

A short history of employer engagement

Once more round the buoy or
set fair for a better voyage?

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Foreword

To coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Elementary Education Act, the first piece of legislation to deal specifically with the provision of education in Britain (*receiving Royal Assent on the 9th August 1870*) we are publishing this paper by Prue Huddleston.

Since our launch in 2009 the Education and Employers Charity has sought to understand what difference employer engagement in education makes to young people and the economy. This paper which examines the history of employer engagement in education fills a large void in knowledge in this area. Prue is Emeritus Professor at the University of Warwick, and formerly Director of the Centre for Education and Industry at the University. She is a Research Associate at Education and Employers and an editorial board member of the Journal of Vocational Education and Training. She has written extensively on vocational education and qualifications, and work-related learning.

It begins with a brief look at the early origins of employer engagement starting with the first apprenticeships in 1497 and then considers in more detail the various approaches and initiatives in recent decades. The aim is to encourage debate around the progress and purposes of employer engagement with the education sector. It does so by charting the history of such endeavours, examines their intent, and their efficacy. It is inevitable that in attempting to chart such a fluid, and often ill-defined, field there will be omissions and differences of view and for this reason we are keen to invite further contributions and comments. We also encourage reflection on what, if anything, we can learn from past endeavours to engage employers with the education system to curtail what Prue characterises as “*trips around the buoy*” and how such lessons might inform future action.

Today interactions with the world of work are widely regarded as being vitally important for all young people. What makes such interactions so special is that they draw upon resources and experiences linked to the world of work which cannot be easily replicated in the classroom. It offers young people something new and different from what they can normally expect - and authenticity. Authentic encounters are ones which ring true for a young person, providing insights which are hard to dismiss.

The [research](#) we have done over the last ten years has shown that interactions with the world of work help to broaden young people's horizons, raise their aspirations and challenge stereotypical views they often have about the jobs people do based on their gender, ethnicity and social background. They help increase motivation to learn, improve attainment, reduce the risks of their becoming NEET and lead to an increase in earnings. They help inform young people about the full range of jobs as well as the career routes into them and in so doing reduce the mismatch between young people's career aspirations and the reality of the labour market. For more details click [here](#).

Please do get in touch if you would like to comment, share your knowledge and help contribute to our collective understanding of the history of employment engagement in education in the UK and internationally.

And finally a very big thanks to Prue – little did she realise when I suggested she might write a short article how much work would be involved. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have done.

Nick Chambers
CEO
Education and Employers

6th August 2020

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Introduction

Employer engagement in the education sector, at all levels, is not a new phenomenon (Jamieson and Lightfoot, 1982; Jamieson, 1985; Huddleston, 2012; 2019). However, in recent decades exhortations from a succession of governments for employers to fully engage in the processes of education have become more pronounced, driven by a desire to achieve a range of policy goals: educational, social, economic and technological. Through their encouragement of employers to participate in a range of encounters with schools/colleges and their pupils/students involving activities such as work experience, career talks, mock interviews, CV workshops, mentoring and workplace visits, governments have sought to close the gap between the classroom and the workplace. The intensity and complexity of such activities, including the involvement of employers in qualification design and even assessment, all of which is imagined on a voluntary basis, has increased significantly during the last forty years. It is not only a British trend, policy makers and influential commentators around the world have become increasingly interested in employer engagement with the education sector (Field, 2019; OECD, 2019, 2010).

This short paper attempts to encourage debate around the progress and purposes of employer engagement with the education sector. It does so by charting the history of such endeavours, examines their intent, and their efficacy. It is inevitable that in attempting to chart such a fluid, and often ill-defined, field there will be

omissions and differences of view, for this reason we invite further contributions and comments. We also encourage reflection on what, if anything, we can learn from past endeavours to engage employers with the education system (to curtail more “trips around the buoy”) and how such lessons might inform future action.

What is employer engagement?

It describes, essentially, the process through which a young person engages with members of the economic community, under the auspices of their school/college, with the aim of influencing their skill development (broadly conceived), educational achievement, engagement and/or progression out of education into ultimate employment (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2008; 2009; Mann, Stanley and Archer, 2014; Education and Employers, 2019). The emphases of these purposes shift over time, depending upon a range of policy drivers: economic, social and educational and also on the stakeholders’ motivations for engagement (Hadow, 1926; Newsom, 1963; Ahier and Moore, 1999; Moore and Hickox, 1999).

Employer engagement in education can be distinguished from work-based learning, which is usually taken to describe learning that takes place through employment, for example through apprenticeship or company training programmes. That is, although work-based learning involves employers, our use of

employer engagement denotes a wider range of employer activities within the education sector. Huddleston (2012) identifies 40 activities in which employers engage with education. These include ‘arms’ length’ activities - such as providing money for school football kit - to extensive work experience programmes, pupil mentoring, acting as governors, or providing careers talks. Such engagement extends to all sectors of education from the primary phase to further and higher education. These interventions may have differing purposes and outcomes and may be viewed differently by participating stakeholders.

Nomenclature within the field has always proved contentious since terms are often used inter-changeably. For example, “work-related learning” has been understood for many years, particularly during its statutory requirement within the National Curriculum until 2010, as learning “about”, “through” and “for” work. Clearly, this could involve engagement with actual employers, although not necessarily. For example, using work as a context for learning within a classroom need not include employers, but should be informed by knowledge and understanding of workplaces. Similarly, career education does not require employers to directly engage with pupils, although it could be argued that it is highly desirable.

Enterprise education, another “mixed use” label sometimes involves direct employer engagement, for example when business mentors engage with school enterprise projects, but not always. We can also add to the mix programmes leading to particular qualifications intended to enhance pupils’

“employability” (Fettes, Evans and Kashefpakdel (2020), or to provide “Skills for Working Life”. In terms of qualification development perhaps the most extreme examples witnessed since 2005 have been the role it has been assumed that employers will play in the development of qualifications for young people 14-19, namely the ill-fated Diplomas (2005-2010) and now, in development, T Levels. All this is predicated on the assumption that employers will “step up to the plate” voluntarily since there is no statutory obligation on them to do so (Gleeson and Keep, 2004; Ertl and Stasz, 2010; Huddleston and Laczik, 2018, 2019; Keep, 2015).

A historical relationship with employers?

Master and apprentice



Tailor. Credit: Jost Amman, *Das Ständebuch*, 1568, in Paul Lacroix - *Manners, Custom and Dress During the Middle Ages and During the Renaissance Period*, 2004, available freely at [Project Gutenberg](#). Public Domain.

Apprenticeships in England can be traced back to the medieval craft guilds, originating from the custom of upper class parents sending children away to live with host families. By the Tudor period, despite overall numbers being quite small, apprenticeships were generally seen as an acceptable form of training. An apprentice, often starting as young as 10 or 12, would learn his trade over a period of years — often seven, but it could be longer or shorter than this — with his master being responsible for his board, lodging and clothing as well as teaching (House of Commons Library, 2015). The medieval apprenticeship served as managerial, moral and social education (Lyon, 1920).



[Shoemakers](#). Credit: Jost Amman, *Das Ständebuch*, 1568, in Paul Lacroix - *Manners, Custom and Dress During the Middle Ages and During the Renaissance Period*, 2004, available freely at [Project Gutenberg](#). Public Domain.

The first Act stored at the Victoria Tower in the Palace of Westminster in 1497 was 'An Act for taking of Apprentices to make worsteds' (a type of wool cloth) in the county of Norfolk (Parliament UK).

The Statute of Artificers, introduced by the parliament of Elizabeth I in 1563, made it illegal for anyone to '*exercise any art, mystery or occupation now used or occupied within the realm of England and Wales except he shall*

have been brought up therein seven years at the least as an apprentice'. (Cannon, 2009)

During the 17th and 18th centuries apprenticeships remained the main route for the advancement of children, but the Act was finally abolished in 1814, as the popularity of apprenticeships waned '*due to conditions in factories and exploitation of young apprentices*' (House of Commons, 2009:11). By this time there was a ready supply of young people available to take up employment, often under the most hazardous, exploitative conditions of factory labour. So the need for extended training under an apprenticeship system was regarded as unnecessary except for some highly skilled occupations (for example, engineering, shipbuilding and skilled crafts within the construction sector). '*...the nineteenth-century type of industry....had an almost unlimited demand for men and women without any qualifications except strength and willingness*' (Hobsbawm, 1968:286).

