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# ENGAGING EMPLOYERS IN SCHOOL CAREERS GUIDANCE

A report on our Young Careers service

**POLICY & RESEARCH**  
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# 1 SUMMARY

This report looks at the role of employer involvement in careers advice and guidance in schools. It is based on interviews with eight of the employers that are working with the two careers cluster pilots that Reed in Partnership is running in London, helping secondary schools to design high-quality careers advice and guidance for students. The eight employers are:



We asked employers why they got involved, what careers activities they have found successful so far and what they think is most important in developing sustainable relationships between schools and employers. We have also looked at wider learning from the pilot so far, but this report focuses on the employer engagement aspect of the project. We hope that this will be of interest to employers, schools and all those trying to improve the careers offer to young people - and encourage more employers to get involved. We want to see all young people benefit from high quality careers provision that will help them to thrive in their future careers.

We would like to express our thanks to the individuals who took time to be interviewed for this report.



## Key points

### Reed in Partnership's Young Careers service

- Young Careers involves two career clusters in London that have engaged more than 11,000 students at 12 schools in careers activities and learning, with the support of 48 employers. More than 400 events have been held so far.



### The case for getting involved

- Every employer's motivation for engaging with schools' careers provision is different. Increasing workforce diversity, improving social mobility and developing the skills pipeline are key reasons for doing so, while most employers are keen to improve young people's understanding of the career options in their sector and challenge misconceptions.

### What makes for successful employer encounters?

- Competitions, challenges and small group work engage students effectively, employers say, but more traditional offerings such as CV workshops or mock interviews also have a part to play. From their experience, employers report working in small groups as particularly effective. It's not just the activity but how it is delivered and who delivers it - for example it helps to inspire young people when they meet someone "like them".

### How do you develop sustainable employer/school relationships?

- A sustainable careers strategy built with strong employer/school relationships is the goal, rather than ad hoc activities. But this takes hard work, time and the slow development of a two-way relationship. This is where good intentions can flounder on practical realities. Employers are very clear that an effective broker or facilitator can help them achieve this, while a committed and consistent careers champion at the school is needed to sustain an employer/school partnership over the long term.



### What are employers looking for in their future employees?

- Employers focused on mindset and personal skills rather than skills relevant to a specific job, such as willingness to learn, motivation, team spirit, confidence and having something to say.

## 2 BACKGROUND: SCHOOL CAREERS ADVICE AND EMPLOYERS

When we published a survey of young people aged 16-25 in 2016, we found that fewer than one in four (24%) rated the careers advice they had received as “good” or “excellent”. In fact, 38% rated it as either “poor” or “not at all helpful”.

In 2012-13 responsibility for careers guidance for students aged 12 to 18 was transferred directly to schools. While there have been great examples of successful school or regional programmes, most research paints a picture of patchy and incoherent provision following this change, with many schools struggling to fund or prioritise careers provision. By 2015 things were bad enough for the then Chief Inspector of Schools Michael Wilshaw to describe careers advice as “a disaster area” in evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee<sup>1</sup>.

More recently, there have been growing grounds for optimism. Established in 2015, the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) has been growing its national network connecting schools and employers. There is a consensus around what educators and careers advice providers are trying to achieve, focusing on the Gatsby benchmarks<sup>2</sup> - eight measures of good practice that are now widely seen as the standard of excellence that should be used to develop and put into practice great careers provision for children and young people. Lastly the Government’s Careers Strategy<sup>3</sup>, published in December 2017, has the Gatsby benchmarks at its core. It sees the CEC taking on a new, better-resourced role in co-ordinating and supporting the efforts of all schools to bring their careers provision up to the standards the benchmarks set, although some have voiced concerns about whether the level of financial support is enough. Crucially, the careers strategy is integrated with the Government’s social mobility strategy for schools<sup>4</sup>, recognising that too often, those young people most in need of good careers advice and guidance have least access to it.



There are many challenges - not least the capacity of resource-stretched schools to put in place trained careers leaders and resource careers education - but the Government's careers strategy and the Gatsby benchmarks offer a clear direction for schools, employers and their stakeholders to work towards. Effective employer engagement is absolutely crucial if these efforts are to succeed.

## Why employer engagement is key

There is very strong evidence that employer engagement has a significant positive impact on children's educational and labour market outcomes. The Careers Strategy says that every young person should have at least one experience of work every year during school years seven to 13<sup>5</sup>.

Research from the Education and Employers charity found that young people who could recall four or more encounters with employers during their education were 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training than those who said that they had no contact<sup>6</sup>. There is also evidence that encounters with employers and the world of work impact on students' academic achievement. A survey carried out by Education and Employers of 824 secondary school teachers<sup>7</sup> found that 93% believed that taking part in

employer engagement, careers advice and work experience has a direct impact on improving exam results. As one of the authors

noted: "For many students, making a connection between the world of work and what they are learning motivates them to study harder. This translates into better exam results."



### 3 OUR WORK

As a national provider of employment and skills services - drawing on more than 50 years of the Reed family of businesses' recruitment experience - Reed in Partnership benefits from strong relationships with large and small employers spanning the length and breadth of the UK.

