

Education
and Employers

primary
futures



Primary Futures Blackpool Project Evaluation

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Introduction

The Primary Futures Blackpool project, funded by the Blackpool Opportunity Area, was launched in September 2021, running over the 2021-22 academic year until July 2022. The project aimed to build on the success of work previously carried out by Primary Futures in the Blackpool area to make Blackpool a national example of excellence, inspiring primary-aged children through career-related learning activities. Our approach was to offer schools a package of support working towards the embedding of career-related learning activities, ensuring that teachers are upskilled to utilise Primary Futures independently.

“The Primary Futures set up allows us to make contact with volunteers who work in a vast array of jobs, requiring many different skills. It enables the children to see the value in learning a wide range of curriculum subjects as each can open up doors to so many future vocations. Ultimately, we want to develop our children’s aspirations at the earliest opportunity.” **Dr Elaine Allen, headteacher at St John Vianney Catholic Primary School**

Why Blackpool?

Blackpool was identified as an Opportunity Area by the Department for Education with a number of contributing factors including lack of social mobility and (perceived lack of) opportunities for future careers¹. Schools reported that the pandemic exacerbated narrowed aspirations as well as motivation in subject learning. The project took a localised approach, utilising a remote team combined with a steering group of local educators and harnessing a vast database of volunteer role models, both nationally and with local ties, showcasing future possibilities for children in Blackpool and beyond. Many activities had a local flavour, such as jobs associated with the famous Blackpool Illuminations, and children and teachers were given local labour market information through ice breaker activities for children and teacher training sessions.

Why primary schools?

Research from our charity, Education and Employers, has established the importance of starting early with career-related learning, because children start to limit the possibilities for their future from an early age, often based on their gender or socioeconomic background. Children's narrowed aspirations stay remarkably consistent into adolescence, often misaligned with labour market needs, hence the call to embed aspirational thinking and activities into curricular and extracurricular school life before children access statutory careers programmes in secondary schools. Primary school teachers in Blackpool and elsewhere have valued the opportunities to enliven classroom learning through career-related learning.

The intended project outcomes were:

1. Children are more informed about how what they are learning in school links to the wider world (focus on English and maths)
2. Children’s aspirations and horizons are broadened with pupils having an increased awareness of jobs
3. Children’s improved perception of self: confidence, self-efficacy, self-belief and the jobs they can access, including tackling gender stereotypes
4. Teachers are supported to recognise the role of career-related learning and to implement an effective programme of employer engagement in their primary school
5. Increased community and employer engagement in primary schools

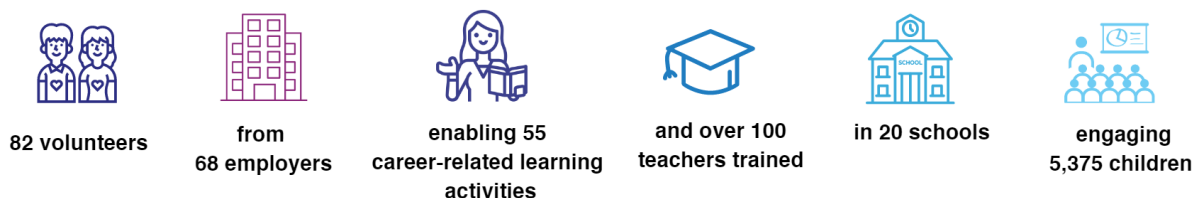
¹ <https://blackpoolopportunityarea.co.uk/>

Intervention approach

The facilitated support offered to schools was:

- A planning call to tailor the project intervention to children's needs by understanding the school's motivations and priorities for participating in the project.
- Two facilitated multi-school showcase events to bring together schools across Blackpool to model virtual sessions and create area-wide community and buzz around career-related learning.
- A bespoke Primary Futures virtual careers activity with workplace volunteers.
- Pre-recorded video resources featuring volunteer talks with interactive elements around themes such as the NHS, the festive period and tackling gender stereotypes.
- Teacher training sessions at school-based staff meetings to (i) introduce Primary Futures (ii) raise awareness of the benefits and the evidence base for career-related learning and (iii) equip staff to plan and embed their own activities independently for a whole-school approach.