The demand for technical education

Growing industrialisation throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries highlighted the need for scientific and technical instruction to equip workers with the knowledge and skills required to operate within an increasingly mechanised work environment and to combat overseas competition. Although '*at Rugby school in the 1860s seventeen out of twenty-two working hours were spent studying the classics. Science and, particularly technology, were regarded as not fit subjects for gentlemen to study*' (Evans, 1983:316). This was the case at all the major public schools where science and technology were afforded little space in the curriculum. Sons of the industrial middle classes were preparing for careers in the 'white

collar' professions: medicine, law and the civil service.

A similar situation prevailed at the universities where *'in 1872 there were only twelve persons reading natural sciences at Cambridge; most of these were training to be medical practitioners'* (Alderman, 1986:126). At the same time Germany had twenty multi-faculty institutions and eleven special technical universities.

In the period before the Elementary Education Act, which received royal assent on the 9th August 1870, the State's involvement with education extended only to pauper and factory children. The 1870 The Elementary Education Act made provision for elementary schooling to become available throughout the country under the jurisdiction of school boards, which were empowered to raise rates in order to finance their activities. Fees were still charged but with remission for those families that could not afford them. However, the curriculum remained firmly rooted in the teaching of the three R's although, depending upon local circumstances, there was provision for the teaching of science, domestic subjects and geography. Much depended on the supply and quality of teachers and results were very uneven. As Robbins (1983) describes: *'The education given and received was for a caste and, even if supplemented by evening classes and "adult schools"it was not expected or desired that pupils should have unrealistic expectations'* (68).

However, the stated rationale for the Act was to build a foundation from which further technical education and training could be developed. In introducing the Elementary Education Bill into the House of Commons, its Chair, W.E Forster, stated *'it is no use trying to give technical teaching to our artisans without elementary education; uneducated labourers.....are, for the most part, unskilled labourers, and if we leave our work folk any longer unskilled, notwithstanding their strong sinews and determined energy, they will become over matched in the competition of the world'* (cited in Maclure, 1973:104).

In 1884 The Royal Commission on Technical Instruction reported the continuing impediments to the country's future growth and prosperity because of the superior preparation of Continental competitors in terms of their education and training (Robbins, 1983). Of particular importance was the practical application of scientific knowledge and of the 'wide dissemination of useful knowledge' (The Royal Society of Arts was established in 1755 and the Royal Institution became a public body in 1810 for the promotion of chemical science by experiments and lectures). But most of this provision was geared towards middle class audiences and the *'gifted amateur'*.

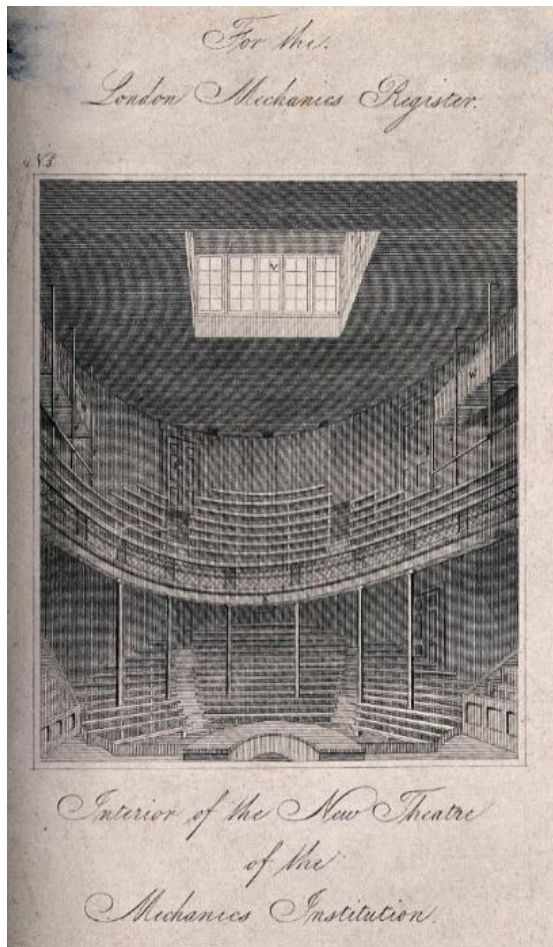
'No adequate handling of the problems of technology and technical instruction was possible without a foundation of primary education, but many men in the first half of the century were prepared to make the latter compulsory for social rather than industrial reasons.'(Court, 1964: 258).



The Mechanics' Institute movement was conceived at the end of the 18th century as a means of improving the literacy and numeracy of working people and providing them with basic technical education, yet it played a vital, but often overlooked, part in the eventual development of adult education. The institutes were the product of the Industrial Revolution which had created demand for a workforce to manage its machinery, to build, tend, repair and improve the complex mechanisation that revolutionised output. They provided education for the working man through lending libraries, lecture theatres and laboratories and often included in their range of courses, wider opportunities for learning, and perceived "social advancement".

[Liverpool Mechanics' Institute](#). Credit: Liverpool John Moores University, reproduced with kind permission from the institution.

The concept was a successful one and by mid-century there were several hundred mechanics institutes across England's major urban centres (Wright, 2001). While the institutes largely failed in their professed objective, systematic instruction in the scientific principles underlying the operations workers were daily called upon to perform, the movement did accomplish considerable educational work among clerical workers, trades people and manual workers, and in its disintegration laid the foundations for a system of technical education.



[London Mechanics' Institute, Southampton Buildings, Holborn: the interior of the lecture theatre.](#) Engraving, 1825. Credit: Wellcome Collection. [Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#)

In 1878 the City and Guilds of London Institute was established in response to the need expressed by its founding livery companies 'to support individuals and businesses by improving professional training under a national system of technical education' (City and Guilds, 2020). Through its examinations the teaching of technical and practical subjects was encouraged with employers heavily engaged in syllabus design and examinations.

In 1902 a new Education Bill sought to remedy the 'badness of our educational system', as Rosberry, the Liberal Prime Minister, had described it, through the introduction of a scheme of secondary education that would

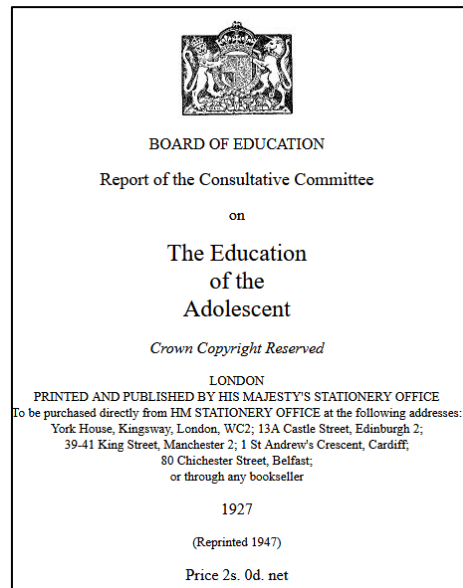
provide the foundation for higher technical instruction (Maclure, 1973). Technical education had already experienced some advances prior to this date and by 1902 450,000 students were attending technical schools or evening classes (County Councils and Borough Councils had already been given powers to intervene in the provision of technical instruction). However, there was no sound general scheme of secondary education to provide a firm basis for higher technical instruction (Robbins, 1983). The 1902 Act opened up the possibility of secondary education beyond the existing provision of elementary education: it was not compulsory and the majority of pupils left school after completion of elementary education. Even for those who benefitted from participation in secondary education, the majority left at sixteen or earlier 'doubts still remained about the suitability of the education they received as a preparation for industry or commerce' (152).

