the next generation of leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs.

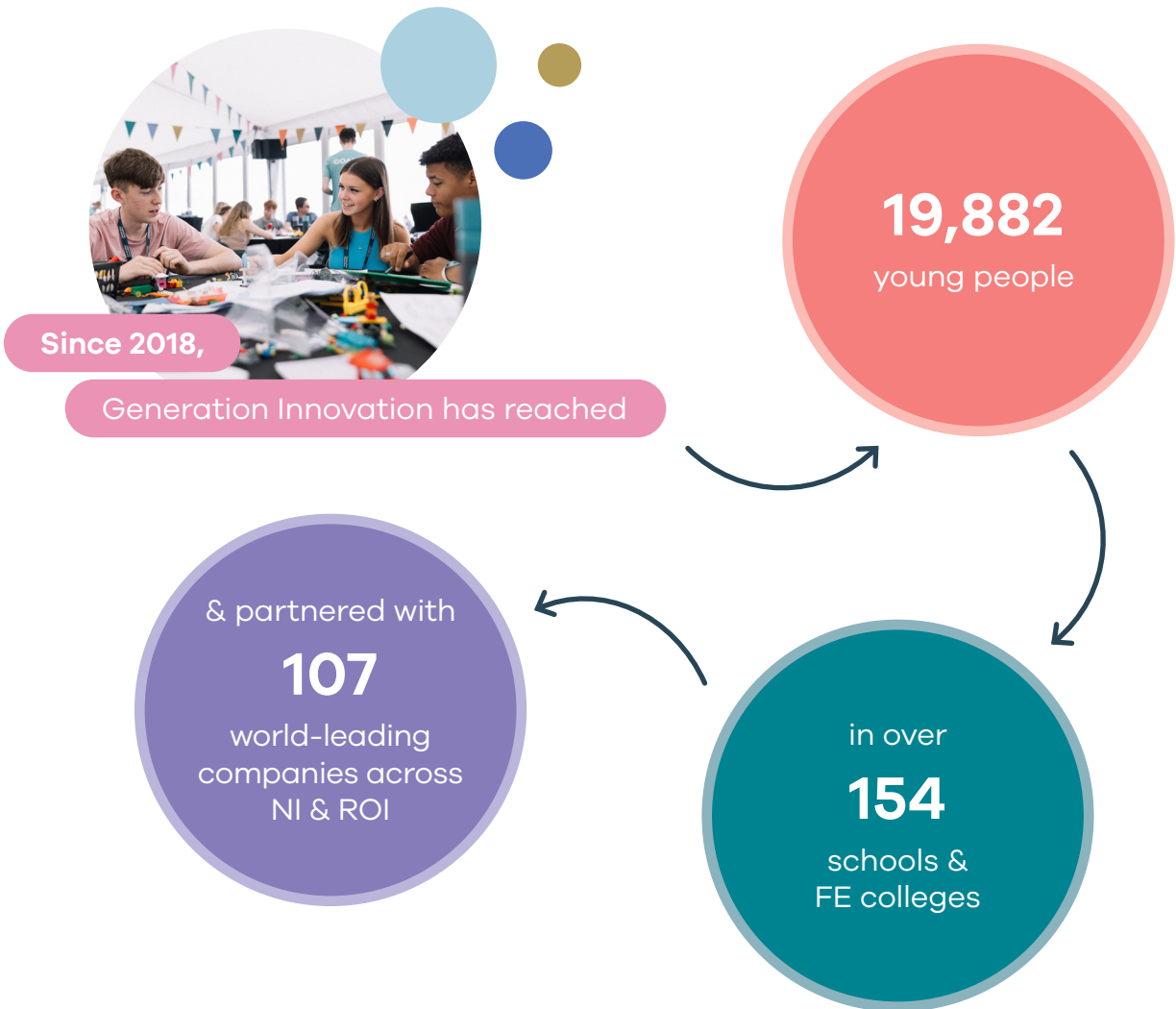
We believe young people are key to unlocking Northern Ireland's future as a globally renowned knowledge economy. That's why we put them at the heart of our inspirational community of entrepreneurs, companies and education leaders.

It's been a busy year for Generation Innovation. We supported 7,113 young people through our workshops, impact days, and Work Experience Programme. We expanded our school outreach, engaged 61 schools and 5 FE colleges, and delivered programmes across all six counties in Northern Ireland. We received a record number of applications, with over 1000 young people applying for the Work Experience Programme. We partnered with 74 of NI's most innovative companies.

