



A COMPARISON OF WELSH
AND ENGLISH APPROACHES
TO EMPLOYER
ENGAGEMENT IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE
IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC
COLLABORATION.
July 2021



Dr Hannah Blake and Dr Jill Hanson,
The International Centre for Guidance Studies

Policy Context



Wales

- Careers and World of Work Framework (2008) sets out guidance for careers education, guidance and work related guidance
- Welsh Baccalaureate – must be offered to all students at GCSE age. Focusses on providing young people with employability skills
- New Curriculum for Wales 2022 – introduction of six areas of learning which focus on the development of skills needed for modern life
- Department for Education and Skills National Mission – young people will be provided with experiences that will support them in becoming ‘enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work’ (Education Wales, 2017)

England

- OFSTED describe school/college employer engagement and careers provision as ‘patchy’ in 2013
- The Careers & Enterprise Company launched in 2014 to support schools and colleges to engage with employers
- Piloting of the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks of good career guidance to support schools and colleges to deliver high quality career guidance in 2015
- Gatsby Benchmarks central to Government’s Statutory Guidance to schools and Colleges in 2018
- Implementation of Gatsby Benchmarks results in increased career readiness and improved attainment outcomes (2021)



derby.ac.uk

England: The Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance

- 1 A stable careers programme
- 2 Learning from career and labour market information
- 3 Addressing the needs of each pupil
- 4 Linking curriculum learning to careers
- 5 Encounters with employers and employees
- 6 Experiencing of workplaces
- 7 Encounters with further and higher education
- 8 Personal guidance

- The Career & Enterprise Company (CEC) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) oversee Enterprise Coordinators and Enterprise advisers to work with schools and colleges, initially on Benchmarks 5 and 6
- The CEC launch Career Hubs
- The CEC provide free training for Careers Leaders

Methodology

WALES

- Research undertaken for PhD around the role of businesses in schools in South Wales looking at corporate social responsibility and engagement.

Research took place 2017/2018:

- Semi-structured interviews with representatives from 10 businesses, 8 schools and 3 school-business partnership brokers
- 1 focus group with selection of school children
- 4 observations of engagement events

ENGLAND

- Four year evaluation of the implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks in 16 pilot schools and colleges in the North East of England, 2015-2019
- Longitudinal design using mixed methods:
 - Semi-structured interviews with school/college staff each year
 - Focus groups with students each year
 - Benchmark audit exercise each year
 - Semi-structured interviews each year with Enterprise Coordinators, Enterprise Advisers, local employers and other stakeholders

How did schools in Wales engage with businesses?

- This varied throughout schools depending on their needs, resources and capabilities.
- 4 types of engagement
 - Careers and Skills Acquisition (CV writing, mock interviews, careers fairs)
 - Curriculum (Welsh Baccalaureate, visiting lectures)
 - Finance and Resources (Donation of monies and resources i.e. IT equipment and sports kits)
 - Community Engagement (Students participating in charity days for businesses)
- Careers and World of Work Framework is not used or followed
- Extent of engagement ranged from some schools having no engagement to others having it multiple times a week

Impact and issues of engagement in Wales

- No formal attempt to measure success or impact

‘we weren’t set any specific targets in terms of what sort of activity might happen with each partnership, what sort of impact or outcomes you might want to see from each of the partnerships so there were no targets’ (School Business Broker)

‘how do you design a performance framework that actually measures the impact of employer engagement in schools?’ (Local Authority)

- For some schools impact was measured through their financial donations from schools and the resources that were donated to them
- Lack of formalised strategy – differs between businesses, brokers and schools
- Seen as a tick box exercise

How did schools in England engage with businesses?

- The Benchmarks enabled schools/colleges to audit their provision and identify what they were doing well and what they needed to do in order to achieve each Benchmark 5 and 6 (which comprise most of employer engagement activity).
- These identified needs dictated how schools worked with businesses
- The LEP and CEC's network of Enterprise Coordinators and Enterprise advisors was critical – schools/colleges forged partnerships with their advisers and with other employers to fill those 'needs'
- Common language of the Benchmarks helped all stakeholders understand each other and work together, and evaluate provision
- Shift from ad hoc acceptance of activities offered by employers to strategic planning – Benchmarks provided an impetus for this

Impact and issues of engagement in England

- Gatsby Benchmarks encouraged schools and colleges to be less dependent on one individual, or even on one employer and to work collaboratively with each other.
- The role of external partners was perceived to be fundamental in sustaining progress:

“It would be a mistake to think that the progress made so far would be sustained by schools and colleges alone [if there wasn’t an Enterprise Coordinator at the LEP or enterprise advisers work with those coordinators] or via only digital support.”

(Company Director and Enterprise Adviser, 2018)

- The Benchmarks provided employers and schools/colleges with a joint agenda and enabled employers to challenge education providers if the employers felt the activities would not be beneficial.

“It became what can we do to meet Gatsby, we challenge them about why they are doing it and in that way. Pre Gatsby, I knew I was being used as a babysitter, doing sessions with Year 7. We would push back now, if it doesn’t support the Benchmarks and it is just to amuse Year 7s we won’t do it”.

(Engagement Manager from a large local employer, 2019)

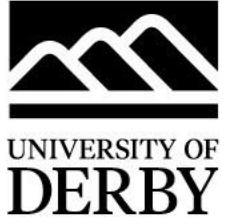
- Employers ended up being involved in helping schools/colleges meet Benchmarks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 and the impact of improved carer guidance on students was significant (career readiness, attainment, raised aspirations and intended destinations)

Conclusions

A framework that describes what good looks like and how to do that enables all stakeholders to:

- Audit provision
- Have a shared language
- Have a common purpose
- Evaluate the quality of the provision and identify steps for development
- Work strategically together to enable students to be career ready, improve attainment, raise aspirations and have intended destinations.

Without this framework, partnerships are not driven by needs and are not strategic.



Questions?



derby.ac.uk