Project Reach



Schools

The Primary Futures Blackpool project engaged 20 schools and 5,375 children through 55 activities. In addition, the project trained 107 teachers on the benefits of career-related learning and shared good practice on delivering activities with volunteers from the world of work. As a result, 85 teachers then registered for Primary Futures so that they could continue accessing volunteers and resources beyond the life of the project.

Case Study: Boundary Primary School – STEM-themed career related learning

Boundary Primary's facilitated activity was STEM-themed. 240 Key Stage 2 children joined the virtual 'What's My Line?' Guess my Job activity on the 21st of April, with the activity happening as part of the school's Science Day. Three volunteers from science and engineering took part – a cosmetic scientist, pharmacist, and a strategic technology manager at the local chemical and manufacturing company Victrex. The school also requested a gender stereotype element if possible, which the latter volunteer mentioned in her talk – she discussed the process of becoming a professional scientist/engineer in what was traditionally a male-dominated sector. A notable part of the activity the children seemed to particularly enjoy was the virtual tour of the cosmetic scientist's home lab, and a guide through the products she currently helps make.

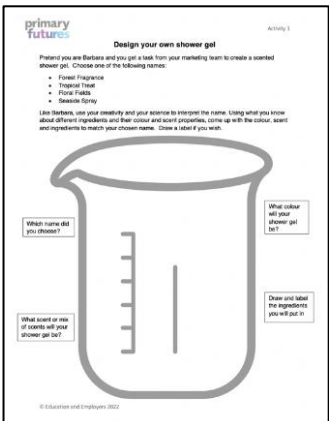
Below are some of the children's learnings from the session:

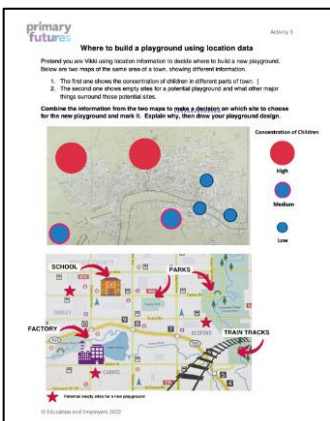
- We didn't know how long it took to become a pharmacist
- Education is important in science related jobs
- Both men and women can do any of the jobs
- There are lots of other subjects that link to science

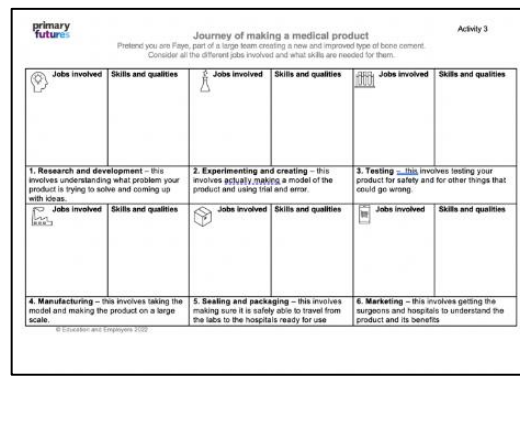
Bespoke school activities typically involved a job guessing game format or standard careers Q&A format. These followed bespoke themes linked to school priorities such as challenging gender stereotypes, literacy and the importance of reading and STEM topics.

Alongside pre-recorded video resources already available through Primary Futures, the project developed a new pre-recorded video focused on women working in STEM-related roles. This met project priorities to tackle gender stereotypes and the importance of STEM subjects. The video featured three inspirational women in STEM jobs across healthcare, cosmetics and local government. Volunteers were Faye a scientist working in Blackpool at a Johnson & Johnson company to develop bone cement for bone replacement surgeries, Barbara a cosmetic scientist creating personal care products like shampoo, perfumes and hand sanitisers and Vikki who leads all the digital solutions teams at Wirral Council, translating between the technical language of programming and what needs to be done to service the local community.

In accompanying learning activities, students were able to reflect on these talks and, as optional extensions, employ their enquiry skills to work scientifically and solve some of the problems faced by volunteers in their jobs. This pre-recorded video has provided a legacy to the project now being used by schools nationally through the Primary Futures platform, with over 120 primary schools nationally accessing the resource to use with over 12,000 children.







