

**Teacher and pupil voices on employer engagement:  
Insights from three focus groups and semi-structured  
interviews with five English secondary schools (2011-12)**

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# About the Education and Employers Taskforce

[www.educationandemployers.org](http://www.educationandemployers.org)

The Education and Employers Taskforce is a UK charity created in 2009 to ensure that every state school and colleges has an effective partnership with employers to support young people. As well as undertaking research into the impact and delivery of employer engagement in education, the Taskforce manages innovative programmes to enable schools and colleges to connect efficiently and effectively with employers including [www.inspiringthefuture.org](http://www.inspiringthefuture.org). The Taskforce works in close partnership with the leading national bodies representing education leaders, teaching staff and employers/employees.

## About this report

Over recent years, the Education and Employers Taskforce has run focus groups with teaching staff and young people to explore the questions relating to whether different types of employer engagement can be expected to support different outcomes for different groups of young people. These questions were central to five structured interviews with teaching staff at English secondary schools undertaken over the summer of 2012. Insights from the interviews and focus groups informed, in particular, the CfBT 2014 publication: *Employer Engagement in Engagement*.

The report authors wish to express their deep thanks to all those young people, teachers who took part in interviews and focus groups contributing thoughts and perspectives, and to partner organisations which helped to arrange the sessions.

## Research into employer engagement in education

The Education and Employers Taskforce provides a free online resource bringing together high quality materials investigating the impact and delivery of employer engagement in education. Resources include a library of key articles and reports, many of which have been summarised to pick out key findings, papers and videos from the Taskforce research conferences and free London seminar series as well as Taskforce publications and a regular e-bulletin of relevant research announcements. The library has attracted usage from across the world including researchers at Harvard, the OECD, Japan, Australia and Denmark.

[www.educationandemployers.org/research](http://www.educationandemployers.org/research)

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## Focus Group One: with Key Stage 4 teachers

The Focus Group took place in the south west of England in March 2011 and involved fourteen individuals from thirteen different schools and colleges including two special schools, one grammar schools and ten community schools serving pupils aged 11-16 or 11-19. All secondary schools in the county were contacted and all wishing to take part were represented. Participants included eight head teachers, deputy heads or senior school leaders and six staff with primary responsibilities related to careers or work-related learning. The primary purpose of the Group was to explore the nature of any links perceived between employer engagement and its variations and pupil attainment at Key Stage 4.

### *Employer engagement activities best supporting the achievement of learners by prior achievement*

Asked to segment the pupil population by achievement at the end of Key Stage 3, participants selected from a list of 12 possible activities those which they felt most – and least – impacted on pupil achievement.

#### Greatest impact

Lowest performing 25%	Mid performing 50%	Highest performing 25%
Literacy support (eg reading partners)	Work experience (10 days or less)	STEM and Language champions
Work-related learning qualifications	Careers advice (eg, careers fairs)	Careers advice (eg, careers fairs)
Mentoring	Classroom presentations	Enterprise events (one-day)
Extended work experience (11 days or more)	Enterprise events (one-day)	Work experience (10 days or less)

#### Least impact

Lowest performing 25%	Mid performing 50%	Highest performing 25%
Classroom presentations	Workplace visits	Literacy support (eg reading partners)
Workplace visits	Numeracy support (eg number partners)	Numeracy support (eg number partners)
Enterprise events (long duration)		Work-related learning qualifications
STEM and Language champions		Extended work experience (11 days or more)
		Workplace visits
		Classroom presentations

In all of the schools represented, 100% of pupils across the three attainment groups would be expected to take part in at least some activities involving employers/employee volunteers. Pressed on what proportion of pupils in each of the three groups might be expected to improve their attainment as a result of such employer engagement, averaged out the teachers estimated that:

- 92.5% of the lowest achieving 25% (at end of key stage 3) pupils would experience an attainment boost
- 90% of the mid performing 50% (at end of key stage 3) pupils would experience an attainment boost

- 77.5% of the highest performing 25% (at end of key stage 3) pupils would experience an attainment boost

Thinking about pupils on the borderline of achieving 5 GCSES A\*-C, the participants felt that on average that up to 20% of pupils might experience such a boost in attainment that they would secure the threshold level of qualification.

*Teacher explanations for why employer engagement has an impact on attainment*

In discussions, participants returned to a number of key points:

- Pupils often gained something new and distinct from their engagements with employers
- They were highly attentive to the views expressed by employers on the value of education and qualifications
- Employer engagement impacts on achievement primarily through increasing pupil motivation
- The greatest impact can be expected among middle and lower level achievers – as high achievers are commonly highly motivated already

*Why it has an impact – middle achieving 50%*

“Makes them realise what they need to achieve and that motivates them”

“Not every young person benefits from employer engagement. Depends on the quality. Probably 80% is good enough to have a positive impact.”

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

“My gut feeling – if work experience went, my results would drop”

“We said that 20% wouldn’t have an impact – 10% on either side, the high achievers and those who are getting disengaged”

*Why it has an impact – lower achieving 25%*

“it’s a really important part of a personalised learning programme and that’s what makes the difference”

“None of my kids will get 5 GCSEs, but they will achieve something because of this and that’s really important” (Special School head teacher)

“Getting them into a work-related learning environment makes them question what they need to do to get there”

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

“90-95% of my students would not have got a qualification without employer engagement. They come to us after being kicked out of 5 different schools. We’re the last stop before the PRU. We do extended placements linked to qualifications. They won’t get 5 GCSEs, but this is the difference between them achieving nothing and beginning to achieve. They’ve spent all their lives fighting with teachers. The thing about the employers is that they are not teachers and the workplace isn’t school. They don’t have to put up a front in front of their mates. Employers can be tough with them.