As we come to the end of our sixth year, we are more convinced than ever that the future is bright with young people leading the way.

# About Generation Innovation

Generation Innovation aims to empower the young people of this generation to thrive as the leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs of the future.



# Workshops

GI workshops are delivered in schools and Further Education (FE) colleges and are open to 16-18 year olds. We offer three bespoke workshops to choose from:

- 1 Skills to Pay the Bills
- 2 Diving into Design
- 3 Exploring Entrepreneurship

This year, we delivered **90 workshops to 47 schools and 5 FE colleges reaching 4,556 students.**

41% of the schools we engaged with were new contacts for this year.



## Teacher feedback:

‘The workshop was excellent. The one hour slot was effectively used and students stayed on task and were engaged for the duration.’

## Student feedback:

‘I thought the workshop was fantastic, and has made me think about looking further into my future.’

‘I enjoyed the workshop and exploring the opportunities that I have in entrepreneurship’

When asked ‘Has this workshop made you consider a career in Entrepreneurship and Innovation?’ 50.8% of young people answered ‘yes.’



# Impact Days

**Impact Days are one-day, fully immersive design thinking experiences for groups of 90+ students aged 16-18, held onsite at partner schools or FE colleges.**

In our Impact Days, we take students on a design thinking journey that leads them from identifying a problem, working through several stages, to designing a prototype/solution – all in one day.

On this journey, students learn important skills at each stage, including user-centred design, teamwork and critical thinking. Impact Days also help to foster soft skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence and resilience.

## What happens on the day?

During an Impact Day, the GI team delivers a design sprint, working through several stages of the design thinking methodology.

- **Empathise**  
Understanding the user base and ‘consumer’, how they interact with the world/system or product, and understanding their needs and behaviours.
- **Define**  
Each team works together to define a problem and then design a solution. This could even be applied to improving something within their everyday life, asking the question, ‘How might we...?’.
- **Ideate**  
Our team works with students in different groups and walks them through an ideation phase where they start to design and develop a solution for the defined problem. Here, students contribute ideas, challenge assumptions, and work together as a team to develop a solution.
- **Present**  
At the end of the day, each team presents their solution to the group in a very welcoming and engaging environment.



We finish the day with a showcase event where several of our partner companies demonstrate innovative technologies and share their own start-up journeys.



Schools Engagement by County

- Antrim: **26.7%**
- Armagh: **20%**
- Down: **6.7%**
- Fermanagh: **6.7%**
- Tyrone: **20%**
- Derry/Londonderry: **20%**

EY, Bank of Ireland, Cropsafe, Cybersyd, PA Consulting, Alchemy Technologies, Automated Intelligence, PwC, Learning Me, and TheWorkhouse all supported our Impact Days as sponsors, providing a challenge for young people to work on during the day.

Work Experience Programme

Our Generation Innovation Work Experience Programme is a one-of-a-kind programme designed to empower, enable, and upskill young people for the workplace of tomorrow. With its foundations grounded in the principles of Design Thinking, Generation Innovation is a programme that gives young people a real-world working experience with some of the most innovative companies making a dent in the universe.

