

Towards an employer engagement toolkit

British teachers' perspectives on the comparative efficacy of work-related learning activities

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This study explores the perceptions of 390 secondary school staff about the value of 16 different work-related activities which are commonly undertaken by pupils between the ages 12 to 16. The aim of this report is to harness the insights of professionals well placed to have an informed view about the uses of different activities, which vary widely in intensity and familiarity within schooling, in order to increase the effective use of such resources within toolkits of interventions upon which practitioners can practically draw. The report asks whether it is possible to distinguish between activities which aim to improve the ultimate success of pupils in education and the labour market and so enable a more strategic approach to their use in schools and colleges.

Context

Over the last generation, UK governments of different political colours have in different ways encouraged, enabled and, at times, required state secondary schools and colleges to adopt teaching approaches and provide careers activities to better prepare young people for working life. These examples of work-related learning, ranging from the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative of the 1980s to the statutory requirement for work-related learning at Key Stage 4 and the Inspiration Agenda of the current decade have become mainstream elements of British educational experiences. However, the type of activities promoted through such initiatives have been inconsistently evaluated with relative little distinction, in research or policy, between activities and how young people can be expected to respond to them.

Advice for Practice

The typical young British adult leaves schooling having engaged with employers on fewer than two occasions over their secondary education (Kashefpakdel et al. 2016). The evidence presented in this paper, drawing on the perspectives of 390 British teaching staff with first hand experiences of a range of sixteen different work-related activities, many of which involve employer engagement, suggests that this is not enough. It is the informed view of surveyed teaching staff that:

- a) Pupils should take part in a variety of different work-related activities**
- b) Priority should be given to activities involving real-world workplace experience**
- c) As a minimum, pupils should take part in one or more activity over key stages 3 and 4 each related to:**
 - Sustained engagement with the working world. Activities include: Work experience, Community volunteering and Mentoring.
 - The development of career exploration and recruitment skills. Activities include: Career talks, Career fairs, Workplace visits, Mock Interviews and Job shadowing.
 - Skill development through Enterprise activities such as: One-day and Long form enterprise competitions.
- d) The needs of higher and lower achievers should be considered separately. Pupils should not be treated as a homogeneous group. They are different – notably by achievement level - and can be expected respond to different activities in different ways.**

Methodology

The methodology used to explore these questions is unusual. It effectively crowd sources the informed perspectives of hundreds of secondary school staff. The study presented respondents with a list of sixteen common activities, identified those which they are familiar and secured their views about the comparative value of such activities in achieving ten different objectives and with five different types of young people. Respondents were asked for their perspectives only on activities which took place in their schools.

Survey data was collected initially from the Pearson panel of teaching staff and members of 1,500 community of teaching staff then registered as users of the www.InspiringtheFuture.org programme. The full sample group was composed of staff members from UK education institutions including: non-selective state schools, selective state schools and independent schools. In all, 390 individuals with experience working with students at Key Stages 3 and 4 completed the survey.

Findings

The study uncovers a widespread belief that many of the activities are effective in achieving different outcomes and supporting different types of pupil. All sixteen activities were on at least one occasion listed among the five most effective activities selected by respondents in considering the different outcome areas and pupil types; 12 of the 16 activities were endorsed as being an effective means of achieving different outcomes, on one or more occasion, by 70% or more of respondents with experience of the intervention. In reviewing the findings, a number of insights emerge:

- a) Effective provision involves use of a range of different activities – with an emphasis on real-world experience (direct engagement with workplaces and employee volunteers)
- b) Different types of young people respond in different ways to different types of activity
- c) Different outcomes are better achieved by use of different activities

Looking specifically at the activities most valued by informed practitioners in securing different outcomes, responses can be clustered around three key themes: ***Sustained engagement with working the world; Career exploration and recruitment skills; Enterprise competitions.***

Turning to different pupil types, the study finds that different types of young people respond in different ways to different types of activity, with again responses clustering on this occasion around two themes: *Sustained engagement with working world; Career exploration and recruitment skills.*

It is important to note that the report offers no view on the extent to which activities can actually achieve objectives. In securing the view of professionals, however, in many areas it reveals very high levels of agreement that certain interventions should be regarded as effective (however that is understood), while in others it illustrates a high degree of professional uncertainty about what (if anything) works best among the different interventions available. The report also offers no opinion on the comprehensive value of the different activities discussed. They may well be used by schools' staff for objectives outside the remit of this paper.

Background to the report

You can download the full publication at: <http://www.educationandemployers.org/research/towards-an-employer-engagement-toolkit-british-teachers-perspectives-on-the-comparative-efficacy-of-work-related-learning-activities/>

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