This was in large part the result of a curriculum that was biased towards public school and endowed grammar school models with emphasis upon the arts and classics and lesser emphasis upon science, and in particular technical and practical subjects. In effect the seeds of a two tier system had already been sown, with a fault line dividing education "for the mind" from "education for the hand". At the same time, within higher education, debates concerning the relationship, if any, between technical and vocational education and "humane" or "liberal" education were voiced. Accommodating and aligning these perspectives became more urgent as the new century dawned.

A new century

What had become clear during the second half of the nineteenth century was that the penetration of industry by science required more than the passing interest of *gifted amateurs*, an underpinning universal education system became increasingly crucial to industrial development. *'The practical value of a good primary education for science-based technologies, both economic and military is obvious'* (Hobsbawm, 1975:43). Mass education became a pre-requisite for the further development of a modern economy.

However, at the beginning of the 20th century a traditional English view persisted that theory and practice should be separated; schools should concentrate on the theoretical aspects and practical activities should be delivered in the workshop. This had been reinforced by the 1889 Technical Instruction Act: *'schools should not be involved in the instruction of any trade or industry. This approach was in stark contrast to similar schools elsewhere in Europe, which emphasised the importance of workshop practice and the apprenticeship'* (Evans, 2007:25).



[The Hadow Report: The Education of the Adolescent](#). Board of Education Consultative Committee, 1926. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

With the dawn of a new century and the raising of the school leaving age, first to 14 under the 1918 Education Act, and in 1926 to 15, as a result of the Hadow Report(1926), attention turned to the nature of the curriculum for universal secondary education and the extent to which engagement with the world of work and employers should be encouraged for all pupils, not just for those directly entering employment at 14. The 1944 Education Act heralded in an era of free secondary education for all pupils, but the institutions (grammar, technical and secondary modern schools) in which education was delivered were distinctive in their provision and reinforced the rift between 'so-called' academic education and technical and vocational education. The number of technical schools dwindled (only 266 by 1960), essentially leaving a bipartite system, which was potentially socially divisive, unequal and, in many respects, ill-suited to the needs of 20th century labour markets (O'Mahony, M. 2004).

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Half Our Future

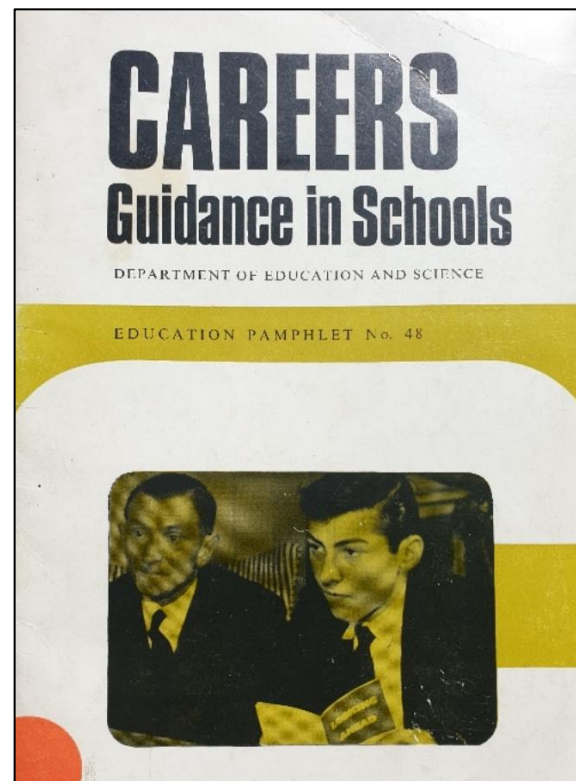
*A Report of the Central Advisory
Council
for Education (England)*

LONDON
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY
OFFICE
1963

The Newsom Report: Half Our Future. Ministry of Education Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 1963. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

The beginning of the promotion of employer engagement in formal education, as an element of public policy making, is marked by the emergence of work experience following the government-commissioned Newsom Report (1963). This report recommended that *'experiments to enable some pupils over the age of fifteen to participate to a limited extent, under the auspices of the school, in the world of work in industry, commerce, or in other fields, should be carefully studied'* (Central Advisory Council for Education 1963: chapter 6). Targeted at 'average or below average ability' pupils, by 1969 the Institute of Careers Officers reported that 2% of young people had undertaken a short period of work experience before leaving compulsory full-time education. In 1965 the Department for Education and Science (DES) published information and guidance on *Careers Guidance in Schools* (DES, 1965) highlighting innovative practice in terms of education-employer engagement. Examples provided included work experience, school/employer visits, talks, open days and

careers conventions: a list bearing remarkable resemblance to today's offerings. In the wake of 1972 legislation that raised the school leaving age to 16, the government acted in 1973 to make it possible for all pupils - regardless of ability - to take up work experience in their last year of schooling (Miller et al 1991: 5).



The World of Work in the School Programme

A great many schools use the natural interests of children in the adult world to provide new and lively material for use in normal curriculum subjects during the last year. The work of previous terms in history and geography is revised and extended by a local survey of industry and commerce. A study of the occupations entered by leavers in the past few years reveals a local pattern of industry different from that of the region, or the country as a whole. Project work based on local knowledge and careers booklets displays the work of local craftsmen. Films, broadcasts and visits illustrate typical work processes both clean and dirty, indoor and outdoor, quiet and noisy, solitary and social, in new and old factories, some large, some small. A map showing the location of the places of work entered by last year's leavers begins a study of transport costs in relation to wages. Rates of wages, piece work, bonuses, stoppages, income tax and insurance are introduced into mathematics, and the intricacies of personal budgets, hire purchase

**id.* Page 27.

Department of Education and Science Education Pamphlet: No 48 "Careers Guidance in Schools", 1965. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

1976 and all that.....

Over the next thirty years, government increased the expectations on schools and provided dedicated resources to enable growing proportions of young people to gain direct experience of the workplace whilst still in education. The subsequent growth of work experience in the 1970s and 1980s highlights processes of educational innovation and adoption. 'Before 1970, fewer than two percent of students participated in work experience, by 1991, 71 percent did' (Stanley, 2012: 14). Although there were those who suggested that much work experience, and indeed careers education, served simply to perpetuate social divisions (Bates et al. 1984; Shilling, 1989). A view reflected in recent research also (Le Gallais and Hatcher, 2014; Huddleston, Mann and Dawkins, 2014).



[James Callaghan](#). Credit: European Communities, 1975. Photo: Christian Lambiotte. [Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#)

In 1976 a speech by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, at Ruskin College Oxford became the rallying cry for a closer relationship between education and industry. The Great

Debate, as it was subsequently titled, highlighted the on-going concerns about the inadequacy of the education system in terms of its preparing young people for the world of work, and the lack of connection between education and industry (Finn, 1987). It also raised questions about the control of the curriculum, since: '*The very initiation of a public debate on education, involving unprecedented consultation of industrial organizations and parents as well as education organizations, served as an explicit reminder to the teaching profession that the curriculum was not solely their responsibility to determine*' (Bates, op.cit.199). As Tomlinson (2005:25) reminds us '*...from this time educational practices were to become more closely linked to industrial regeneration*'.

The resultant schools-industry movement, as it became known, was as Jamieson (1985) noted: difficult to describe because it encompassed a range of projects, organisations and government interventions with a variety of foci, all with the purported aim of changing the relationship between education and the wider economy in some way. A veritable "cottage industry" of organisations sprang up, many of them in competition with each other, offering, amongst other things, work experience, careers talks, curriculum materials, teachers' workshops and industry placements, various school challenges and competitions, Industry Days. A few of the many examples include: Junior Achievement, founded in 1918, embracing the concept of "learning by doing" (1916-2002); Project Trident (1971) for work experience; SATRO - 47 Science And Technology Regional Organisations across the country engaging young people in STEM and informing them

about careers in STEM; understanding British Industry (UBI), arranging teacher placements in industry (see Huddleston, 1992); Young Enterprise (founded in 1962) specialising in enterprise and financial education (Young Enterprise, 2020).

