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Promote a culture of work

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Michael Izza on how young people can be helped to achieve their potential

There is a catchphrase gaining currency among those who support the campaign to help young people achieve their potential: “it’s who you meet that stops you being NEET”. For those of you not in the know, the acronym stands for “not in education, employment or training”.

It’s the motivation behind an initiative, Inspiring the Future, which will see employers and employees from across the sectors and professions volunteering to go into state secondary schools and colleges to talk about their jobs, careers and the education routes they took to get there.

The BIS-backed Education and Employers Taskforce, which runs the initiative, has gathered research globally that shows a significant link between young people’s contact with employers and their future prospects. It points to OECD analysis which reveals that countries with education systems combining classroom learning and workplace exposure linked to vocational pathways tend to have much lower youth unemployment rates.

Recent research in the UK shows that the more employer contacts a young person has at school, such as careers talks or work experience, the greater their confidence (at 19-24) in progression towards their ultimate career goals. Employer contacts also have a real influence over whether young people are NEET or non-NEET (at 19-24) and the amount of their earnings if salaried.

The EET is shortly to publish new research revealing that there is a real mismatch between students’ job aspirations and the number of available jobs in their target sector. Again, exposure to employers may help to bring a more balanced and realistic approach to career paths.

Encouraging and informing young people in school is something that ICAEW members have been keenly involved in for a long time. Part of it is to ensure that young people have a basic understanding of financial matters but another is to make them aware of chartered accountancy as an attractive and rewarding career.

We run a number of initiatives including BASE (business, accounting and skills education), our national business game competition which provides students in years 12 and 13 with an opportunity to develop key employability skills and network with experienced business professionals. We also run BOSS (business opportunity skills session), a computer-based business simulation game which offers teachers a new way to explain business theory in the classroom.

The more we get engaged with the education system the better, I believe, and not just in the UK. Making sure that young people are aware of the options so they can make informed choices is of fundamental importance globally.

I have already signed up to Inspiring the Future (inspiringthefuture.org) and I would urge you, wherever you are, to do the same.

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