## Reed in Partnership's Young Careers service in London

“For those who know where and how to access it, London is a city full of opportunity,” the Mayor of London’s first ever skills strategy for London<sup>8</sup> says. It explains that too often, however, young people and adults born to poorer families or belonging to minority or disadvantaged groups are held back from accessing the Capital’s economic, social, cultural or civic opportunities. Moreover one report<sup>9</sup> suggests that many young people in London (equivalent to 480,000 across the UK as a whole) are not studying or working nor claiming any form of state support, suggesting a staggering number of young people who may have “fallen off the government’s radar” in failing to make the transition from school to employment or further study.

When young people make that transition, a post-16 education system in which “everything points to University as the default”<sup>10</sup> means that apprenticeships and other post-16 vocational options struggle to get a hearing. Recent research by the Greater London Authority with young people found that they did not feel they were being presented with a full range of options. “All said that they felt that schools/colleges pushed university as the best option, and that other options were presented as inferior.”<sup>11</sup>

These are issues facing the education system across the UK and not just in London. In fact, thanks to the London challenge and the efforts of the devolved London government to tackle educational inequalities, disadvantaged students in London have seen huge strides in their educational opportunities, with nine in 10 attending a good or outstanding school compared to one in five in Blackpool and Knowsley<sup>12</sup>.

But despite the strides that London schools have made, huge educational and labour market inequalities in outcomes in London remain. Despite outperforming other regions at GCSE level, London fails to sustain this progress post-16, with huge variations in level three attainment between local authorities<sup>13</sup>. While outer London boroughs do not feature in the worst national

## WORK WITH EMPLOYERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

We also run many services for young people, from the National Citizenship Service in the East and West of England to our Youth Employment Skills (YES) services across London helping hard-to-reach 16-24 year olds access and progress in employment, education or training, particularly those from BAME communities, with learning disabilities and with mental health issues.

Across the country we work with young people to explore their career and training options and help them to identify the right options for them. We want to see young people overcome barriers, thrive in the labour market and benefit from the education, training, work experience and careers guidance that will help them reach their full potential in life.

“cold spots” for careers advice that have been identified by the Careers and Enterprise Company, they rank high on many indexes of deprivation. Enfield, for example, is ranked the 13th most deprived borough in England on the income deprivation index affecting children (up to 15 years old) and the fifth most deprived in London<sup>14</sup>.

## London Ambitions and the careers clusters

In 2015, the GLA, London Councils and London Enterprise Panel published *London Ambitions, shaping a successful career offer for all Londoners*. It sought to ensure that all of London’s young people get the best opportunities through seven key commitments, including a commitment that young people should have 100 hours’ experience of the world of work in some form prior to the age of 16. One commitment was the establishment of careers clusters - groups of schools that would share resources and develop a “whole school” approach to plan and deliver careers provision in partnership with the Capital’s employers.

## Young Careers

The 12 careers cluster pilots in London are funded by the European Social Fund. Nine have a geographical focus, while the other three focus on a particular sector. In Autumn 2016, Reed in Partnership launched two of the careers clusters:



- **A geographically-based cluster working with six schools in Barnet and Enfield; and**
- **An ICT excellence cluster, working with six schools in the boroughs of Barnet, Ealing and Waltham Forest.**

Our name for the service is Young Careers. The overriding goal is to help young people to successfully make the transition from secondary school to work or higher/further education. To do this, Young Careers aims to improve the labour market relevance of learning, by developing relationships between schools, local employers and higher/further education institutions and supporting teachers and school leaders to deliver high-quality careers guidance. The pilot tests intensive support for a small number of schools and seeks to develop employer/school relationships that will last.

Young Careers is designed around the Gatsby benchmarks. In particular, it prioritises benchmarks 1,3,5 and 6 (see page 7). It aims to complement the school, college and employer brokerage support provided by the National Careers Service and the Careers and Enterprise Company - piloting an approach that helps schools to put in place a careers approach that they can embed and sustain for the long term.

Young Careers was due to end in July 2018 but has now been extended until March 2019.



## Young Careers in numbers



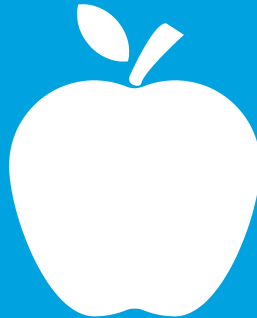
**48** employers and higher education institutions engaged



**438** events in schools



**11,134** students engaged in activities



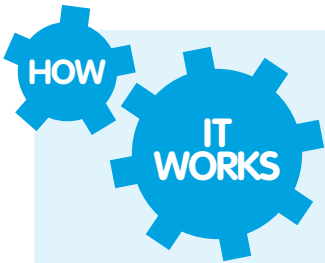
**505** teachers engaged



**711** work placements/ experience via Youth Talent

## The eight Gatsby benchmarks

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



## Futures Week at Totteridge Academy

The structure of the Young Careers scheme enables schools to pilot activities that coordinate input from a number of employers. In June 2017, for example, Reed in Partnership organised a “Futures Week” for year 10 student at Totteridge Academy in Barnet, part of the ICT cluster of schools. It included:

