

Employer Engagement in English Independent Schools

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About the research team

Summary

This review of the engagement of English independent schools (and high performing independent schools in particular) with employers to support the learning and progression of pupils was undertaken by the Education and Employers Taskforce and Warwick University. The project asks:

- To what extent do independent schools engage with employers?
- Why do they do it?
- How do they go about it?

The research methods included:

- Desk research to identify the extent of employer engagement in 20 high performing independent schools.
- In-depth face-to-face interviews with a total of 15 staff in six of the schools (lasting on average half a day).
- Analysis of data from a survey of 987 young adults (aged 19-24) which provided evidence on the extent to which employer engagement practices identified in high performing independent schools are typical of the sector. In addition, a comparison of the impact of activity on pupils in both state and independent schools was undertaken.

The purpose of employer engagement

Employer engagement in independent schools (work experience, careers advice from employers, enterprise activities, business mentoring, visiting speakers, workplace visits) is commonplace, although some activities are more prolific than others, and undertaken to an extent largely comparable with the state sector.

High performing independent schools primarily and consistently engage employers to:

- Help pupils decide on and achieve their career goals
- Support pupil admission to university courses of choice
- Help pupils develop social or personal skills, including employability skills
- Help pupils develop networks of value after leaving school
- Stimulate a culture of expectation and aspiration
- But not typically to increase pupil motivation or aid classroom learning

The practice of employer engagement

High performing independent schools are skilful in exploiting existing social networks to identify relevant workplace opportunities for pupils. To access employers, high performing independent schools make extensive use of networks of alumni, parents, governors and teachers. Pupils commonly approach employers directly themselves. Intermediary, or brokerage, organisations are rarely used.

A distinct advantage of such approaches is that many people in the social networks linked to schools work in occupational areas (notably, the professions) highly relevant to the career aspirations of pupils. Among the most effective practice identified was the systematic use of alumni aged in their late twenties to provide pupils with insights (through careers fairs or talks) into their transitions from education to early employment within a profession.

In all schools visited, there was an expectation that all pupils would take part in the majority of employer engagement activities (work experience, workplace visits, careers events), even though such activities might take place outside the timetabled teaching time. A minority of activities (enterprise competitions, visiting speakers) were seen as optional for pupils but were very popular with them. Staff did not see the majority of required employer engagement activities as extra-curricular events. They saw the activities as part of a broadly defined curriculum which prepared pupils effectively for adult life. However, little evidence was found of links to the taught curriculum.

Reflecting much higher progression rates to higher education the delivery of work experience was found to be distinctive in comparison to the state sector. Pupils at independent schools would typically undertake work experience at an older age (16-17), in occupational areas closely tied to career aspirations and relevant to preferred university subjects of study. The experiences are used effectively to provide pupils with information for UCAS personal statements and often took place during vacation periods, in part to reduce the perceived health and safety obligations falling on the school.

In the most effective practice observed, employer engagement was embedded in careers advice and guidance provided by the school and was used effectively to help pupils clarify, confirm and support their progression towards career aspirations.

The relative impacts of employer engagement

Data from a February 2011 survey of young British adults, aged 19-24, segmented by school type attended asked respondents to reflect on the utility of work experience, careers advice (from employers), enterprise competitions and business mentoring in deciding on a career, getting a job after education and getting into university. The survey finds that in a number of important areas, the former pupils of independent schools felt that they had, for whatever reason, derived a significantly greater value from the activities which they took part in when compared to their state school-educated peers (and especially those attending non-selective state schools).

1 Introduction and background to the research

This paper addresses three questions:

- 1) To what extent do independent schools in general, and the highest performing independent schools in particular, engage with employers to support pupil learning and progression?
- 2) Why do they do it?
- 3) How do they do it?

The study adopted a mixed methods research approach.

Selection of high performing independent schools

The Sunday Times 2009 secondary and Further Education education league table was used to identify the top 20 highest performing independent schools across England. The table itself combines GCSE and A-level results ranking schools with sixth form provision.¹ The table listed the following 20 schools (in order of combined attainment levels):

1	Withington Girls' School	Manchester
2	Westminster School	London
3	North London Collegiate School	Edgware
4	St Paul's School	London
5	Magdalen College School	Oxford
6	St Paul's Girls' School	London
7	Perse Girls'/Stephen Perse Sixth Form College	Cambridge
8	Wycombe Abbey School	High Wycombe
9	Royal Grammar School	Guildford
10	City of London Girls' School	London
11	The Lady Eleanor Holles School	Hampton
12	Eton College	Windsor
13	King's College School	Wimbledon
14	Sevenoaks School	Sevenoaks
15	Guildford High School for Girls	Guildford
16	Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls	Elstree
17	Haberdashers' Aske's School for Boys	Borehamwood
18	Oxford High School for Girls GDST	Oxford
19	Winchester College	Winchester
20	South Hampstead High School GDST	London

¹ http://www.timesonline.co.uk/parentpower/league_tables.php?t=independent_secondary_schools

Desk research

The websites of these 20 schools were interrogated for evidence of employer engagement across six specific activities typically found within the state sector (careers advice from employers; work experience; business mentoring; enterprise activities; workplace visits; visiting speakers). Desk research allowed an assessment of activity across all 20 schools, and subsequently informed interviews with a sample of six of the schools randomly drawn from the list above.

Interviews with six schools

Following discussions with their head teachers, six semi-structured in-depth interviews were arranged at three boys' schools and three girls' schools. Three of these were located inside London and three outside; three were boarding and three were day schools. Most interviews took place with two or more members of the school's staff as nominated by the head teacher. Interviewees included heads of careers, directors of learning, classroom teachers and senior leadership team members, including head teachers. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, subject to the agreement of the respondents. Field work was carried out between November 2010 and June 2011. In keeping with standard ethical research guidelines, participating schools have been anonymised in this report.²

In terms of analysis, the transcripts were initially examined and a coding framework developed in relation to the three research questions. The data was thematically segmented, coded and then interrogated (using Ethnograph V6.0 computer assisted qualitative data analysis programme). This permitted the research team to drill down into the data and generate over a dozen relevant categories which aided the understanding of the extent to which, why and how independent schools engage with employers to support pupil learning and progression.

YouGov Survey of young adults 19-24

This paper also draws upon results of a survey of young adults commissioned by the Education and Employers Taskforce and undertaken, on a pro bono basis, by YouGov. The February 2011 survey explored experiences of school-age employer engagement. It covered the whole of Great Britain and involved 987 young people aged between 19 and 24. Numbers were sufficiently large to allow analysis by school type attended between the ages of 14 and 19 (non-selective state schools, selective state schools and independent schools). Data from the survey allows assessments to be made of whether the experiences of the 20 high performing independent schools identified above are typical of the independent sector and the perceived impacts of employer engagement on different cohorts of young adults.

Literature review

Literature reviews were undertaken during the initial, midpoint and closing stages of this study using digital databases likely to reference relevant books and journal articles.⁴ Key terms and themes used to source relevant articles included but were not limited to: 'independent schools AND employers', 'private schools AND work-related learning', 'enterprise education' and 'careers education'. Searches returned literature that was of little relevance to the topic of employer engagement within independent schools, reinforcing the need and significance of this study.

