



Employer engagement in education

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Education and Employers Taskforce



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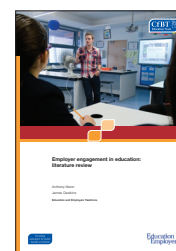
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Education and Employers Taskforce

The Education and Employers Taskforce was established as a charity in 2009. Its vision is to ensure that every school and college has an effective partnership with employers to provide its young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential and so secure the UK's future prosperity. The Taskforce places a high value on research, working with leading UK and international scholars to better understand the potential impact and most effective delivery of employer engagement in education. Towards this end, the Taskforce runs annual research conferences, hosts free monthly seminars at its London offices and makes available through its website (www.educationandemployers.org/research) direct access to numerous relevant research publications, many of which are summarised. A free fortnightly e-bulletin informs subscribers of UK and international research developments. The Taskforce also runs free programmes for British schools and employers, allowing them to connect for free across a range of different activities; see www.inspiringthefuture.org. All the work of the Taskforce is underpinned by a Partnership Board which includes the main national bodies representing employers and teaching staff.



In addition to this paper there is a separate publication (*Employer engagement in education: literature review*) which includes the full literature review on which this guide was partly based. This paper can be downloaded from: www.cfbt.com/research



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Summary

The subject of this paper is employer engagement in education as it supports the learning and progression of young people through activities including work experience, job shadowing, workplace visits, career talks, mock interviews, CV workshops, business mentoring, enterprise competitions and the provision of learning resources. Interest has grown rapidly in the UK and overseas in employer engagement as a subject and, from 2013, it has become, for the first time, a required element of a key educational stage.

The purpose of this report is to review existing and new evidence about how employer engagement can impact on the learning and progression of young people. It does so as the beginning of a process which is designed to provide school leadership teams and individual members of teaching staff with access to the best available information in order to make strategic use of employer engagement as a resource. It examines available evidence to identify patterns in the character of different types of employer engagement, asking whether perceived benefits vary by discrete types of pupil, by attainment levels or destination intentions.

The report draws on insights from a number of evidence sources: a review of UK and international research literature, a unique survey of 556 teaching staff, and a total of eight semi-structured interviews and focus groups with teaching staff and young people in schools across England.

What different employer activities can give to young people

The paper reviews the research literature surrounding:

- work experience placements and related activities (job shadowing, part-time working and pupil volunteering)
- career talks, career networking and mock interviews
- workplace visits
- business mentoring
- enterprise competitions
- curriculum enrichment and real-world resources (including work-related learning qualifications).

The review presents evidence surrounding perceived and measured impacts relevant to different types of pupils (for example borderline attainers, disengaged pupils or higher achievers), and then explores employer engagement strategies to secure two specific outcomes:

- increased engagement and attainment
- improved transitions from education to work.

Insights from the literature were tested with staff and pupils through five structured interviews (with teaching staff) and three focus groups (with teaching staff at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 and pupils at ages 14–16). In this qualitative research, first-hand insights are presented relating to different employer engagement activities, their purposes and delivery. Focus groups provided particularly useful material for exploring questions of attainment and effective progression.



A unique new survey completes the evidence review. It compiles the views of 566 secondary classroom teachers. Respondents were invited to choose, from a list of 17, different employer engagement (and related) activities which they had seen in practice themselves. Then, from this smaller list, they were asked to select activities they felt were especially useful in developing employability skills, supporting different types of pupils and enabling effective progression towards desirable outcomes.

What the report has to say about effective employer engagement

The report highlights clearly the need for schools and colleges to embrace a broader range of employer engagement activities. Strategic approaches to employer engagement will recognise that one size does not fit all and that engagement activities are relevant across secondary education. As survey data clearly shows, approaches which combine careers exploration, hands-on learning experiences and first-hand experience of working environments are likely to optimise outcomes. The report provides new perspectives in setting out the high value of employer engagement as a means of providing young people with access to reliable information which has the potential to influence thinking and behaviour. There is a widespread view that employer engagement enhances attainment primarily through improving motivation, and also that young people are able to make more informed decisions at 14, 16 and 18 if they are able to relate their educational choices to understanding of employment opportunities and the demands of recruiters. Evidence is compelling that school-mediated employer engagement does enhance the school-to-work transitions of young people: the more they have the better, in the early labour market: hence the high value of multiple, short, career-focused interventions. Where pupils are particularly disengaged from education, there is clear support for more intensive exposures to the working world through mentoring, extended work experience or work-related learning educational programmes. For higher achievers, evidence is strong that personalised use of employer engagement can help secure access to the most competitive undergraduate courses. Here, young people often need to demonstrate insight into careers related to their courses of study and the advantages of post-16 job shadowing become clear.

This review represents a first attempt to collate insights into such strategic uses of employer engagement to support pupils' learning and progression. Its value will be greatest for those schools and colleges reflecting on what they do, when they do it and which groups of young people they do it to.

Introduction, purpose and methodology

The subject of this paper is employer engagement in education. In this, the authors consider the range of different ways that employers can support the learning and progression of young people in British schools. The paper draws on a wide range of source material to ask: What are the typical benefits of different types of employer engagement? Do expected benefits vary by discrete types of pupils, by attainment level or destination intention, for example? How can teaching staff make best strategic use of employer engagement to support their pupils to succeed in education and then in the workplace? The questions present a first attempt to develop coherent frameworks for understanding the ways in which young people can and do experience the workplace and working professionals whilst still in education.