They can say 'you're sacked'. They fail time after time in class. This gives them the chance to achieve. To feel good about themselves." (Special School teacher)

"Where both parents don't work, never worked, work experience, especially extended work experience can have a huge impact"

*Why it has an impact – higher achieving 25%*

"It's unusual for them. They rarely get to do stuff outside of the classroom."

"It gives them a sense of reality."

"A lot of our high achieving students come from families where no one works. Employers tell us that they think the impact is especially significant where this is the case."

Pupils "have no idea about professional careers."

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

"There are those who are hugely motivated already. It doesn't really mean much to them in terms of attainment, but is helpful elsewhere, especially in making the right decisions on what to study at 16"

"It makes a difference between how well they do at GCSE. Some will drop off a little, but most of them you can be pretty sure will get their 5 or more GCSEs. You can see the difference though in the number of A\* they get. The measure of 3 or more A\*s"

"There are some whose motivation dips, maybe two or three in a class of thirty and it can be the difference for them in getting 5 GCSEs"

*General comments*

"A lot of kids go get jobs out of their work experience. Of 220 last year, I know 3 got apprentices, 7 got part-time jobs"

"Where employers endorse particular routes, it really work. We have a compact with our FE college and [local aviation company]. They know that if they pass the BTEC engineering, they'll progress to a Foundation Degree technician course with guaranteed way into [local aviation company] technician jobs. Come early twenties, they'll be earning 32 grand. Motivation is sky high."

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

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

"If you raise aspiration, automatically you increase motivation"

"They say we didn't even know that job existed"

"They begin to feel in control of their own pathway. They understand what they need to do to achieve"

“It makes the curriculum more relevant. They do get to apply their learning”

“My kids learn that you don’t need to be unemployed when you leave school” (Special school teacher)

## **Focus Group Two: with Key Stage 5 teachers**

The Focus Group took place in the north west of England in March 2011 and involved eleven individuals from nine different schools and colleges including one special school, one Further Education College, one Sixth Form College and six community schools serving pupils 11-19. All secondary schools in the county were contacted and all wishing to take part were represented. Participants included seven head teachers, deputy heads or senior school leaders and four staff with responsibilities which included aspects of careers, enterprise education or work-related learning. The primary purpose of the Group was to explore the nature of any links perceived between employer engagement and its variations and pupil progression on to a higher education course of choice (thinking of highest 25% achievers at end of Key Stage 4) and/or avoidance of becoming NEET (thinking of lowest 25% achievers at end of Key Stage 4).

### *Employer engagement activities likely to reduce incidence of becoming NEET*

- Work-related learning qualifications
- Careers advice
- Extended work experience (more than 10 days)
- Workplace visits

In discussions, participants returned to a number of key points:

- Employer engagement formed an essential element in ensuring lower achievers at Key Stage 4 avoid becoming NEET at post-16
- Young people interact with employers in very different ways to school staff
- Young people gain both in terms of enhanced motivation to achieve but also through improved contextualisation of learning

### *Why it makes a difference – avoidance of NEET*

“Every one of them would experience at least one of the activities. It varies on the extent though. It can be very intense. In Hair and Beauty, the hair salon is designed to be a real work environment”

“It makes learning more relevant. They want practical, hands on experience. If you stripped away all the work-related learning, they wouldn’t turn up”

“There’s only so many times that you can build a wall and knock it down in the classroom”

“It’s essential. It’s vital to them getting qualifications”

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

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

“Only when they go into the workplace, that when they get it”

“They are more likely to listen [to an employer]. It’s not your teacher droning on and on”

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

“It must be integrated with teaching approaches. Otherwise, it’s wasting money. You are relying on the employers”

“The ones going into employment we get on long term work experience placements. It’s a lot about getting the employer comfortable” (Special School)

“We need to prepare the employers to work well with the kids” (Special School)

“Long term engagement with an employer backed up by the college – that works” (Special School)

*Employer engagement to support access to university course of choice*

- Workplace visits
- Careers advice
- Enterprise projects (long duration)
- Work experience (more than 10 days)

In discussions, participants returned to a number of key points:

- Young people often gained insight into careers related to courses of study through their employer engagement
- Such insight was likely to improve insight into university study choices and demonstrate enthusiasm and deep interest to admissions officers helping applicants to stand out
- For some HE courses, relevant work experience is essential within applications
- Employer engagement can lead to relevant part-time employment and access to Apprenticeships

*Why it makes a difference – accessing higher education*

“80% have some employer involvement, to some extent. People coming into class, workplace visits, work experience, trips out” (general agreement)

“Those who have completed employer engagement may have more background knowledge to base their focus and ambitions on”

“For vocational courses [in HE] It supports them in their application”

“If they can relate their experiences to their vision and ambitions for the future, and show the skills they’ve got out of it” [employer engagement is an asset in applications]

Employer engagement “distinguishes between A\* (top) students. Employer engagement will give competitive advantage”

“Universities do distinguish [between candidates] on the basis of work experience. In subjects like medicine, law and veterinary science, all the grades [of applying students] are more or less the same. It can be what sets them apart”

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

Employer engagement “consolidates on the teaching. People in the workforce reinforce what you say at school”

“It helps them to apply their knowledge”



“They either really, really like it, or decide a career or job wasn’t for them. That’s a positive. There’s not much in between”

“Their experience depends on how the workplace treats them”

“We had a pupil who was very active in the Young Enterprise. That led to a part time job and the employer was able to guide him”

“It helps them make more informed choices about where to go to. I would expect it helps determine whether they will stay on their course through university. I expect that’s why admissions officers ask for it”

“It helps them to think strategically”

“A small number get sponsorships for university”

“In Engineering, the majority of firms prefer to take youngsters on at 16 and then take the through university. They want to grow their own”

“Kids who do their work experience before 16 are at a huge advantage in being taken on if the employer offers apprenticeships”

### **Focus Group Three: with young people (Year 11) completing a work-related learning qualification**

Sixteen Year 11 pupils enrolled on the young apprenticeship (YAP) in performing arts. Pupils were from three different schools, studying the programme one day a week at a Further Education College based in the Midlands. The group met on their last teaching day of their programme. They were accompanied by their tutor who spoke rarely during the session.