² This study adhered to ethical precepts outlined in the British Educational Research Association's guidelines. One week prior to the commencement of each interview the interviewee(s) were briefed on the background of the study, provided with a full set of questions, informed of their rights and asked for their consent to be recorded via a dictaphone. This information was reiterated at the beginning of each interview and written consent was sought before the activity took place. The audible data generated in the interviews was transcribed, anonymised and stored in a safe and secure location (BERA 2011).

³ Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS 16.0 with significance testing at the 10% level; weighting was also used to mitigate sampling bias, making the sample more representative of the wider population of relevant schools across the country (ESDS 2011: 4-6).

⁴ Academic Search Premier, British Education Index, EBSCO, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), JSTOR and Web of Knowledge

2 To what extent do independent schools engage employers?

Evidence from the desktop review, interviews and polling of former pupils, suggests strongly that independent schools engage frequently with employers to support pupils at levels comparable to the state sector.

Employer engagement activity participation: 20 highest performing independent schools

The question was addressed via the identification of six employer engagement areas – careers advice, work experience, business mentoring, enterprise activities, work-place visits and visiting speakers – which are relatively typical in the state sector. The extent to which independent schools undertake these activities was initially investigated via the browsing of online materials (primarily: careers pages, prospectuses, school magazines and alumni websites). This resulted in the composition of the table below which outlines activity uptake across each of the 20 high performing schools identified.

Of the six employer engagement activities listed above:

- 100% of the 20 schools undertake **enterprise activities** involving employee business coaches, typically through optional extra-curricular activities such as Young Enterprise (involving employers as external team coaches) and participating in employer enterprise management schemes.
- 90% undertake **work experience**, being a school-mediated short placement (typically two weeks) at an employer's premises. Participation in work experience is typically a requirement of pupils, even if taking place outside school time e.g. over summer vacation periods.
- 85% involve employers in giving **careers advice** to pupils, often through careers' fairs or regular careers' talks.
- 80% invite external **visiting speakers**, typically from businesses, the professions, or universities to address and interact with pupils, often on a very regular (i.e. weekly) basis.
- 45% encourage or require pupils to undertake **workplace visits** – participation in 'take your daughter to work day' is, for example, commonplace in girls' schools.
- 25% provide some pupils with the opportunity to take part in **business mentoring** whereby adult members of the workforce interact with a small number of pupils to provide long term support and advice from a workplace perspective. As in the state sector, while many schools offer some form of such mentoring, only small proportions of pupils appear to take part.

Given the methods employed (desktop internet research), these levels of activity may well be underestimates of actual behaviour.

The desktop findings, set out in detail below, demonstrate that employer engagement activities are commonplace across high performing independent schools. Only one school from the 20 considered, however, was found to have a work-related learning policy available online – City of London School for Girls.

Table 1: Employer engagement activities across 20 high performing independent schools

Institutions	Types of Employer Engagement					
	1 Careers IAG	2 Work Experience	3 Business Mentoring	4 Enterprise Activities	5 Work-place Visits	6 Visiting Speakers
Withington Girls' School	•	•		•		•
Westminster School	•	•	•	•		•
North London Collegiate School	•	•		•	•	•
St Paul's School	•	•		•		•
Magdalen College School Oxford	•	•	•	•	•	•
St Paul's Girls' School	•	•		•		•
Stephen Perse Foundation/ Perse Girls'	•			•	•	•
Wycombe Abbey School	•	•		•		•
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	•	•		•		•
City of London School for Girls	•	•		•	•	•
Lady Eleanor Holles School	•	•	•	•	•	•
Eton College	•	•	•	•		•
King's College School, Wimbledon		•		•	•	
Sevenoaks School	•	•		•		•
Guildford High School for Girls				•		
Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls	•	•		•	•	•
Haberdashers' Aske's Boys School	•	•	•	•		
Oxford High School GDST	•	•		•	•	•
Winchester College	•	•	•	•	•	•
South Hempstead High School GDST		•		•		•

Desktop review of independent schools. Fieldwork: September – November 2010

How does employer engagement within the independent sector compare to that within the state sector?

Analysis of YouGov survey responses allowed a comparison of activity across four employer engagement activities (work experience, careers advice, enterprise, business mentoring) between independent schools (of all performance levels) and state schools (segmented by selective status). The February survey asked 987 young adults whether they recalled being involved in the four activities whilst they were at school or college between the ages of 14 and 19. The results below provide data on the recalled experiences of young adults who attended the same school type (although not necessarily the same school between the ages of 14 and 19). The table shows that the experiences of former pupils of independent schools in undertaking four common employer engagement activities were largely comparable with their peers in the state sector.

Table 2: Comparative engagement in four employer engagement activities recalled by young adults (aged 19-24) who attended the same type of schooling between the ages of 14 and 19

		Non-selective with sixth Form	Grammar with sixth Form	Independent with sixth Form	N
Work Experience	Yes	90%	86%	84%	649
	No	10%	14%	15%	82
	N	530	122	79	731
Careers Advice	Yes	44%	48%	57%	336
	No	56%	52%	43%	395
	N	530	122	79	731
Enterprise Activity	Yes	27%	38%	38%	221
	No	73%	62%	62%	510
	N	529	122	80	731
Business Mentoring	Yes	16%	16%	15%	613
	No	84%	84%	85%	117
	N	529	121	80	730

N = Number of respondents

3 Why do high performing independent schools engage employers?

Interviews with staff in six high performing independent schools, combined with desk research, offers insights into why such schools engage with employers. Employer engagement can perhaps best be seen as a process through which schools access specialist resources to help pupils clarify, confirm and support identification of career aspirations and routes towards securing them. A number of common themes emerge from the evidence collated. Schools were driven to engage with employers in order to: help young people decide on career goals and work positively towards achieving them; enable access to university courses of choice; help develop pupils' personal and social skills, including at times explicitly employability skills; help pupils develop networks of value to them after leaving school; and, as a means of stimulating a culture of expectation and aspiration. The focus therefore, of independent school activity is on enabling the successful progression of pupils through access to useful information, networks and experiences. Engagement with employers is seen as relevant to wider learning outcomes (such as employability skills), but is rarely used as a means to contextualise learning or embedded within classroom activity. Unlike the state sector, where employer engagement is often seen as an effective means of increasing the motivation of pupils to achieve academically, or to contextualise learning, independent school interviewees argued that this was rarely relevant as pupils were already highly motivated.

To help pupils decide on and achieve career goals

Independent schools perceived their engagement with employers as essential in helping pupils decide on, and achieve, their chosen career destinations. Activities such as work experience, visiting speakers and careers advice from employers were viewed as opportunities for individual pupils to obtain insights into career options and pathways to achieving them. Embedded within personalised approaches to careers advice and guidance, employer engagement activities, over the duration of secondary education, were used to clarify, confirm and support the intended career destinations of pupils.

“...what I hope is that they see the range of possibilities. I don't know if that sounds ambitious enough for them, but... I want them to realise that there's all sorts of options that they can consider, they don't need to be limited...” (Head of Careers reflecting on value of careers' fair to pupils, Girls' School A)

Careers-related employer engagement described was typically delivered through a combination of workplace visits, theme days and careers' fairs/talks.