Employer engagement

82 volunteers representing 68 employers engaged in this project to deliver 91 career insight talks. Volunteers represented local, national, and international organisations from SMEs to large employers, with 24% having local ties to Blackpool, 58% being female and 25% from an ethnic minority background.

Volunteers represented a vast range of employers from various sectors including healthcare, tech, finance, transport, infrastructure, media and arts. They ranged from big-brand employers like ITV, to multinationals operating locally like DePuy Synthes and to small SMEs such as the local art gallery, Grundy. . With thanks to the Blackpool Responsible Business Network for engaging their employer network to support the recruitment of local volunteers.

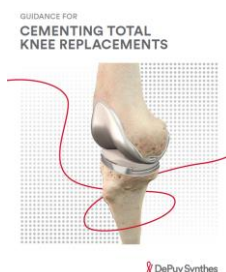
Blackpool & the Fylde College
 Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust
 Starboard Hotels
 Starboard Hotels Merlin Entertainments Limited Network Rail
 Amazon Web Services (AWS) Bank of America
 Penguin PR UK Power Networks Environment Agency
 Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust
 DePuy Synthes Network Rail Serco Serco Lightpool Festival
 ITV The National Trust Victrex SAS International
 Starboard Hotels Royal Air Force CityFibre
 Royal Air Force Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
 Grundy Art Gallery Blackpool & the Fylde College
 Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
 Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
 UK Power Networks The National Trust
 Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

Case Study: Volunteer, Faye Hodgson

Faye Hodgson lives and works in Blackpool. A native of Carlisle who studied in Manchester, she decided to take a graduate scientist role at Depuy Synthes, a Johnson & Johnson company that manufactures orthopaedic medical devices. Faye works on developing bone cement that surgeons use to keep implants in place.

Using play dough to demonstrate, Faye talked live to children about the jobs involved from R&D to testing and getting a product to market. She shed insight into both her lab and desk roles, and how she used enquiry skills, a key part of the primary science curriculum, as well as writing skills to put together clear reports. Faye introduced children to this invisible world on their doorstep, with manufacturing, laboratories and clean rooms all onsite in Blackpool. Faye also featured in our 'STEM in everyday life' video resource.

Faye enjoyed figuring out ways to pitch her talk age-appropriately and she inspired children by telling them the things she enjoys about Blackpool as someone who chose to live and work there. Despite her personal plug for the opportunities Blackpool has to offer, she showed children how mobile a scientist's career could be, with the entire world as her oyster.



Impact - Children

The project focused on three key impact areas for children:

1. Children are more informed about how what they are learning in school links to the wider world (focus on English and maths)
2. Children's aspirations and horizons are broadened with pupils having an increased awareness of jobs
3. Children's improved perception of self: confidence, self-efficacy, self-belief and the jobs they can access, including tackling gender stereotypes

We aimed to measure this through four key outcomes:

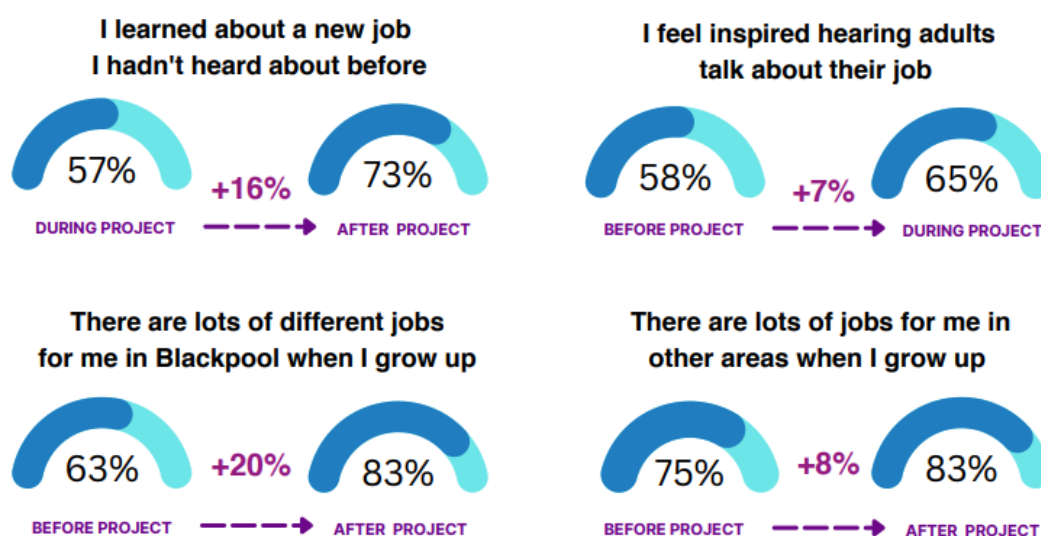
- % of children that learned about a new job they hadn't heard about before
- % of children feeling that there are lots of different jobs available to them in the future
- % of children that feel more motivated in their learning at school after hearing about relevance to jobs
- % of children that feel that various non-traditional jobs are available to both boys and girls