Arguably, there has never been a more important time to take stock of employer engagement in British education. The importance is twofold. Firstly, over recent years there has been a flourishing of serious UK and international research into specific questions related to employer engagement in education. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Learning for jobs* (2010) and the Harvard School for Graduate Education's *Pathways to prosperity* (2011) both provide a compelling international endorsement of the value of employer engagement to young people's educational experiences. In the UK, conferences in 2010 and 2011 organised by the Education and Employers Taskforce¹ have provided settings for a new research community to come together to exchange insights and perceptions.² The publication early in 2014 of the first collection of serious essays on the theme of employer engagement in education (Archer, Mann & Stanley, forthcoming) will break further new ground. This wealth of new research material reflects a decade of government activity, including the introduction of a statutory requirement for work-related learning in 2004 and the Wolf report in 2011, both designed, in different ways, to increase the role of employers in education.

Recent changes to the policy environment provide the second rationale for attempting this collation of current understanding. The implementation of the Wolf review requires schools and colleges to think afresh about how they will provide young people with experience of the workplace at post-16. Indeed, from 2013, for the first time, it is a requirement of all young people's programmes of study that they must include a spell of work experience, with schools and colleges explicitly expected by government to 'increase their engagement with employers' through such activities as workplace visits, enterprise projects, mentoring, work shadowing and workshops. What's more, changes in careers provision places a clear onus on secondary schools to oversee such provision to young people, with new accountability data published on the destinations of former pupils.³ As a result of changes in government policy, it is much more difficult for schools to look to their local authority or Education Business Partnership Organisation to guide activity. Schools need to make their own decisions, often in very new ways, and to do so with full confidence they must have access to good quality evidence on what works and why it works. A primary objective of this paper is to help meet this need.

The purpose of this paper then is to unwrap and disaggregate what happens when a young person in a learning environment comes into contact with the working world. The paper considers the range of common employer engagement activities (see Box 1) and asks what each can be expected, typically, to give to a participating young person in terms of employability skills, attainment and employment outcomes, and changes in insights and attitudes. Moreover, it explores whether

¹ See www.educationandemployers.org/research

² Essays from the 2010 Taskforce conference were published in a special edition of the *Journal of education and work* in 2012.

See <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjew20/25/4>

³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/qandlearning/programmes/b00223495/post-16-work-exp-enterprise-educ>



different types of young people, as defined by attainment levels, learning difficulties and engagement patterns, can be expected to gain, particularly from different types of activity.

Box 1: Types of employer engagement in secondary education

- Work experience
- Job shadowing
- Workplace visits
- Career talks
- Mock interviews
- CV workshops
- Business mentoring
- Enterprise competitions
- Learning/curriculum resource

Consequently, this is without doubt an ambitious paper which must be seen as the beginning of a process rather than its conclusion. It takes account of existing and new data which, while considerable in scope, is imperfect and limited in addressing the specific questions identified. It represents a first attempt to dive deep into the available evidence and present teaching staff with genuinely helpful material to inform decision making.

The paper presents a review of the main research literature relevant to typical employer engagement activities and the primary outcomes (attainment and employment) considered. In doing so, the paper uses approaches more commonly found in the humanities than in the social sciences. Given the relative paucity of high quality research material on employer engagement activities, the widespread inconsistent use of terminology to describe the same phenomenon, the availability of much research of interest in public – rather than academic – literature, and the fact that insights of value are often to be found in works addressing outcome areas rather than describing process, simple key word searches of research databases are unlikely to fully provide material of greatest value. Rather a critical exploration of literature is undertaken, following links between papers and drawing on the considerable library of research materials compiled by the Education and Employers Taskforce.

In addition to insights from the literature, the paper is also based upon interviews with staff members at five English secondary schools and focus groups undertaken in 2011 with teaching staff who had experience respectively at Key Stage 4 and 5, which explored questions relating to the differential impact of employer engagement activities on different types of young person. Interviews were arranged either through CfBT or contacts of the Taskforce and carried out over the summer of 2012. Interviews explored the reasoned behaviour of schools understood to have invested considerable interest and resource into employer engagement in education. An additional focus group, also dating from 2011, spoke to young people (Year 11) about their experiences of a learning programme rich in employer engagement. Finally, the paper draws from a unique new survey of teaching staff. Based on a total sample of 556 teaching staff drawn from the Pearson panel, the survey segmented respondents with experiences of teaching at Key Stages 4 and 5, presenting respondents with a list of 17 different employer engagement activities and inviting participants to consider the relative effectiveness of only those activities which they had themselves observed in supporting specific types of outcomes for different types of pupils.

In presenting such detailed evidence, it is hoped that both this summary paper and the supporting literature review will prompt further interest and discussion.⁴

⁴ The full literature review is presented in a separate publication (*Employer engagement in education: literature review*) available at: www.cfbt.com/research



What do different employer engagement activities give to young people?

Work experience and related activities (job shadowing, part-time working and pupil volunteering)

'We are told by UCAS and the universities that our kids don't have enough work experience across the board. Universities want to know that the choices they make are not fantasy.'

Focus group with Key Stage 5 teachers, North West England

'We witness them knuckling down. It can be dramatic. But it does depend on the quality of the work experience.'

