

How and why the Taskforce developed Inspiring the Future

Inspiring the Future was developed through a process of deep consultation and rigorous research. The consultation process involved key stakeholders along the delivery chain from government officials, leaders of national and local brokerage organisations, large and small employers, organisations representing teachers and school leaders alongside school teachers, careers experts and individual volunteers. Research drew on insights from a Taskforce Research Group which included leading UK academics, policy-makers and practitioners whose collective work informed what was then the world's most systemic review of relevant literature.¹ A Taskforce team of two former DfE policy officials drew on insights gained through consultation and research review to develop with colleagues deeply experienced in volunteering in schools the wholly new approach to employer engagement which is now known as Inspiring the Future.

Key points shaping the development:

Employer engagement in education is very important to young people, employers and the economy and there is not enough of it. Employer engagement in education has multiple benefits for young people, but primarily it serves two purposes: i) it allows them to develop skills (including employability skills) and experience relevant to the workplace which employers value in recruitment and which are not so easily delivered in the academic curriculum; ii) it provides young people with access to trustworthy insights into the labour market through careers information. Young people trust the information they gain directly from employers and they experience first-hand significantly more than other sources of advice. What young people gain from employer engagement is important to employers because it helps to make a broader range of young people available for recruitment and for the economy because it enables a better matching of the supply of young people with aspirations, experience and qualifications relevant to actual levels of demand across the labour market. Good evidence shows that the more employer engagement young people have in school, the more they are likely to earn in the 20s. In both skills development and career information, more is more – and, as of 2011, only 15% of young adults recalled 3 or more employer contacts from when they were in school.

Both employers and schools want to work together and will do at scale if it easy, cheap (preferably cost-free), trusted and clear what should be done. Surveys of both sides routinely show high willingness to collaborate. Historical data validates: in 2009/10, 90% of state secondary schools offered work experience in 400,000 workplaces. This happened because government invested millions in local authority based Education Business Partnership Organisations (EBPOs) and national intermediary bodies to make it cheap, easy and clear to do.² These three adjectives are important, because collaboration is not at the core of either sides 'business'. Willingness to engage diminishes with the risk of collaboration becoming burdensome, costly and disruptive to the business of earning a profit, running a business or securing pupil attainment.

¹ Mann, A with Stanley J and Lopez, D (2010), *What is to be gained through partnership?* London: Education and Employers Taskforce

² Taskforce analysis, of behalf of the DfE, estimates that in 2009/10, a total of £82.7m was invested by national and local government in connecting schools and employers through intermediary organisations.

Transactional costs involved in securing employer engagement in education largely relate to the cost of finding the right people willing to work with schools and connecting them. Employer engagement in education essentially consists of an individual or organisation in the economic sector volunteering to provide support (eg, work experience placements, workplace visits, mentoring, enterprise competition coaching, career talks) to young people in schools. In a small number of cases, there are fixed costs in health and safety checking (work experience) or child safeguarding checks (mentoring), but for the great bulk of activity, costs relate to finding one another and that was the primary purpose of EBPOs – staff recruited volunteers and workplace access on behalf of schools.

It is more efficient if the costs of finding people can be stripped out and this is what Inspiring the Future does. Inspiring the Future is designed around making a simple ask of employers/employee volunteers, from Apprentice to CEO, from architect to zoologist – would you be willing to take an hour a year to go into a local school to talk about the job you do? Importantly, wherever they are in the country, all users are directed to a national web portal – www.inspiringthefuture.org and in the process of registration select the local authority areas where they are willing to be approached by schools.³ On average, each volunteers makes themselves available in two different local authority areas, often where they live and where they work. Teaching staff in those areas can then, at the click of a mouse, see often hundreds of volunteers who have identified themselves as being happy to be approached about providing support for a school. It is, of course, only more efficient if teachers are willing to adjust to this new way of finding people. All the evidence suggests that they are adapting and quickly. Eighteen months after launch, 4,500 individual members of teaching staff from 2,750 schools (including 75%+ of English secondaries) have registered as users sending between them 22,000+ messages to volunteers.

Inspiring the Future removes barriers for schools in connecting with employers by being is deliberately designed to free, easy, trusted and clear. By stripping out the costs of finding people, the cost of getting volunteers into schools is massively reduced. Inspiring the Future recognises, moreover, that schools commonly need ‘just in time’ access to volunteers - after the Year 9 careers fair to support options choices is completed, few schools have someone dedicated to worrying about it for the next 9 months – and so it is designed to make volunteers accessible at the point teachers need them. Inspiring the Future enables teachers to go ‘off system’ with volunteers as soon as they choose, exchanging emails, recognising the ambition of making it easy to connect and not keeping them in a web system for non-practical reasons. Inspiring the Future is trusted because it was developed a not for profit charity in collaboration with the organisations which collectively represent hundreds of thousands of teachers and school leaders and it through these organisations that most schools hear about Inspiring the Future: ASCL, NAHT, the NUT, NASUWT, TeachFirst etc. As of February 2014, 13,000 individuals from 3,750 different employers have registered as volunteers on Inspiring the Future making themselves available typically across two different local authority areas.