The evaluation included children, teacher and volunteer surveys with closed and open-ended questions. For children, baseline, midpoint and endline surveys were requested from at least one class/year group in each participating school. Responses collected were as follows:

	No of children respondents	No of schools represented
Baseline	562	17
Midpoint	425	12
Endline	410	10

Broadening horizons

Based on both children's and teachers' qualitative and quantitative responses, the project had the greatest cumulative impact on broadening children's horizons. The greatest distance travelled from baseline to endline was in the children's agreement that 'there are lots of different jobs for me in Blackpool when I grow up (+20%)', 'there are lots of different jobs for me in other places when I grow up' (+8%) and that 'I learned about a new job that I hadn't heard about before (+16%)'.



Comments from children included:

- *There are lots of different and unique jobs in the world and there's many to pick from*
- *We have learned not to let our gender stop us doing anything*
- *Reading and writing are very important in all of the jobs*
- *The thing I liked best about the activity was the action and excitement of their jobs*
- *There are lots of little jobs in one big job*
- *I was surprised that Tony is a nurse*

Linking learning to the wider world

When asked about their agreement with the statement 'English/Maths are used in most jobs' results showed an 8% increase in children 'strongly agreeing' and 'agreeing' from baseline to endline, indicating that activities have helped to show children the relevance of these subjects in different jobs. For several activities, volunteers were briefed to focus on this as part of their talks at the request of schools such as in the bespoke activity at Bispham Endowed CE Primary, which is highlighted in the case study above.

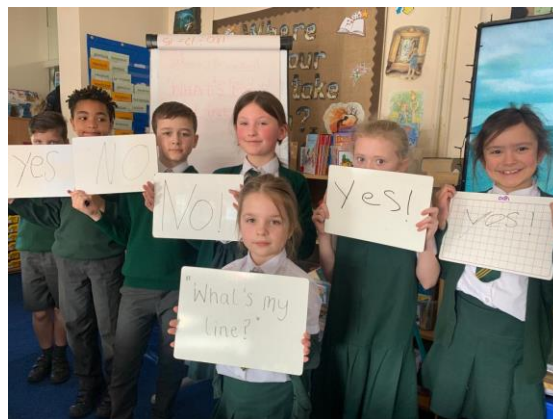
Case Study: Bispham Endowed CE Primary School – linking literacy learning to jobs

Michelle Warburton, headteacher of Bispham Endowed CE Primary School in Blackpool, came to the project by word of mouth, motivated to use careers activities to enhance literacy and the school's reading for pleasure campaign. To get whole school buy-in, Primary Futures delivered an all-staff training on the evidence base of starting early and practical tips for accessing volunteers that invariably all use literacy in their jobs, alongside those in which English is a key focus.

200 children had their first introduction to the project through the large virtual event in the autumn, 'Illuminating Careers', showcasing jobs that bring Illuminations to life, including a tram driver, creative director and gallery worker. Pupils did some writing and drawing reflections prior to the event - another way to give purpose to their literacy learning. A few classes followed up with video resources, meeting behind-the-scenes jobs of the festive season and women working in STEM sectors of medical technology, local government and cosmetic science, with an on-screen interactive guessing game. Pupils then met a male nurse and female technology professional in a gender stereotypes themed activity.

Finally, 300 children from Year 2 to Year 6 had three volunteers virtually visit their school exclusively in June. One of them, an employee at local chemicals company Victrex, inspired children by telling them she herself was once a student at Bispham! She was joined in an interactive Q&A panel by a graphic designer in the film and television industry and a civil engineer. All three volunteers discussed their job and the importance of English skills, such as reading, writing and communicating.