#### **Experience of the YAP**

Pupils were overwhelmingly sad to see the end of the programme which they had clearly hugely enjoyed. Pupils especially valued:

- The applied learning style – learning through doing – notably, in creating their own performance pieces
- The breadth of the programme – covering backstage roles as well as performance
- The wider communication skills the programme fostered
- The opportunity to be taught alongside pupils from other schools
- Being treated more like an adult in the college setting

“If school was like this, I’d love it” (General agreement)

“It’s been a great experience. A really good course. I’m so thankful I chose it and got in.”

“We’ve learned so many skills, communication, engaging audiences, everything”

*Work experience.* All had undertaken 1-2 weeks work experience placements in creative industries through work experience organised by their schools. The placements involved a range of employment areas, all of which were seen as very relevant to the YAP. The remaining work experience requirements were undertaken through a range of workplace visits, pupil productions and part-time working.

“I did work experience in a nursing home. I did some drama for the old people. I had to engage that audience. Because of that experience, I know that I could do it. I know that I could act.”

*Achievement.* Pupils were divided on whether they applied themselves more on the YAP than on their other courses. All agreed that they had worked hard on the YAP – with half feeling that they worked much harder on the YAP compared to their other courses of study. They enjoyed it and often it didn’t feel like work. The fact that the BTEC L2 Performing Arts was considered to be equivalent of 4 GCSEs made many feel that there was more at stake in achieving well on the YAP compared to individual GCSEs. Many agreed that the experience of the YAP had made related subjects, notably English, more interesting and they had worked harder on those subjects as a consequence. There was widespread recognition that attainment across all subjects of study would be important to their futures. Many felt that they worked harder on learning content which they had missed in the day when they were at the college – one-to-one catch up sessions were school teaching staff were praised. There was concern that the BTEC L2 awarded within the YAP would not be recognised by employers or other educational institutions as the equivalent of 4 GCSEs.

Pupils felt that they had developed communication skills over the course. They were very aware that they needed to give space to others to contribute and listen actively to those contributions. In doing so, and in articulate and confident spoken communication, they demonstrated high level employability skills in areas of communication and team working.

*YAP in comparison to other L2 courses of study.* Many of the pupils also undertook GCSE Drama and all those argued that the YAP offered a significantly better learning experience. The YAP was seen as much more challenging than the GCSE. Pupils especially valued the manner in which the YAP provided a broader educational approach, especially in teaching back stage skills and offering a historical perspective on the performing arts.

“There is no comparison [between the YAP] and GCSE Drama. This [the YAP] is so much better. The GCSE has no depth. It’s monotonous.”

“You don’t get much feedback on the GCSE. You get great feedback [on the YAP] and you need that to learn, to get better.”

“With the GCSE, you don’t really get a great sense of understanding. It’s just a syllabus. It’s not related to the real world at all. The [YAP] is a far more professional environment.”

Some concern about the credibility of the BTEC as it is a relatively new qualification was noted.

### **YAP as a pathway into the creative industries**

At least three-quarters of pupils stated that their career aspirations lay in the creative industries at the end of the course. Two had definitely decided that they would be unlikely to pursue careers in the industries, but would intend to stay involved in performance.

*Learning pathways.* All pupils intended to stay in education after Year 11, with a majority planning to study courses related to their YAP either at Sixth Form College or FEC. The BTEC in Performing Arts was the most popular L3 option.

*Understanding the industry.* Pupils were convinced that the programme had given them a realistic insight into the industry, but would have welcomed more content on how to access paid employment.

“You get a lot of insight into real life situations.”

“It [the YAP] does give you a realistic perspective on what the industry is actually like. What the nature of the industry is, and we learnt that in class as well as when we were speaking to people or doing work experience.”

“What I learnt about the profession is that you must never give up. People in the industry told us that. You keep going and trying.”

“That casting agents are often looking for just a right person, so you could go for lots and lots of things, but if you don’t fit, you’re probably not going to get it. So, it can be better to be able to do a range of different roles.”

“I would have liked to have had more on how to get actual work in the industry.” (General agreement)

*Access to entry level paid employment in the creative industries.* Three of the sixteen pupils (19%) had been offered paid employment in the performance arts as a result of their participation on the YAP:

- One pupil had met a local producer through a student production undertaken within the YAP and had been promised employment over the forthcoming summer

- One had undertaken work experience at a theatre, had been encouraged to consider gaining more experience in lighting and had arranged with the lighting technician to return to undertake unpaid voluntary work with a view to paid work being offered after she had reached age 16
- One had taught drama in a children's nursery as part of her work experience placement and had subsequently been offered regular paid employment (two days a week) to begin after completion of Year 11

## Structured interviews with five secondary schools: edited comments

### School A: Coeducational, 11-19 comprehensive school, West Midlands

May 2012

**Interviewees:** Work Related Learning Manager & Head Teacher

Work experience: accessing placements

*..we physically have to create these work placements. And on the one hand people are saying, "Yes, it needs to be more quality work experience in year 12." Hello?! Let's talk –let's see if the employers feel the same way about that because they might say they do but some are solicitors, doctors, architects – some of the very significant, difficult, interesting professions – almost impossible to get students in; you might get one in for two weeks.*

