

Introducing primary children to the world of work

Working paper by Dr Elnaz Kashefpakdel

1 BACKGROUND

In the [*Career Strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talent*](#) published by the Department for Education in December 2017, there was an acknowledgment of the role of primary schools in introducing children to the world of work and the government's plan to test and fund career activities that works. This is an important step in recognising the important role of early years in developing children's attitudes and aspirations. Looking at the past social mobility reports, from Coalition government's [*Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility*](#) (2011) to recent reports by the [*House of Lords Select Committee*](#) (2016) and the [*Social Mobility Commission*](#) (2017) there is scant reference to the vital role that primary schools play in raising aspirations, challenging stereotypes, broadening horizons and connecting children's learning to their future lives. We welcome the steps the current government and other bodies are taking to acknowledge and further research the significance of career related learning in the primary phase.

At Education and Employers, we have laid out evidence to show why working with primary schools children is vital and its impact on [*academic achievement*](#), challenging gender stereotyping and changing attitudes. [*Drawing the Future*](#), the landmark report published in January 2018, showed the role of gender when 7-11 year olds thought about their career aspirations, and how social capital and social media can have a large influence on who children want to become when they grow up. In the same survey, we asked children about how they heard about their dream job, and, perhaps alarmingly only a very small number indicated that they heard about this job through somebody coming to their school. This is one of the key messages coming out of the report. What are schools doing to help children hold less stereotypical views about their future and more realistic aspirations about the world beyond classroom walls? Despite a range of evidence outlining the importance of engagement with careers from an early age, it is clear that more needs to be done to fully understand the impact of careers learning in the primary phase.

In March 2018, Education and Employers in collaboration with National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and Times Education Supplement (TES) decided to launch a survey to find out how primary schools in the UK are responding to the career strategy and what primary schools are doing to develop pupils' understanding of the world of work and the challenges they face in doing so. The survey is aimed give an snapshot of how primary teachers feel about careers learning and highlight general themes related to its

delivery. The results will be used for further development and in-depth analysis of what works in primary what is the landscape of career learning looks like in early years of children's education.

2 CONTEXT

In a snapshot of practice offered in a 2010 review by Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA), as cited in the work of Mann, Kashefpakdel and Iredale (2017), the researchers explore the delivery of work-related learning 95 primary schools and the activities they have been engaged in via a number of semi-structured interviews with primary leaders. After finding relatively high levels of engagement with local communities the QCDA concluded that:

“Work-related learning is important in the primary context and primary schools see this area as relevant to their own aims and agendas. Primary schools view preparing children for their life in the workplace as a significant part of the school's role and, importantly, this means that the provision of learning activities that relate to the world of work is not currently felt by primary staff to be imposed from above; instead these activities fit into what primary schools are already trying to achieve”. (pp. 47-48)

QCDA findings, in addition to other work done in this area (Education and Employers 2017, Edcoms 2008), shed light on the twofold purposes of employer engagement in primary education. It can be understood as a tool for both enhancing pupil knowledge and skills and for providing new information and experiences to enhance understanding about jobs and careers commonly with an aim of influencing pupil attitudes and aspirations.

Career-related learning activities and employer engagement have been used historically by primary schools across three coherent areas of knowledge and skills development: supporting literacy, numeracy and the development of 'enterprise' and 'employability' skills. For instance, in a 2002 review by Torgerson et al. it is shown that in some circumstances reading partner schemes are positively associated with improved learning outcomes. In a more recent study led by Sara Miller (2012) a number of reading programmes are evaluated and the researchers found the programmes to be “effective in improving a number of reading outcomes for pupils”.

A 2014 Education and Employers survey of teaching staff in 28 primary schools with experience of participating in such a Number Partners programme (www.numberpartners.org) found that volunteering was most commonly undertaken to support pupils aged 8 to 10 with weekly sessions of 15-30 minutes typical. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants in the programme overwhelmingly valued it with two-thirds reporting that they felt that the scheme “very much” increased the pupils' chances of reaching individual numeracy targets. Respondents highlighted increased pupil confidence as the single most powerful observable effect of participation in such programmes suggesting a relationship with feelings of heightened self-efficacy – children believing that if they applied themselves, they would be able to resolve Mathematical problems – an attitude which is strongly related to numerical achievement (OECD 2013).

Enterprise competitions are also another familiar activity within primary provision and are a growth area with programmes such as the Fiver Challenge (www.fiverchallenge.org.uk) often drawing on local

volunteers bringing personal experiences of running an enterprise to act as competition coaches and judges. In a 2012 Dutch review (Huber et al. 2012) the effect of taking part in a programme wherein 11-year-old pupils ran their own enterprise over five non-consecutive full days was studied. Using a randomised control trial evaluation, the study found that when compared to a control group, participants significantly improved non-cognitive skills, and changed attitudes, across a range of areas: self-efficacy, drive for achievement, risk-taking, analysis, persistence and creativity.