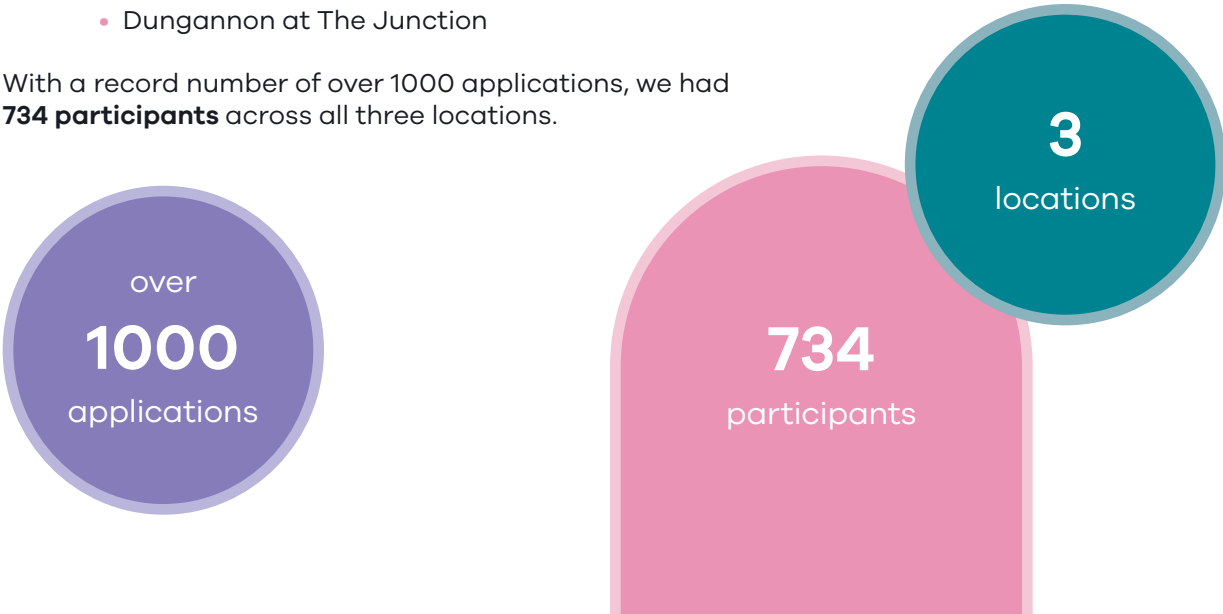
The Work Experience Programme is open to all 17-18-year-olds interested in accelerating their career development, gaining awareness of the skills needed for tomorrow’s world, and building an innovation mindset through Design Thinking training.

During the programme, young people are paired with innovative employers, such as **EY, Bank of Ireland and Aveva**, and learn how to work as part of a new team. Their skills are put to the test through solving a real-life company challenge, developing a solution before pitching it to the partner company and fellow peers.

This year, we delivered the Work Experience Programme in 3 locations:

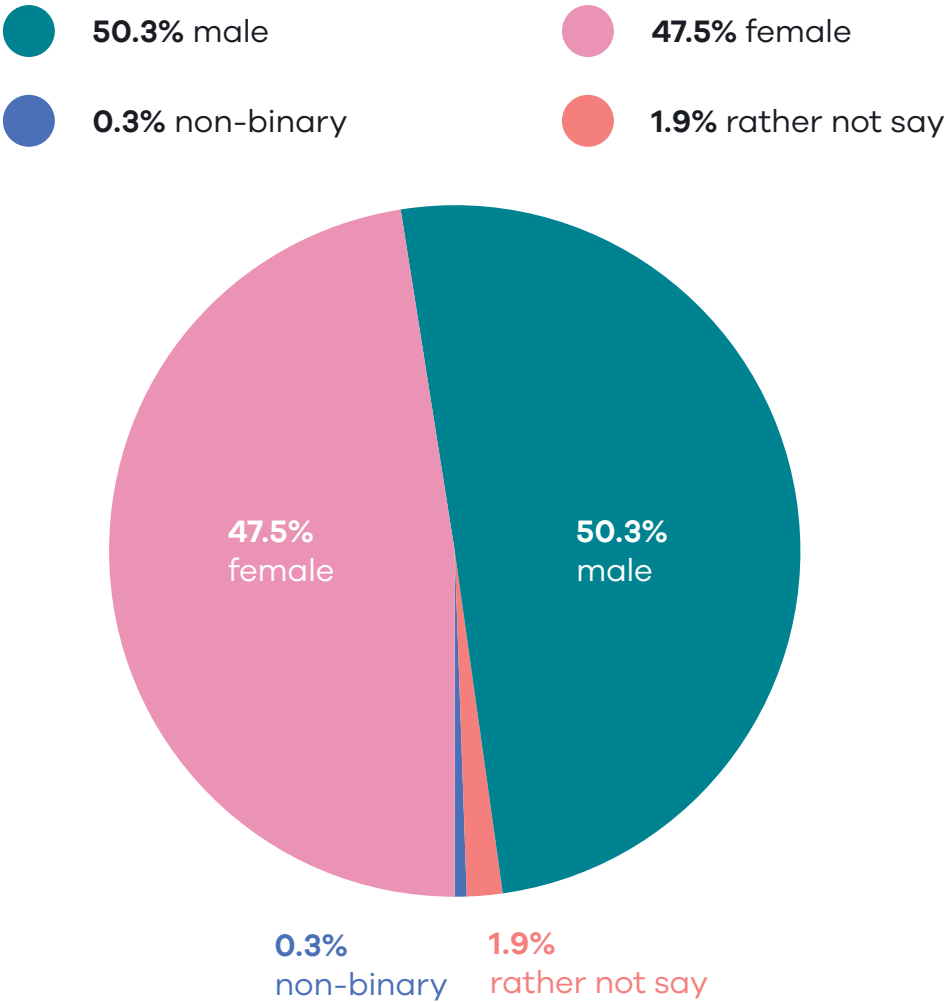
- Derry/Londonderry at the Millennium Forum
- Belfast at the Catalyst Marquee
- Dungannon at The Junction