*And if we're talking about, here I think we've got 180, here in the Sixth form – for me to get 180 students straight into those sort of professions - solicitors, lawyers, architects, civil engineers – it's not going to happen. I've got every will to do that but the people that I need to talk to are not geared up for that: they're not ready for work experience a lot of companies.*

*Statistically, 35% of our students go to their previous primary school to do their work experience, generally. A high proportion. And not 35% of our students are going to be teachers!*

Impact of work experience

*Certainly, with regard to work experience, ours do it towards the end of year 10. They used to do it at the beginning of year 11. It is to a certain extent to aid the maturation that can tend to occur between the summer of year 10 and the beginning of year 11: the penny-dropping moment of understanding what the point of all this education stuff is, really.*

*I think work experience can help quite a number of students to see the point of school.*

*And I think that is particularly pertinent for exactly the kind of children who haven't been motivated to work as hard as they ought to. The others have got it already: they see the point, because they want to get good grades because they want to get to university and that actually, the ones who don't work as hard as they should, who might very well end up leaving school and going into work straight away who need to understand that, "I've got to develop some success. I've got to get some grades under my belt."*

*And for them, some children will often think that when I go into the real world, I will be on time, and I will dress the way I'm supposed to dress and I will do what I'm asked to do, because then there's a proper point to it; at school, it doesn't matter. I think we say to them, "Actually, the things that you don't do that you should do are bad habits, and you won't break those bad habits just by going to work; if you're the sort of person who takes a day off for a cold, or is constantly late for school, within about a week of the novelty of being at work, you'll be doing those things again, unless you break the habit, and so the experience – work experience can help – it helps the kids to rub shoulders with a lot of people who know those messages and know the quite swift justice in average workplace for being continuously late or having bad attendance at work.*

*When we say, "You won't get away with this at work," they think that we're telling them some kind of story*

*So, I think it's a 'penny-dropping moment' for those people really. I think with – I mean, since we've had [my colleague] working constantly on being able to develop placement links, we've been able to get the more elusive, more professional placements slightly more easily; they're still not that easy to get hold of.*

*But that level of motivation that then comes for those students who want to go into law or medicine or whatever, those sorts of doors are so difficult to open, aren't they? And of course, our children, not a very high proportion of our youngsters, I would say, maybe, somewhere between 5 and 10% of our youngsters would have parents who are in professions. We hardly have any where their parents are doctors. We might have some that would work as legal secretaries; I don't think we've got any lawyers – we certainly haven't got any barristers. We have some teachers, but the doors that you can open for your own children, I mean, they're hard enough, aren't they? But it's harder for our kids to open those professional doors and so, you know, [my colleague] would be able to say whether, "Because of you being in a position whether it's easier for you to push those doors open for them."*

*And they trust what we give them is what they're going to get. So there's that - you build up that trust in people. But it is – because I was saying before a lot of - we don't do a lot of bespoke placements for students in work experience: they find their own placement – it's part of finding a job, that's what we do with them, because we haven't got that accessibility to a 1000 employers who will take students: we don't have that. We have a possibility of about five or six hundred we've done in the past, so we use that as a database.*

*But a lot of the times a student comes in and says, "We've got a job at a solicitor's." I say, "Well, how have you found it?" It's usually, "Mum works there" or "It's somebody's friend", so the great placements are perpetuated by those people who work in those great placements.*

*If you're from a [inaudible word] – standing family and you don't know anybody who works in the solicitors, you're not going to get anyone who works in the solicitors because you're never going to have that opportunity to open that door, and even I can't open all those doors.*

*I knew a girl who went to her local doctors' to see if she could work – you've clearly had this before – only wanted to work in admin and they said, "Oh no: data protection. We can't have you working here." And I was quite certain that she was being batted back with a piece of vaguely official sounding nonsense but, you know, if we've got less social mobility than we had previously, which is what we're being told in the media, really, that we're going backwards rather than forwards, actually some kind of process to equalise the opportunities across the classes for access to professional work experience is key.*

*And the only way you'll get that is if we have a menu to choose from, of "this solicitor will take 3 students" so we will put 3 students, not from a background that is used to solicitors, who probably – and quite – they've got to be fairly academic...*

*...because I don't want to put somebody who's not academic into a profession where they go, 'Duh'. But that's the only way you're going to get that transition, that mobility of students into experiencing work experience that is not just what they see on the telly or what mum and dad can provide, or uncle can provide locally. So, the girl who can only get a hairdressers – has to be stereotypical – but the girl who can only get a hairdresser's work experience, who might be clever enough to get into a solicitor's, if mummy and daddy don't know a solicitor's, it's not going to happen and that is a shame, that is a real shame, because that door: she could do really great there, but that door won't be opened because we don't have the employers locally or in Birmingham knocking on my door saying, "Can I take some*

*of your students?" We have to knock on their doors many, many, many times to see if we can just squeeze somebody in: one person!*

## School B

London: Co-educational, 11-19 comprehensive school, June 2012

**Interviewees:** Key Stage 4 manager & Governor (with interests in work-related provision)

Impact of careers talks high on borderline pupils

*.. there's a big careers fair in November ...[in a neighbouring area]. And I've booked already 45 places for that, we'd like to book up to a 120 but it's just a case of getting the students there is a concern and what we'd like to do is, if we can get as many of the Year 11s there as possible that's exactly what we'd like to do but if we can't what we'd be focusing on is, we'd be focusing on taking students from the middle band, the middle academic band.*

*The severely borderline students...and those below, because we know those who attain higher probably have got a clearer idea of where they want to go and what they want to do... and it's those in the middle and in the lower groups, really who need a lot more guidance.*