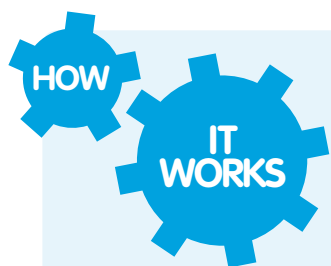
- **Motivational talks and Q&A sessions from Zurich Insurance, Uber and law firm Baker McKenzie**
- **Completing psychometric tests using the Reed Career Portal**
- **Workshops on CVs, cover letters and interview skills from Goldman Sachs, Genesis Housing, Uber, Santander, 3AA and Reed in Partnership**
- **Student visits to SOAS University and Hertfordshire University, with a tour of the campuses and discussions with students**
- **Mock interviews by employees from Uber, the Metropolitan Police, the RAF, Reed in Partnership and Goldman Sachs, with feedback for all students.**

Over the week, students created a reflective journal, while lesson plans were created for the CV and cover letter workshops. The whole week was very positively received with feedback from the main school contact Amy Francis, Assistant Principal as follows: “What a week. I honestly could not have expected the Futures week to go any better than it did and 95% of that was down to your organisation, your team, the employers and resources. Honestly it was fantastic.”



## Characteristics of Young Careers

- A **whole-school** approach
- The **goal of developing sustainable employer/school relationships**, with employers asked to commit to a minimum of 26 weeks
- Engages **major employers** that can offer meaningful opportunities, apprenticeships and advice
- Engages **higher education and further education institutions** alongside employers
- A body of **online tools and resources** for teachers to use, including a comprehensive e-learning suite, a video hub, industry reports, a further/higher education directory and a searchable employer database
- Student and teacher **feedback** gathered on every interaction
- **Networking meetings** each term that enable the group of schools and employers to sit down and share learning
- Reed in Partnership staff based in schools to identify needs and provide support
- Referral of young people for work placements via Youth Talent
- Designed to **complement the CEC's expanding role** and its Enterprise Adviser network
- Supports the Government's careers strategy by helping schools put in place a careers strategy that is accessible to students, parents, carers and employers



### BNP Paribas and Whitefield School

BNP Paribas were keen to develop a sustainable, long-lasting relationship with one particular school in the Barnet and Enfield cluster (Whitefield School) in order to really dedicate resource and measure the impact of the pilot.

Initial meetings between the school and employer focused on the employer learning about the school's priorities and focus as well as the school learning what BNP Paribas could offer and what they wanted to achieve.

This was followed by regular monthly conference calls held to plan activities between Reed in Partnership, BNP Paribas and the school to plan activities.

To kick it all off, a relationship launch day saw students invited to visit BNP Paribas for a full day of activities, an introduction to the workplace and a presentation from the school.

The ongoing programme of activities has included talks, workshops, a trading game (see p20), student visits to BNP Paribas offices and work shadowing and mentoring sessions.

## Young Careers partner employers include:



## 4 LEARNING FROM EMPLOYERS

This section sets out the learning shared by eight employers interviewed about their experience of Young Careers so far. It looks at their reasons for getting involved, the activities that worked the best, the practical challenges and their views on developing sustainable relationships with schools.

### The case for getting involved

Every employer's motivation for engaging with schools' careers provision is different. Increasing **workforce diversity**, improving **social mobility** and **developing the skills pipeline** are key reasons for doing so, while most employers are keen to improve **young people's understanding of the career options in their sector** and challenge misconceptions.



Each organisation's story of getting involved Young Careers is unique. Some employers, such as TfL and the Royal Air Force, have a small but dedicated team already engaging in large-scale activities with schools and want to increase their impact and reach. Others, such as global ground transportation services company Addison Lee Group, wanted support to engage with schools for the first time. For some it was the opportunity to build more sustainable, meaningful relationships with specific schools that was the reason for getting involved in Young Careers; for others it was the fact that many of the schools themselves were in areas of relative deprivation.

The person leading this work on the employer side is likely to sit within a HR, skills or people development team, but may be in a CSR or corporate affairs function, depending on where this work sits in promoting the employer's objectives. Employer's objectives are diverse and interlinked, as often the business case (serving a diverse customer base or addressing skill shortages) and the moral case (giving back to the community or improving social mobility) are two sides of the same coin. But as the RAF point out, any organisation would be able to make a strong case for getting involved - to them it is a "no-brainer".

## Increase the diversity of the future workforce

The business case for diversity has many aspects, but it was clear from many employers that increased workforce diversity in the future was seen as critical to their organisation's bottom line success. Insurance firm Zurich wants to improve awareness of the insurance sector as a career choice amongst a more diverse range of people - both in the long term and in the short term through their apprenticeship and wider recruitment processes. In order to best serve their diverse customer base, they argue, they need a diverse workforce drawn not just from those who have an "in" to the sector, such as a parent who works in it.

Similarly, Enfield Council's involvement in Young Careers stems from a piece of work the council has been doing on the make-up of the council's workforce. It wants to increase the diversity of its workforce both to better respond to the community it serves and to address the issue of the ageing workforce by encouraging more young people to consider working for the council.

## Address skills gaps

A more diverse talent pool is crucial to a related objective mentioned by employers - addressing skills gaps. This is a high-priority objective for those involved in the ICT excellence careers cluster, such as global private hire firm Addison Lee Group, which wants young people to know about the digital roles available in the transport sector. TfL for example, want to address the under-representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), where there are skills shortages. Many of the schools activities offered by the RAF focus on girls' participation in STEM activities.



**WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING TO ACHIEVE**

- Increase the diversity of the future workforce
- Address skills gaps
- Promote better understanding of careers in different sectors
- Showcase apprenticeship options
- Be socially responsible and promote social mobility
- Influence the talent pipeline
- Develop employees through volunteering

## Promote better understanding of careers in different sectors

All the employers we spoke to were keen to increase awareness and understanding amongst students, parents and teachers about their sector. Equally, they wanted to tackle commonly-held misconceptions.

For example, Marriott Hotels has been communicating to young people the different jobs available in the hospitality sector besides waiting staff or receptionists, such as finance, sales, engineering and management. They describe the sector as an “iceberg” and want to raise the profile of the jobs and progression opportunities below the surface - or behind the scenes. Similarly, the RAF want to increase young people and their parents’ awareness of the significant number of RAF roles that do not involve flying, such as those in engineering, logistics and operations support.

## Showcase apprenticeship options

With fewer than 26% of apprenticeship starts coming straight from school or college<sup>15</sup> and overall starts declining rapidly since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017, increasing awareness of apprenticeships amongst young people is a priority for many employers. With Young Careers, employers are seeking to get apprenticeships higher up the careers advice agenda in schools. Enfield Council aims to challenge the perception that apprentices are only relevant to manual jobs, taking apprentices and managers into schools and explaining about the civil engineering, legal or business administration apprenticeships available, for example.

## Be socially responsible and promote social mobility

Improving social mobility is high on the Government’s agenda, with the recently-published plan to improve social mobility through education<sup>16</sup> identifying good quality careers guidance and experiences as essential in addressing the unequal access to the networks and support that give some children an advantage in their education and careers. As guidance from the National Foundation for Educational Research states: “Employer engagement can be especially important for those who would normally be disadvantaged in the labour market, helping to remedy poor access to networks and limited support at home.”<sup>17</sup>

Our interviews with employers suggest that they are fully behind this aim. For example, promoting social mobility is a key aim as part of the civic responsibility pillar in BNP Paribas’s CSR strategy, and young people were highlighted as a focus area in their 2020 Engagement Manifesto. A representative from BNP Paribas spoke about the lack of home support, contacts and geographical mobility by which some young people taking part in Young Career’s activities are disadvantaged, for example a student very interested in architecture who had not been to Central London to see the buildings.

## Influence the talent pipeline

Employers want to help young people develop the skills they will need to thrive in the future labour market for both CSR and talent development reasons (see *What are employers looking for in their future employees?* p26). Simply put, Young Careers gives them a means of influencing the skills pipeline and helping young people to understand the skills and attributes that will help them get the job they want.

## Develop employees through volunteering

Both Zurich and BNP Paribas, which have extensive volunteering programmes as part of their businesses' CSR strategies, considered employee volunteering as an objective in taking part in Young Careers. BNP Paribas became involved as part of a drive to increase their community engagement and employee volunteering.

Zurich finds that employees are hugely keen to volunteer with Young Careers because they get to use their professional knowledge more than in non-sector related volunteering projects, but also because they get the opportunity for deeper and more regular engagement than more one-off volunteering projects provide. While other organisations did not mention employee development through volunteering as an objective, many said it was a benefit of taking part.





## Example employer objectives



- Improve young people's knowledge of the range of opportunities available in hospitality, such as the finance, IT, engineering and other roles that are not so visible as the receptionist or the waitress.
- Challenge assumptions about what it is like to work in the hospitality sector, amongst both children and their parents.
- Raise the profile of apprenticeships as a choice, as well as degree-level roles following university.
- Employee development was not a specific objective, but it has proved to be a benefit.



- Inspire young people to look at the RAF as a career of choice.
- Increase young people's awareness of a wider range of opportunities and choices than they might otherwise not have known about, whether they consider the RAF or not.
- Build strong, lasting relationships with schools and wider communities including parents and community leaders.



- Improve financial literacy amongst children, including the role played by insurance.
- Attract diverse talent into the sector by improving awareness of insurance as a career choice amongst a wider range of people. This is both about longer-term awareness and in the shorter term trying to attract young people to work for them via apprenticeships and wider recruitment.
- Enhance employee development through the opportunity to volunteer.



- Enable social mobility, targeting work in the most deprived London boroughs.
- Address under-representation, for example of women in the workforce.
- Address scarce skills.



- Enhance the diversity of the Council's workforce and its representativeness of the community it serves, particularly in terms of age given the ageing workforce and skills shortages.
- Raise profile of the apprenticeships that are available amongst young people and tackle the misconception (not just amongst children but parents and the wider community) that they are only relevant to manual jobs. This is both a long- and shorter-term objective, with a view to both influencing the longer-term workforce profile and encouraging young people leaving school to consider apprenticeships.

# What makes for successful employer encounters?

**Competitions, challenges and small group work** engage students effectively, employers say, but more traditional offerings such as CV workshops or mock interviews also have a part to play. From their experience, employers report **working in small groups** as particularly effective. It's not just the activity but **how it is delivered and who delivers it** - for example it helps to inspire young people when they meet someone "like them".

Young Careers takes a whole school approach, with employers working with schools to help them build a careers strategy, improve teacher knowledge and improve student outcomes in the long term. A key element of this work, however, are the actual encounters between students and employers. Of course the most important verdict comes from young people themselves. After every event held as part of Young Careers, feedback from students and teachers is gathered and collated to evaluate and refine activities.