Large companies appointed dedicated education liaison officers, for example, BP, Rover Group, Boots, McDonalds, The Post Office, NatWest and many others, to encourage relationships between industry and education to flourish. The motivation for their engagement stems from a variety of reasons, to some extent dictated by sector, for example: accessing current and potential customer base (financial services and retail); improving the attractiveness of careers in the sector (engineering and manufacturing, for example Royal Society of Chemistry Industry Study Tours); opportunities for pre-recruitment selection (legal, medical); staff development opportunities such as serving as a school governor (several sectors); Corporate Social Responsibility objectives (several sectors) contributing to local community (hospitality, retail, health); access to fresh ideas and perspectives/recruitment of school leavers (several sectors) [Source: Huddleston (1998, 2008. Survey of companies' reasons for engagement by Business in the Community]. They also reflect wider concerns about: youth unemployment (1980s); the "demographic time bomb" (1990s) (Ahier and Moore, 1999), "skills" (CBI, 2007, UKCES, 2010, Edge, 2019) and "employability" (UKCES, 2009). Education-Business collaboration became the policy axe with which to slay a many headed hydra.



["I can't get a job because I have no experience"](#).

In parallel local education authorities began appointing schools-industry liaison officers (SILOs) to develop such work in schools. One particular and long-lived example is provided by the Schools Council Industry Project, later the Schools Curriculum Industry Project, (SCIP) established in 1977. This initiative was established in dialogue with, and jointly supported by representatives of employees and employers, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), to develop and promote curriculum innovation through direct engagement with local education authorities and their teachers. The initiative was seen as providing "local solutions to local problems". A network of SCIP co-ordinators worked across local authorities bringing together schools, businesses and trade union partners to inject "industry awareness" into the curriculum. In 1989 it moved to the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at the University of Warwick (see below) and continued in operation until 1998.



School Curriculum Industry Partnership newsletter, SCIP News, issue 22, Winter 1988. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

A range of classroom activities, resources and training was developed to promote curriculum innovation predicated on a model of experiential learning. These were shared across the SCIP network through publications, action research, evaluation and conferences. Characteristic activities included: non-vocational work experience, mini-enterprise projects (DTI/National Westminster Bank, 1988) simulations and role play and problem solving techniques. Wherever possible these were supported by business and trade union partners or by “adults other than teachers” as they were often described. A distinguishing feature of SCIP’s work was its “bottom up” approach characterised by its operations at local level with schools, teachers, business and trade union partners in deciding what was appropriate and required to introduce industry awareness into the curriculum. Its emphasis on

“processes”, rather than simply “content” was attractive to educators. It has been suggested (Cathcart and Esland, 1985) that SCIP’s approach was able to provide the blueprint, in pedagogy, subject matter and use of personnel, for a number of Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) schemes.

The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI)

TVEI represented an unprecedented level of investment by central government, £90 million per year over the period, through the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) to local education authorities. The stated aim of the initiative was to: *‘widen and enrich the curriculum in a way that will help young people prepare for the world of work, and to develop skills and interests including creative abilities. That will help them to lead a fuller life and to be able to contribute more to the community.’* (Dale, 1989: 148).

TVEI was announced, to general astonishment, in the House of Commons by Prime Minister Thatcher in November 1982. The announcement outlined the intention to introduce a pilot scheme by September 1983 of technical and vocational education for 14-18 year olds. The astonishment derived from the lack of any prior consultation with interested parties, namely, the Department for Education and Science (DES), local education authorities, teacher professional organisations or the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), all of whom were expected to work in concert to bring TVEI to fruition. Despite initial resistance, some local authorities expressed willingness to participate in the pilot. The expectations of the

design, although allowing some variation in proposals according to local authority needs, made clear what components were necessary to ensure a successful bid for TVEI funding (MSC, 1984).

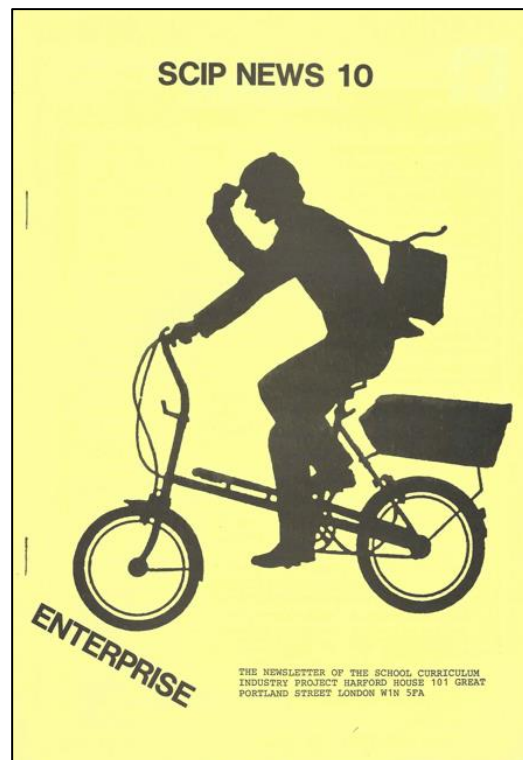
Each project had to offer a full-time programme, combining general and technical and vocational education for 14-18 year olds across the ability range, offering opportunities for progression, include planned work experience, lead to nationally recognised qualifications (many of them vocationally related), allow for careers education and guidance and recognise pupil profiling as an effective and empowering means of recording pupil achievement. In a private comment made by a senior MSC official to the author: "it was the largest investment in education research and development ever made".

Not everyone would share that view (for a fuller discussion see Dale et al., 1990). However, largely as a consequence of TVEI in the 1980s, work experience placements came to form part of the education of two-thirds of school leavers, a proportion rising to four-fifths by the first decade of the twenty-first century (Miller et al 1991; Mann 2012). Work experience was by no means the only way in which employers engaged with education throughout the period. The majority of other schemes and initiatives, some of which I have previously mentioned, thrived because they were able to tap into the prevailing *zeitgeist* and funding available through TVEI, during its pilot (1983-87) and extension (1987-1991) phases.

'The reaction to, and integration of, work experience can, indeed, stand for the perceived place and importance of 'links with

industry' as a whole within TVEI schemes.'
(Dale, 1991, 243).

DTI Education and Enterprise Initiative 1988-1991



School Curriculum Industry Partnership newsletter, SCIP News 10. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

In 1988 the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) published a White Paper urging the case for employer engagement with schools, colleges and higher education in order to promote an "enterprise culture". It reflects a wider debate gaining ground, and followers, throughout the 1980s of the need to foster, celebrate and reward enterprise and entrepreneurship. The notion of enterprise is an elusive concept since, as Coffield argues, *'there is no generic skill of enterprise whose essence can be distilled and taught'* (Coffield, 1991:248). The proliferation of schemes, initiatives and charitable trusts promoting enterprise activities in schools and colleges

and universities, even to the current time, suggests that others think differently (Davies, 2002; Hytti, 2002; Ofsted, 2004). Nevertheless, Lord Young, Chairman of the MSC and Secretary of State for Employment during the 1980s saw the need to develop an enterprise culture as a key driver for economic reform. Part of the blame for a lack of enterprise he placed on an education system that he perceived as anti-industrial and anti-enterprise (similar concerns were raised in the 1884 Samuelson Report). The policy prescription for schools saw the establishment of the Enterprise Advisor Service (DTI, 1988) as set out in the Enterprise and Education White Paper. The Paper argued that schools and colleges had much to gain from employer engagement through their contributions to the curriculum, school management and in supporting enterprise activities.

The Enterprise Adviser Service, usually one per LEA, was established in September 1988. Each of the 140 Advisers had a target to achieve industrial placements (minimum 5 days) for 10% of teachers per year and one or two weeks work experience for every school pupil in their last year of compulsory education. In addition Advisers were expected to work with teacher training institutions to raise awareness amongst trainees of the importance of school-employer links. The DTI's ensuing Enterprise Awareness in Teacher Education (EATE) project, launched in 1989, was funded to promote staff and course development to encompass enterprise, economic and industrial awareness in teacher training institutions.