Business mentoring: gifted and talents

*She was a gifted and talented student. ...the head of the business mentoring scheme for gifted and talented students usually try and ensure that the gifted and talented... 'cause what had been happening was that the gifted and talented students were not meeting their predictions all the time. Once they've been identified as gifted and talented...they were part of the business mentoring scheme and found that the results actually, more results were beating their predictions because they had been stimulated by the businesses and the people who had come in were seeing them once a fortnight giving 40 minutes at 8 'o clock in the morning or something like that...once a fortnight were keeping them on...it worked very well for the school who are still doing it.*

Job shadowing: gifted and talented

*I've worked on work shadowing projects before and what I found was that with the...above average to gifted and talented pupils work shadowing worked very well because they're more likely to have higher aspirations they choose work experience projects which possibly suit their vocational estimation and their abilities at the age of 15 or 16 and the problem that I've seen is that they go in and because they're not that well prepared enough for it and because the structure of their observations are not specifically planned they don't get so much out of it but the scheme that I worked on with the school had a diary, it had questions for them to ask and there was feedback to help them to articulate their experiences and to help them, if you like to be slightly more vocationally mature when they had finished the project...so I think if you don't mind me saying I think a tiered system of say, job shadowing for the more able, gifted and talented are good work experience scheme for the middle ground and some form of 'supported structure' for those who are...likely...need more support.*

Job shadowing: lower achievers

*Do lower achievers take part in job shadowing? I saw that the lower achieving ones had... in the scheme that we devised the one's who were struggling were having to struggle with the overall concept of the interaction required between... they didn't always have the confidence to deal with the interaction required...because the job shadowing scheme it seems to me works if you have questions... you've got an idea of the environment you're going into so you have questions about the environment you have questions about the job, and you have questions to the person that you're shadowing so you get a three dimensional idea of the experience you've got and I think some of the lower ability children*



had difficulty in getting that contact and therefore were less confident in dealing with the adults [Inaudible] more interactive process...they were better if they were working in a working environment which was 9 to 5 had specific jobs they were given by the office administrator and the office administrator was able to involve them in the contacts of the department and the job they were actually doing but because...they lacked some of the confidence of the more able young people...they weren't as able to... they were better off in a more structured working environment providing that the person who they were working with was aware of the structure of the school asking them to provide...and so...you know, that requires a different type of preparation feedback in my view.

You prepare them with a work diary, and the work diary was structured to prepare them for a 2 week experience...I can't remember whether it was a 1 or 2 week experience and there was three elements that we were asking them to research if you like, it's a bit like a research thing, okay, when you go there its asking questions about the company, so what sort of macro place is the company and what sort of economic setting is it in? What's its business, what's it selling? etc etc etc.

The pupils are aged 15 to 16... the job shadowing is once a year...they do it instead of work experience.

#### Impacts of job shadowing/work experience

I think it was a 2 week period, yeah...you then ask them to ask questions about the department that they are working in, so you get the macro climate of the company you're operating in, you get the micro climate of the department that they are actually working in. Because what we found is these children were actually more often than not...either working with relations or they had a much stronger idea of the type of wider, higher aspirations they had like 'I'm choosing to work with my uncle because he is a barrister and he's allowed me to come with him for 2 weeks to shadow him or I'm working in a personnel department because I want to work with people, you know, I've always wanted to ... so they, they ...could conceivably work with a vicar for two weeks, or whatever and then you get the microclimate of the department that they are working in...and then the third element is the person who they're actually shadowing, talk them into what they're doing, what qualifications did they get, what experience did they get, did they go to university, and basically you structure a little booklet that you give to them... and guide them through the type of questions that they might want to ask these people, ...and at the end of the day when they get back to school you have 30mins of feedback with an expert ...guidance person, or with your tutor or whoever it is and they help you to articulate the experience that you've had. What we found with work experience was, or, what I found if I interviewed a bright young person who has done 2 or 3 weeks of work experience and I said 'how did it go?' 'oh, it was boring, I want to be a solicitor so I worked for the local solicitors and all I did was boring photocopying all the time because they said it was too secret for me to be involved in so I was working with office manager, God it was boring' and I certainly realise that someone's ambitions has been hit firmly on the head because that's not what being a solicitor is really about at all, but that's what they thought they were going into, you see? And no one really prepared them for the experience of just working in an office, a boring office – so you need to structure it more. But what I actually found, ... the people that we were working with actually preferred a more intelligent and interactive involvement with the young people and gave more. The more you give to them the more they give back to you, and I thought that model worked well.

#### Work experience: delivery to optimise impact

[The impact of work experience] depends on how well they've been prepared...if this was just a one off thing with no preparation and no feedback, like for example, if this was the type of school that I've worked with in the past who says 'oh, bloody hell, we've got to get them off to work experience or do

*it in the last two weeks of the summer term and then they go off and then they come back again beginning of September, they've forgotten what's happened, there's no feedback and in that case none of those [positive] outcomes will happen but if its contextualised within the curriculum, then all of these things will happen. Do you see what I mean?*

#### Employer engagement and careers awareness

*...interestingly, when you have a look at 'aspirations', the students here have incredibly high aspirations and you have students coming up to you going 'oh, no I want to do this for my options because I want to be a lawyer'...and you look at the boy and you think, oh my God...you haven't got a hope in hell...however the aspirations are great and when we sat with the student council this week, and the student council interviewed the...cabinet member for education for the borough this week and he asked them what they wanted to be 'I want to be a forensic scientist etc' and all these sorts of things come out...something engineering it was, so they've got great aspirations but they've got no idea how to get there...*

*It's like a conversation I had yesterday with a boy: 'how long do you think it takes to become a lawyer?' 'Oh, well I can become a lawyer quite easily, can't I?' 'Well no, you need to do 4 years at university and then you've got to do another 2'... '6 years? I'm not gonna do that', 'well, what else do you like?' 'well I quite fancy car mechanics' so its only when you have the conversation with them, I don't tell them they can't do it, you then get somewhere a little bit more realistic.*