With a record number of over 1000 applications, we had **734 participants** across all three locations.



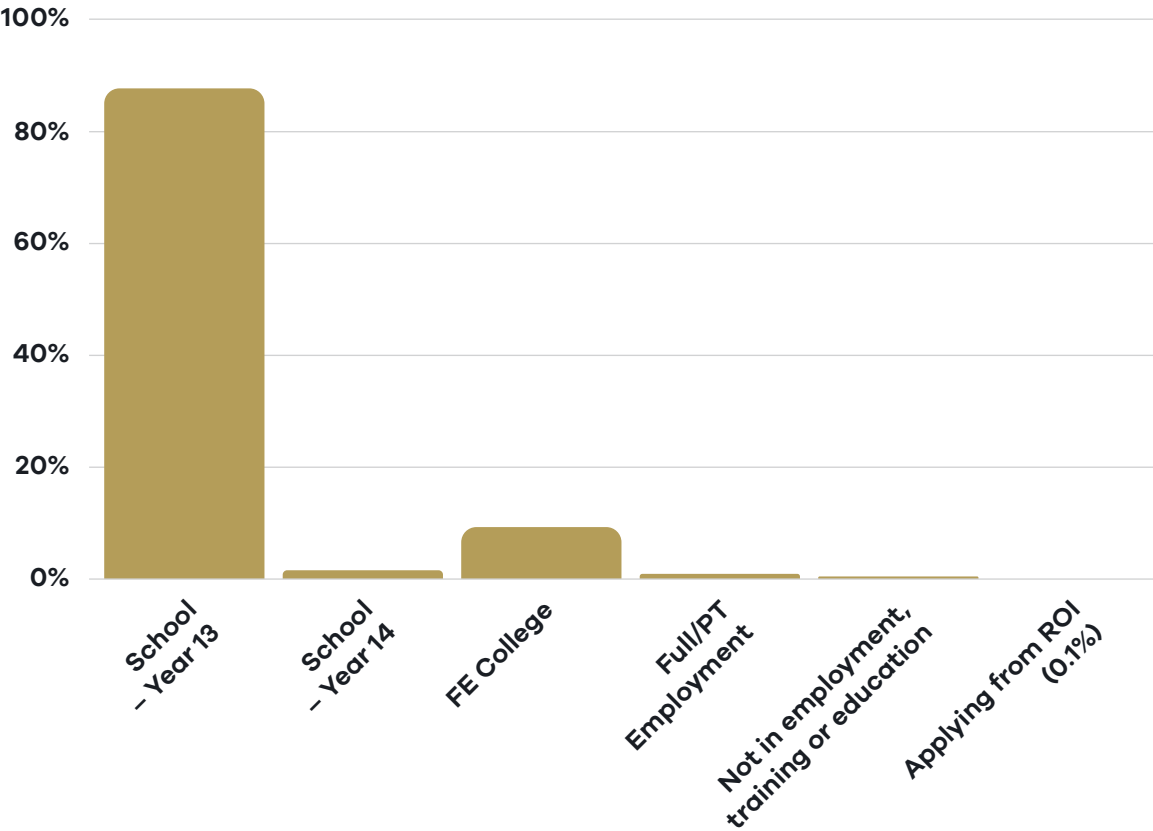


Participant Gender



Participant Education/Employment Status

89.2% Year 13 or 14  
9.4% FE College  
1.4% Other (full or part time employment or NEET)