## Challenge and excitement

Asked to describe what they viewed as their most successful activities, employers commonly mentioned that competitions and challenges are highly effective in engaging young people:

- Addison Lee runs an excellence challenge which involved students devising, designing, building and launching an app, with the competition facilitated and judged by a team of the company's digital marketing professionals.
- BNP Paribas's commodities trading game sees teams compete to profit by trading materials such as sugar, gold, coffee and oil.
- Transport for London's *Innovate TfL* initiative involves groups of students in years 12 and 13 working as a team over three months to come up with an innovative solution to a real TfL challenge, with finalists winning work experience at TfL. The programme is open to schools across London, but through Young Careers TfL increased participation at the career cluster schools.



## Working in small groups or one-to-one

Many of the employers we interviewed described some of their most well-received activities as working in small groups of children, as opposed to speaking to a whole year group at an assembly, for example, particularly with young people considered to be not engaging or achieving as well as they could. Addison Lee Group cited the “interactivity, feedback and relationships” that characterised their work with small groups of students. Insurance firm Zurich, for example, developed a mentoring programme that emerged from a talk given to a group of year 9 students, when the feedback was that the students wanted to stay in touch. With another eight colleagues getting involved, a mentoring programme developed with short individual sessions taking place each month.

The RAF also cites the success of its teambuilding days on employability skills, where work in small groups enables young people to work on the personal skills and behaviours (such as teamwork, communication or presentation skills) that will help them later on. A comment from Addison Lee Group was that “small workshops, more often” are the best way of working, but this can present significant time and resource issues for both schools and employers.

## Meeting “someone like me”

Given the lack of diversity at the top of UK organisations, it is unsurprising that too often employers visiting schools will not be representative of the BAME communities represented by the young people at the schools they are visiting. Many of the employers involved in Young Careers were engaged with this issue - for example the RAF’s diversity ambassadors and BAME network are closely involved in their work with schools. The RAF describes the “significant impact” for students of meeting someone from the same or similar culture, heritage or background in the RAF, demonstrating that this is a career that they can realistically consider. Enfield Council spoke about the impact of taking senior council officers to tell their stories of how they got where they are, with young people engaging with “someone like them who has a great job”.

## Young people engaging young people

A number of employers reported that involving their own organisation’s young people - particularly apprentices - in delivering activities was very well received. Marriott says that involving the company’s apprentices and trainees has been one of the most successful aspects of the Young Careers.



They are seen as more “relatable” by the students, so they are more likely to ask direct questions that they might otherwise be shy to ask, such as “how much do you earn?”

Through Young Careers, TfL were able to pilot an approach to parental engagement which involved sending their apprentices to parents’ evenings. This was done in a low-key way, with apprentices engaging parents and young people in informal conversations about apprenticeships rather than more formal, branded talks. This helped shape how TfL will engage with parents in the future.

This is not to argue that only young volunteers need be involved. Marriott, for example, found that its involvement in delivering Young Careers was hugely enriched by volunteers who had experience of caring for or working with young people and were able to use these skills in delivering school activities.

## **Authenticity, realism and seeing work in action**

Young people are not only a tough audience but quick to pick up on anything that is contradicted by what they see. They also need honesty and realism in careers advice if they are to enter the labour market prepared for the challenges they will face. Addison Lee Group spoke about how they wanted their CV and careers workshops to help young people to understand the “good, the bad and the ugly” about the world of work.

Site visits are also reported by employers to be a great tool to help young people see work in its real context, although transport and finding space in schools’ busy schedules can pose challenges. All the employers interviewed said that employer visits were a successful element of their activities so far. For example, at one visit to a school by Zurich, young people were left with a challenge to work on. They then visited Zurich’s offices to present the results, meet the company’s CEO and have lunch.

## **Supporting the wider curriculum**

STEM activities are a particularly fertile ground for employer involvement in schools, where the desire of employers to tackle current and future skills shortages meet the demands of the school curriculum and the need to engage a higher proportion of girls with STEM subjects. The Thames Tunnel Tideway project<sup>18</sup>, run by Tideway, is a great example of this.

More broadly, the overlap between the attributes that employers are looking for in students (such as creativity, teamwork, drive and self-discipline) and those that schools are helping young people to develop means that there is endless potential for employers to assist in developing learning and activities that help students to develop these qualities. The example of the RAFs involvement in the lead learner programme at St Ignatius College (see below) is one example of this. As one employer commented, employers need to “think beyond the CV” in order to really help young people consider the attributes that will help them both find a job they want and thrive in the workplace.

# Presentation skills with the Royal Air Force at St Ignatius College



St Ignatius College is a Catholic school for boys in Enfield with a sixth form. In March 2018 representatives from the armed forces helped run an activity day at St Ignatius College focused on skills such as team building for a group of students who have worked hard to be selected as “lead learners”. One of the skills was presentation skills and at the end of the session, the students learned that they were tasked with preparing a presentation of their own in a few weeks’ time, to an audience to include representatives from the air force, teachers, their headteacher and - possibly most intimidating - their parents.