Following the sessions, children said 'you can do whatever job you want when you work hard', 'you have to know maths and English, and 'that girls and boys can do any job'. One child left particularly inspired: 'there is more jobs than I think out there in the world, and I can do anything i want and no one can tell me different.'



Children were also asked about their agreement that 'learning at school is important for my future job'. There is significantly high agreement at baseline (over 88%) and then a small decrease in agreement from baseline to endline (-3%). A similar pattern was noted in the equivalent statement in the charity's national study of 20,000 children (Scaling Up), as well as in our recent Inspiring Dorset project impact evaluation suggesting this is not a Blackpool-specific trend.

One interpretation is that children are aware of the "correct" answer in principle and answer with this in mind rather than their true attitude; another is that the content of volunteer talks are not standardised and therefore not all volunteers may explicitly speak about school subjects unless prompted by the session facilitator or in a Q&A. Another possible explanation is that volunteers tell their authentically complex journeys, which often entail arriving at their jobs despite academic 'failures' or not doing well at school. While results in this area are mixed, qualitative data from individual activities shows that many children saw the applicability of learning and key subjects to all jobs they encountered:

- *One thing I learned from volunteers talking about their job is you have to know maths and English*
- *One thing I learned from volunteers talking about their job is that lots of jobs use maths and English*
- *One thing I learned from volunteers talking about their job is that you need to be good at maths and science*
- *One thing I learned from volunteers talking about their job is they use basic skills like maths in some jobs*
- *One thing I learned from volunteers talking about their job is a lot of jobs have science involved with them*

Improved perception of self, including tackling gender stereotypes

While exposing children to a wide range of diverse role models in the world of work implicitly tackles gendered aspirations about jobs, this project benefitted from additional funding from the government's Gender and Equalities Office. As a result, Primary Futures offered explicitly themed gender stereotypes interventions, including a virtual webinar, teacher training and the video resource featuring women working in STEM roles.

To measure the impact of activities on challenging gender stereotypes, children were asked to identify whether a given list of jobs could be done by boys or girls or both.

Jobs where a high proportion of pupils had a stereotypically gendered view before the project



In ranking order of the greatest shift, these are jobs where children shifted their gendered views after the project, understanding that both boys and girls can do these jobs



Previous learnings indicate that children often display an unconscious bias, knowing that in principle boys and girls can both do all jobs, but not applying this to their own aspirations. The word cloud below shows girls' aspirations after the project. While nurse, teacher and vet remain popular choices, after the project more girls indicated they would like to be a doctor, police officer, footballer, lawyer or pilot.



To measure outcomes on self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-belief regardless of background and gender, children were asked about 'feeling brave about doing a job even if not many people like me do it'. Feedback showed a small positive shift from baseline to endline, indicating activities have had an impact on these areas.

“Blackpool is one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK and for the children at St John Vianney’s, seeing people from the town who have gone on to have brilliant jobs – people like Hannah and Stuart – who they can relate to, is inspiring. We’ve already taken part in an online event for World Book Day and we’re looking forward to being more involved with the project in the future.” **Teacher Damian Horton, St John Vianney**

Case Study: St Nicholas Church of England Primary School – challenging gender stereotypes

On the 14th of June, 120 children across Year 5 and 6 from St Nicholas Church of England Primary School attended their bespoke virtual gender stereotypes themed ‘What’s My Line?’.

The school asked specifically for at least one male and one female in roles that would challenge children’s preconceptions of gender within jobs, after the ‘tackling gender stereotypes’ multi-school activity in February sparked some interesting conversations with pupils around what boys or girls can do when they are older. Three volunteers took part – Steven, a therapist; Erika, a lawyer; Jansel, an accountant. All three spoke about how gender stereotypes impacted them in their job. For example, Erika discussed how she is often the only woman in meetings with other lawyers, and how she balances being a mother of two alongside a demanding job. The children engaged with this by asking questions about both these topics, notably ‘How do you manage to be a mum and a lawyer at the same time?’.

After the activity, Sarah, the teacher contact at the school, discussed her plans to introduce a session like this relating to gender stereotypes for the rest of the school using the knowledge gained from their Primary Futures staff training in January.