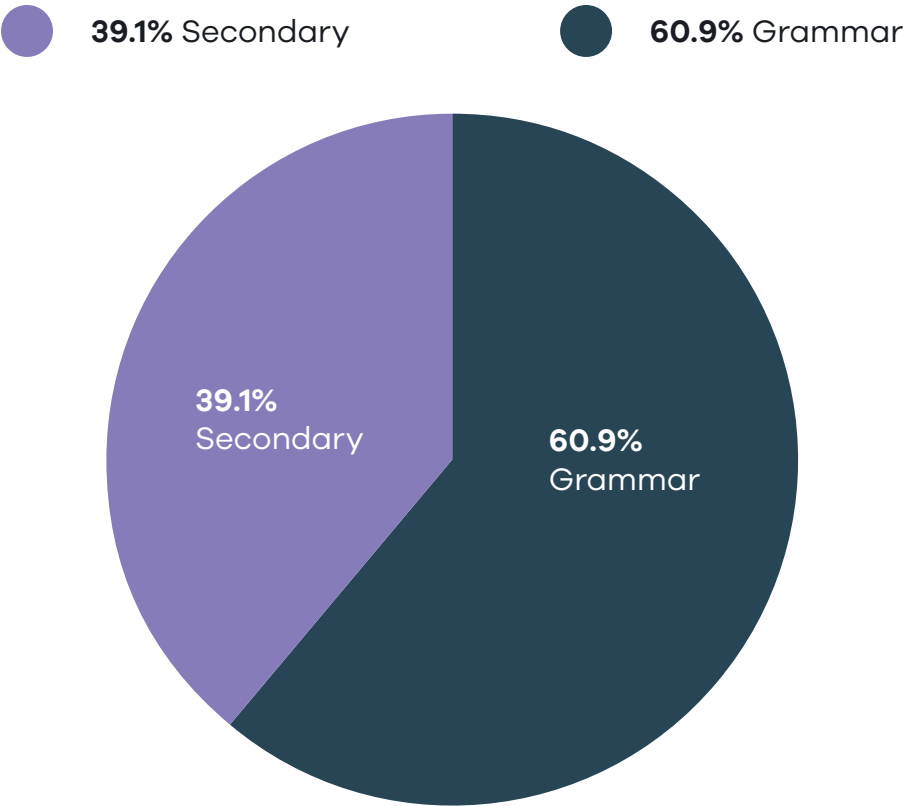


Schools Represented by Council Area

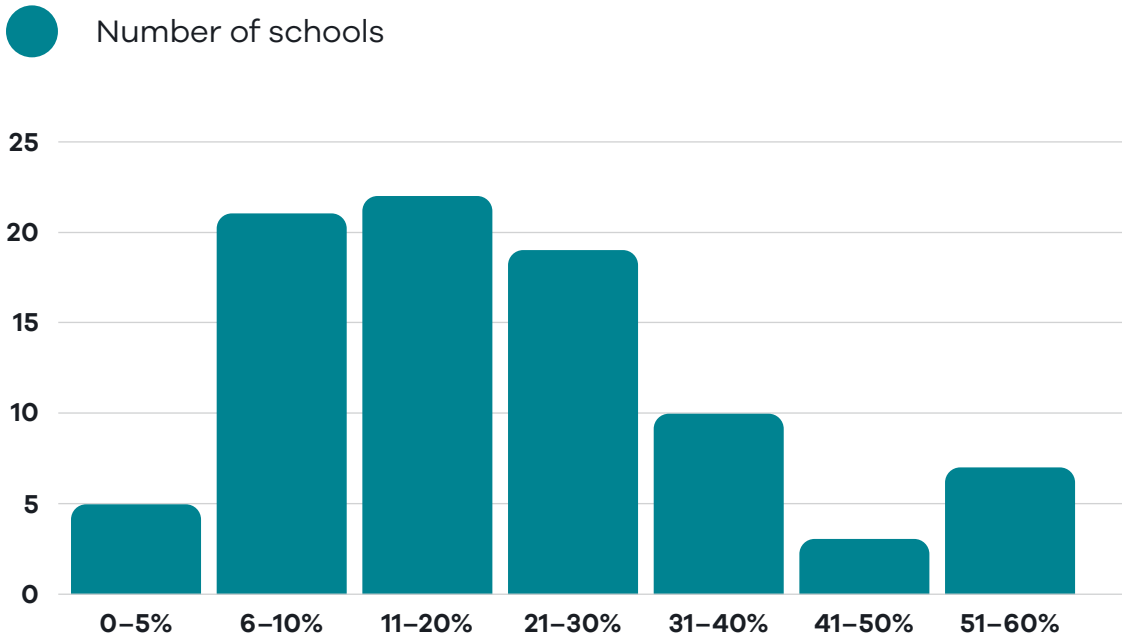
- Belfast: **18.9%**
- Newry, Mourne, and Down: **12.2%**
- Mid-Ulster: **11.1%**
- Fermanagh and Omagh: **9.1%**
- Causeway Coast and Glens: **8.5%**
- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon: **8.5%**
- Derry City and Strabane: **7.9%**
- Mid and East Antrim: **7.9%**
- Ards and North Down: **5.5%**
- Antrim and Newtownabbey: **5.5%**
- Lisburn and Castlereagh: **4.9%**



