



Defining effective employer engagement

December 2009

The Taskforce vision:

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 to secure our future national prosperity.

This is Taskforce Paper 1 *Defining effective employer engagement*. It is a publication of the Education and Employers Taskforce.

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About the Taskforce

The Education and Employers Taskforce was launched in October 2009 as an independent charity supported by initial funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to ensure that every school and college in England has an effective relationship with employers. In undertaking this work, the Taskforce is implementing a key recommendation of the 2008 report of the [National Council for Education Excellence](#) (NCEE). The Taskforce brings together key partners from the worlds of education and employment to work in a spirit of greater collaboration to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions from the public, private and third sectors. For more information about the Taskforce, visit www.educationandemployers.org.¹

¹ For information about the National Council for Educational Excellence and its recommendations, visit <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ncee>.

Summary

The 2008 report of the National Council for Educational Excellence recommended that every school and college should have an effective partnership with employers. Without a clear understanding of what is meant by 'effective' employer engagement, it will not be possible for the Taskforce, working with partners, to benchmark current practice and assess if new initiatives, campaigns and communications have any measurable impact on the learning outcomes of all young people. This paper sets out the definition that has been developed by the Taskforce, working with partners including Ofsted, DCSF and the members of the Taskforce's Expert Group on Research. The paper has been endorsed by the Taskforce's Partnership Board and Board of Trustees.

In short, 'effective' engagement is where the cumulative total of partnerships provides an individual school or college with engagement that is broad, impactful, mutually beneficial and relevant to institutional circumstances.

The paper distinguishes between the characteristics of an effective set of partnerships between a single school/college/cluster and a number of employers and those of a partnership between with a single school/college and employer. Ways of capturing data at a national level are explored and areas where data is currently scarce are identified.

1 Objective

The purpose of agreeing an approach to defining and measuring the effectiveness of employer engagement with schools and colleges is to allow for judgements to be made of the effectiveness of:

- individual schools and colleges in engaging with employers – the observable characteristics of optimal engagement
- national strategies to encourage and enable mutually beneficial relationships between schools and colleges and employers – the national indicators that highlight change in the volume and impact of relationships
- relationships between individual schools and colleges and individual employers - the circumstances most likely to secure the optimal benefits for the two parties and young people

Work to define effective employer engagement informs the work of the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Education and Employers Taskforce, providing the basis for assessing the impact of the Taskforce and influencing the way it communicates with stakeholders.

In considering this work, it is recognised that data is most readily available at a national level, and that school or college level data is less so. The paper covers primary and secondary schools, and colleges offering educational provision to young people aged 5 to 19. It is recognised that needs and activities will vary, particularly relating to primary education which is considerably different to secondary or college level engagement, and the data gathering methodology will reflect this.

2 Background

The requirement to define the effectiveness of employer engagement with schools and colleges arises from the 2008 report of the [National Council for Educational Excellence](#). That report recommended that:

“Employers should support the delivery of a new National Framework for business education partnership so that by 2010, every primary and secondary school and college should have an effective relationship with business’.

The National Framework (see Annex) defines where business can contribute most to raising the aspirations and achievements of young people, and covers:

- School leadership, including governance and teacher professional development
- Basic literacy, numeracy and life skills including knowledge of the world of work
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
- Enterprise education and employability skills.”

The DCSF’s response to the NCEE report, [Building Stronger Partnerships](#), adapted the NCEE approach, simplifying the National Framework. The underpinning themes were grouped into three areas:

- Leadership and governance
- The Curriculum, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
- Employability and Enterprise Skills

The report also set out the Government’s desire to make it easier for employers, from private, public and third sectors, and schools/colleges to work together, arguing that partnerships should be “of mutual benefit: they are a two way street” designed to meet the priorities of both parties.

Further, the document cautioned school and college leaders that “a flexible approach is required. Different employers and businesses will be able to work with you to varying degrees and in different ways. A relationship can be valuable even if an employer can only offer a few hours of staff time.” The document repeated the NCEE call for greatest effort in increasing employer engagement to be focused into schools that need it most with a particular focus on schools in the National Challenge.

3 Assessing the effectiveness of a school or college’s total range of partnerships with employers

Collectively, the NCEE recommendations and the DCSF response provide four assumptions to inform definitions of effective employer engagement between a single school/college/cluster and the totality of its employer partnerships:

Assumption one: The total number of employers engaging with a single educational institution or cluster between them offer a **breadth** of opportunities for young people across the themes identified in the National Framework. (This is not to say that any single employer relationship must offer a breadth of different activities in order to be deemed effective).

Assumption two: Effective employer engagement has a positive **impact** on the aspirations and achievement of young people. ‘Achievement’ include not only qualifications but also the development of attitudes, skills and knowledge outside the qualification framework.

