Bridge to Work | HYF Lessons Learned

HYF practice and placement evidence | 2023 - October 2026

These are HackYourFuture's lessons from employer partnerships, training and placement practice. They draw on a nine-page internal analysis and additional operational experience. Our records cover 98 starts in tech roles, not all programme participants; the observations below are not a causal evaluation.

1. Different routes into work matter

Of 98 recorded tech-role starts, just over half came through HYF's employer network and the remainder were found independently by graduates. HYF-mediated starts were almost always internships; independently sourced starts more often included direct employment. Our experience is that a rigorous but fair intake, stronger programme quality and active preparation have improved cohort readiness and coincided with more graduates finding work themselves. We cannot attribute that change to selection alone.

2. Job preparedness works best inside the programme

We embed an intensive one-month job-preparedness phase: CVs, LinkedIn and GitHub profiles, presentation skills and practice interviews, including sessions with professionals from Uber, Adyen and other employers. We see this as an effective part of the programme, not an optional add-on after graduation. It helps trainees demonstrate their abilities and navigate recruitment independently.

3. Internships are the main bridge - conversion is the real test

Approximately three quarters of recorded starts were internships. Of internships with assessable outcomes, 56% converted into jobs in 2023, 42% in 2024 and 75% in 2025. The 2026 conversion figure is not yet comparable because many placements have not reached six months. Counting internships alone overstates employment outcomes: we track conversion and subsequent paid work.

4. We are testing a broader internship approach

Historically, we prioritised internships with a clear stated intention to hire. That gave candidates a clearer route to employment but also restricted opportunities and left some graduates waiting. We are now considering adding experience-first internships where a hiring commitment is absent, but real assignments, senior mentoring, references and meaningful CV-building experience are present. We must then be very transparent about expectations. Whether these placements improve later employment outcomes - or sometimes convert unexpectedly - remains to be tested.

5. Relationships beat standard vacancies

Our strongest partnerships typically begin with founders, CTOs or hiring managers; HR joins later for the formal steps. Open-vacancy applications have rarely worked for our trainees, while dedicated entry opportunities and warm introductions (via HYF, Alumni and volunteers) have. Our network of more than 90 volunteers is especially valuable: developers who know trainees can vouch for their abilities and open doors at their employers. We could test the alumni / volunteer network more deliberately as a pathway into work.

6. Choose employers for learning and employment potential

In our analysis, mid-sized and large employers converted around 60 - 70% of internships into jobs, compared with roughly 40% at smaller firms. Startups offered accessible internships but often had no junior hiring budget or dedicated senior mentorship. Size alone is not the deciding factor. We basically look for a committed manager,

technical supervision, meaningful work, realistic expectations and - for hiring-intent internships - a credible potential position.

7. Entry-level expectations have risen

Employers increasingly ask juniors for evidence of real projects, collaboration, agile and product thinking, code review, work in existing codebases and independent learning. In response, we have strengthened final-project design, personal development and intercultural communication, and moved towards core foundations plus specialisation tracks. The first trainees from the newer model are only now graduating, so its employment impact still needs to be assessed.

8. Personal development is professional preparation

Workplace feedback points to communication, feedback, teamwork, cultural expectations and ownership of learning as decisive skills. We have integrated personal development into the programme and have seen positive experiences. Our aim is to prepare trainees both as individual professionals and as members of a team, not just as technically capable graduates.

9. Practical access barriers still exclude capable people

Internships are often treated as available only to students enrolled at a Dutch university or university of applied sciences, even when this is not a legal requirement. We also encounter many misconceptions about work authorization for permit holders and assumptions based on non-Western names. Another practical bottleneck is uncertainty about internship allowances when a trainee receives benefits: employers may fear that unpaid internships breach collective-agreement rules, while trainees may fear that an allowance threatens essential income support until they have secured a job. The applicable rules depend on the arrangement and individual circumstances, but confusion alone can stop many placements. Clear guidance and case-by-case coordination are needed.

What we retain and what we test

Retain: rigorous and fair intake; embedded job preparedness; market-responsive technical training; personal development; direct hiring-manager and volunteer relationships; and internships with genuine learning conditions. Support direct applications alongside HYF-mediated placements.

Test: compare (A) hiring-intent internships with a possible junior role and (B) experience-first internships with explicit expectations and safeguards. Test whether volunteer introductions can increase quality placements. Follow immediate conversion, later paid work, time to employment, candidate experience and the reasons placements do not convert.

Measure consistently

Track eligible cohort size, intake characteristics, participation in job preparedness, route to placement, employer type, mentor availability, hiring intent, six-month conversion, later employment and time to first paid job. Our existing placement records capture successful starts; they do not yet prove the effects of selection, program and pathway changes separately.

For Digitale Doorstroom, these are HYF's contributions to the shared evidence base. Other partners may see different patterns across learner groups, occupations and employer networks. Those differences are precisely what we want to learn from.