In 1987, the Training Agency introduced a parallel project - Enterprise in Higher Education – an initiative to encourage the

development of enterprising graduates through their engagement with business and in the development of their enterprise skills. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were invited to bid for funds.

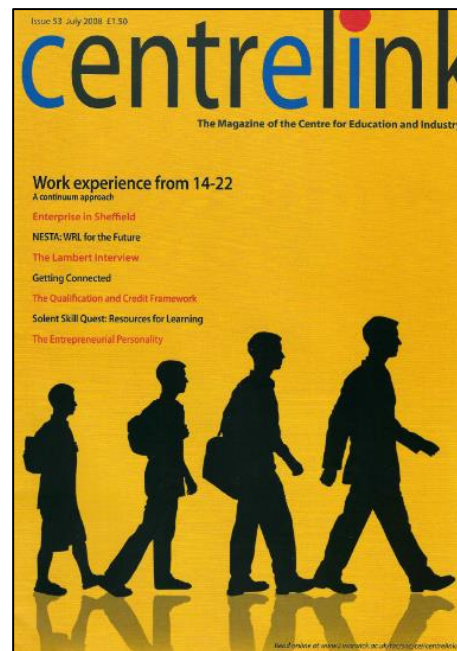
It is clear from the foregoing summary that employer engagement with education at every phase was pervasive and active throughout the 1980s and supported, what now appears generously, by government. Industry Year in 1986, marking the tenth anniversary of the Great Debate, was designed to celebrate and promote further the perceived advantages of education-industry collaboration. Moreover, the majority of activities in the field would be totally recognisable today: work experience, industry visits, talks by employers, careers events, mock interviews, industry-informed and developed curriculum materials, teacher placements, although some will have assumed greater prominence and funding than others.



CEI Centrelink issue 12. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

This burgeoning interest in education-industry work is reflected in the growing demand for opportunities for academic study and research in the field. In 1988 The Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) was established by the University of Warwick within the Institute of Education to serve as a national centre for the study and dissemination of information on education-industry collaboration. It offered research, consultancy, teaching and evaluation services for government departments, business and education nationally and internationally. Its Postgraduate research and Professional Studies programmes were popular with staff from education, business, careers professionals and Education Business Partnerships. CEI also provided a locus for SCIP, Headteachers into Industry, the Mini-Enterprise in Schools Project and NatWest Face2Face with Finance.

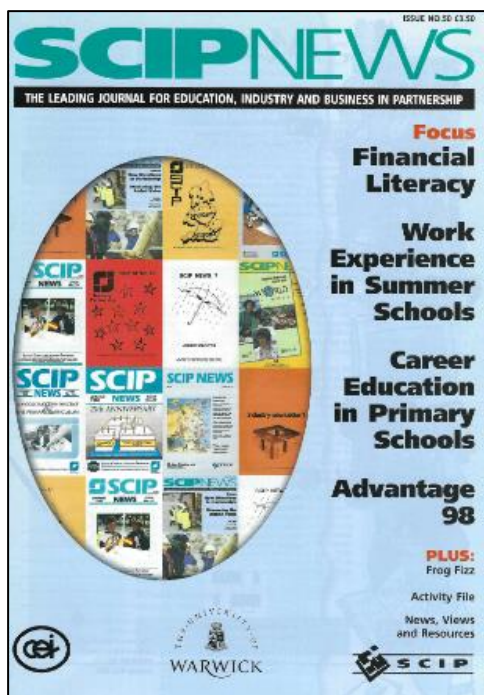
At the same time, The Open University offered a Certificate Programme: 'Teachers into Business and Industry' designed for Enterprise Education Advisers (see above) as well as its popular MA programme: 'Education, Training and Employment'. London Metropolitan University, through its Primary Schools Industry Centre, also offered research, training and teaching opportunities. Several other HEIs were similarly engaged in research and teaching in the field, for example Durham University Business School focused on enterprise education.



CEI Centrelink issue 53. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

Education Business Partnerships

The notion of a network of Education Business Partnerships (EBPs) was first proposed by the Department for Employment in 1991 with the intention of bringing coherence and a greater degree of strategy to the diverse range of approaches then taking place in terms of education-business link activities. The “cottage industry” still prevailed and over time several different government departments had been engaged in providing funding for different education-link activities, for example the DTI, Department Of Employment (DOE), MSC, DES and this is not to recognise that these departments also underwent several changes in name and responsibilities over time, a process that continues to this day (see Tomlinson, 2005 for an interesting “*tour d’horizon*”).



School Curriculum Industry Partnership newsletter, Issue No 50. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

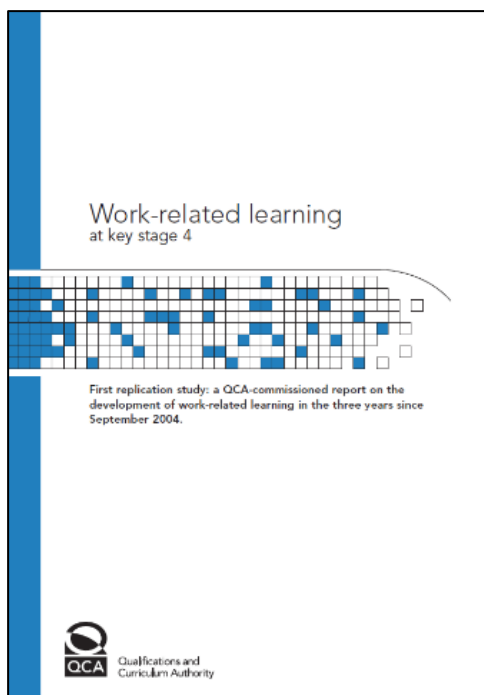
EBPs were certainly in existence by 1992 and, by 1995, there were around 150 EBPs offering national coverage in England. Funding for EBPs was channelled through the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), which took over administration of funding from the Employment Department, along with funding for careers and work experience - which, in some locations, might also have been the responsibility of an EBP. Government funding was made available from the start, though not all EBPs were able to receive it until they were fully established in terms of being able to supply - annually - a local strategic plan acceptable to their respective TEC, and a suitable programme of education-business link activities relevant to their aims.

EBP funding was primarily programme-related rather than core funding designed to support/sustain EBP infrastructure, meaning that EBPs were hugely dependent on other

funding sources for their staffing/accommodation and survival, for example from LEAs, business sponsorship, in kind support with free accommodation. When TECs were abolished, Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) took over funding for education-business links - but now through consortia of education-business links organisations (EBLOs) which included EBPs. Nevertheless, EBPs took on the role of meeting the expectation that virtually all 14-16 year olds should experience a work placement in addition to other work-related experiences (CEI, 2004). Funding ceased in 2011, after which monies for activities including enterprise, went directly into schools. At the same time funding for Connexions, which provided careers services to schools, was terminated. EBPs had provided an infrastructure for education-business link activity, including the maintenance of data bases of employers willing to engage with education. They had provided a conduit through which such activity could be encouraged and supported.

Into the 21st century: Education-industry; everyone's business?

At the start of the new century education-industry collaboration appeared to be everyone's business: government departments (several, both national and local), teachers and careers professionals, employers, trades unions, charities, other professional bodies, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Ofsted, awarding bodies and academics. Why was it the case?



[Work-related learning at key stage 4](#). Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007.

A growing body of evaluation studies, and some research, had identified the benefits to be derived from closer co-operation between education and the world beyond the academy. In a reprise of much of the earlier policy rhetoric, to which I have already alluded, engaging employers in education, and exposing young people to the realities of the workplace, was seen as a potential driver for, *inter alia*, economic growth, social mobility, curriculum refreshment, increasing participation, reduction in youth unemployment, even inculcating particular attitudes and values. Particular perspectives and emphases varied according to the political and economic context, and also the different stakeholders, some of which were even in conflict (Huddleston and Oh, 2004).

Enterprise Education again.....