“...careers education really starts in year eight... 'take our daughters to work day' and that's year eight and that is earlier than many schools, because the school is very selective and very academically successful we've tried to adapt the programme to reflect the needs and ambitions and aspirations of the children...and I think the girls get a great deal from that 'take our daughters to work day', again, we've got a very supportive parent body, we're very fortunate with, and they all go on a placement.” (Head of Careers, Girls' School A)

“...there are careers' days when we have visiting speakers, many of them boys who have been at school here, who are able to come down to the school and tell current pupils what work experience is like and how they got into it, what qualifications and experience they need...” (Registrar, Boys' School F)

“Obviously each department will only invite their own guests... from the science department they will invite people in the field of physics, biology etc... and the arts they will also have people... we try and be as forward as possible, we invite as many people as much as we can from a variety of different careers and then we have to give them their little talks, they often gather over in the school where the boys have the opportunity to meet them and talk on a one to one basis...” (Head of Careers, Boys' School F)



Pupils attending independent schools were felt to be especially attentive to advice which came directly from professionals working in a field of interest.

“I’ve had old girls in who are now running their own businesses, one of the ones had a great impact, she’s actually running a nursery around the corner and came in and talked about how she got started... it had a huge impact on the girls because there was somebody right in front of them they could ask questions of...” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School A)

“...some girls themselves have aspirations which aren’t suited to their particular skill set and part of our role is to try and encourage them to understand why there isn’t that match and what might be a better route for them. ..you know I can tell them a hundred times that their strengths are in particular areas .. When they talk to people who are in those professions and they talk with them directly ‘what are you good at?’ ‘What are your skills?’ it has a bigger impact than anything we can tell them second hand... so that’s another thing they get from it. Actually, having that opportunity to speak to people who have made a career in a particular area which will either motivate ‘this is definitely what I want to do’ or make them think ‘oh, actually, this isn’t what I want to do’ for whatever reason and they can believe it fully because it’s from someone who is living it.” (Head Teacher, Girls’ School C)

“Again I’m not sure I can define this enough but there’s something called business awareness... what I do know is that there are careers’ days when we have visiting speakers, many of them boys who have been at school here, who are able to come down to the school and tell current pupils what work there is like and how they got into it, what qualifications and experience they needed, and that’s a complete day, I think for... year 11 and year 12 and they choose what they want to go to... so we may have 20 or 30 speakers here and they choose what they want to go to and they go and listen to these speakers... before their A-level choices.... We like to get them thinking... we kick them off on the process and get them thinking... careers testing, they’re doing that this time of year and they get feedback just after Christmas and then we’re really thinking about choices.” (Registrar, Boys’ School F)

“a talk is twenty minutes with a ten minute question and answer session... and people giving them...tend to be relatively young,... obviously if they’re of retirement age, the world was a different place than when they left so we try and get them here fairly young and not too distanced from the boys. [They talk about] what they did after university, whether or not they went into further education overseas, it gives the boys some idea... demystify the whole environment...” (Head of Careers, Boys’ School F)

“So why do we engage with employers, because I suppose that’s the most obvious way of giving them that aroma of where they are likely to go” (Teacher, Boys’ School E)

To support pupil admission to university courses of choice

All six independent schools emphasised the importance of engaging with employers in order to help pupils gain entry to university courses of choice. Interviewees were keenly aware that work experience, in particular, was often highly desirable or an essential requirement for influencing successful admission to highly competitive university courses. Interviewees noted that where undergraduate courses related closely to a specific vocation, for example medicine, work experience (and other employer engagement activity) could provide excellent opportunities for pupils to show insight and commitment to careers linked to intended courses of study.

“[In supporting pupils to secure work experience]...We focus on the ones who we know need it for their particular careers, so I mean all the medics will be doing it and the engineers because it’s a requirement for their course. I mean some vets have to do 11-13 weeks of work experience before they can apply... and the medics need to have done a variety of things... they need to have done some hospital type work, they need to have done some voluntary

work, they need to demonstrate that they've got a real understanding of what it is they're getting into... and I think for some university courses which inevitably lead into a particular career you can only do that with work experience beforehand. I mean the engineers are actively encouraged to take a year off between school and university and it's even better if they've got a clear idea that that's what they want to do before they embark on it..." (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

"My view is that [pupils applying to university to study medicine] ought to have had time with a GP and time at a hospital before they put in an application..." (Head of Careers, Girls' School A)

"I think with certain subjects [practical experience is] essential, I think with medicine, with engineering, you need to demonstrate... with medicine you need to go into a hospital, I've actually heard an admissions tutor say this explicitly. For engineering certainly the ability to demonstrate a practical experience of some sort... it might not be work experience it might be building something... it is very important..." (Director of Studies, Boys' School F)

"...We've got a girl in the current lower sixth whose chosen all art subjects and has suddenly decided she wants to do medicine, so is applying for pre-med. But she had no work experience because it's something she's come to quite recently, so we've been in touch with our alumnae and asked them if they could offer her work experience over the summer and we've had some return on that even at quite short notice our alumnae are able to step in and bridge the gap which is very fortunate..." (Development Director, Girls' School C)

Interviewees held a strong view that often relevant work experience would make a difference to the success of applications and cited first hand advice from Russell Group university admissions tutors who commonly visited schools to speak to pupils. Courses linked to medical, dental and veterinary degrees were particularly cited. Consequently, schools worked hard to ensure that pupils were aware of the importance of securing attractive and relevant work experience and that they presented it effectively within their personal statements in UCAS applications. Work experience was seen as less relevant to successful admission to what were described as academic courses, such as History or Classics, but not as completely irrelevant.⁵

"I think the fact that universities are becoming... at the top end becoming more competitive... I still think the top universities that the girls are applying for here are not terribly... other than in the subjects where it's vital, like medicine, they're not terribly bothered whether an economist has got work experience. But on the other hand I think having some work experience in an investment bank environment, for example, would allow them to demonstrate their interest in their subject much more effectively because they can draw on experiences and they can reflect on that and link it into the relevance of the subject so... although it's not a barrier to progression necessarily in those subjects I think it can't have done any harm... it gives them more... motivation perhaps... I mean in the legal world, for example, I think it would be important... if you wanted to go and study history... I'm not quite sure what type of work experience you would have done, but it won't stop your progression into a history degree... what will be much more important is what you've read and what ideas you have, those sorts of things." (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

⁵ The Taskforce has published research on the admissions requirements of the 20 Russell Group universities across six subject areas. Desk research explored the extent to which work experience was described as a desirable or essential admissions requirement and found that for veterinary science undergraduate degrees 100% asked for such experience, medicine (88%), dentistry (91%), Law (37%), Engineering (28%), Business/Economics/Management (21%). See: *The importance of experience of the world of work in admissions to Russell Group universities* (Education and Employers Taskforce, 2011).



To help pupils develop social or personal skills, including employability skills

A number of the interviewees explicitly noted the desirability of equipping pupils with employability skills, which were understood by respondents in ways which would be familiar within the state sector. They were recognised as the sort of personal skills necessary to be effective in the workplace, for example, team-working, problem-solving, communication. Respondents saw employer engagement, in general, and work experience, in particular, as a means of developing the personal effectiveness of pupils in different social settings. Consequently, employer engagement was seen as a means of enhancing the maturation of pupils and often discussed in relation to other activities designed to secure similar outcomes, such as volunteer working, community engagement and extra-curricular activities. Such activities were described in terms of developing ‘more rounded pupils’ which all schools knew would help to create a stronger university application and ultimately put alumni at an advantage in the job market.