Focus group with Key Stage 5 teachers, North West England

'We have a great relationship with a hair salon. It provides a lot of work experience and they tell the kids that to work there they need to go to a partner college for a hairdressing course and they'll need at least a D in English to get in. It's hugely motivating.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England (teacher at a Special School)

Teacher survey results:

At 11–16: work experience is the single most effective employer engagement intervention to help young people understand the world of work; it impacts positively on low and borderline achievers and learners with SEN and disengaged pupils; increases attainment; broadens aspirations; improves understanding of what's needed to get a job; can lead to part-time employment.

At 16–19: work experience is the single most effective intervention to support low achievers and disengaged learners; increases attainment; and the opportunity of part-time employment. For older learners, volunteering in the community rivals work experience as the intervention that has the widest positive impact across different types of learners and in achieving positive outcomes for them.

The traditional one-to-two week work experience placement has become commonplace across British education and is remarkably widely regarded by teaching staff and pupils. As reported in the review accompanying this guide, teachers feel that, compared with a wide range of alternative activities, placements deliver the broadest range of outcomes for the widest range of pupils both pre- and post-16. Many teachers have direct experience of placements and value them highly.

A review of the research shows a widespread view that pupils commonly come back from placements more mature and with greater confidence – with those young people who have most to gain prior to placement typically gaining most from it. Equally widespread is the view that most young people will gain valuable information about future careers from their placements.

While some teachers feel that placements can enhance learning through offering useful contextualisation, by far the most important academic benefit of work experience is the way in which it is routinely felt to change pupil attitudes about the value of education in general and of qualifications in particular. Pupils attest, and their teachers agree, that they commonly come back

from placements far more motivated to work hard in school (Mann, 2012). It is borderline pupils and those with low levels of attainment who are most likely to gain from this motivation bounce (or boost). For lower achievers and pupils disengaged from education, extended work experience (commonly a day or two a week over the school year) is widely regarded by teachers, but also by academic commentators, as a highly effective means of re-engaging learners, especially when integrated into a coherent learning programme and using real-world learning materials (Raffo, 2003; Golden et al., 2005). Such learners are particularly well placed to benefit from relevant work experience at Key Stage 4, especially where it is timed to allow increases in motivation to be nurtured over a significant period of teaching time.

For higher achievers, who are commonly well motivated already and are less in need of such a 'wake-up call', the greatest value of work experience is often found in helping them to access university courses of choice. Recent high quality research has made it clear that insights into careers related to higher education programmes of study are valued by admissions tutors looking for real understanding and commitment from prospective applicants, especially where competition for places is tight (Jones, 2012; Mann et al., 2011). For these pupils, placements need to be available ideally after university choices have been made but before UCAS forms have been submitted – as is commonly the case across high-performing independent schools (Huddleston et al., 2012).

For those young people not intending to go on to university, work experience demonstrably helps to secure employment, especially when undertaken after the age of 16. It does so by giving young people business insights and connections relevant to specific occupations, providing useful information on actual entry requirements and by developing, in part, their employability skills. Perhaps counterintuitively, as set out in new survey material gathered as part of this study, teaching staff feel that work experience cannot deliver all employability skills – other activities such as enterprise competitions are seen as a better means of developing problem-solving and team-working skills.

Research has raised consistent and significant concerns about the delivery of work experience. Commonly, young people have been asked by their school or college to source their own placements. While undertaken in part to give pupils a realistic taste of job hunting and putting them into greater direct contact with potential employers, and in part to save costs, the downside of such an approach is that pupils fall back on family-derived social networks and cultural confidence that varies very significantly with social backgrounds. As a consequence, work experience rarely effectively stretches and broadens aspirations and challenges stereotypes about professions despite the potential it appears to offer. Placements can, and often do, serve to reinforce socially-situated attitudes about the working world which ultimately serve to reproduce, rather than challenge, social immobility. A consistent message from the teaching staff interviewed for this guide was how difficult it was to secure placements in 'top end' professions (barristers, architects etc.) in the absence of pupil family ties and formal company schemes. As researchers have shown, this is not a problem encountered in high-performing independent schools (Huddleston et al., 2012). For teaching staff in the state sector, the challenge is to provide young people, following a period of career counselling and reflection, with a choice of placements and related workplace insights which address their aspirations, tackling practical barriers to accessing placements.⁵ For pupils most disengaged from the learning process there is real risk that through simple inertia, they will end up with a choice of placements unwanted by their peers; for such pupils, where there is so much to gain through an appropriate selection of work experience, the need for personalised teacher support is especially high.

⁵ See Hatcher & Le Gallais (2008), available at www.educationandemployers.org



In thinking about work experience placements, there is good reason to consider what young people can gain from related activities such as part-time employment, volunteering, job shadowing or workplace visits. For example, there is some research evidence to show that young people gain in comparable ways when undertaking part-time employment (as well as full-time employment) or work experience, developing similar employability skills and increasing the statistical likelihood of being able to move into sustained employment as a young adult (Crawford et al., 2012; Ruhm, 1997; Stern & Briggs, 2001; Howieson et al., 2010). They also gain something akin to a 'wake-up call'; driving a more motivated engagement in schooling. However, they are much less likely to secure part-time employment in an area related to ultimate career aspirations than is the case with work experience (Fullarton, 1999; Mann, 2012). It should be noted, though, that approximately only one quarter of pupils have a realistic discussion about paid employment with the employers they have their work experience with (Mann, 2012). These conversations could provide entry to part-time employment opportunities which are much more likely to relate to actual career opportunities and aspirations than is the case for general teenage employment which clusters around just two economic sectors – hospitality and retail. Moreover, schools should be aware that opportunities for teenage part-time employment have reduced considerably over recent years. Where in the past, young people might be expected to get their first taste of the working world through their personal endeavours, that can no longer be taken for granted. This places increased responsibilities on the education sector to step up and enable relevant workplace experiences.