Following the Davies Review (2002), the government's aim was to fund every secondary school by 2005-06 to run the equivalent of 5

days' enterprise experience during Key Stage 4 (KS4) each year. Funding was made available from September 2003 to support Enterprise Pathfinder Projects for either one (151 projects) or two (87 projects) years with the intention of preparing for and informing the wider roll-out of Enterprise Education in 2005.

In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Enterprise and School Business Links Unit entered into discussion with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) in 2005 regarding the development of a Network throughout England, at local, regional and national levels, which would focus on training through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as a means of engaging all school staff with enterprise education. One school in each of roughly 47 areas was to be selected as a 'hub' school (ideally, a Business and Enterprise College [BEC] which had led an Enterprise Pathfinder project). All other BECs in each area would receive support at a lower level to work with their 'hub' school as 'spoke' schools. Together, their role would be to develop, sustain and support enterprise pedagogy within all schools in their area. Activities to assist this CPD approach could include conferences, seminars and workshops (based on a nationally-agreed set of topics), supported regionally and locally by Enterprise Advisers and EBPs. At national level, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) would work with partners such as business links bodies to help develop the network. The DfES was prepared to fund development of the network from 2005/6 to 2007/8.

An evaluation carried out by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2005a) records:

'Many schools make effective use of local employers and the local community. These schools often have well-established partnerships with local employers and local community organisations in place and find it relatively easy to build on these links to develop enterprise education. In some schools the local EBP or enterprise adviser plays a key role in helping to set up projects with local employers and community organisations.' (p.12).

However, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) also suggested that enterprise education should not be seen as yet another initiative but as part of the wider statutory requirement for work-related learning at KS 4 (QCA 2003). The contribution of enterprise education to young people "achieving economic well-being", one of the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a), was also recognised. It is to some of these changes to curriculum and qualifications, which increased the volume of demand on employers to engage with the education system, that I now turn.

Curriculum and qualification reform

During the decade, in addition to the significant number of organisations and programmes already in existence in terms of careers education and guidance, enterprise education and work-related learning, further curriculum and qualification reform highlighted the intention to link the curriculum more closely with the world beyond school. The development and growth of vocational qualifications, particularly for the 14-19 age range, were already well established and

popular, for example BTECs and OCR Nationals. All such qualification design pre-supposes a close alignment between curriculum content and sector relevance, involves employer input on subject panels and frequently requires a period of work placement as part of the programme. They may also include other employer engagement activities, for example "guru lectures", workplace visits, business speakers and enterprise projects or challenges (see for example BTEC National in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship).

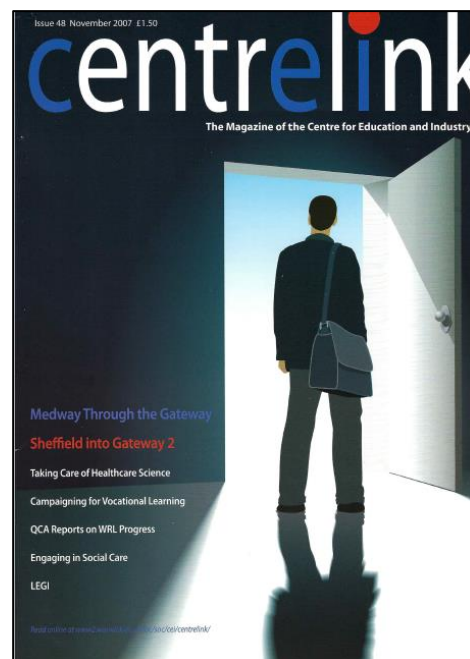
During the same period the development of applied GCSEs, introduced in eight curriculum areas in 2002, offered an alternative qualification designed to provide a more 'hands-on' approach, encouraging application of knowledge and understanding of a subject in a practical way. Again, employer involvement was central to their design. The Increased Flexibilities (IFP) at KS 4 programme, from 2002, enabled 14-16 year olds to be "dis-applied" from parts of the National Curriculum to allow them to spend time each week studying vocational programmes in colleges of further education, or with training providers. Partnerships involving schools, colleges and training providers were responsible for the planning and delivery of programmes with the Connexions Service, EBPs and employer representatives invited to act in an advisory capacity.

The IFP was extremely popular and over-subscribed during its roll-out. An Ofsted Report (Ofsted, 2005b) states that: *'Courses are, on the whole, proving to be successful. Students have responded well to the broader opportunities IFPs provide and their attitudes to learning and behaviour have improved. Four*

out of five students are gaining vocational qualifications as a result of their participation in IFPs, and more students are staying on after 16.' (p.1).

Young Apprenticeships (YAs) provide another example from this period of a more intensive alignment between education and the world of work. Introduced in 2004, they enabled 14-16 year olds access to high quality training, leading to a vocational qualification, within a company or college, also including 50 days work experience placement, in addition to their core curriculum entitlement delivered in school. These were highly regarded, over-subscribed, well resourced and exhibited generally positive outcomes (NFER, 2010).

Whilst these programmes and qualification types have a specific vocational orientation, within the general education curriculum a substantial number of changes occurred in terms of statutory and non-statutory requirements at KS4. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century work-related learning, in its broad definition as learning “for” “through” and “about” work formed a key component of the curriculum in schools. At KS 4 there was a defined statutory requirement for work-related learning and for careers education (QCA 2003). In addition, non-statutory programmes for Economic Well-being and Financial Capability at KS3 and 4 also included topics of relevance to work-related learning, including careers education and enterprise education. This policy drive was not only intended to engage learners about to embark on school to wider education/employment transitions but also to include all pupils from Early Years to Post-16 (DCSF, 2009).



CEI Centrelink issue 48. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

The 2009 schools White Paper (Great Britain Parliament, 2009) enacted ‘*all secondary schools will have access to high quality careers education and information, advice and guidance so that they can make informed choices about learning, work and lifestyles and are well supported during transitions*’ (DCSF, 2009a:35). This was accompanied for the first time by statutory guidance (DCSF, 2009b). Previously a non-statutory framework for careers education and guidance had been in place since 2003 (DfES, 2003b).

Substantial guidance was produced by QCA, DCFS (Stanley, 2012; Muir, 2012; Morris, 2012) on the implementation of all these requirements. Other organisations, including purveyors of programmes designed to assist schools in delivering the obligations of the statutory and non-statutory requirements, were legion. Requests for employer engagement were increasing exponentially. Keeping abreast of all the curriculum and qualification

changes presented a significant challenge, but more was still to come.

New Labour's ambitious approach to curriculum reform centred on the 14-19 Diploma (Ertl et al., 2009). In the development of the Diploma qualifications employer engagement was taken to a new and more substantial level (Laczik and White 2009, Huddleston and Laczik, 2018). Promoted as a qualification 'developed with employers for employers', the government called on employers to: help 'bring learning to life' by contributing to qualification design (across 14 sectors at 2 levels); offer extensive engagement activities, including a compulsory period of 10 days work experience; promote the Diploma within the business community (through sector "champions"); develop sector focused curriculum materials and guidance and; become involved in [teacher] staff training (QCA/ DfES/ Skills for Business, 2005: 16).



[Coding together](#). Credit: NESAs by Makers.

It was a substantial request made of employers (QCA, 2008a, 2008b) far in excess of any previous demands for employer engagement, although some of the components were familiar, for example work experience.

'Employers, however, well intentioned, do not have the technical capacity or competence to

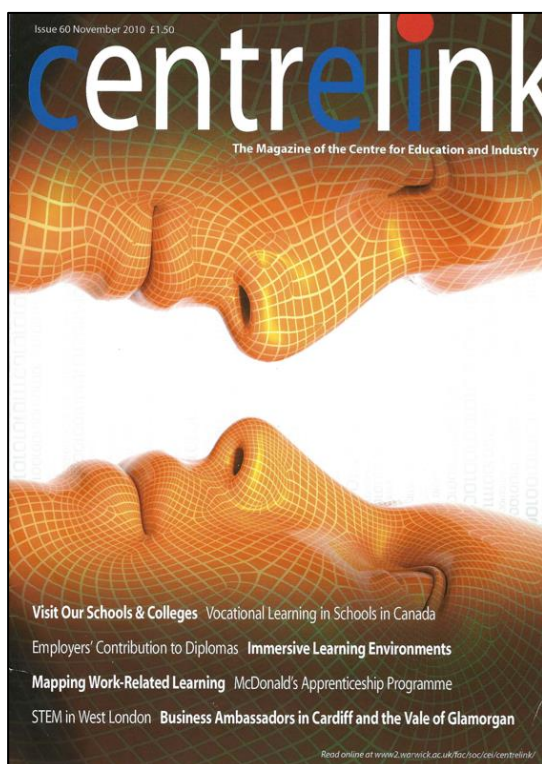
design qualifications, and their assessment methodologies, and the majority are not experts in curriculum or pedagogy.' (Huddleston and Laczik, 2019:19).