A number of respondents identified ‘employability skills’ to be gained from employer engagement activities (and work experience in particular) which would be readily recognisable in the state sector.

“...I think when they go out into work experience they have to actually organise themselves and that is something they will benefit from... communications skills.” (Teacher, Boys’ School E)

“Year 9, an outside company called ‘Inspiring Futures’ comes in to run a fair trade enterprise activity with the year group split up into 8 groups and so the citizenship focus is a more global one... The guy that came to lead it ...he addresses the issue of fair trade but ultimately, the bit I think is most important is that they’re working in a team communicating, they have to give a presentation, they have to come up with a product and they don’t get any sort of use of technology or anything it’s all on bits of paper, they have to create a T-shirt as well. So it’s all about them working together as a team, they also have a member of the sixth form who’s their mentor so the sixth formers come in early in the morning on that day and they are briefed by the guy from ‘Inspiring Futures’ and they lead the group so there’s a lot of peer mentoring going on there which we are very keen on.” (Teacher 1, Girls’ School C)

“Emphasising the sorts of skills that [employers] are interested in, like leadership skills, your team work... how you use the things like young enterprise to show the sorts of skills you have, key communication skills. Improving employability... not just an academic [qualifications] but things you need alongside that. I think it’s very useful... it’s important for them to be able to reflect on all the things they do.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School B)

Other respondents focused on broader aspects of personal development and life planning.

“I think it does their self-esteem quite a lot of good and I think in a school where you’ve got very high achieving girls confidence can sometimes be an issue... I think in actually getting out into the work environment makes them realise that they are intelligent in slightly different ways and that [pupils who] sometimes aren’t praised in a high achieving environment they suddenly feel ‘well actually, I’m good at this’ when dealing with people or whatever it might be, it’s a moment where different sorts of students can find strengths that aren’t celebrated in the same environment.” (Head of Careers reflects on the value of work experience, Girls’ School B)

“There’s no good shying away from it, you’ve got to address [the issue of women balancing careers with family responsibilities] and the more women that you can get in who have dealt with it and can talk about it openly, makes it a lot easier for girls to make those hard decisions.” (Development Director, Girls’ School C)

“Yes, there is something altruistic about giving something back, some of the boys who will do the community service with a view to the personal statement and the UCAS application whether or not they actually believe...if we believe

we're actually creating a more rounded person I often think, I think ultimately that is the aim. We want to give them as many experiences as we possibly can... you have got to remember this is a bit of a goldfish bowl and it can be quite insular... they play on the field with each other, they stay in the boarding house and so on and so forth... we do try and encourage them to branch out and then rather than being within their own little bubble they are actually able to communicate with a broad range of people from different social backgrounds." (Head of Careers, Boys' School F)

"It's all part of a good education isn't it? It's all part of equipping them to leave school in the best possible position..." (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

However, while interviewees commonly described such personal outcomes as driving school behaviour, they were not unanimous in the view that experience of workplaces always had an observable impact on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

"Interviewer: I was very taken by [Interviewee 1's] description of the key benefits of the work experience around employability and business awareness... is that something you've observed when pupils come back from their placements?"

Interviewee: No. I didn't see much evidence of that at all (pause). The groups of sixth form boys that I've tutored in the past... it's not been something that we've really talked about much at all or that I've seen much evidence of. And it's definitely not anything that necessarily transfers into class room practice on their part." (Teacher, Boys' School D)

To help pupils develop networks of value after leaving school

Helping pupils to develop networks of value was another common reason for engaging with employers. Interviewees understood that having connections with these individuals/institutions played important roles in securing work experience placements and helping them to make a transition into the world of work after leaving education. To a greater extent, it was expected that useful relationships with alumni and other adults of influence would develop informally without the direct involvement of the school. One school, however, adopted a more directive stance.

"... a girl who's got an interest in engineering, for example, we'd be able to put in touch with a former pupil who's now working as an engineer who might be able to offer her work experience. But even if she couldn't she could certainly be a sounding board for ideas not just in her applications for work or in her applications for university but beyond, hopefully their careers would move in parallel so there would always be an older mentor in that sort of area." (Head Teacher, Girls' School C)

"I had the parents phone me in the first week of term about their daughter who had just started in Oxford doing medicine and ... she had an absolute disastrous first week and she was just going to drop out and said well 'what can you do?' I got on the phone to another old girl from the school who was doing medicine at the same place but two years ahead and she was around with a cake later in the day and it all settled down. Those parents are always saying to us how anxious they are when they're daughters go on to university all the support structures that they've known disappear and, of course, what we can say to an extent, and what we'd like to say to a much greater extent, is that they carry this support structure with them and that's really what the dream is. We want to carry that support structure through university and into their careers at the point at which a woman stops to have her first baby and wonders what's going to happen to her career while she's away and those sorts of things. It really helps to talk to people who have been through over that journey themselves and we've got a wealth of support out there if we can harness it well and target it properly to the girls who need particular support at particular times..." (Head Teacher, Girls' School C)



To help stimulate a culture of expectation and aspiration

All schools interviewed invited visiting speakers, often of very high national profile and sometimes, but by no means always, alumni, to speak to pupils. Typically, speakers would address issues related to their profession, often providing insight into topical questions of public interest of relevance to academic study. While the content of speeches would at times be discussed in related classroom activity, the purpose of inviting visiting speakers was not pedagogic. Rather, it provided pupils with insights into the world views of individuals occupying elite positions, privileging them as insiders with whom confidences could be shared. Such events were often attended by a relatively small number of interested pupils (dozens rather than hundreds) and often followed by a dinner or lunch to which interested pupils would be invited. Consequently, excellent opportunities were presented to build social connections and explore career aspirations in detail. Visiting speakers, in particular, were seen to reinforce thoughtful, serious approaches to considering relevant questions rooted in public life.

“Our girls very definitely, when you show them photographs of alumnae and then show them photographs of them here at school, their school photograph which we have, they can empathise with that person and they can put themselves in that person’s position and they can think: ‘well you know she was like me 20 years ago and if she’s gone on to do something like this, then I can go on to do something like this’. I think that most girls feel that they are this little family, this grouping and that community is still out there when we have the old girls coming back. You know they are the same sorts of girls and our girls perceive it in that way so us being able to put them in touch with somebody who is doing what they dreamt of doing now, they know they have the same aspirations...” (Director of Studies, Girls’ School C)

“...we also run a thing called the [XXXX] Society and that happens every Wednesday and it’s open to sixth formers, and we have really notable people from all walks of life, so we’ll have MPs, media people, bankers, people who have done something very, very interesting and many of them quite well known, will come back and give a lecture. Again our sixth formers get to know the life of someone who has been very successful and perhaps what it took for them to get there, what luck they had, what bad luck they had, things in life where we can’t always predict where we’re going... so they get a nice insight into the grown up world into professions and achievements and that happens every week... so we get at least 25 of these a year...” (Teacher on the value of high profile visiting speakers meeting with pupils, Boys’ School E)

“I think being in London is a huge advantage for a lot of these things particularly for our Friday lecture programme... it’s so much easier to have someone pop in from working somewhere in [location of the school]. They come in about 11:20am they do a 40 minute lecture until 12pm and then they have lunch with five or six senior girls, so they then have a chance to discuss things in detail.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School B)

“Interviewer 1: Is the thinking [in inviting external speakers to talk to pupils] in part to help create a culture of expectations, a culture of learning?”