*You can also tell them about the legal executive apprenticeship you can get into at the age of 16 or 17 which actually requires basic level 2 level 3 qualifications and you can be a... and if you get through those you can start qualifying as a solicitor through the profession...*

#### Employer engagement and career realism

*it's about showing people, well actually this aspiration that you've got to be a lawyer is not necessarily unrealistic, whether or not you're going to tell the people at Oxford and Cambridge that I'm the person to study Law or Jurisprudence is one thing but it's not unrealistic and I...you're talking to someone who doesn't believe that any aspiration at the age of 15 or 16 is unrealistic it's just a question of how you frame it and understanding that frame, and the problem is that we're working with such a manic pressurised way just to get the standards right that we're actually...we just haven't got the time to do everything.*

**School C: Co-educational, 11-16 comprehensive school, East of England, June 2012**

Interviewee: Head Teacher

Employability skills and contextualisation of learning

*...there are other skills here that aren't mentioned around [employability skills], around dealing with a broader variety of people dealing with different people in different situations and adapting your behaviours in order to do that so to us they're quite important for some of our students particularly those at the lower ability end who struggle with interpersonal relationships with strangers. So, it can serve a very useful purpose but again that's only...we have a number of students who come back more confident in speaking to people which is part of the purpose of it as far as I'm concerned. Do they come back with it? Yes, certainly, I wouldn't say we've got anyone whose come back with a grand vision that its changed my attitude towards education, but certainly with subjects students can find a little bit...away from their reality, maths would be a good example that students sometimes struggle to contextualise I think for certain of our students who have gone on placement it has supported them coming back and understanding that numeracy is an important skill.*

[Interviewer: You've observed this?]

*Yes, absolutely. I think the maths department will say that. We've had students who have come back and been able to link what they're doing with a certain situational circumstance that they've come across in their work experience placement so yes we've certainly had examples of that... and the other thing that we've had from it is that we've also had from a number of our students it makes them realise what they don't want to do because if they've done a work placement in a location that they chose they come away thinking 'do you know what? That's not for me!' ...which I think is as important as finding out that something is for you actually... but its certainly... a number of them come back with a clearer view of probably the breadth of some employers as well which I think is important that when they think of a building company, they think of brickies, they don't think of the office work, the supply, they don't think of all of those different aspects of that company and I think it's useful with work experience that they can see, you know, it's the same as a school, they think of the school as teachers, even though every day they see teaching assistants, office staff, canteen staff, site manager staff technicians, science technicians they see that all but they see a teacher and I think work experience is sometimes very good at letting them see the breadth of employment that maybe available within one employer that they just haven't thought about.*

Young people listen to employers: careers

*I think that 'trusted' part is a really important word because I've had staff say to me that the students will not believe them that the quality and the way in which you present yourself, but also the way you put out written information about yourself they just don't get that its important when an employer comes in and says if you gave me this, this is the bin, this is where it would go I think it does hit home ...so I do think we've had police, and the RAF, we have had a number of employers come in and do one-to-one interviews with students as well to improve their skills in interviewing and they are quite ruthless, and we tell them to be ruthless because if someone turns up and they're rubbish, because if you tell them sitting there chewing gum, with a cigarette behind their ear, not that that reflects my students but you know I'm just giving you an extreme example and they come in thinking that's okay if somebody doesn't pull them up short very quickly they are really impacting on their future career goals so I think that 'trusted' thing, I think it's that external...that somebody external to the school is really, really important because they do trust what they say. They trust what we say about history...well you're a teacher, you know, you're not an employer or an employee in that sense.*

## Modern Foreign Languages

*... Oh, I forgot we did a languages for businesses morning as well. We had some linguists come in and do a languages for business morning with students where the core focus was languages as a degree subject and languages as a door opener into our very very broad variety of careers. We did that just before options evening as an impetus for the children to seriously consider languages when they were making their options choices.*

*... that was for year 9 and that went down very well... what I mean by that is the current situation...in my current year 11 I've got my percentage of children taking a modern language is zero. There weren't even enough children to opt for it in year 9. In my current year 10 its 30% in the current year 9 who start their GCSEs in September over 50% of the cohort are taking at least one language ...so I'm not putting that solely down to that morning because we've done a hard push as the school because of how much we value languages...but our language uptake well its increased enormously over the last couple of years and part of that has been student understanding of...how a language can be relevant to broadening both their horizons and their career opportunities in the future.*

## Work experience: access to 'top end' placements

*... I have to say our gifted and talented are probably the most likely to be self-sourcing of their placement...because their parents ... it's not always the case, but a number of our students who are in our top set will be the ones whose parents have got links into universities, into barristers, into various places and more supportive of their students in self sourcing. It's not always the case, but there's always a bit of a correlation there so I mean our problem is we do struggle to get ...if it's not self-sourcing we do struggle to get placements at the very top end of employment...*

*Top end? I mean barristers chambers, solicitors, you know, medicine is a slightly different matter because there's all sorts of issues around medicine...we can get a lot of placements in shops on shop floors, at the supermarket things like that, they're not easy to get hold of but reasonably easy to get hold of...but barristers, your solicitors, your...engineering is okay, we've got that covered because [local employer] take students routinely but your architects and I'm not picking out those careers because they're special or anything else but careers that require a university education qualification then in many instances a post university, professional qualification as well. They can be the hardest to source.*