Assumption three: Effective partnerships between employers and schools and colleges are felt to be of **mutual benefit** by both

parties, addressing and meeting respective needs

Assumption four: Definitions of effective employer engagement should be sufficiently flexible to be **relevant** to the range of potential activities undertaken by individual employers and schools/colleges in partnership, recognizing the recognising the variation that exists between schools and colleges (acknowledging the differing needs of primary, secondary, special schools and colleges and their learners, and of National Challenge Schools

These four assumptions are the foundation of a methodology for gauging the impact of public and private interventions over time, across the breadth of partnerships entered into by education institutions, covering most notably the impact of the Education and Employers Taskforce.

In considering means to measure the effectiveness of employer engagement with schools and colleges, it is helpful to recall the five principles of good regulation, as articulated by the [Better Regulation Executive](#). The principles state that any regulation should be transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted (only at cases where action is needed).

Consequently, in defining and assessing the effectiveness of employer engagement there is an obligation on policy makers to make full use of existing national and institutional resources and consider with care proposals to commission new approaches providing additional data.

4 Methodology

Understanding and measuring **breadth**

The National Framework as described in both the NCEE recommendations and in the report *Building Stronger Partnerships* identifies three clusters of activities underpinning the revised National Framework themes. The approach, building on Government's desire to see work-related learning a part of provision across the secondary curriculum, allows for the creation of a dashboard of success indicators, drawing on data sets which will enable benchmarking at national and, to some extent, institutional levels.

Individual education-employer relationships may offer a very narrow range of opportunities but assessing the range of opportunities across all employer partnerships with a single educational institution/cluster will enable us to evaluate progress towards the NCEE vision that relationships between employers and schools and colleges are broad as well as deep.

The volume of employer engagement and to some extent, the type of activities undertaken, will vary according to context. Primary and secondary schools, colleges and special schools may engage in some similar activities e.g. teacher mentoring, curriculum enrichment activities, but the volume and nature of some activities may vary. In particular, there is little available data on the extent of employer engagement in the primary sector. Most engagement is grouped with other activities 'using adults other than teachers' or 'developing pupils' understanding of different types of work in their community' rather than specifically to employer engagement.

Understanding and measuring **impact**

Where engagement with employers is effective, the impact on the aspirations and achievements of young people should be demonstrably apparent. Impact

should be visible across a range of areas with most significant impact felt in areas benefiting from the most intense relationships with employers (e.g., Diplomas and Young Apprenticeships):

- higher levels of achievement, as measured against comparable groups, through the whole experience of education
- higher levels of staying on rates at 16, as measured against comparable groups of young people
- higher levels of confidence of young people, as measured against comparable groups, in finding a job that matches their skills and interests when they leave full-time education
- higher levels of motivation of young people in education driven by the perception of a more relevant curriculum
- lower rates of NEET, as measured against comparable groups of young people
- higher wage rates on initial entry to employment, as measured against comparable groups of young people
- higher levels of employer satisfaction in the readiness of young people for work

Such impact can only be measured within robust evaluations and research programmes. The Taskforce provides a mechanism for collating such evidence of impact and influencing approaches of partners.

Understanding and measuring **mutual benefits**

Where partnerships between employers and schools/colleges are effective, the quality of the relationships should be evident to both parties and demonstrated through:

- surveyed employers agreeing that relationships with schools had led to clear benefits to their enterprise
- surveyed school and college leaders agreeing that relationships with

employers lead to clear benefits to the educational institution and all learners entitled to work-related learning

- surveyed employers agreeing with the statement that it is easy/it is not difficult to work with schools and colleges – whether engaging directly with the school or college or through a broker
- surveyed schools/colleges agreeing with the statement that it is easy/it is not difficult to work with employers – whether engaging directly with the employer or through a broker

The Department, the Taskforce and its partners have means of influencing the content of surveys of both employers and schools and colleges to secure consistent questioning of representative samples.

Understanding and measuring **relevance**

Where partnerships are relevant to the different interests and needs of employers and schools and colleges, the relevance of the relationships should be demonstrated through:

- surveyed employers agreeing that they understand the range of opportunities open to them and are happy with the extent of their engagement
- surveyed school and college leaders demonstrating that they understand the breadth of potential engagements with employers open to their school or college and are content with the range and quality of their engagements.

Annex – the National Framework

Leadership and Governance including
Governors
Expert help to schools and colleges
Professional development for teachers
Supporting the Curriculum including
Literacy and numeracy
Diploma support
Supporting STEM subjects
Supporting languages
Developing learning materials
Enterprise and employability skills including
Work experience
Mentoring
Workplace visits
Supporting projects
Classroom talks to students
Supporting enterprise and employability activities
Supporting information, advice and guidance/careers
Young apprenticeships
Online support