Education Environment



Participating Schools and Percentage of Free School Meals Eligibility



“I loved the partner company representatives and the friendly staff at Generation Innovation who helped my group and were on hand at all times to assist us. I was able to develop new skills from this week such as; being more confident in Public Speaking, Teamwork skills and Problem-Solving skills.”

– GI Participant

Survey Data

Through our pre and post-skills survey, participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 in the following skills. Here is the growth they reported:

**Originality:** Coming up with new or creative ideas to solve a problem.

6.2 → 6.6

**Active Learning:** Thinking about how new information impacts current and future tasks and problems.

6.6 → 7.0

**Range of Ideas:** Coming up with many new ideas about a problem or topic.

6.3 → 6.7

**Complex problem solving:** Using relevant information to come up with the options and solutions to problems.

6.8 → 7.1



**Judgement and Decision Making:** Choosing what to do by considering the advantages and disadvantages of different options.



**Ability to Collaborate:** Working with others in a team on an activity or project.



**Understanding of Others:** Being curious about other people, thinking about why they act the way they do.



**How would you rate your level of Emotional Intelligence?**  
Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognise your emotions, understand what they're telling you, and realise how your emotions affect people around you. It also involves your perception of others: when you understand how they feel, this allows you to manage relationships more effectively.



**How would you rate your skills in service orientation?**  
'Service orientation' is all about designing and delivering the best possible service for customers.



**How creative do you think you are?**  
Remember creativity isn't just about the ability to draw! Think about your ability to think creatively and look at problems in a different way.



**How would you rate your cognitive flexibility?**  
Cognitive flexibility refers to the brain's ability to transition from thinking about one concept to another.

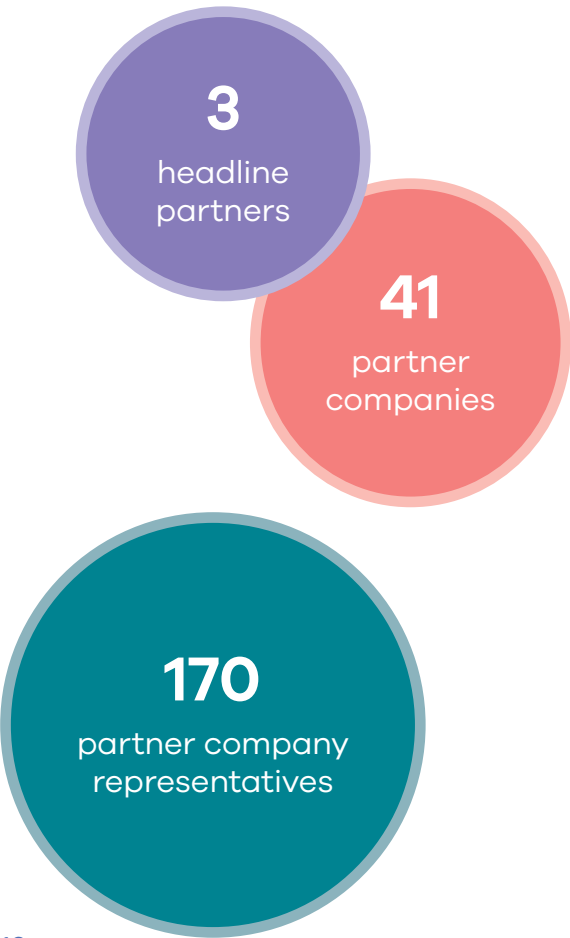


**How would you rate your level of negotiation skills?**  
You have negotiated successfully when you navigate through, or prevent, conflict, achieve an acceptable solution to a mutual problem, and agree follow-up actions that both sides are willing to implement.