Interviewee 2: Oh yes, definitely, and that’s what we’re about really... keep thinking about learning and keep learning. So we have a huge programme and variety... There is hardly a day goes by without someone here giving a very interesting talk...” (Director of Studies, Boys’ School F)

Employer engagement is not typically used to increase pupil motivation or underpin classroom learning directly

Generally speaking, the independent schools that were visited did not use visiting speakers, or any other employer engagement activity, to support classroom learning or, as is common, in the state sector to increase pupil motivation by demonstrating the workplace relevance of education. Pupil motivation was overwhelmingly described, across all schools visited, as very high at all ages.

“I think it’s certainly true that the girls know what they need to achieve academically in order to go on to do what they wish to go on to do so there is a motivational factor there, there is an element of I need so many A stars in order to be able to be to get into this university to do this and they know that from quite a young age and so they... I think they learn that from each other...I think they learn it from parents and former pupils but I think they know it because the sixth formers are very involved with ... the girls lower down and there’s an element that they are aware of that but the reality is actually that the girls from the day that they come into the school and probably longer before that are driven to be successful as well which is not to do with us, it’s to do with them, they come to us like that.” (Head Teacher, Girls’ School C)

As discussed below, most, if not all, pupils in all the schools visited, were expected to take part in a number of core employer engagement activities (work experience and careers fairs notably), while others (for example, enterprise competitions) were seen as optional. Pressed on where such activities sat within the curriculum, interviewees tended to describe them as central to school life experienced by pupils, but not as elements of the academic curriculum.

“I think [employer engagement activities sit within] the core part of what we provide but [are] not seen as an academic... it’s definitely outside the classroom and outside the academic curriculum but part of the school’s curriculum.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School B)

“... when we think of the curriculum, certainly see [employer engagement activities] as perfectly valid interventions in their curriculum... what the school should provide. We wouldn’t deal with it going out of our way so we would very much encourage the person... we spend a lot of time doing the extracurricular stuff we really really believe in it... Do we discuss careers within the academic work? Not really.” (Teacher, Boys’ School E)

4 How do they engage with employers?

The respondents had a clear understanding of the importance and impact that employer engagement had upon the career choices and destinations of their pupils. Consequently, they endeavoured to build and sustain productive working relationships with employers which increased the schools' pools of professional expertise on which they drew when organising the range of engagement activities.

One of the most common methods used to engage employers is alumni networks. Interviewees saw former pupils as valuable conduits into the world of work; details were held on alumni databases. These were used to track the career pathways of alumni for the purpose of identifying work placements aligned with the career aspirations of their pupils. Parental, and teacher/governor networks were used to make contact with employers. In particular, they were used to support pupils who encountered difficulties in securing their own work placements. Employers were also engaged directly by pupils who would negotiate and arrange their own work placements. This approach proved effective in most cases and was encouraged by the schools' staff. One school in this study made limited use of intermediaries such as Connexions. However, this practice was atypical and was not used in any of the other five schools. Engagement also occurred in the form of direct approaches from employers to the schools, several of whom commented upon the constant attention they had received from high profile investment banks.

Alumni networks

All six independent schools made effective use of alumni networks to engage employers with their pupils. Schools maintained alumni directories and databases and networked primarily for fundraising, but also used these networks to provide work experience placements of value to current pupils. Desk research showed that many semi-autonomous alumni groups responded to school requests for alumni to offer engagement activities. As the website of Winchester College asks "Perhaps you are a barrister and can help a current Wykehamist discover something about chamber life? Maybe you work in the media or arts industry and wouldn't mind advising on how to get into the business? Alternatively, do you work in the city or practice as an architect and would be prepared to be shadowed by a student?"⁶ The utility of alumni connections was increased when current pupils were interested in studying at the same Russell Group universities as alumni before entry into a narrow range of professions (medicine, law, military service, business/accountancy).

"one of the obvious advantages that independent schools must have and you must find this in almost every survey you do of a school that there is always this point of reference from boys and girls that have been at the school... who have become successful... ok, they're asked to come back... and they'll feedback into the system... so we're very, very lucky... so I think this is what one of the aspects of privilege is, not about how much money you've got but how you have this contact..." (Teacher, Boys' School E)

"It's such a good network through the old boys' association, and the parents; we have sent out a blanket request and people will say yes I'm happy to help." (Registrar, Boys' School F)

Two schools described as very effective their approach to target alumnae ten years after leaving school to come back to school to talk about progression through university and then into the job market.

"... every two years we have what's called a careers convention... and in the last three I have invited in as many old girls who have left 10 years previously because before that when I had the old girls in... I know it's a terrible expression, those in the old girls association were about 70 and they were tottering in

⁶ Winchester College Old Wykehamist Society, <http://wysoc.com/>, accessed on 2 December, 2011

[Laughs] ‘when I was a girl!’ and my heart would sink and I went ‘oh dear’...when I was a girl, well it’s a bit different now so... I put it ten years on, because I reckon late twenties they can relate to them still and not so out of it...also for example I had a couple who did natural sciences who were both working as management consultants, somebody who does accountancy I mean all sorts of things... various medics... one medic was a GP and she was talking all about all the issues in medicine and now she was just coming off her second period maternity leave and what possibilities there were for her combining that career with raising children and so on...” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School A)

“For the past couple of years I’ve used [alumnae who left the school in 2001] ...for coming back in and running career workshops with the girls in the morning [of our annual careers day]. So we’ve got I think eight different career workshops running this year, the girls will choose a couple of those and then we get all the visitors together in a preliminary session ...and what we’re really trying to show them... ‘What A levels these girls took?’ ‘Where are they ten years after leaving school?’ ‘How did they get there?’ and ‘what sorts of things are they involved in their daily lives?’ Trying to bring it to life a bit really, for the girls, with ex- students I suppose who they can identify with... so I think that’s quite useful. Sometimes when you’re bringing in people to talk about their careers they’re so much older that the girls don’t really listen because they can’t really imagine how they ever got from where they are now to where these people seem to be so we try to get them... as they’re progressing.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School B)

Respondents from two different schools described the development of online systems to help connect current and former pupils.

“...we’re currently developing... an online sort of community among our alumnae [which consists of] all of those who would like to offer mentoring or work experience or talk informally. We have an online sort of attachment to that as well and we’re developing a system which we can manage them online... but actually it has the potential to expand to current parents and former parents, in fact the wider and local business network as well the community, so it doesn’t have to be limited to alumnae. The system that we’re developing now will allow anyone to sort of register at least their interests and we can come to them and say yes ‘would you mind coming in? [Currently], in terms of those who are interested in offering careers opportunities probably about five or six hundred [on the database]. We are in touch with 3,000 alumnae actively. There’s 4000 out there so I’m working on finding the remaining 1,000 [laughs] of that. Of that, we’ve been really overwhelmed by the response from the alumnae census to offer support on any level and we would like to utilize that and manage that.” (Development Director, Girls’ School C)

“I think actually we’re very near the point where we can set the wheels in motion on that, it’s really just the right software to be sort of practical about it and it’s... a service we want to offer to alumnae as well particularly former pupils. Current pupils will be able to log into this system and view a whole list of those who have... not names, just ages and career areas and that our old former pupils have said ‘yes I’d like to be a mentor’ and they can just send them a very brief...through this system and that’s why...we’re very near, it’s hopefully a little bit more than a gleam now we’re actually being quite near to launch it for the next academic year.” (Development Director, Girls’ School C)

Parental networks

Parental networks are another commonly used strategy for sourcing contacts for pupil work placements. In some schools parents were directly asked if they would be willing to provide a placement for a pupil, but in others it was more informal, with pupils (or their parents) speaking to friends’ parents about the possibility of work placements. Interviewees stated that these networks were drawn upon extensively and were particularly valued as a means of sourcing placements which were especially difficult to find, such as in dentistry.