Within the context of voluntary participation its realisation could not be assured, although tribute should be paid to those employers who were keen to engage and who contributed much time and effort in doing so. It is unsurprising that some showed disappointment when their efforts were unrecognised and when the Diploma was finally abandoned in 2010 before the implementation of the full programme and at a cost of £295.6m. (Isaacs, 2013; Ertl and Stasz, 2010; Huddleston and Laczik, 2018).

Expectations of employers and opportunities for their engagement with the education system were significant throughout the decade. Although many of the activities in which they were urged to engage were familiar, with the exception of qualification design (certainly within the compulsory phase). It was the scale and intensity that was more pronounced, in particular the request to engage in ever more "reforms". Even the name of the responsible government departments changed several times during the period: the title of the 14-19 Diplomas was changed three times during its development.

Brokerage organisations, businesses, charities and private providers still offered their wares to schools in support of work-related learning, career education, enterprise education, or whichever label applied. It is natural that such agencies will concentrate their efforts on initiatives to which funding is attached. Companies keen to raise their profile will likely

gravitate towards supporting similar activity. The “cottage industry” still existed and as Stanley (2012) suggests the number of competing and overlapping agencies reflected, and continue to reflect, the many missions of work-related learning. For example, STEMNET – the Science, Technology, Engineering Maths Network founded in 1996 to encourage participation at school and college in science and engineering-related subjects and (eventually) work. However, the environment was about to change.



CEI Centrelink issue 60. Image courtesy of Centre for Education and Industry archive.

2010: Goodbye to all that?



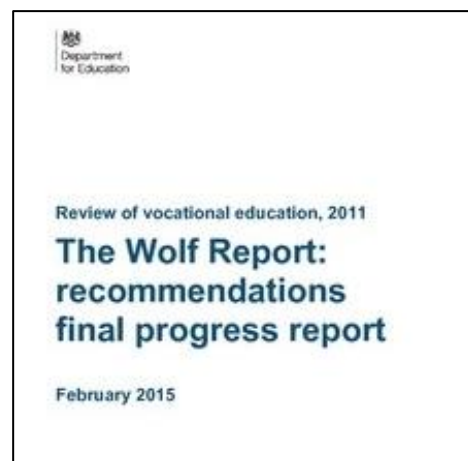
“Taskforce News” newsletter. Credit: Education and Employers.

At the beginning of the decade a contribution to the debate on the significance of employer engagement in education (Mann et al., 2010), heralded the establishment of a new charity – The Education and Employers Taskforce (now Education and Employers). Its vision was to “provide children and young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential”. It aimed to do this by: ‘bringing together leading national partners to work in a spirit of greater collaboration to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of education-employer activity undertaken by public, private and third sector organisations. In taking forward its mission, a key objective of the Taskforce is to understand better what happens when employers are engaged in educational processes’. (p. 6). Was it really the case that after more than forty years we still did not know?

A number of important points are made in the paper: the field is complex; different stakeholders have different objectives and hold varying views as to what they want from employer engagement. These include, for

example: pedagogical purposes, social inclusion aims, improved career information and guidance, enhanced transitions for young people, improved company profile and sales, addressing skills shortages. Herein lies the problem because research interests in this area are dispersed across a range of disciplines: education, sociology, economics, business, psychology, and in specialist fields within these wider disciplines. Also, much of the literature within the field resides in evaluation reports commissioned for specific projects and other “grey” promotional literature.

Nevertheless, despite this promising start from Education and Employers, and its call to arms for researchers, the return of a coalition government in 2010 heralded in a new era of education policy, which impacted significantly on the relationship between education and employers. Within very short order announcements were made that funding for EBPs and Connexions (careers service) would cease. The curriculum in schools was to focus on subjects, and particular ones at that, with associated targets, relegating “creative arts” subjects to second class (Baker, 2017; Henley, 2012; Warwick Commission, 2015). A significant change of direction came about as a result of the publication in 2011 of Review of Vocational Education (Wolf Report).



[Review of vocational education: the Wolf report](#). Department for Education, 2011.

The Review of Vocational Qualifications (Wolf Report)

The report, with its 27 recommendations, all of which were accepted, focused on vocational education for 14-19 year olds. Here is not the place to debate the wider implications of the Wolf Review, which included the introduction of T levels, but to highlight those recommendations of significant change for employer engagement. Namely, in Recommendation 21:

*‘DfE should evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds who are enrolled as full-time students..... Schools and colleges should be encouraged to prioritise longer internships for older students, reflecting the fact that almost no young people move into full-time employment at 16; and government should correspondingly **remove their statutory duty to provide every young person at KS4 with a standard amount of “work-related learning”**’(p.17) (author’s emphasis).*

The rationale given for this recommendation states:

‘....the blanket requirement to give all KS4 pupils ‘work experience’ – or, as it has officially become, ‘work-related learning’ – has served its time. It is very expensive: typically, for a

school, the equivalent of at least half a full-time senior teacher's salary a year plus substantial administrative support. Too often, now, this does not even involve being in a workplace, as schools admit defeat and arrange something 'work-related' (and largely pointless) on school premises (p.131).

This approach suggests that work-related learning is synonymous with work experience and does not focus on other aspects of work related learning, dating back over fifty years (DES, 1965; Huddleston and Oh, 2003; QCA, 2003; Huddleston and Stanley, 2013) and does not fully reflect the experiences of young people, their teachers, businesses and employers who took part in evaluation and research undertaken (Jones, Mann and Morris, 2015; Mann, Kashefpakdel and Percy, 2019; Huddleston, P. and Muir, F., 2009).

In Recommendation 27:

*'At college and school level the assessment and awarding processes used for vocational awards **should involve local employers on a regular basis. Awarding bodies should demonstrate, when seeking recognition, how employers are involved directly in development and specification of qualifications**' (p.18) (author's emphasis).*

As already noted in the development of 14-19 Diplomas this is not a straightforward process, employers are not specialists in the development of qualification specifications, nor are they necessarily specialists in assessment. However, employers have always been involved, to some extent. They have contributed sector specific knowledge for over a century in the case of City and Guilds, and with BTEC and its predecessors since the 1980s. To achieve this at scale with increasingly onerous demands on employers and on a voluntary basis is a significant request. This is not to mention the impact on

awarding organisations when trying to engage more employers more frequently.

Wolf's main recommendation in terms of what she describes as 'genuine work experience' is for more 16-19 year olds *'to spend substantial periods in the workplace, undertaking genuine workplace activities, in order to develop the general skills which the labour market demonstrably values'* (p.12). This has been made manifest in the requirements of all Programmes of Study for post-16 students, but specifically within the design of the approaching T levels (Huddleston and Laczik, 2019).

T levels

In introducing the action plan for the new T level qualification (DfE, 2017a), the Department describes them thus:

'...new technical study programmes that will sit alongside Apprenticeships within a reformed skills training system. The reforms are at the heart of a skills partnership between government, business and education and training providers – a partnership that will create the skills revolution needed to meet the demands of our economy' (p.4).

T levels are full-time programmes for 16-19 year olds to be studied at college, with a training provider, or in school (although it is hard to see how many schools have the necessary resource, expertise and experience to offer some of these qualifications). They are composite qualifications, unlike single subject A levels, and require students to study an approved technical qualification from a wide range of subject areas, complete 45 days work placement with an employer, achieve a minimum standard in English and maths, if not already achieved, plus other "enrichment

activities” designed to enhance “employability”. (Department for Education, 2020).