**“Usain Bolt didn’t win the races on his own. He had his coaches, sports scientists and fitness trainers to help him.”**  
Year 8 student, St Ignatius College

On 15 May near the end of the school day the students assembled to prepare for the event. They had an hour to make final improvements and practice their lines. Stewart from the RAF and teacher Miss Healy were on hand. “Great information, can you make it a little more personal?”

Miss Healy inquired. “Look at that spelling - is that right?” Stuart asked. The students needed to consider a range of practical and personal factors, such as checking and re-checking their slides, thinking where they would need to stand, overcoming technical hitches and practising their delivery to see how differently their written words sounded when spoken out loud. They were nervous and their teacher was able to reassure them that this was normal. “This is all about you doing something really challenging”, she said. “There are year 11s who have never done this and I certainly didn’t do anything like it when I was at school!”

The students had three minutes to engage the audience in a topic they were passionate about. From “Are computers taking over the world?” to an analysis of the USA’s versus Jamaica’s athletics performances at the 2016 Olympics, the presentations were both inspiring and interesting. They included interactive quizzes, video clips and were built on some thorough research. Headteacher Mary O’Keeffe congratulated the students and their parents, emphasising the transferable nature of the skills they were learning and telling them: “nerves are normal - the more you do it, the easier it will get.”

The presentations were followed by a short talk from the RAF’s Stuart about apprenticeships to both students and their parents.

The school is seeking to make the lead learner programme a three-year scheme for those in years 7 to 9, with the older children mentoring the new year 7 students when they join the school. The air force and other employers will continue to participate, seeking to build a sustainable relationship that is not just about careers advice but putting employability skills at the heart of the curriculum.

**“Everyone has a different role on the football pitch. Each role is as important as the others.”**  
Year 7 student, St Ignatius College

## Using a variety of approaches

The Career and Enterprise Company's "What Works" research suggests that employer mentoring, enterprise competitions and work-related learning have a stronger evidence base for a positive impact than CV workshops or mock interviews, for example. But as a major study of international evidence from charity Education and Employers suggests<sup>19</sup>, it is good to have a variety of activities, to reflect both different student needs and different objectives or outcomes, such as a better understanding of careers or providing the knowledge and skills needed to make a successful transition to work or further/higher education.

CV workshops and mock interviews can be a powerful element of an effective careers programme. In fact, an evaluation carried out at the end of the first year of Young Careers found that CV workshops scored particularly highly amongst student reporting an increase in their understanding of what employers are looking for.

BNP Paribas, for example, ran a "dream job" session, where company volunteers spoke about their dream job and the path their career took, whether they ended up doing it or not. This fed into a CV workshop, with young people considering how their existing skills matched up to what they wanted to do, putting a skeleton CV together and taking part in mock interviews. One observation was that many students were unaware of the skills and capabilities they already possessed - such as speaking multiple languages - and were surprised to learn how valuable they were.

### Example employer activities in schools



ADDISON LEE

- Careers talks with an emphasis on personal stories and barriers – "What I did in order to get to where I am now".
- An excellence challenge as part of an excellence week focused on stimulating learning experiences beyond the curriculum which involved 20 students devising, designing, building and launching an app, with facilitation and judging from employees from the company's digital marketing team.
- CV workshops, mock interviews.
- Workshops to engage harder-to-reach students in years 9 and 10 on their career aspirations.



BNP PARIBAS

- Activities focused on developing a relationship with one school (Whitefield School – see p9).
- Introductory session.
- Site visits.
- Sessions on personal impact (eg presentation, networking, social media) for one whole year group, run by HR and interns.
- A commodity trading game, where teams compete to make the most profit by trading coffee, gold, sugar and oil.



**BNP PARIBAS**

- Sessions on your dream job.
- CV workshop.
- Mock interviews.
- A Discovery Day which included a more advanced trading game building on the previous commodity trading game, talks from senior employees and work shadowing on the trading floor.

**ENFIELD**  
Council



- Interview skills sessions.
- Careers fairs, sessions on apprenticeship options.
- personal talks by senior people at the council about their career path.
- Visits by Enfield Council apprentices.



- Each of 14 hotels in the region matched with one of the 12 schools in both career clusters.
- Student site visits to hotels, mock interviews, careers fairs, work experience and employee talks and demonstrations in schools.
- Involving apprentices and trainees in school activities.
- Uniforms prompt interest amongst the children and get them talking!
- Practical activities linked to the wider curriculum - for example two chefs visiting a school and doing a workshop on cooking steaks, discussing provenance, cooking terms and techniques.



- Team-building days on employability skills, CV-building workshops, presentation skills workshops.
- Presentations on RAF careers and apprenticeships.
- Visits to RAF units, including young people coming to the RAF Museum at Hendon.
- Careers fairs.
- Speed mentoring.
- Involved career cluster schools in many other RAF national school engagement activities, such as a STEM activity day for 120 girls, the RAF's STEM roadshow and offering a variety of opportunities to take part in the RAF's centenary celebrations and activities.



**TRANSPORT  
FOR LONDON**  
EVERY JOURNEY MATTERS

- Innovate TfL, which asks groups of students in years 12 and 13 to work as a team over three months to come up with an innovative solution to a real TfL challenge. While this programme is run across London, Young Careers enables TfL to reach schools in deprived areas and get a good response from those schools.
- Promoting engineering and other STEM careers through TfL's STEM ambassador programme to explain what STEM careers look like and provide accessible role models.
- Piloting apprentices attending parents' evenings via Young Careers to communicate with parents about options.
- Working to strengthen relationships with teachers and planning teacher drop-in meetings.