Equally, research suggests that many benefits gained from work experience can also be gained through volunteering in the community; for example: maturation through engagement with adults in a professional, non-educational environment; the development and application of new skills; and access to new, reliable information about potential careers. Pupil experience of paid part-time employment and pupil volunteering should therefore be very relevant to school discussions on personalised packages of employer engagement activities to enhance individual learning and progression.

As well as part-time working and pupil volunteering, other employer engagement activities do provide alternative means of delivering outcomes comparable to the traditional work experience placement. Some of these – workplace visits, careers talks – are structurally different in delivery from typical placements and will be discussed below. Here, it is important to consider a variation on the traditional theme: work or job shadowing. Job shadowing is comparatively rare in the UK, but common in the US and other countries and provides a detailed insight into one or more professions. Consequently, job shadowing succeeds in providing young people with easy, reliable access to information about careers, presents opportunities for social connections to be made and allows young people to absorb, and where necessary, demonstrate understanding of working environments to prospective future employers or universities. Job shadowing represents a lower-level demand on employers and also makes it easier for young people to gain relevant insights into occupations which rarely recruit at sub-degree entry level. Teacher perspectives are that job shadowing is better suited to more mature, more confident, older and higher-achieving pupils, as it presents participants with a much greater range of environments in which they will be required to communicate effectively with adults than is the case with traditional work experience.

Box 2: Job shadowing: the basics

Job shadowing is an opportunity for young people to learn about the reality of different working environments by following working professionals around over, typically, one to three days. During this time they may follow a number of different people, learning about their typical working days, employment entry routes and gaining the opportunity to check whether different prospective occupations are really for them.

A further advantage of job shadowing is that it provides young people with more chance of experiencing a greater number of workplaces and vocations, through multiple episodes. With traditional work experience, young people have typically been presented with a single, if longer-lasting, opportunity to familiarise themselves with the labour market prior to leaving education. It becomes imperative, therefore, given the value of work experience, that young people are able to make informed choices about their work experience preferences. This is best done through career exploration processes which combine professional advice with first-hand insights into different working worlds.

Careers talks, career fairs/networking, CV workshops and mock interviews

'They've got great aspirations, but they've got no idea how to get there.'

Key Stage 4 manager, London

'Things like [career networking]: they love that sort of thing. And then they realise that actually "I can't just become a policeman, I've got to get this, that and t'other... I just can't become a motor mechanic or an engineer." '

Enterprise/work experience manager, West Midlands

'When an employer comes in and says if you gave me this [CV], this is the bin, this is where it would go, I think it does hit home. We have a number of employers come in and do one-to-one interviews with the students as well to improve their skills in interviewing and they are quite ruthless, and we tell them to be ruthless... I think that it's somebody external to the school is really, really important because they do trust what they say.'

Headteacher, East of England

Teacher survey results:

At 11–16: careers talks, fairs and networking events are the most effective employer engagement interventions to support high achievers; to broaden aspirations; and in making good decisions on continuing study. Mock interviews are effective in supporting learners at all achievement levels.

At 16–19: career-focused employer engagement activities are among the most effective interventions in helping young people to make good decisions about continuing study and to understand what's needed to get a job; and in supporting higher achievers.



Ideally, no pupil would embark on work experience choices without first having had chance to speak to individuals working in the profession. Through careers fairs and related events, young people are presented with opportunities to explore and clarify career interests, testing out their prospective fit with available occupations, developing skills of direct relevance to ultimate job searches.

With the publication in 2010 of the OECD report *Learning for jobs*, the world's most influential education think-tank came firmly to recommend that employers be fully integrated into careers advice. Bringing young people into direct contact with employers whilst they are still in education enables them to gain insights into a complex labour market undergoing rapid change. There is very good evidence that young people particularly value the advice and information they receive from working professionals – whereas teachers may be seen as partisan or ill-informed, the verdicts of working professionals are instinctively trusted (Lord & Jones, 2006). Unlike parents and friends, whose advice, while seen as reliable, is inevitably narrowly focused, or the media/internet, which is broad in scope but unreliable in context, working professionals are seen as providing information which is both broad and reliable (Mann & Caplin, 2012). It can be reasonably assumed that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the two million British children growing up in workless households, have most to gain from exposure, through their educational institutions, to working professionals.

It is unsurprising then that surveys set out consistently heavy demands from both young people and from their teachers, for greater employer involvement in schooling (YouGov, 2010). Access to careers insights through fairs, networking events (see Box 3) or talks is highly regarded and of highest value prior to key decision-making points; for example when selecting options at the end of Key Stage 3, deciding on education or training provision at 16, or completion of UCAS applications. As key assessments loom, CV workshops and mock interviews help young people to reflect on qualification profiles and relate them to prospective careers. They can provide young people with something akin to the 'wake-up call' often experienced during work experience placements; and are seen, by those teachers with first-hand experience of them, of serving to increase attainment.