*... Law firm ones? I've got a couple that are self-sourced this year with family members who are taking them into their barrister set for a couple of weeks but I offer that service if their kids don't want it because my background is law so most of my friends are barristers and solicitors but that tends to be, again, the more confident student because they're all solicitors in London so I've got several, I've a couple of students who are going to London for 2 weeks with their work experience but it has residence issues its got all sorts of issues around work experience, but my God what a fantastic work experience so whereas, here you tend to get really small solicitors firms we don't really have barristers at all we've got a few places at the town hall with the student who wants to be a solicitor actually and the school and she's working at a town hall and they're offering her a lot of support around that 'cause she wants to go into politics and things like that as well, so you can get some really good placements...I don't think I've got anyone doing dentistry this year. They are the least developed links that we've got.*

## Work experience and disengaged pupils

*We try to manage all of them because otherwise it just doesn't work anyway and we don't want a placement go wrong so we then lose the employer or the child gets disillusioned and we lose the child as well. I think the key thing is you have to be very careful to make sure that the students who arrive*

*at the lower end of the ability stage or your most disillusioned don't end up with the poorest placements because I think there's the potential for them to end up with the less high quality either because they're not self-sourcing or because they haven't returned their forms in on time or this, that and the other and they end up going going down down down down and they end up with a placement but not one that they particularly value, so I think you've got to be very careful that... I'm not saying they need to go to the top of the list...but I think you have to be very careful that they don't end up on the bottom of the list through nobody on purpose putting them to the bottom but through a number of circumstances sometimes you can end up with a student and think 'oh, God, why on earth did we allocate that person that placement?' because its obvious they're going to think that's all they're good for.*

*...So, I think there is that danger...it doesn't happen very often. I've had a couple of instances where when you look back on it, in hindsight and think well that was a really poor choice, and usually we work that out in advance and we managed to sort them out with a placement elsewhere but I think that can be a danger that they end up in an unskilled placement and the impression goes out that oh well only the bright kids get the good placements...*

Work experience and access to part-time work

*We do get a number that pick up holiday work or Saturday jobs because they've had a really positive work experience and put in a really good work ethic or Christmas jobs you know when employers are peaking towards Christmas and then they see the benefits because they love that and some of them get money out of it...sometimes... they don't obviously get paid...but, for example, we've had some that have been on the removals and obviously people might sometimes tip very generously for a good removal company so when the kids can come back and say their share of... a little bit of tips and things they're very happy with that.*

Enterprise competitions

*...certainly I think with the number of activities so the entrepreneurial stuff I still can't remember what its called that we do in year 8 I think...it benefits a skills set rather than benefitting academically, so it was as much about working with people that you've never worked with before, working as a group and coming to agreed decision-making, learning the importance of compromise, learning that without team-work a task will not be completed successfully. So, and I think that skills set is an important skills set wherever you sit on the ability range so it's not focused on ability range in particular. That maybe something that we need to look at is how we focus activities more for different types of students.*

**School D: Coeducational, 11-19 comprehensive school, West Midlands, May 2012**

**Interviewees:** Enterprise/Work Experience Manager & 14 – 19 Manager

Career networking

*We did this thing called 'speed dating' for years. One firm – a law firm in Birmingham – sent in seven people and they had eight to a table and every five minutes we whizzed round and they changed. Now, believe it or not, a law firm only employs about half lawyers – and we had their security guard in, their librarian in, their IT manager in, their HR manager in, their finance guy, their transport guy – a whole range of different jobs who happened to be all under one roof working in a law firm.*

*And, you know, ...they love that sort of thing. And then they realise that actually, "I can't just become a policeman, I've got to get this, that and t'other... I can't just become a motor mechanic or an engineer.*

Business mentoring: gifted and talented and disadvantaged girls

*Right, well, there are two angles of mentoring: one is which [my colleague] has been running, which is we've called academic mentoring and we carefully wrote to the year 10s. Those that would get most benefit from it, who had some sort of career plan, but didn't know how to formulate it. These were seven of our kids, of which who've all stood the pace; they've sent in seven of [local law firm's] mentors, by the way, so it's a one-to-one.*

*It's gone on all this year, culminates in July and maybe even run on next year as well, and we've selected kids who have an idea of a plan, but are not quite sure. So, one of the lads wants to become a politician, I think, doesn't he? So it doesn't have to be law: it can be anything. And they've put the reference, the monitoring reference pack together, and working with the kids about how they should put a CV together; what colleges they should be looking at; if they want to do law, as an example, what exams do you need and what are the colleges you should go to. So they're looking at practical steps to achieving their ambitions, aspirations.*

*That's point one. Point two is where the other firm took some disadvantaged girls who were not being very assertive, and their training team talked to them about how they can boost their own esteem, boost their own ego, and that worked reasonably well. I say 'reasonably well': we didn't really – it's outcomes we're not very good on. I think that's fair on anything that happens in schools; it's very difficult to get outcomes of a programme like that: you know, how much is that definitely achieved?*

Careers talks: aspiration

*...the young man who came to me after the [name of recent high profile business leader who spoke at the school] and wanted to change [his work experience choice] from what he was doing – which I forget what he was doing – he wanted to go work in business because he had been inspired by [the speaker]. ...this young lad, if he hadn't had been inspired by [the speaker], wouldn't have come and said, "I want to change my work experience."*

*I thought that was a really... I mean, you were there. He was inspirational.*

*You can say that as a result of one of the keynote speakers, you know, it does make people think about maybe what they want to do. It works the other way too: we've had Olympic athletes and they get thinking about different people.*

## Accessing speakers of national prominence

*We did the [pupil] fashion show as a result of [well known CEO of national retailer] coming down here. He was going on Question Time and wanted to say, "I've been to a school recently"; his PA was the partner of our then Deputy Head's brother and so we said, "Come here." He came down for an hour and stayed five!*

## Job shadowing

*We do it as a very one-off thing. Outside the mainstream, in the school holidays. So this is very informal stuff. We sometimes do job shadowing rather than work experience because some people can't give them work to do that will take them round to meetings.*