“I think my record parent once took 5 little girls with him, a barrister, I think he deserved some sort of special medal, but we ask them to share if we haven’t... for some reason their parents can’t take them, and frankly I’ve been very surprised by the range of activities, I mean I’ve had children, for example, going into an operating theatre, accompanying a consultant which I was frankly utterly amazed. ...a couple of law firms ...are very good, for example, [Large Legal Company X] ... one of the partners is a parent here and she’s been hugely supportive...” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School A – on parental support for workplace visits)

“...the big difference at this school is that in general if the girls really want to go into a particular experience they can find somebody... either through us or...they help each other: ‘my dad’s a...’ and they do it that way a lot.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School C)

“...one of the things I do on work experience, it sounds terrible... I do encourage them to do what I call ‘Parent swap’... you know your parent is... I don’t know... a doctor, your parent is a lawyer...” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School A)

“The boys usually get work experience by relying on their family networks. Say for example a boy’s looking for work experience, they might know one of the other boys in the house, or their father happens to be a director of a certain company and potentially through the social contact that those children might have with each other in the holidays they will gain an opportunity to go and work in that business environment...” (Teacher, Boys’ School D)

Respondents described strategic approaches to collecting information on parents and the support they might make available to pupils.

“My letter is just about to go out to parents at the end of term and one thing I’m reminding them is that we are always interested in hearing from people who are willing to offer work experience in their particular field or come and talk about what they do or mentor somebody whatever.” (Head Teacher, Girls’ School C)

“I’ve got a database of parent contacts and yes, they are very, very valuable ... the database [including 150 to 200 contacts] ... is obviously really a very valuable resource. ...It’s mainly parent contacts but could be other things like old girls I’ve had on there...former members of staff if they’re married to X,Y, Z, I mean I sound like a bit of, I suppose, a spider building a network and trying to hold on to it.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School A)

Parental contacts were also described as providing effective routes into employers which would be able to provide work experience of interest to pupils.

“I try and find a way and usually I can find it through a parent contact. If you just call from outside, who are you going to speak to? They don’t have a full time work experience organiser so it’s usually personal.” (Head of Careers, Girls’ School A)

Governors’ and Teachers’ networks

Governors’ networks were also used to engage employers in providing work experience placements. School governors occupy positions of influence in places of direct relevance to the career aspirations of pupils and can be called upon to provide access to desirable workplace experiences.

“one of our governors professor X is the... what’s the grandest thing you can be... not chair... senior... at an NHS foundation trust... we had a meeting and wanted [pupils] to go in and do some work [experience], and they did quite a lot of work and they produced presentations to the board, to the CEO, in the foyer of [large London hospital] ..all

their photographs, all their recommendations and they have to do that and they have to stand up and give a speech about it. Now that is putting them on the spot, it may be a bit uncomfortable, they have to do the work...but it's going to resonate far more if they do that than if they shadowed [someone]... I want to produce more things like that." (Teacher, Boys' School E)

"...I think us, staff themselves... myself and other colleagues have you know, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, have offered work experience placements. I mean I've been at the height of cheekiness with my relatives, I've just sort of said 'here's my number you can give me a work experience placement.'" (Teacher 1, Girls' School C)

"We wouldn't necessarily know [which of our alumni would be able to offer work experience in a barristers' chambers]. We wouldn't have that list... or maybe not until recently. It would be based upon, maybe, somebody who's been here teaching twenty years who knows somebody who's become a barrister..." (Teacher, Boys' School D)

Pupil approaches

Some pupils actively sourced their own placements often using school arranged activities, such as visiting speakers, to approach employers and, negotiate placements.

"I think also our girls are very astute at taking advantage of opportunities. When we took them down to the 'Breaking the Mould' competition... one of our girls negotiated her own sort of media work experience with the person who shot our video..." (Head of Economics, Girls' School C)

"One very ambitious boy, but also a very thoughtful boy, failed in his initial application to Oxford, knew that he wanted to apply to Oxford and Cambridge the following year, and in that period in his final year he actively sought through the web for really significant internships... the Social Market Foundation... that sort of thing is what he was interested in, and he had no guidance from anybody on that." (Teacher, Boys' School D)

"...we have a lot of societies in the school, so, for something like the medics, we have a medical society... the girls will learn from each other and use each others' contacts and we have a lot of speakers coming into the school for lots of reasons... whether it's to societies... careers events ... [or] a Friday lecture in the senior school... a whole variety of different people who come in to speak... the girls are very canny they use any opportunity of somebody coming into the building to say 'oh, you're working with so and so and I'd really love to get involved with this or that...'" (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

"[Pupils] will also ... reply to the [work experience] schemes that exist within medical and legal professions... a number of companies have schemes you just have to get in there early enough... so I think if they're struggling they'll find parents to pull some strings somewhere but I think there's a lot going through the schemes that they operate" (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

Through intermediaries

The use of intermediaries, or brokerage organisations, to engage employers was rare as the schools had alternative channels of engagement which saved them time and money. One school did engage with intermediaries, but on a modest scale.

"...we have a personal advisor from Connexions who comes in once a week, I've used Connexions, if you like, but I've used them as a consultancy service..." (Head of Careers, Girls' School A)

Direct approaches from employers

A number of interviewees, particularly from girls' schools, reported that direct, unsolicited approaches from employers, typically of national or international prominence, were common. In contacting schools, employers would invite participation in activities raising awareness about careers in their sector.

"...the head of staff recruitment at [Large IT Company X] in fact an old girl who has got in touch with us and said actually we don't get many... there's not much of this sort of thing going on... you know would you like to arrange something? Or in fact I think she first got in touch because she was going to arrange with a whole range of different schools to come and she thought we should be part of that day. Sometimes an investment bank approaches us wanting to come and talk about their internship scheme... I said that's lovely come and do that but could you do something on CV writing with our senior girls and then while they were here I said, oh by the way what about having some girls [on work experience placements]... You know why not talk to the younger ones because actually if you want to get investment banking on the horizon you need to be talking to girls who are much younger [before] they've chosen their A-Levels. So we were looking at things which they could do for us and we could do for them, they were always looking for very bright women most of these companies so they're very keen to... in fact I'm always being approached by investment banks because they have various programmes that they run and are... I wish they would but they won't... but I wish they would so something slightly more co-ordinated that I didn't have to keep... they get in touch with you as if they as if you had never heard of an investment bank...well actually you're the third investment bank this week!" (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

"...I must admit maybe because of the reputation of the school and maybe because of where we are... it goes in fashions, for example, at one stage all the banks were absolute mad keen to make contact with a girls school because somebody woke up to the fact that there weren't many women doing banking...and I've had contacts with Goldman Sachs, I had a big contact with Merrill Lynch..." (Head of Careers, Girls' School A)

"...a lot of the parents... and a lot of [alumnae] are often getting in touch and what I would tend to do is... a work experience opportunity I will convert their email into something very quickly just bash it out to the relevant year group..." (Head of Careers, Girls' School B)

5 How does employer engagement sit within the independent school experience?

Is it an extra-curricular activity?