Box 3: Career networking: the basics

Career networking essentially borrows from speed-dating: employee volunteers from a range of occupational backgrounds sit at desks around a room, while young people – singly or in very small groups – rotate around the room talking to volunteers about the jobs they do and their entry requirements. Timed to take place before key decision points, career networking events provide an efficient means of giving young people access to trusted information about how educational choices relate to the working world. Employee volunteers are easily and freely accessible through programmes like www.inspiringthefuture.org

As set out in new survey material in this report, there is a strong view among teaching staff that employee-delivered careers advice is of particular value to higher achievers at both pre- and post-16 who may have developed initial aspirations surrounding a limited number of high-profile professions (doctor, lawyer, architect etc) and who are well placed to benefit from a broader consideration of university or employment options (Mann et al., 2013). Teachers who have direct experience of career networking events often see them as being especially valuable for younger (for example Year 9) or less confident pupils, as the structure of the events require rapid and effective discussions with a



series of adults, so enhancing communication skills whilst imparting careers information. Such first-hand advice can be especially useful in influencing pupils to explore non-traditional career options and can supplement workplace visits and work experience which are more demanding to arrange.

As argued below, emerging evidence suggests strongly that one of the primary benefits of school-mediated employer engagement is that it gives young people access to a broader range of relevant and reliable information about the jobs market and where they see themselves fitting into it. In these terms, activities of quite short duration can be of great benefit, allowing pupils to explore, test, clarify and confirm careers interests.

Workplace visits

Teacher survey results:

At 11–16: after work experience, workplace visits are the most effective employer engagement intervention in supporting young people across a wide range of outcomes; being positive with learners of all achievement levels; helping to develop self-management skills; and broadening aspirations.

At 16–19: workplace visits are seen as the most effective intervention in helping learners to understand what's needed to get a job; they are among the most effective in broadening aspirations; and in supporting disengaged learners.

Workplace visits occupy a space between the real, unambiguous exposure to working cultures as seen in work experience or job shadowing and the high-level provision of career-related information described above. Very little research has been undertaken into workplace visits, which both surprises and disappoints, as they are highly regarded by teaching staff – being seen as the second most effective activity after work experience at pre-16.

Available survey and research material suggests that younger secondary school pupils, at Key Stage 3, are especially well placed to take part in activities such as 'Take Your Daughter to Work Day' that are designed to allow pupils to begin exploration of their career options (Huddleston et al., 2012). Surveyed teaching staff see workplace visits as being especially effective with pupils requiring additional support (lower achievers, learners with SEN, disengaged learners, pupils with limited aspirations), improving their understanding of the world of work and the achievement required to succeed well within it. Visits provide a change of environment, allowing new perspectives to emerge. Workplace visits are less demanding to arrange than work experience placements, while contributing to many of the same outcomes. It is not uncommon for pupils to secure part-time work in an area of career interest following workplace visits (Mann, 2012). Job shadowing can be seen as a form of workplace visit more suitable for pupils aged 16+ – enabling a young person to understand an enterprise (a specific world of work) and the career options within it.



Business mentoring

‘Those that would get the most benefit from it [were those] who had some sort of career plan, but didn’t know how to formulate it.’

Enterprise/work experience manager, West Midlands

‘One to one mentoring with students who are at risk – my understanding is that those students have thrived much more in every aspect.’

Headteacher, South of England

Teacher survey results:

At 11–16: business mentoring is seen as an especially effective employer engagement intervention in supporting low and borderline achievers and disengaged learners, increasing attainment and helping young people to broaden aspirations and get onto a course of choice in continuing study.

At 16–19: mentoring is seen as the most effective activity in helping learners to understand the world of work; and a means of positively supporting borderline achievers and learners with SEN.

Up to 15% of young people might experience business mentoring – a school-created close relationship between a non-expert, working adult and a young person lasting over a period of time – whilst still in secondary education (YouGov, 2010; Mann & Kashefpakdel, forthcoming). Like many other activities, mentoring is relatively poorly reviewed. Available research does show it to be an effective means of supporting young people to engage better with schooling and to connect educational experiences to the working world. Survey data for this guide shows mentoring to be well regarded by those with experience of it in supporting young people on attainment borderlines, those with lower levels of attainment or special educational needs, and those who are disengaged, helping particularly to broaden their aspirations and provide insights into the world of work. Both British and US studies have looked for, and successfully found, evidence of an increase in attainment as a result of teenage participation in mentoring programmes, especially where relationships last for six months or more and for borderline attainers (Linnehan, 2001; Miller, 1998). Mentoring is an unusually expensive means of connecting young people with employers, containing fixed costs (for example providing background checks on mentors and providing basic training) and further research is particularly needed on its effectiveness. New research should look too at career-focused e-mentoring, which promises to provide highly effective pupil access to reliable information about different vocational areas and pathways whilst making lower demands of mentors (Mann & Kashefpakdel, forthcoming).