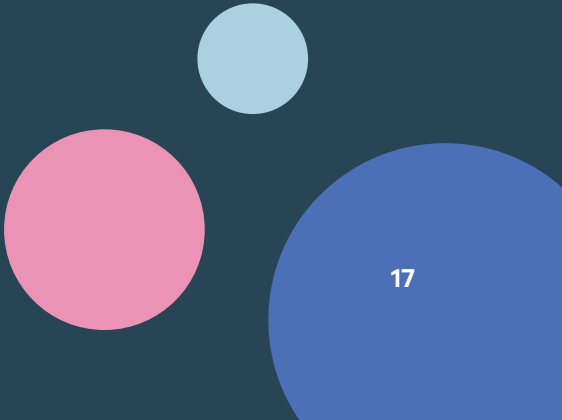
# Partner Companies

Key to the success of the Work Experience Programme is the support from our partner companies. This year, we had 41 partner companies including three headline partners: Aveva, Bank of Ireland and EY.



Industries represented by the Generation Innovation 2024 partner companies:

- Software Development – 14.6%
- FinTech – 12.7%
- Professional Services – 9.8%
- Technology, Information and Internet – 9.8%
- Health Tech – 7.3%
- Accountancy and Business Consultancy – 7.3%
- Financial Services – 4.9%
- GreenTech – 2.4%
- Engineering – 2.4%
- Aviation and Aerospace – 2.4%
- Defence and Space Innovation – 2.4%
- Sustainable Energy – 2.4%
- Insurance – 2.4%
- Digital Marketing – 2.4%
- Research Services – 2.4%
- Retail and Manufacturing – 2.4%
- Innovation Support Services – 2.4%
- Data Management – 2.4%
- Social Housing – 2.4%
- Biotechnology Research – 2.4%
- Education – 2.4%



Partner Feedback

How would you rate your overall experience as a GI 2024 Partner Company?

97% said 'Amazing' or 'Good'.

How likely is it that your company would recommend GI to their network, colleague or friend?

97% said 'We would 100% recommend GI'.

How has your company benefited from partnering with GI for the 2024 Work Experience Programme?

- Gained fresh perspectives to a company problem – 22%
- Personal development opportunities for our employees – 19.5%
- Spot and shape future talent – 16.7%
- Enhanced employee morale – 11.7%
- GI has reignited our team's love of innovation – 10.4%
- Achieve company CSR targets – 8.2%
- Networking opportunities – 7.1%
- Company image and brand – 4.1%
- Other – 0.3%

97%

(of partner companies) would 100% recommend GI

“As a software company we do a lot of these pitches – I work with a lot of adults who could not do as good a job as our groups did. Not only in the pitch competition but also when they presented to our team in office. The quality of their work was amazing. The problem the guys solved is a real-world issue faced by all us new flexible workers!”

– Katy Parkhill, Product Manager

The below quotes are from 2024 Partner Companies:

The level of professionalism from the

young people this year was outstanding!

And the ideas were absolutely amazing!

- “**Seeing the change** in the team from the first sit down on Monday to presenting on the Friday. More confident, energy, interaction.”
- “Their **perspective on the challenge was eye opening** for us.”
- “Just that feeling of seeing all the ideas in the early part of the week form into genuinely strong and informed presentations by the end of the week. **Our senior team at the company visit were so impressed both by the research done by our two teams and their innovative ideas.** It was also fantastic that we saw some of the quieter members of both groups taking on some of the most challenging areas of the presentations, and leading them really strongly.”
- “It was **great to broaden the horizon of our team**, they have never participated in anything like this, so we were keen to let them engage in it.”
- “We **received two website mock-ups and additional advertising research** which is very achievable for us to implement.”
- “We had an extremely **engaging and motivated student who came up to us** at our exhibition stand. We are now in touch with him and will invite him to spend some time at the labs.”
- “The team gave us **fresh marketing ideas.**”

Does your company have plans to further explore or implement the creative solution that was presented by your team?

49% said 'yes, my company is very keen to implement elements of the creative solution.'

49%

said yes!