Encountering the world of work while in primary can also become a resource to influence both the aspirations of young people through addressing the assumptions which shape attitudes and expectations.

Using data from the UK Millenium cohort, Flouri and Pangouria (2012) have, for example, looked at the career aspirations of children aged seven and found statistically significant associations between aspirational levels and pupil behaviour: looking at children from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with higher aspirations were less likely than comparable peers to act out (behave poorly) in class. US and Australian studies have found links, moreover, between the nature of occupational aspirations of primary school age pupils and later educational outcomes, with higher aspirations being positively related to higher levels of attainment and lower dropout rates (Knight 2015, 76; Gutman & Akerman 2008, iv, 16).

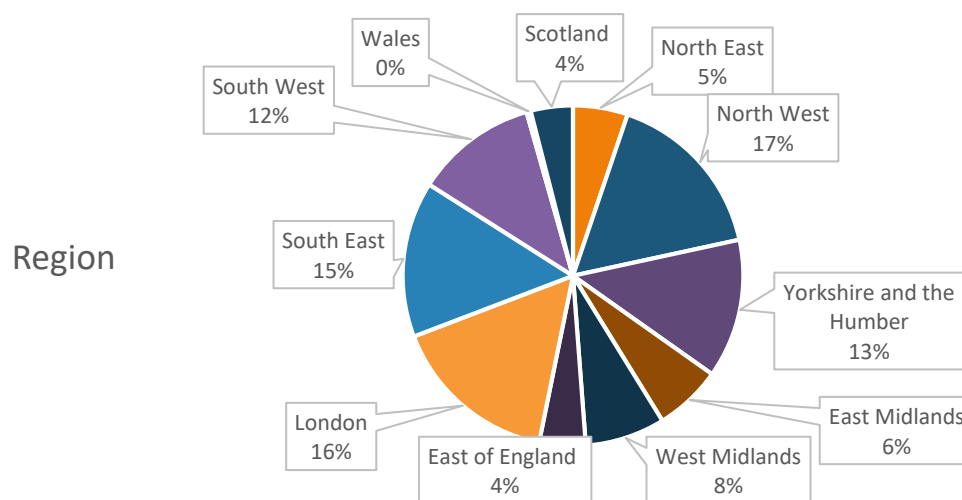
Studies have shown that aspirations are important, but also emphasised how the “early years of a child’s life are a key time in [their] formation and development” (Gutman & Akerman 2008). The attitudes formed by children shape their later behaviour in ways of ultimate economic importance. Looking at interest in science, for example, research led by Professor Louise Archer has shown that longitudinal tracking finds that students who do not express STEM related aspirations at age 10 are unlikely to develop STEM aspirations by the age of 14 – and are consequently less likely to pursue science subjects, achievement in which is related with higher adult earnings (Archer et al. 2013).

Introducing children to the world of work and learning about future jobs and careers in primary education can be seen, therefore, as a resource which can be harnessed in the development of knowledge and skills and applied as a mechanism to influence the attitudes and aspirations of pupils.

In the UK, while it has never been a legal obligation for primary schools to work with members of their local economic communities and connect to the world of work there has certainly been a long history of engagement supported by rare bouts of state-sponsored encouragement (Smith 1988; Saunders et al. 1995; RSA 1989, Hutchinson 1986).

3 THE SURVEY

The survey was promoted in March 2018 to a network of schools through NAHT, TES and Primary Futures. In total, we received 250 responses from teachers across the country. The majority of the respondents were head teachers (29%), deputy head teachers/ member of school's senior leadership team (22%) and classroom or subject teachers (26%). The majority of schools who responded to our survey were large size schools educating 200 plus children.



In primary schools which responded to our survey 53% said they have a member of staff who is responsible for organising these activities and 47% didn't have a dedicated person to organise career learning events.

4 FINDINGS

We started the survey by asking whether primary schools have heard about the *Careers Strategy* and the announcement of a renewed focus on career learning in primary. The majority of the respondents weren't aware of this (67%), with only around 33% reporting that they had heard about the strategy. We then asked from those who were aware of the strategy whether they had discussions in their school on how to act upon this. From this sub-sample of respondents 54% had talked about the implications of the policy for their provisions (43 individuals, of which 31 were member of senior leadership team and head teachers).

In our past studies we have seen that researchers believe it is important to start introducing children to the world of work from early age, as early as pre-school in certain contexts. So we asked schools at what age they believe children should start learning about jobs. The finding echoed what we already located in the literature. 47% of those who responded to this question believed children should start learning about

the world of work at reception and under the age 5 and around 21% think year 1-2 are the most appropriate age.