Enterprise competitions

'One-day enterprise events are really beneficial for the high achievers. They take loads away from it. You can see the benefits in front of you. They communicate, speak freely, interact with the business partner. It's classic employability skills.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England

'The entrepreneurial stuff? I think it benefits a skills-set rather than benefiting academically, so it was as much about working with people that you've never worked with before, working as a group and coming to agreed decisions, learning the importance of compromise, learning that without team-work a task will not be completed successfully. I think that is an important skills-set wherever you sit in the ability range.'

Headteacher, East of England

Teacher survey results:

At 11–16: enterprise competitions are the most effective employer engagement activities to help young people to improve problem solving and team working; and are among the most effective in increasing attainment.

At 16–19: enterprise competitions are seen as the most effective employer interventions to help learners develop problem solving and team working skills; longer competitions are the most effective activity to support higher achievers; and both short and longer types of competition help to increase attainment.

Enterprise competitions in the form of one-day or longer-term competitions between pupils to develop and run mini-businesses have been an element of the British educational system for decades. Once barely reviewed, they have recently been the focus of good quality studies which have asked whether young people taking part in such competitions become, when compared to similar groups, more positive about self-employment as a future aspiration and perform better in standard tests to assess for entrepreneurial potential (Athayde, 2012; Oosterbeek et al., 2008; Schoon & Duckworth, 2012). The results of these studies are inconclusive. The perceptions of teachers with direct experience of enterprise competitions are positive – survey data shows that they believe that young people gain much from their involvement, and hesitations about ongoing delivery of the provision are based on practical considerations such as timetable tightness or difficulty in securing employee volunteers as pupil mentors – seen as a critical success factor to delivery (McLarty et al., 2010). Compared with other employer engagement activities, new survey data shows high regard for enterprise competitions as a means of developing problem-solving and team-working/communication skills. It is striking that one-day competitions are rated more highly in this regard than activity of longer duration – this may well be because long-duration programmes are commonly opted into by pupils already possessing entrepreneurial interests and interested in the problem-solving, team-based challenge, whereas one-day competitions typically expose a whole cohort of young people, regardless of personal preferences, to new learning experiences. The relationship between employee volunteers and pupils taking part in enterprise competitions has the potential to embrace both skills development and provide information provision about how young people can best prepare themselves for successful self-employment.



Curriculum enrichment and real-world learning resources (including work-related learning qualifications)

'If school was like this, I'd love it.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 learners reflecting on Young Apprenticeship provision

'With the GCSE [in Drama], you don't really get a great sense of understanding. This [Young Apprenticeship in Performing Arts] is so much better. The GCSE has no depth. It's monotonous.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 learners reflecting on Young Apprenticeship provision

Teacher survey results:

At 11–16: use of real-world learning resources is seen as among the most effective employer engagement intervention with low achievers, learners with SEN and disengaged learners.

At 16–19: use of real-world learning resources is the most effective intervention with borderline learners; and among the most effective in supporting low achievers, borderline achievers, pupils with SEN and disengaged learners.

As post-16 educational provision changes in England in light of the Wolf review (2011), it becomes pertinent to reflect on insights from learning programmes deliberately enriched by employer engagement. High quality reviews of programmes typically taught at Key Stage 4 delivered over the first decade of this century (Student Apprenticeships, Young Apprenticeships, Diplomas, Increased Flexibilities Programmes) describe pupils' reactions to learning environments designed to highlight the links between classroom learning and workplace realities (McCoshan & Williams, 2002; Golden et al., 2005; NFER, 2010; Ofsted, 2007; Ofsted, 2009; Lynch et al., 2010; Harrison et al., 2012). Reviews suggest that pupils of all ability ranges respond well to such learning approaches, consistently showing that young people enjoy and feel well motivated by such learning styles. Increased motivation is seen to lead to greater levels of engagement in education, underpinning higher attainment. It is pupils with lower levels of preceding achievement and histories of disaffection who are observed to make the most significant gains in achievement. As set out in new survey material for this report, surveyed teaching staff agree that lower achievers, disengaged learners and learners with special educational needs respond particularly well to the use of learning resources specifically selected because they are relevant to working life. In delivery terms, use of learning resources and real-life exposure to workplaces through work experience, workplace visits and pupil volunteering to change attitudes towards education can be supplemented by bringing employee volunteers into the classroom to contribute to relevant lessons. Such a role serves to enrich learning and can be used by schools to enhance the attractiveness of specific taught subjects, such as through science clubs using STEM volunteers (National Audit Office, 2010).

Employer engagement strategies to secure specific outcomes

Increased attainment

'My gut feeling: if work experience went, my results would go down.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England

'You see the change in attendance, behaviour. They realise how important it is to get English and maths. Impact on motivation is huge.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England

'They need to know that if they don't get [minimum qualifications], they won't get a job. Employers testify to that and it makes a huge difference.'

Focus group with Key Stage 5 teachers, North West England

'For youngsters who really struggle, the only way to get them through the key skills in literacy and numeracy – which they hate – is to contextualise it in a workplace setting.'

Focus group with Key Stage 5 teachers, North West England

Table 1 shows, in rank order, the favoured employer engagement and related activities that teachers said most increased attainment at 11–16 and 16–19.

Table 1: Which employer engagement and related activities most increase attainment?