³ Inspiring the Future operates on a similar but more sophisticated platform to that used by Speakers for Schools (www.speakers4schools.org) which was also developed and designed by the Taskforce team.

In designing Inspiring the Future, user needs were built into the design – search mechanisms recognise that different teachers will want to use it for a wide range of purposes, so it makes it simple, for example, for them to find volunteers well placed to talk about cross cutting areas of interest: Apprenticeships, Entrepreneurialism, use of Maths or Modern Foreign Languages at work, and a growing range of activities such as CV help and mock interviews as well as career talks. Schools deliberately do not have to nominate a single person to act as gatekeeper but allow multiple users, each typically with different purposes in mind. Collectively, however, this (current) network of 4,500 individuals represent the movers and shakers of employer engagement in education and they are the perfect audience for raising awareness of different approaches, new activities and the availability of related resources (such as 750 Inspiring the Future schools recently responding to the offer of packs of printed Apprenticeships materials).

By making the teacher the customer, Inspiring the Future enables optimal use of employee volunteering. With Inspiring the Future nothing happens unless the school wants it to – the teacher is the gatekeeper and customer deciding for themselves which volunteers would be best placed to support the learning and progression of young people they know and whose interests they hold dear. This stands in contrast to the historic delivery of employer engagement through EBPOs where schools had less ability to commission exactly the employer resource they needed – rather employer opportunities would be recruited en masse at volume by the intermediary and then made available to schools. Survey data shows that ITF users feel that volunteers sourced through ITF are of better ‘quality’ than those available through other schemes – this reflects both the sheer number of volunteers available in many areas, but also the fact that the teacher chooses who they want to bring in, reinforcing new levels of autonomy. Many intermediaries – eg, Young Enterprise, Business in the Community, Career Academies - offer programmes to schools. Inspiring the Future is access to resource. It is not a programme in itself, but schools can improve the quality of employee volunteering within programmes run by intermediaries through using ITF.

Inspiring the Future removes barriers for employers connecting with schools because it is designed to be free, easy, trusted and clear. Research shows that only the very largest employers typically have resource to invest in having dedicated staff to liaise with schools. The design of Inspiring the Future deliberately enabled employers of all sizes to use it as a means to manage and own their engagements with schools. Currently, half of ITF volunteers are recruited directly and half through their employers which can brand ITF as their own and receive Management Information on their volunteers if they so wish. The sign up process is deliberately quick and simple. The great majority of ITF volunteers heard about the volunteering opportunity through their employer, professional association or word of mouth – social networks which are trusted. ITF is branded with the logos of all the key national organisations representing employers and the workforce: the British Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of British Industry, CIPD, Federation of Small Businesses, Trades Union Congress etc.

By removing the transactional costs of engaging with schools, Inspiring the Future makes employer involvement in education more representative and more effective. With the creation of Inspiring the Future, for the first time it has become possible for employers of any sector and size to be involved in a national volunteering campaign with schools. Inspiring the Future assumes that employers with greatest interest in improving interest and competitive applications from young

people will be more interested in working with schools to help signal to young people the breadth of job opportunities and how they can be secured. The greater employer involvement, the more effective labour market signalling to young people becomes: hence, wage premiums identified in UK and US studies. With a single online gateway, Inspiring the Future makes national campaigns focused around areas of strategic economic importance (ie, interest in manufacturing, Apprenticeships, take up of modern foreign languages or STEM subjects) cheap, easy and effective. Where there is market failure and economic sectors fail to provide young people with the signals they need to make informed decisions about the education and training they seek out (eg, in IT sectors dominated by very small, new firms), national campaigns can amplify and enable employer voices through strategic working with professional associations and media.

Inspiring the Future enabling better investment decisions by young people underpinning economic growth through more efficient operation of the youth labour market. It is clear that young people's career aspirations historically have borne little relationship to actual labour market demand. This is important because every year young people are making effective investment decisions linked to their aspirations – in choosing options, what and where to study post-16 and post-18, deciding how hard they will apply themselves to specific qualifications – hoping that when they leave education, the market will reward their accumulation of human capital by well paid employment. This isn't happening – young people are facing ever higher rates of unemployment and lower earnings compared to older workers – and with recent student finance reform the stakes are getting higher with large numbers of graduates struggling to find graduate level employment. There is a mismatch between career aspirations, study selections and labour market demand. Employer engagement, at high volume beginning early in school careers, provides young people with the opportunity to gain new, useful information about the working world and its connection to their schooling informing agency through the school to work navigation and demonstrably reducing risk of becoming NEET and improving earnings. Markets cannot work without good information – Inspiring the Future is the most efficient means available of providing young people with the good information they need to make investment decisions critical to their futures.