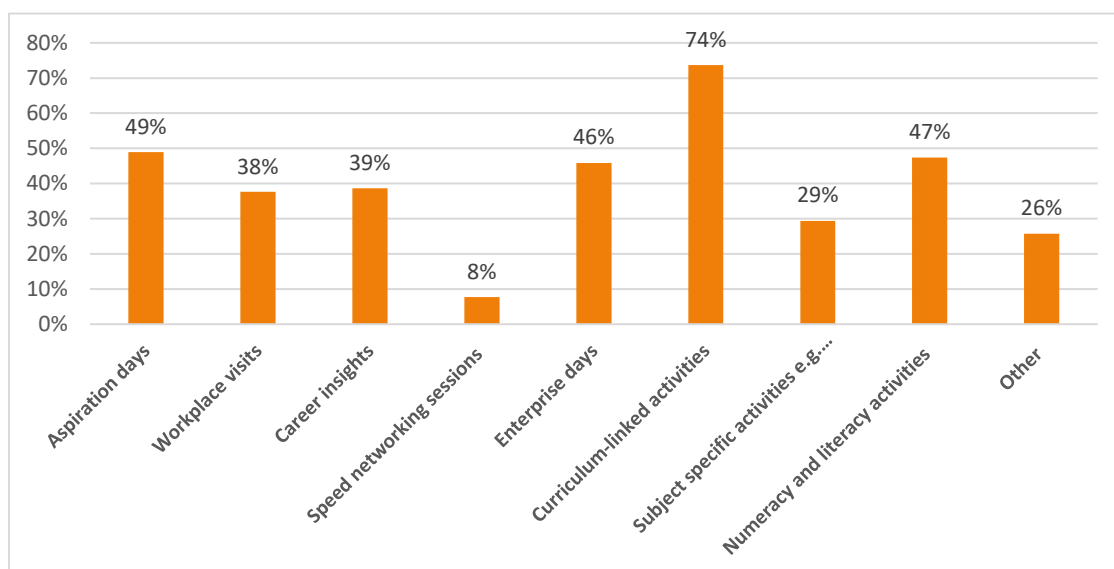
Table 1. At what age do you believe children should start learning about the world of work?¹

Age 5 and under	114 (47%)
Age 5-7 (year 1,2)	50 (21%)
Age 7-9 (year 3 and 4)	32 (13%)
Age 9-11 (year 5 and 6)	28 (11%)

In the second part of the questionnaire we were keen to find out more about the type of activities primary schools deliver to introduce children to future jobs, if any. 81% of the respondents said they organised activities in their school with the aim of increasing children's understanding of the world of work. This is very interesting as the majority of the schools said they didn't hear about the career strategy, yet they are already doing activities to support children's career learning. Most of the schools who do organise these type of activities they run them on yearly (43%) or termly (41%). There is a smaller group of schools run regular activities for instance on every month (9%) or every week (7%).

To show a range of activities in primary schools, the responded selected what they have organised for their children. The result is presented in chart 1.

Chart 1. Activities schools organise for primary children



¹ Around 8% of the responses are not categorised as they were generic comments

The most common activity in our respondents' schools was curriculum-linked activities followed by aspiration days, numeracy and literacy activities and enterprise days. Some of these activities don't involve volunteers from the world of work and schools are able to organise such programmes using their internal staff but it seems that the schools in our sample value the employers' engagement in career learning activities. 94% of the schools think it is important to invite volunteers from the world of work to engage in activities offered to children in primary.

We asked teachers why they think engagement activities such as those they mentioned they organise are important and what outcome they expect from introducing children to the world of work. Table 2 summarises the responses.

Table 2. why introducing children to the world of work is important?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
They can be very influential in broadening children's aspiration	64%	33%	2%	0%	1%
They can bring learning to life and increase motivation	64%	33%	1%	1%	2%
They help to challenge gender stereotyping about jobs and subjects studied	66%	32%	1%	0%	1%
They help children to believe in their abilities (self-efficacy)	50%	44%	2%	0%	5%
They can change children's attitude positively towards school	44%	46%	5%	0%	6%
They can change children's attitude positively towards learning leading to improved academic attainment	44%	46%	4%	1%	6%
They help link school subjects to the world of work	57%	39%	2%	0%	2%
They can help parents/carers to gain insights to the world of work.	30%	47%	10%	3%	10%

The positive impacts of engaging children with career learning activities seems to be very evident. 66% of the teachers who responded to this question strongly agreed that introducing children to the world of work can challenge gender stereotyping about jobs and subjects. This is a major issue for schools as children can typically aspire to traditional pathways to future limited to what they hear from their network of family and friends; this in turn has an impact on their decisions about who they want to become when they grow up. Introducing children to the world of work is also believed to be influential equally on broadening aspirations and bringing learning to life, 64% of schools strongly agreed.