At 11–16	% of teachers selecting as effective	At 16–19	% of teachers selecting as effective
1. Work experience	58%	1. Work experience	56%
2. One-day enterprise competitions	38%	2. Career talks from outside employee volunteers	48%
3. Longer-duration enterprise competitions	35%	3. One-day enterprise competitions	43%
4. Mock interviews with employers	34%	4. Longer-duration enterprise competitions	37%
5. Career talks from outside employee volunteers	33%	5. Learner volunteering in the community	28%

Table 2 shows which employer engagement activities are most frequently cited by teaching staff as likely to impact positively on pupils.



Table 2: Which employer engagement activities are most frequently cited by teaching staff as being more likely to have positive impacts on pupils and learners?

At 11–16	At 16–19
1. Work experience	= 1. Work experience
2. Workplace visits	= 1. Learner volunteering
= 3. Pupil volunteering	3. Dedicated curriculum time
= 3. Mock interviews	4. Real-world learning resources
= 3. Business mentoring	= 5. Long-term enterprise competitions
	= 5. Business mentoring
	= 5. Workplace visits

The literature suggests strongly that pupil exposure to employer engagement activities can and does work to increase their attainment, but not in all cases. A key publication is the 2008 literature review undertaken by AIR UK on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The review looked at US and UK research literature for evidence of positive links between employer engagement activities and increased pupil attainment. It found firstly that very few serious studies allowed any reliable conclusions to be drawn about such impacts – just 15 were judged through a detailed assessment process to provide material of sufficient quality. Secondly, the reviewers noted that reliable evidence of increased attainment was presented in eight of the reviews. No assessment of the extent of increases was possible. In the seven studies reporting no increase in attainment, other positive (typically work-related) outcomes were recorded: importantly, attainment did not reduce. This is a serious consideration, as teaching time is precious in education and it is important to establish whether time spent preparing for employment is at the cost of academic achievement: this is not seen to be the case.

The British studies identified by AIR UK⁶ demonstrate improved attainment among Key Stage 4 pupils identified as being disengaged, disaffected, lower achievers or on the borderline of achieving five GCSEs. Such increases in attainment are recognised by teaching staff in surveys and focus groups and are largely explained in terms of young people changing attitudes as a result of their exposure to the world of work. In impressive numbers, they are observed to return more mature, more confident, more engaged, more willing to apply themselves in class, more aware of the value of education and qualifications, and more motivated to succeed in school or college. Consequently, deeper, more intense experiences such as mentoring or work experience are seen to be especially effective in challenging assumptions and influencing attitudes, but as survey data shows, activities designed to deliver comparable insights, such as mock interviews and career talks, are also valued by teaching staff as means to increase attainment. Thus, there are advantages in providing young people with opportunity through their academic years (and not just at the end of the summer term in Year 10) with chances to explore and test their understanding of the value of education and qualifications to developing career aspirations. This is not to say that already well motivated higher achievers have

⁶ AIR UK, the UK subsidiary of the American Institutes for Research (AIR), was commissioned to report by the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).



nothing to gain from workplace exposure mediated by schools and colleges – focus group testimony is clear that benefits are to be had, but on a lower proportional level than found with lower achievers.

For those young people struggling to engage fully in schooling, high levels of employer engagement can transform their educational experiences. Through extended work experience, workplace visits and use of work-related learning resources, pupils are presented with learning situations clearly relevant to imagined working futures. Such opportunities for contextualised, applied learning are seen too in enterprise activities which are consequently well regarded by teaching staff. By designing programmes of employer engagement that will encourage and enable pupils to explore, clarify and confirm career interests and ambitions, arguably schools allow pupils to develop a new sense of agency and ownership over their educational choices and experiences.

Improved transitions from education to work

'It's all to do with raising aspirations. Giving them information they wouldn't otherwise have on how everything fits together. How what they do at school relates to work. What they need to do. It's showing them that people like them do go into jobs like that.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England

'[Work experience] helps them make more informed choices about where to go. I would expect it helps determine whether they will stay on their course through university. I expect that's why admissions officers ask for it.'

Focus group with Key Stage 5 teachers, North West England

'[Pupils] believe employers, they don't believe us. They see employers as different. They form a relationship with them and that gives them a sense of reality of what's happening post-16.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England

'Prevention of NEET is dependent on pre-16 intervention.'

Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England

Table 3 shows which employer engagement activities (delivered at 14–16 and 16–19) were highlighted by teaching staff as being the most likely to enhance employability skills, in terms of: 'problem solving and team working'; 'self-management'; and 'understanding the world of work.'

Table 3: The most effective employer engagement activities to enhance employability skills

Employability skill	14–16	16–19
Problem solving and team working	One-day enterprise competitions	One-day enterprise competitions
Self-management	Pupil/learner volunteering in the community	Pupil/learner volunteering in the community
Understanding the world of work	Work experience	Business mentoring

Table 4 shows which employer engagement activities (delivered at 14–16 and 16–19) were identified by teaching staff as being the most likely to support progression into work, in terms of: ‘getting a part-time job’; ‘broadening aspirations’; ‘understanding what’s needed to get a job’; and ‘making good decisions on continuing study’.