Impact – Teachers

Teacher respondents rated the project highly, with 86% of the teachers indicating that the project was ‘highly or very impactful’.

- *It has shown children the types of careers available to them that they thought previously weren’t or even didn’t realise they existed.*
- *Inspiring, engaging, interactive.*
- *A good introduction to careers for our children. The project gave them the opportunity to see what was available to them beyond their locality.*

Teachers were asked to rate the different elements of the project, with the highest ratings given to the planning call, bespoke virtual event at their school and the general support offered by the project team. This suggests that teachers placed high value on individual support from the Primary Futures team and the ability of the programme to flex to their bespoke needs.



86%

said the project was highly impactful



86%

said children became aware that maths and English are used in most jobs



100%

said children broadened their horizons and raised their aspirations



100%

said children challenged their gendered stereotypes about jobs



71%

intend to link careers to curriculum



Teachers rated the bespoke elements of the project highest as compared to the large-scale activities

In open-ended responses about what they think worked well, teachers referenced the organisation, bespoke activities and volunteers as a positive:

- *A range of career options were discussed.*
- *Bespoke science 'growth' webinar. All the participants were engaging and inspired more detailed questions from the pupils.*
- *Brilliant support in setting up events and training for online activities.*
- *We have loved linking the life skills curriculum in school. We particularly enjoyed the personalised session for our school and the gender stereotypes event.*
- *Showcase events - The events showed our children possible career choices beyond our locality.*
- *Great planning.*

While feedback about activities was positive, constructive feedback was given about the virtual nature of activities indicating a desire from schools to return to in-person activities moving forwards:

- *face to face rather than remote*
- *Post Covid, more in person events, also notifications of updates of what/who is added to the pre records so I can plan to use in curriculum planning.*
- *Getting more visitors into school*

Teachers were asked for their feedback on the impact on children after activities. 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their children:

- Learned about a new job they hadn't heard about before
- Learned there are lots of different jobs for them in the future
- Feel that there are no jobs that are limited to just boys or just girls

This largely corroborates children's survey responses that show the largest positive shift in outcome statements related to broadening horizons, as well as challenging gender stereotypes. Teachers felt more strongly than children reported that there had been an impact on children feeling inspired after hearing adults talk about their jobs (86% of teachers agreed with this compared to 67% of children at endline). Similarly, on subject motivation, teachers showed greater confidence that there had been an impact on children learning that English/Maths are used in most jobs (86% of teachers agreed with this compared to 77% of children at endline). It is possible that teachers are seeing indicators of this shift in motivation in the classroom that are not reflected in children's own responses

Teachers were also able to share some examples of pupils that were particularly inspired or impacted by encountering volunteers from the world of work:

- *Seb - 9 year old who was inspired by Stuart at the School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool. He found it fascinating as he could relate to the reptiles being researched as he kept them himself.*
- *The virtual talk was hugely inspiring. Although we only have one female student, she began looking at potential careers in a different/not so limited way.²*
- *One child was completely shocked that a male could be a nurse.*
- *One child was inspired by the talk about hospitals and knowing there are other jobs than just doctor and nurse*



² Educational Diversity are a Pupil Referral Unit for ages 6-16 and focused on their KS2 class for this project.

Case Study: Thames Primary Academy

Thames Primary Academy headteacher, Julie Allison, registered the school for the project as she was keen to ensure the school supported the broadening of their children's aspirations, having identified it as a challenge. 60% of children at the school were eligible for free school meals and unemployment was prevalent within the local community. It was the first time the school had worked with Primary Futures, and she also joined the project steering committee to ensure local priorities were represented.

The school were keen to take part in as many aspects of the project as possible, with 120 children from the school joining the illuminating Careers Multi-school Showcase event to kick off the project in November 2021. Following a planning call with Primary Futures to map out their engagement in the project, they decided to first utilise the Primary Futures Festive pre-recorded resources, identifying this as a good way to get staff involved initially.

Thames Primary Academy were very keen to embed career related activity across the school and organised for teacher training to be delivered in January 2022 for 11 staff members. All 11 staff members in attendance created a Primary Futures account the same day. Following a discussion on how they can best use Primary Futures to compliment the curriculum in the next academic year and beyond, one teacher created an activity on their account on the topic of space travel to link to an upcoming topic they were teaching.