*Unfortunately, we have a lot of activities – well, it's fortunate, but it's unfortunate – where it takes students out of school, and it takes them out of core subjects and therefore the problem that we have really is that staff are concerned that students aren't getting through their academic programme, can't progress because they're being taken here-there-and-everywhere and there are university visits, residential: there's all sorts of things. So a two week block of work experience is a calendared event, so we know they can plan for it but bringing another [job shadowing activity] – where it would involve students being taken out of school – is a great idea, but as [my colleague] says, in practice, is impractical.*

## Career talks

*Assembly talks are a good motivator. I mean a lot of it is motivational talks – it's a good motivator in terms of getting the students to actually sit there, and there's one lad who asked the question, "I'm not very good at school like you wasn't [sic] very good at school, how do I get to be like you are?" This guy was a particularly motivating speaker, actually he's doing quite well for himself and he really really got the kids engaged, go wild. He changed attitudes. And he, definitely, I think, had an impact in terms of you know kids' aspirations – seeing actually if I can, if I actually choose to, this is what they call go rhino, you know, go out there grab it, and... Go rhino. Or be a sheep.*

## Work experience and career planning

*[In terms of] improved transitions from education to work, I think work experience is really good there. It helps them to decide what to do – more importantly it helps them decide what not to do.*

*So that is a - that's an improved careers decision, because some of them say, "Actually, you know, I never wanted – I thought I wanted to work in a primary school, but now I know I don't like kids, I don't want to do it at all." Some of them say that they definitely do want to do things as a result of going on work experience.*

## Access to employment

*Getting outcomes is difficult though, as an overview on that. It is hard to see how enterprise education and all this stuff helps, but it somehow - we can only tell you anecdotally that it does. People do get jobs out of it as well; [my colleague] mentioned that apprenticeships: we've had people in our construction yard – they get picked up as bricklayers by local brick – you know – by local employers. So it is very important.*

## Transitions from education

*[Interviewer: Of the work you do with older pupils, which would you say most effectively support their transition from education with you and into work or continuing study?]*

*Probably the careers lessons really: the delivery of bespoke programmes through the careers lessons and the progression event from my own personal experience because they can see a purpose and they can see a pathway, whatever their ability and needs are.*



## **School E: Co-educational, 11-16 comprehensive school, South of England, June 2012**

**Interviewees:** Head Teacher; Development Manager; Senior Head of School; & Staff member.

### Work experience

*So we have 40 who have gone out [this year on work experience] and many of those 40 have chosen have maybe organised their own or have looked very hard for something that they're interested in, because certainly in the past when we've sent out more students on work placements we've found that some of them have not really valued the experience because they've been placed in something that wasn't... they weren't hoping to aspire to, as it were...*

### Difficulty in accessing professional work experience placements

*It's a self-perpetuating cycle really you know it's difficult to find a wide variety perhaps of professions where, I mean, you know if you wanted to be a solicitor, or a vet or a medic or somebody who was in, you know, a high level professions they're not easy to come by.*

*And I think even with something like mechanics we used to have really good links with some of the mechanics but again due to paperwork, health and safety regulations it's been too costly for them to take on our students and so there are those factors as well that have led to this reduction in numbers I think.*

### Mock interviews and career talks: higher achievers

*We are having more, but again it's just difficult sourcing people. One activity that we have done is I think that's coming 'careers activities' where we've done mock interviews with some local employers and things like that. In terms of people coming and talking specifically about their career we've had a few this year and interestingly they've been largely associated with a group of more able students...*

*We're very, very good at supporting children with social, emotional and learning needs but data over the last few years shows that our levels of As and A stars or the rates of progression of the children who do enter from primary school well with high attainment has been not as good as we would wish. So a group of students who are vulnerable to underachievement ...are the most able students because they haven't been working in an environment hitherto that is being sufficiently made sufficient provision for them, so we recognise that we've identified the top 10% academically able using scores and other criteria ...and we have had in some careers speakers to talk about...in fact we did have a medic as it happens but she was talking about any health related profession and we've also had some careers talks this year for a slightly wider group - about 40% of the cohort, students who might not have been thinking about further education but who are now.*

### Extended work experience

*We've got a looked after child who is doing a hairdressing work experience every Wednesday, so on a bespoke basis. That's our current Year 11 on the wall there, that's a photograph of every child and that tells us how they're current qualifications matrix stacks up and we know exactly what they're likely to achieve, how they're getting on and what its going to take to inspire and motivate them and for some of our learners spending two days a week out doing a working at somewhere called an entertainment media centre where they're learning skills around sound technician and making films and we have to pay for these but we have, I have a budget of £80,000 which we spend on alternative education much of which is offsite and is to motivate and inspire and is working with adults other than teachers to help develop those employability skills. We just call it 'alternative provision'.*

## Enterprise talks

*The other thing I'd like to see more of is dragon den type of activity. We had ...a kind an entrepreneur who now has his own business and he is a very inspirational... speaker basically and talks about what you need to get on in life, your life skills etc and we did that for Year 8 and year 10 and many of them came away mesmerised by the speech and if we could do more of that, you .. getting real life business, entrepreneurs, dragons den type people in I think it's what we need, we need that kind of hook for our students, really.*

## Business mentoring

*[Business mentoring] has certainly taken place in our sister school has involved one to one mentoring with students who are at risk of need and my understanding is that those students have thrived much more in every aspect but very intensive one to one mentoring...they're a high number of hours and we're hoping to move into that. In terms of the alternative education where we've got a large number of youngsters who have the opportunity to do something off-site or on-site but different outside the conventional school curriculum I would say that alternative education has certainly changed attitudes towards the values of qualifications, improved enjoyment of education...*