## Workshop Event

**At our Belfast Work Experience Programme, we hosted a full day of workshops which were led by a range of innovative company hosts. These workshops gave students the opportunity to explore exciting areas in innovation and entrepreneurship, including AI, robotics, animation, and social media.**

Made for More | Solid Solutions | Murgitroyd | Nuerovalens |  
PA Consulting | Bank of Ireland | VaVa Influence | Fire Safety |  
EY | Aveva | Instil Software | Catalyst | Axonnr | FAST Technologies |  
The Nerve Centre

### **What the young people enjoyed about this year's Workshop Event:**

- "I enjoyed learning about how influencers are hired to promote businesses instead of just being sent PR."
- "The workshop I attended was fun and engaging and I learned a lot about the different aspects a Consultant would need to succeed."
- "I absolutely adored the workshop. I'm a very hands-on person so I loved that it wasn't really a talk but we just had free rein to draw what we wanted while they taught us some techniques."
- "I really enjoyed learning more in-depth about AI and what it could do."
- "The workshop was really interesting and it was great to learn about advancements in technology and the application of these technologies."

I thought the Chat GPT one was interesting

as it talked to us about harnessing AI as a tool.



## Follow on Success Stories

2 young people were invited back to the PA Consulting office to complete a 2-day project to further develop their creative solution with the PA strategy team. They have now pitched to the global CEO and next on their journey is to pitch to the minister of Agriculture at Stormont. **Watch this space!**

4 young people have successfully secured a 5-day internship with Nurture, to develop their entrepreneurial mindset and further explore their own ideas.

1 young person will complete a work experience placement at Learning Me, working on a project to add an Irish translation feature to their existing app.

2 teams were invited back to the Learning Me office to see features of their creative design implemented in Learning Me's new website.

1 young person has secured a job shadow placement at Axonnr in September to learn more about the robotics industry following the 2024 Workshop Event.

2 young people took part in The Nerve Centre Creative Arts workshop.

2 young people will join StimOxyGen for a job shadowing opportunity.

2 young people from WEP 2023 completed a 1-week work placement at Vikela Armour in July.

10 WEP alumni completed an Entrepreneurship Bootcamp at Catalyst that took them through the process of idea generation, validation, presentation and the steps / supports to make it a realisation.

4 young people went back to the PA Consulting office to present their creative solution to the Senior Partner of the US Pulpac office. Engineers are now testing the concept and approaching a current client about the idea.





3 alumni presented their idea generated during Generation Innovation on ‘How to involve young people in the Housing Community Network’ to Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Digital Inclusion working group.

2 alumni were fast-tracked to final stage interviews after completing the EY Careers Starters programme that was shared during EY’s live stage spot during GI, and both young people have secured EY apprenticeship placements.

Cirdan, Bia Analytical, Alchemy Technologies, StimOxyGen, The Workhouse, GranLab and Thermofisher have offered job shadowing opportunities. This has been communicated to all alumni.

Thanks to your feedback, here are our thoughts to making 2025 even better:

- Explore adding a more detailed session on coaching/ mentoring for participating reps during the company training days.
- Make ‘Challenge Statement Formation’ aspect a bigger part of the pre-event training.
- Move the majority of company-orientated information to our online portal/ GI App which will allow partner companies to see at a glance what stage they are at on the onboarding journey and what is outstanding.

We will be reviewing the format of the programme to ensure maximum impact and enjoyment. Our structure and foundations built on design thinking will not change. We will be exploring how to expand our reach without sacrificing quality.



Thank you to:

Our Principal Funder:  
Department of Education

Company Partners

School Leaders

Our Steering Team:

Andrew Fulton  
CEO Dawson Andrews | Chairperson

Lucy Marshall  
Workplus

Shirleen McCann  
Bank Of Ireland

Joanne McCourt  
NRC

Carol Fitzsimmons  
Young Enterprise

Tim Kernohan  
Solid Solutions

Stephen Dallas  
Bytes

Sarah McKeag  
PwC

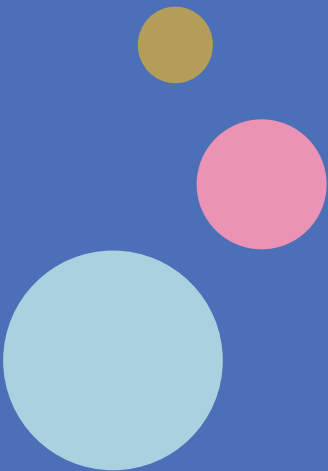
Brian Shevlin  
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