During the staff training discussion, the topic of their bespoke activity was decided – jobs in healthcare. This was chosen as it linked to a healthcare topic one year group were studying in PSHE in the summer term. The bespoke activity aimed to help children to find out about healthcare jobs they may not have heard about before or may not typically associate with a hospital. Volunteers on the day included an occupational therapist and an advanced biomedical support worker whose role involved supporting biomedical scientists with preparing patients' samples.

The school engaged in a wide range of activities across the project duration, beginning their journey towards embedding career-related learning across the school. 15 teachers from the school are now registered to Primary Futures as an ongoing legacy and are able to use the platform moving forwards to organise more activities across the next academic year.

Legacy and Recommendations

As a historical flagship area for Primary Futures, the majority of Blackpool's 35 schools with a primary phase have engaged in some career-related learning. However, the fallout from the pandemic prevented some keen schools from getting involved due to other urgent priorities. Throughout the delivery of the project, Primary Futures focused on efforts to sustain momentum with Blackpool schools and volunteers, with the expectation that teacher-led activity will increase moving forwards and volunteers will be invited to more activities by schools. At the end of project celebration event, teachers expressed interest in maintaining a community of practice and learning from and sharing tips with each other.

There is great potential through these types of interventions to deliver a localised approach to a nationally tried and tested programme, combining local future labour market needs with the priorities of local schools and harnessing the power of local employers and volunteers. To sustain the momentum built by the project and enable more activity moving forwards, our recommendations are:

- A Senior Leadership Team (SLT) backed approach was necessary for schools to maximise benefit from the project, in particular the aspect of embedding career-related learning activity beyond the life of the project, using Primary Futures platform of volunteers independently. We recommend schools looking to take this forward involve SLT at an early stage and ensure all staff have a good understanding of the benefits of career-related learning to their primary school pupils and parents.
- Teachers have expressed their intent to embed careers activities in the curriculum moving forwards. Feedback throughout the project indicated that the support provided to staff from Primary Futures through training and calls was helpful in getting this activity started. Teachers have indicated that ongoing support would be useful to ensure they feel confident and able to use Primary Futures moving forwards.
- Both children and teachers gave feedback indicating an appetite for more in-person rather than virtual activities post-pandemic. While previous research shows equivalent outcomes for both formats, saturation with virtual events means there is a desire to run more in-person activities moving forwards. Continued employer engagement and volunteer recruitment is needed to further diversify the pool of local volunteers available to schools, particularly males in non-traditional roles.
- Teacher feedback and pupils' anecdotal learnings indicate a positive impact on core subject motivation, for example seeing how maths, science and English learning link to future aspirations. However, pupil survey responses in these areas were less conclusive. To ensure that pupils can confidently recognise their learnings in these areas, we recommend refining evaluation questions and standardising the linking of subjects to jobs during volunteers' talks.
- Blackpool continues to be an exemplar for other areas for its commitment to joining up early career-related learning with curricular learning, social mobility and the need for a future skilled workforce. Many schools have shown best practice, with this project as a springboard. For example, Baines' Endowed CE Primary has linked career talks to several key moments in school life such as World Maths Day, Y6/7 Transitions and science topics. Moving forwards, we recommend that Blackpool maintains a community of best practice for schools to learn and motivate each other.

Appendix

Participating Schools

Anchorsholme Academy
Baines Endowed CE Primary School
Bispham Endowed CE Primary School
Blackpool Gateway Academy
Boundary Primary School
Devonshire Primary Academy
Educational Diversity
Hawes Side Academy
Kincraig Primary School
Marton Primary Academy & Nursery
Mereside Primary Academy
Park Community School
St John Vianney Catholic Primary School
St John's C of E Primary School
St Kentigern's Catholic Primary School
St Nicholas' CE Primary
Stanley Primary School
Thames Primary Academy
Unity Academy
Westminster Academy



Primary Futures connects schools with volunteers from the world of work who can be invited to take part in virtual and in-person activities to help broaden children's horizons. It also gives schools access to a range of planning resources and support, as well as pre-recorded video resources.

Primary Futures is a free programme run in partnership with the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Education and Employers charity, as part of its Inspiring the Future service.

Sign up as a school or volunteer
inspiringthefuture.org

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