Employer engagement undertaken by high performing independent schools is recognisably similar to that undertaken in many state schools. The types of activity undertaken are largely the same. There is also the same expectation that key activities will be undertaken by all, or the overwhelming majority of, pupils in a year group (work experience, workplace visits, careers activities) even if events take place outside school hours. Such activities are, however, rarely integrated into the curriculum with specified learning outcomes. Consequently, they can be best presented as co-curricular activities. As in the state sector, a minority of activities, notably involvement in enterprise competitions, are seen very much as extra-curricular activities which pupils opt into. Schools varied in their approach to the visiting speakers' programme, some giving pupils discretion over attendance, others being more prescriptive. In the one example of mentoring encountered during interviews, the pupil had been selected (in response to specific social characteristics and difficulties experienced) to be involved.

The delivery of work experience

As in the state sector, the most widespread employer engagement activity undertaken by high performing independent schools is work experience. Interviews highlighted a distinct approach to the delivery of work experience within the independent sector. Compared to that typically delivered in the state sector, work experience undertaken within independent schools is:

- Much more strongly linked to HE admissions
- Often undertaken in the summer either directly after GCSE exams or between lower and upper sixth, rather than during the school year
- Placements are more often sourced by pupils themselves (if following up on initial school identification of willing employers) only after career counselling and prior employer engagement activity to clarify career aspirations
- Following placements, pupils routinely discuss their placement experience with school staff (often the head of careers)
- Placements are not always inspected for Health and Safety
- Placement are not curriculum linked, but are strongly linked to pupil career aspirations
- Written references are often secured, for use within UCAS Personal Statements, after the placement

The Independent schools visited universally saw high value in work experience and expected pupils to reflect upon and gain from their placement.

“The key thing... I think, is what have I learnt?” (Head of Careers on how pupils were expected to reflect on their work experience placements, Girls' School A)

“A year or so ago we contacted [alumni] and sent an email to around 650 [alumni] asking whether or not they’ll be prepared to offer work experience to current [pupils]. We had a good healthy response, we have as you see there, I don’t know how many, probably somewhere in the region of 50 opportunities that boys can sign up to. The system we employ, we let the boys come in look to see which area of work experience interests them, they then go through to talk to one of the ladies [within the careers team], will give them the information and they then will make contact with the employer. We then step back from it, the problem we have is if we get involved we are then, I suspect, liable, we’re not absolutely sure about our position regarding... it is the pupil who will contact the employer directly, they will arrange a time to meet and then they will have an interview and they will then arrange then the dates outside of term time when they are available for work experience. We’ve had quite a few boys who have had more than one work experience opportunity from that board, we’re limited to the lower sixth because we only have a limited number there so only the lower sixth are eligible, others... obviously use family contacts to gain work experience ...” (Head of Careers, Boys’ School F)

School type and the age at which work experience is undertaken

The Taskforce YouGov survey sample of young adults allows us to segment by school type attended: non-selective, grammar or independent school between the ages of 14-16 and 16-19. The survey also asked the age(s) at which work experience was undertaken. As the tables below show nearly twice as many pupils at non-selective state schools undertook work experience at 14-16 than at independent school pupils, but at 16-19 participation levels reverse and nearly three times as many former pupils of independent schools undertook work experience at the older age compared to their non-selective state school peers.

Table 3: Age at which work experience was undertaken segmented by school type

Work experience undertaken at 14-16			
	Yes	No	N
Non-selective	82%	18%	591
Grammar	70%	30%	219
Independent	45%	55%	122
Total	695	237	932
P=0.000			
Work experience undertaken at 16-19			
	Yes	No	N
Non-selective	18%	82%	686
Grammar	32%	68%	152
Independent	52%	48%	90
Total	217	711	928
P = 0.000			

Note: Statistical analysis allows for comparisons between the proportions of young people who did and who did not undertake work experience across three different school types. A common method for identifying statistical significance – demonstrating that the variation in experience is highly unlikely to be due to chance – describes variations as a P value. Where the P value is less than 0.1% (that is, there is only a 10% chance of the variation occurring due to chance) the result is seen, by statisticians, to be statistically significant. Such statistically significant variations are given in bold in the opposite table.

An iterative, strategic approach to employer engagement

The best practice observed in the independent sector mirrored that in the state sector in providing pupils with opportunities initially to clarify career choices, followed by experiences to confirm decision-making and support successful progression.

Figure 1: Example practice: one girls' school

Careers continuum						
Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Young Engineers Day (A)	Take Your Daughter to Work Day (A)	Girls in the Arts Day (A)	Girls in the City Day (A)	Work Experience (A)	Young Enterprise (O)	Work Experience (O)
				Independent Schools Careers Service: Expanding Horizons courses (A)*		
					Contacts Breakfast (attended by alumni, parents and employers) (S/O)	
			Careers Convention (A)			
			Employer Mentoring (S)			
Work Place Visits (A/O)						

(A)= all pupils in the age cohort would be expected to take part

(O) = the activity was presented to pupils as an optional choice

(S)= only selected pupils would be expected to take part in the activity

* = careers advice delivered by external provider, often including psychometric testing

It is not possible within the scope of this review to determine whether such effective practice is more, or less, common in the independent sector than in the state sector. However, polling of young adults aged 19-24 suggests that, for whatever reason in a number of key areas, the former pupils of independent schools assessed their school-mediated employer engagement to have been of greater use to them after leaving secondary education.

6 Outcomes of school-mediated employer engagement: young adults

Variation in three outcome areas by school type

The Taskforce YouGov survey sample of young adults allows us to segment by school type attended: non-selective comprehensive, grammar or independent school. The table below presents the views of pupils attending one type of school throughout their education from 14 to 19. Individuals may have changed school at different points between the ages of 14 and 19 but did not change school type.

The table shows young adults who previously attended independent schools typically feel that their experiences of employer engagement (in which they took part in comparable proportions to state school pupils) were of greater value to them in deciding on a career, getting a job after university and getting into university. This does not, however, hold for all outcome areas or activity areas. Those where the variation is statistically significant are indicated in bold. In each column, the first number represents the total who undertook the activity who felt that it was a lot of, or a little, help for each of the three outcomes. The second figure (in parenthesis) isolates the proportion of the whole sample who agreed that the activity helped them a lot.