- Sessions on CV writing, mock interviews, student visits to Zurich offices.
- Sessions on careers in insurance, using part of Zurich's financial literacy module that is integrated with all areas of the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4.
- A mentoring scheme that emerged as the result of a talk at one school by a Zurich employee to year 9 students, resulting in more employees getting involved in short one-to-one sessions once a month.
- Work experience placements.

## How do you develop sustainable employer/school relationships?

**Sustainability**, rather than ad hoc activities, is the goal. But this takes **hard work, time and the slow development of a two-way relationship**. This is where good intentions can flounder on practical realities and misunderstanding. Employers are clear that **an effective broker or facilitator** can help them achieve this, while a committed and consistent **careers champion at the school** is needed to sustain an employer/school partnership over the long term.

A stable careers programme - a published strategy with senior backing, regular evaluation and a trained person of authority responsible for it - is the Gatsby benchmark (1) that schools are furthest away from achieving, according to the Career and Enterprise Company's 2017 State of the Nation report<sup>20</sup>. It found that only 4.2% of schools using the Compass benchmarking tool were achieving it. As the CEC says: "Achieving a high standard of careers and enterprise provision is not just a question of providing lots of activities, but rather something that requires careful planning, consistent delivery and ongoing monitoring and evaluation."

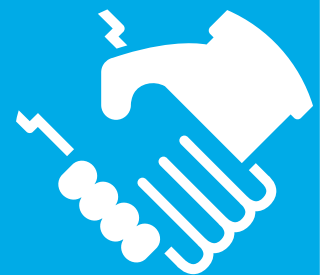
Both supporting schools in developing a stable, sustainable careers strategy and involving employers meaningfully in developing this is a core objective of Young Careers.

Employers engaged with Young Careers were asked to commit to a minimum 26-week period, with the objective that their engagement would both help the school to develop a much more effective careers offer to students but also that it would continue once the two-year project duration was over. All the employers who committed to the 26-week engagement have continued with the service beyond that.

We asked employers for their views on developing and sustaining their involvement with schools' careers strategies and programmes of activity and the challenges they had encountered.

"You can run activities but it is sustainability that is the hard nut to crack."

Royal Air Force





# Tips for effective employer engagement in school careers strategies

- 1 Get senior support and buy-in for this work at your organisation
- 2 Be clear and explicit about your organisation's case for getting involved
- 3 Find out about the many programmes, networks and tools already out there
- 4 Try to work with a school where there is a dedicated careers adviser or leader
- 5 Remember it is a two-way relationship and you will need to find out how the school works and what it is trying to achieve
- 6 Learn and refine activities as you go along using student and teacher feedback
- 7 Embed your work with schools by making links to other work your organisation may be doing
- 8 Take your own organisation's young people with you to schools
- 9 Support volunteers, brief them on what to expect and make sure they have enough notice
- 10 Don't underestimate the scale of organisational work needed
- 11 Find a good broker to support you to develop quality partnerships with a school or schools
- 12 Get involved - it is very rewarding and enjoyable!



## The role of the schools careers leader is key

Employers commented on the crucial importance of having a careers champion at the school or schools they worked with. Without this, it is difficult to sustain a longer-term partnership with a school.

Most of the employers reported that the career leaders at the schools they worked with were doing this on top of a teaching or other leadership role. Some mentioned teacher turnover as an issue. In recognition of this, one idea put forward by the RAF was for schools without a dedicated careers leader to tag a particular role (eg head of physics) with this role in the job description, to avoid succession planning issues when a careers lead leaves their role.

The Government's Careers Strategy says that all schools need to have a named careers leader in place by September 2018, but some have raised concerns that the funding allocated for training careers leaders is insufficient to bring about a step change in the number of schools with a dedicated careers leader.

## Employer co-ordination

Mirroring the situation in schools, employers also stressed the need for a consistent point of contact in their own organisation to lead work with schools, as well as senior buy-in and support for activities. Enfield Council stressed not just the need for schools to co-ordinate and build in their activities into the curriculum but for the employer to do the same with their work. For example, the Council is trying to mainstream their careers work with schools into other areas of the Council's activity, by aligning it with the Council's support for young care leavers for example or disseminating information on apprenticeships through the council's parent engagement panel. Some employers reported that, while some financial investment in a schools engagement programme helps, it is the time of staff and volunteers that is the key resource to consider, manage and plan.

## Understanding how schools work and what their priorities are

Any employer programme in schools is a learning curve, with experience of working together and understanding the needs of the participants improving effectiveness as the programme progresses. Facilitated planning between schools and employers has been crucial to the success of Young Careers. While initially schools were offered a list of employers and a menu of what they could offer, this soon developed into a more effective joint-planning approach.



The employers we interviewed spoke about the process of working with schools to understand the way they operate, their objectives and priorities. One issue was the difficulty of scheduling in activities in a busy school timetable - and the need to get involved in planning at an early stage. Some reported that activities in the weeks following exams worked the best, without the same scheduling pressures surrounding activities organised at busier times of the school year.