Employers and providers are working with the DfE and the Institute for Apprenticeships within T level panels to define the skills and requirements for each T Level course with the aim of identifying the technical knowledge and skills required by employers in each industry. Resulting qualification content is tested and reviewed with students, education providers and employers. Employers have also been asked to provide suggested content for industry-based assignments and, to some extent, support assessment. The provision of 45 days’ work placement (reduced from previous 50 days) and now allowing for some flexibility is a significant challenge and possibly unachievable, certainly in a post-Covid environment, without further modification once the full roll-out has been accomplished (DfE, 2018a).

It is clear that the demands for employer engagement within T levels are significant and these come in addition to all the other demands made for contributions to the educational experience of young people and adults from the primary phase onwards. They also bear a striking resemblance to the abandoned 14-19 Diplomas.

Careers guidance

Following the publication of its careers strategy (DfE, 2017b) in 2018 the government published Statutory Guidance for careers guidance in schools, further education and sixth form colleges (DfE, 2018b, DfE, 2018c). This sets out the expectations on schools in terms of their obligations to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks (Gatsby, 2014) for

excellence in careers guidance and enterprise. The eight benchmarks include, for the purposes of this account: ‘*Encounters with employers and employees*’ (Benchmark 5); ‘*Experiences of workplaces*’ (Benchmark 6); ‘*Linking curriculum learning to careers*’ (especially to STEM subjects, Benchmark 4). Sound familiar?

In support of this statutory requirement, the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) was commissioned to provide external support for schools to assist them in working towards the Gatsby targets and to connect them with employers. Enterprise Advisers (business volunteers) were encouraged to work with schools to help them develop a practical careers plan. The notion of enterprise advisers emerges once more. We should not forget that other policy directives, for example 16-19 Study Programmes also include careers guidance in their prescriptions. Alongside this, a National Careers Service working with employers and employer bodies operates across England.

The show goes on.....

At the same time a large number of organisations, charities and a number of small independent providers continue to act as brokers for the education sector to engage with education. Education and Employers, for example, has already engaged 56,000 volunteers to work with schools through its programmes: *Inspiring the Future* and *Primary Futures*, as well as conducting academic research in the field. Large colleges and universities have their own departments dedicated to such endeavours. Some organisations are long-lived, for example

Young Enterprise; others are more recently arrived, or may be refreshed versions of their former selves. The Edge Foundation, a charitable organisation, aims amongst other things to: *'create a broad, balanced and relevant 14-19 curriculum and to make school work relevant to the workplace by getting employers involved'* and conducts research into vocational education.

Large companies deliver bespoke programmes (for example Barclays Life skills), smaller companies engage by providing perhaps a few work experience placements or through mentoring. Hundreds of employers engage with the education system by acting as governors, sitting on advisory panels (for example awarding organisations), coaching (for skills competitions), helping with school clubs/activities (Prince's Trust xl clubs), the list goes on.



Inspiring Women Campaign. Credit: Education and Employers.

Some concluding thoughts

Whilst some may suggest that the foregoing account represents something of a trip down memory, there is also a case for suggesting that there is a whiff of policy amnesia as well. Many of the activities described and the attendant forms of employer engagement have been around for a very long time (over a hundred years in some cases). That is why it is surprising, and frustrating, that the education and skills policy wheel just keeps on turning, stopping from time to time in a different, but the same, place.

Employer engagement in education has been promoted in terms of a number of policy objectives: educational, social, economic and technological. These emphases change from time to time depending upon, *inter alia*, economic climate, political predilection, demographic challenges, skills shortages, access, equity and inclusion concerns, and sometimes, but not always, curriculum enrichment. Policies may also have unexpected and unintended consequences, they may achieve a multiplicity of objectives, or indeed none. As Billett (2014) reminds us what is 'intended' is not the same as what is 'enacted' or 'experienced' within the curriculum.

From the employer perspective we know that they are not a homogeneous group, the requirements in one sector may be quite different from the needs of another (Huddleston and Keep, 1999). There were more than 5 million self-employed people in the UK in the fourth quarter of 2019 - up from 2 million in 2000 (ONS, 2020) – a proportion likely to increase in the future.



[Inspiring the Future career speed networking event](#). Credit: Education and Employers.

'A typical worker, more likely to be a woman can anticipate having nine employers before reaching the age of thirty (Standing, 2014:62). Therefore, any attempt to engage with 'real' employers/employees represents a significant challenge in addition to which there is no statutory requirement on employers to engage. The result is that employer consultations involve "proxy" organisations and the coalition of the willing.

Employers are not experts in pedagogy, qualification design or assessment, unless from a training background, but they can contribute in other ways. Therefore, when asked to engage the focus should be upon what they can uniquely contribute ("authenticity"), what is straightforward, meaningful, related to sector needs and within their competence. Any guidance offered should be clear, not constantly changing, easily followed and unequivocally set out the expectations in terms of the scope of the tasks and time involved. It should be seen as a "two way street" since both can gain from such encounters. Less frequently within the narrative are the benefits to employers from engaging with education explored. Examples

include: personal and professional development opportunities for business people when mentoring pupils; “live projects” with colleges to solve real business problems; enhancing presentation and speaking skills through speaking at careers events.

Research carried out by Education and Employers suggests:

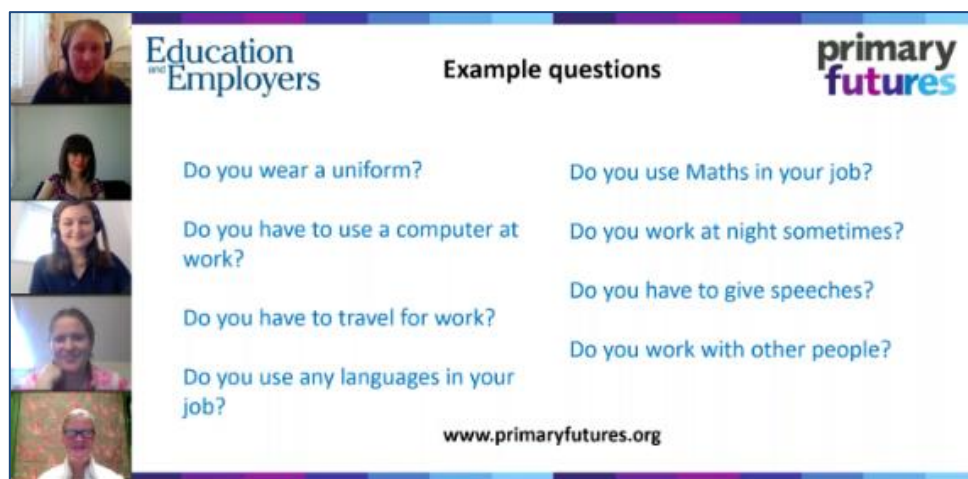
‘Interactions with employers and the world of work help to broaden young people’s horizons, raise their aspirations and challenge stereotypes. Activities such as work placements, work experience and career insight talks help increase their motivation to learn and be informed about the full range of jobs as well as the career routes into them. They also help reduce the mismatch between young people’s career aspirations and the reality of the labour market.’ (Chambers, July 2020).

In conclusion, it might be timely to reflect on two propositions raised earlier in this paper by the Hadow Report (1926) and Newsom Report (1963):

“every effort should be made to ensure a close connection between the work in school and the pupil’s further education” (Hadow Report, 1926, chapter 2); to which I suggest we should now add life.

“there might be room in the educational scene to draw more on the special knowledge or skills of persons outside the schools” (Newsom Report, 1963, chapter 6).

How far have these aims been achieved in the past half century or more? How far have we been sailing around the buoy rather than using the experiences to inform a more purposeful voyage?



Primary aged children taking part in a virtual interactive Primary Futures session with a range of volunteers from the world of work (July 2020). Credit: Education and Employers.

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