Table 4: Perceived usefulness of four employer engagement activities across three outcome areas segmented by school type attended

Usefulness of work experience in...				
	deciding on career	getting a job after education	getting into HE	N⁷
Non-selective*	54% (16%)	27% (9%)	25% (6%)	441-470
Grammar*	59% (19%)	31% (10%)	28% (11%)	94-105
Independent*	81% (36%)	47% (15%)	42% (13%)	53-67
P-Value	0.000	0.036	0.032	
Usefulness of careers advice from employers in...				
	deciding on career	getting a job after education	getting into HE	N
Non-selective*	58% (10%)	39% (7%)	37% (10%)	223-232
Grammar*	62% (12%)	38% (7%)	46% (7%)	55-58
Independent*	81% (28%)	56% (13%)	37% (17%)	40-47
P-Value	0.003	0.389	0.122	
Usefulness of enterprise activity in...				
	deciding on career	getting a job after education	getting into HE	N
Non-selective*	37% (5%)	29% (5%)	33% (5%)	101-156
Grammar*	48% (6%)	36% (4%)	35% (5%)	29-48
Independent*	46% (3%)	33% (7%)	57% (8%)	12-30
P-Value	0.633	0.881	0.110	
Usefulness of mentoring activity in...				
	deciding on career	getting a job	getting into HE	N
Non-selective*	70% (11%)	49% (11%)	50% (10%)	84-89
Grammar*	85% (30%)	61% (17%)	56% (39%)	18-20
Independent*	92% (17%)	67% (8%)	69% (8%)	12-13
P-Value	0.054	0.636	0.006	

*(including a sixth form or college)

The table suggests that former independent school pupils get significant additional value from their work experience, employer-provided careers provision, and business mentoring compared to their peers attending state schools. The differential impact in terms of career decision making is especially notable. It should be noted that in the interviews undertaken with six high performing schools, only one example of business mentoring was found, suggesting that it may be more common practice in lower achieving independent schools

⁷ The numbers presented represent the range of individual respondents answering each of the three questions

7 Conclusions

“Social networks are very important, very interesting, the way external involvement creates a culture of expectation, a culture of achievement, a learning environment.” (Teacher, Boys’ School D)

This research sought to answer three questions concerning the engagement of high performing independent schools with employers:

- To what extent do independent schools engage with employers?
- Why do they do it?
- How do they go about it?

Data gathered through desk research and fieldwork have identified that high performing independent schools, and independent schools more generally, undertake considerable engagement with employers and to an extent comparable with that currently undertaken within the maintained sector. The range of activities offered is similar to those found within maintained schools, particularly with regard to pupil work experience, careers advice, and enterprise activities; although other forms of employer engagement are less common, for example curriculum projects, mentoring, Industry Days. The use of visiting speakers appears to be more prevalent in the independent sector than in the maintained sector based on this sample, although within the maintained sector ‘classroom visitors’ who provide specific subject input may not always be regarded as ‘visiting speakers’. The important point to be made is that whilst there is widespread evidence of employer engagement within the maintained and independent sectors, the focus of employer engagement activity often differs markedly between them.

This brings us to the second research question. The high performing independent schools in this sample see employer engagement as a means of identifying, confirming and supporting higher education aspirations and subsequent, related career trajectories. Engaging employers provides access to careers advice, high quality work experience, and to communities of practice where pupils can meet and engage with successful professionals, many of whom have been pupils at their own schools. Through these means, pupils are provided with insights, role models, encouragement and experiences designed to support a successful navigation of the transition from education into ultimate, successful employment.

The emphasis on successful HE admission is fore-grounded in the types of employer engagement in which the independent sectors participate. This is understandable given that the overwhelming majority of pupils studying in the sixth forms of high performing independent schools aspire to gain entrance to higher education, and, if not to Oxbridge colleges, then certainly to Russell Group institutions. The situation pertaining within the maintained sector differs in that not all post 16 pupils will be seeking access to higher education; currently around 47% of post-16 pupils progress to higher education. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the comparative tables, see Table 3, reveal that work experience is more common at pre-16 within the maintained sector than in the independent sector since pre-16 pupils are closer to decision points in terms of progression to a range of options, rather than to a pre-determined path, such options include: apprenticeship; other further education; higher education; employment, or to an uncertain destiny. For pupils in independent schools future destinations are largely unproblematic and, therefore, work experience needs to be more aligned with the process of university admission and ultimate career destination and, it has to be said, to parental expectation.

The evidence from the fieldwork overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that employer engagement within the independent sector is designed to enable pupils to succeed in terms of admission to their university of choice by providing them with relevant experiences within their chosen field of study and eventual career destination. This is strongly supported by dedicated school staff who assist pupils in identifying appropriate placements and ensuring that such placements are highlighted within UCAS personal statements. In addition, other forms of employer engagement, for example visiting speakers, reinforce the careers dimension of employer engagement by providing pupils with role models of successful men and women from the professional and business world.

Some of the findings also point to a desire on the part of independent school staff to ensure that employer engagement enables pupils develop wider 'employability' skills, such as team-working, communication and presentation skills, good citizenship, resilience. These are seen as helpful in terms of university admission but also in developing a 'well-rounded' person capable of taking his or her place in the world, which is also likely to include employment within the professions.

Within the maintained sector work experience has long been viewed not just as a preparation for employment but as serving a multiplicity of purposes, including: supporting core curriculum subjects; personal, social, health and economic education; careers education and guidance; opportunities to develop generic transversal skills.⁸ It might be inferred from the research evidence that employer engagement within the independent sector does not serve such a multiplicity of purposes, but rather that it is clearly aligned to higher education admissions and intended career destinations. It could be argued that the multiplicity of extra-curricular activities offered to pupils in independent schools, especially to those who board, provide for the development of such wider skills and that this is not an intended outcome of work experience. However, some curriculum development opportunities may be lost by failing to make connections between learning in and outside school. The evidence suggests that such linkages were not being made.

In achievement of the aims espoused for work experience and careers activity, independent schools in this sample revealed a high degree of sophistication in terms of canvassing and securing highly relevant employer engagement (the third research question). A wide range of networks were used including: alumni databases; parents; governors; staff, including their partners; previous speakers and work experience hosts. Dedicated staff are in post to ensure that employer engagement is sustained and developed; social events for adults who contribute to the schools' efforts reinforce the importance of this commitment. Driven, in part, by fundraising imperatives, schools invest in maintaining connections with alumni and knowledge about their adult fortunes, in effect reducing the direct costs of enabling much employer engagement. Former pupils appear bound by attachment to their old school to contribute to the success of current pupils. There are clearly few problems in identifying and securing high quality environments and experiences for pupils who are seeking access to elite institutions and professions. The central location of some schools in the sample (London) resulted in approaches from companies to schools rather than the other way; this provides companies with some pre-recruitment intelligence.

Independent schools in this sample are close knit, well-networked communities, some of them are quite small compared to the size of a large maintained comprehensive school, where several hundred placements could be required in any year. The range of placements being sought is narrow, mainly in the professions, in comparison with a maintained school which has to source a very wide range of placements for pupils with widely different motivations, ambitions and abilities, but certainly including some of the types of placements sought and secured by independent schools.

The structural mechanisms in place at independent schools make it easier and less problematic for their pupils to progress. Networks are in place supported by personalised careers guidance which reinforce cultures of aspiration and achievement and which are also congruent with parental demands. Schools can draw upon substantial pools of expertise to garner placements and speakers and in so doing expose their pupils to communities of practice, role models and experiences that will enhance university applications and subsequent entry to elite professions.

⁸ Huddleston, P. (2011) 'Pupil Work Experience' in Huddleston, P. and Stanley, J. *Work-Related Teaching and Learning: A guide for teachers and practitioners*. Abingdon: Routledge.

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