Table 4: The most effective employer engagement activities to support ultimate progression into work

Progression into work	14–16	16–19
Getting a part-time job	Work experience	Work experience
Broadening aspirations	Work experience	Pupil/learner volunteering in the community
Understanding what’s needed to get a job	Work experience	Workplace visits
Making good decisions on continuing study	Career fairs	Career fairs

In the British educational context, government policy rationales for the introduction of initiatives to encourage and enable schools to increase pupil contacts with employers were driven by an explicit viewpoint that such activities would improve the ability of young people to succeed in the adult labour market. Until recently, this assumption has not been methodically tested. Work published by the Education and Employers Taskforce in 2013 in the *Journal of education and work* (Mann & Percy, 2013) shows compelling evidence that the more employer engagement young people have when they are at school or college, the better they do as young adults – earning more in work and being less likely to be NEET even after allowing for highest levels of qualification (Percy & Mann, forthcoming). The conclusion makes sense because good international evidence also exists to show that young people who work part time alongside their full-time studies or who take part in courses rich in employer engagement are also known to do better in the early jobs market than their peers.

Why is it then, that such early exposure to the working world makes a difference? The evidence points to two key things. First, employer engagement helps young people to better understand the range of opportunities available in the labour market and routes into them. This is hugely important. Study after study shows that a very high proportion of young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, find it difficult to understand the breadth of the labour market and what they need to do to be able to compete for available jobs. The great majority of young people have high aspirations, but many are not based on any realistic assessment of how, and whether, they are achievable. When young people come into contact with working professionals, they encounter people they are very likely to trust and listen to when they talk about jobs and careers.

Secondly, encounters allow pupils to better explore potential working futures for themselves and understand the mix of qualifications and experience relevant to such jobs. Just as such encounters can lead to a changed attitude towards schooling and qualifications, they can also help young people to take greater agency to navigate their own way through education and training, and allow



ultimately for a better match between labour market demand and their own skills and interests. Young people experiencing higher levels of employer engagement while at school routinely earn more than similarly qualified peers with low levels of engagement, and it seems that a key reason for this is that they are better able to find places in the early labour market where they can thrive, leading to greater retention, higher productivity and higher wages.

Employer engagement, therefore, is hugely important as a means of career exploration, particularly before key decision points – at ages 14, 16 and 18. Short-duration activities – such as career fairs, talks, networking events and workplace visits – are of huge value. As young people initially explore future working possibilities, it is important to give them a chance to clarify and confirm their interests through more intense experiences such as work experience, mentoring, STEM clubs or longer-duration enterprise competitions. In such activities, young people have the opportunity to meet people who are potentially able to provide advice, information and support of long-term value, such as part-time working opportunities, references, advice on college courses or apprenticeship frameworks. Through such deeper exposures, young people gain insights into business cultures which employers complain is the primary thing lacking in younger recruits they feel are ill-prepared for work.

For those young people seeking to attend university prior to entering the workforce on a full-time basis, it is important to provide them with opportunities to explore, clarify and confirm how their higher education choices influence their later employment prospects. More than that, to optimise chances of admission to the most competitive courses, it is highly important that young people can demonstrate to admissions tutors an understanding of the careers related to courses of study. High-performing independent schools understand this fully and ensure that their pupils are exposed to rich programmes of visiting speakers and have the chance for job shadowing and work experience opportunities in Year 12.

For schools embarking on new relationships with employers, it is useful finally to consider the means by which employers can enhance school and college governance. Schemes encouraging staff to volunteer to be available as governors in local schools have been running for many years and have, of late, been subjected to good quality evaluations. Such reviews explore the roles of volunteer governors, supported from local employers, who serve on governance boards in schools where they have no other connection and find that such volunteers are typically held in very high regard by headteachers and chairs of governors who feel that they often play a role similar to that of a non-executive director in a private company – challenging and supporting schools to optimise performance.

Conclusions

It is clear from both the literature and the data gathered as a result of this research project that the key outcome for schools and colleges is a need to embrace a wider range of employment activities for their students to engage in. The variation across the responses from teachers and pupils alike shows that a combination of approaches is necessary in order to properly provide for pupils.

There is a widespread view that employer engagement enhances attainment, primarily by improving motivation, but also that young people are able to make more informed decisions at 14, 16 and 18 if they are able to relate their educational choices to an understanding of employment opportunities and the demands of recruiters. The large-scale survey of teachers conducted as part of this review has demonstrated that work experience is easily the one activity that is thought to be most important in terms of improving attainment and allowing pupils to progress into their desired career.

Career-focused interventions work best when they are both short in duration and combined with a number of other related interventions; in particular it has been shown that the more employer engagement activities, the better, in terms of enhancing the school-to-work transition.

Furthermore, this review has specifically addressed individual pupil groups, showing that where pupils are particularly disengaged from education, there is clear support for more intensive exposure to the working world through mentoring, extended work experience or work-related learning educational programmes.

For higher achievers, evidence is strong that personalised use of employer engagement can help secure access to the most competitive undergraduate courses. Here, young people often need to demonstrate insight into careers related to their courses of study and the advantages of post-16 job shadowing become clear.

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Further information and resources

This publication seeks to start a debate on how employer engagement can best be strategically used to support the learning and progression of young people – we are pleased to receive comments via our email address: research@cfbt.com

The accompanying report *Employer engagement in education: literature review* is available at: www.cfbt.com/research

For free guidance and details on ongoing research into employer engagement in education, see:

www.educationandemployers.org/research

www.teachers-guide.org

State schools and colleges can contact thousands of employee volunteers to support careers activities, CV workshops and mock interviews quickly and for free, through:

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