Below are few examples of primary schools' perception of the impact of introducing children to the world of work:

"Pupils enjoy talking to visitors from the world of work - speaking, listening, questioning skills etc are all applied during these activities. The younger pupils show great curiosity whilst the older pupils make links between the world of work, school work and their talents and interests."
(Deputy Headteacher, North West)

"I carried out a practitioner enquiry, comparing maths work from regular weeks to that of a Stock Market week where we turned the classroom into an investment bank. Pupils across all abilities achieved more, quantity of work went up and the pupils said they enjoyed learning in that environment more than usual while class/group teaching sessions." **(Subject teacher, Scotland)**

"Having just run a careers aspirations fair as part of STEM week for our Year 5 and 6 pupils for the first time, I have been really pleased with the way it was embraced by our pupils. We had some particularly inspirational visitors who have indicated that they would like to do further work with the children. It is an exciting area of development for us." **(Headteacher, London)**

Last but not least, we asked schools to explain what barriers prevent them doing more with employers in their school. The majority of our respondents believed time constraints are the major barrier in organising more activities with employers (60%).

The second biggest challenge is availability of employers/volunteers and teachers, and difficulty in communication and/or scheduling a suitable time for both groups. From the responses we gathered that teachers needed access to local employers. In some cases, teachers aren't aware of local organisations who would like to support schools.

And in the third place is curriculum; 22% of the teachers believe that there is too much focus and pressure on achieving data driven results which squeezes the curriculum and restricts time to organise and run activities linked to employers in schools. A headteacher from East of England specifically told us:

"....the curriculum is already overcrowded. I only organise things that fit in with the curriculum objectives I am teaching, but I ask the visitors to be ready to talk about their jobs, alongside the other reasons why I have invited them and invite the children to ask questions about their job."

Heavy focus on reading, writing and math curriculum appears to stop some teachers to spare time for other activities.

The cost of organising events has burdened some of the respondents, 15% of the respondents believed funding is an issue for schools and under the current economic system things aren't easy and they heavily rely on volunteers.

"School funding is in crisis. Until this is resolved, the education and futures of all children are in jeopardy. Teacher workload is extreme. This again puts the education and futures of children at risk." (Deputy Headteacher, West Midlands)

There are other barriers that the respondents referred to such as DBS checks and the location of schools. Schools in London for instance benefit from being surrounded by a wide range of employers comparing to schools which are located in rural areas with limited access to local employers and wide range of industries. Safeguarding is also a very serious matter when it comes to children and teachers have to take necessary measurements to reassure the safety of their students which might entail more resources.

Table 3. Challenges for organising activities with employee volunteers

Time	Availability	Curriculum	Cost	Safety	Location	Age	Unsure	Other
60%	28%	22%	15%	4%	2%	2%	2%	3%

5 DISCUSSION

In the [Career Strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talent](#) published by the Department for Education in December 2017, there was an acknowledgment of the role of primary schools in introducing children to the world of work and the government's plan to test and fund career activities that works. This is an important step in recognising the important role of early years in developing children's attitudes, aspirations, knowledge and skills.

The result of this survey shows a great number of schools in the sample are doing a fair amount of work to introduce children to the world of work and to develop children's knowledge and skills and to broaden horizons and realistic aspirations despite lack of policy emphasis on the role of primary schools. Just over 50% of the respondents said they have someone in their schools responsible for organising career learning activities such as aspiration days, enterprise competitions etc. They collectively believe in the power of engagement activities and testify the impact it has on their children education and behavioral outcomes including the areas discussed above. They also face challenges in the design and implementation of a good provision including finding the time to do anything outside the curriculum delivery and exam preparation, availability of volunteers and the narrow curriculum itself which doesn't leave any room for creativity and embedding engagement with the world of work into curriculum.

The current survey was designed to understand primary schools' response to the Career Strategy (2017) and what they are doing that aligns with the policy emphasis on the role of early years experiences on the transitions to post-primary and ultimately to the world of work. This is the very first step taken by the researchers at the Education and Employers to develop more in-depth studies in this area. Research into the impact of career learning and employer engagement activities on the learning and progression of children is limited. Only a small number of projects using methodologies sufficiently robust to allow meaningful conclusions to be taken from their results, especially in the UK. Where good quality evidence does exist, it suggests that the instincts of surveyed teachers are right: that employer engagement, if done correctly, is positively associated with improved attainment, the development of non-cognitive skills demanded by twenty-first century employers and changed attitudes towards the world of work and the relationship between the classroom and the workplace.

The research team at the Education and Employers is now commissioned to conduct research into what works in primary career learning and what approach schools taken to tackle challenges of high quality encounters with the world beyond classroom.