## Support from a third party

All eight employers stressed the time-consuming nature of both the planning, devising, organisation and scheduling of activities but also the slow, gradual work that needs to be done to understand each partner's agenda, maintain and develop the relationship. This is where the help of a third party or broker was felt to be most essential in providing information, support, trouble-shooting and organisation. For example:

- Zurich says that the facilitation provided through Young Careers has made the difference in helping them to develop quality relationships with the career cluster schools.
- BNP Paribas describes the facilitation as “crucial” in supporting their activities with schools.
- Transport for London says that it prefers to work with third party support to increase the impact of its activities and it finds that this helps them understand the schools better and tailor activities more effectively. It says that working with an organisation that had already established a relationship with the schools meant that they avoided “hammering on a door with no context”.
- The RAF sees the role of third party support as essential in making sure things happen, dealing with the administration of the schools and getting involved in school planning. The advantage of Young Careers is that “There’s always someone there to help.”

External facilitation is not just about administrative support but about helping schools and employers to develop a stronger relationship and accessing wider sources of advice and networks. One characteristic of the career clusters is the fact that a group of schools and employers are working together in a geographical area or sector, holding termly meetings to exchange learning and good practice. As an example of how learning from these meetings are incorporated into practice, TfL recalls hearing from one school that they were concerned that boys did not lose out on STEM career learning opportunities given the many employer STEM initiatives targeting girls. It also heard feedback that schools were keen for employers to reference the Gatsby benchmarks more explicitly in the activities offered to schools, which TfL has acted upon.



# What are employers looking for in their future employees?

Employers focused on **mindset and personal skills** rather than skills relevant to a specific job, such as **willingness to learn, motivation, team spirit, confidence and having something to say**.

The core aim of Young Careers is to equip young people for the transition from school to work or further/higher education. So for those young people seeking to enter the labour market, either directly or following a further period of education and learning, what are employers most keen to see from them in terms of skills and attributes, besides their achievement of academic qualifications?

We took the opportunity to ask employers this question directly. It was striking that the overwhelming majority of answers concerned qualities and behaviours that can be described as “mindset” - such as enthusiasm, adaptability, creativity and motivation to keep learning. While employers see an increased need for flexibility and adaptability emerging over the coming years, behaviours and attitudes are likely to remain the priority. Here are some examples of what employers told us:





SME accounting firm **Accounting Direct Plus** wants to find young people who are willing to learn, work with others and be considerate and respectful to everyone they meet.



ADDISON LEE

For **Addison Lee**, IT skills are an absolute priority, but most of all the company wants young people with an enthusiastic mindset and a desire to learn. Given the dramatic technology-linked change happening in the sector, flexibility in attitude and approach to work will be increasingly important in the future.



BNP PARIBAS

**BNP Paribas** want strong academic and analytical skills, but are also looking for a spark and determination from young people who will drive their own development and take every opportunity to learn that comes their way, combined with true team spirit and the ability to work collaboratively with others. This will remain the case in the future, but digital skills (artificial intelligence, big data) will be even more in demand, particularly when combined with an innovative, inquisitive and entrepreneurial mindset.



**Enfield Council** values the following behaviours in its new recruits: working together, collaboration, being supportive, openly sharing information, thinking independently, challenge and creativity. While it is hard to predict how these will change, the importance of creativity is only likely to increase as local authorities continue to try to do more with less.



**Marriott** say that skills are not the main concern for new employees as the company does a lot of training. Of much greater priority are self-confidence, social behaviours (such as knowing how to speak to adults) and resilience. They want a problem-solving mentality and a get-up-and-go approach - not giving up when you inevitably hit a problem or something goes wrong. In ten years' time there will be even greater need for adaptability but these fundamentals are likely to remain key, with technology impacting hugely on the customer experience but social skills remaining key.



**Transport for London** says that it is essentially looking for a) potential and b) motivation. While this is likely to remain the case, curiosity, the motivation to learn new things and adapt to change are likely to grow in importance in a world where technology is rapidly changing the way TfL employees work.



ZURICH

**Zurich** says that for today's young recruits and apprentices taking responsibility, turning up on time, people skills and STEM skills (especially maths) are clearly important, but perhaps more important is having something to say and being willing to stand up and say it. Good thinkers are wanted from diverse backgrounds - diversity is key to getting the mix of skills and perspectives needed. Over the next ten years, the speed of change will mean continued demand for quick thinkers. Moreover the need for diverse viewpoints will only become stronger, STEM skills will remain a priority and technological change means that people skills become more, not less, important.

# Future employees: what are employers looking for in young people?

"being supportive"  
**Social skills**  
"being considerate and respectful"

**Integrity**

"ability to work collaboratively with others"  
**Teamwork**  
"true team spirit"

"a get-up-and-go approach"  
**Determination, motivation, resilience, enthusiasm**  
"self-discipline and self-confidence"  
"enthusiasm" "drive"

"able to adapt to change"  
**Adaptability**  
"flexibility"

"motivation to learn"  
**Curiosity and a desire to learn**  
"an inquisitive mindset"

"a problem-solving mentality"  
"ability to think laterally"  
**Independent thinkers with ideas**  
"having something to say"  
"strong analytical skills"  
"creativity"

"good timekeeping, attendance"  
**Work-readiness**  
"know how to manage personal social media"

**IT skills**

**Diversity**  
People from all walks of life

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Government's Careers Strategy and in particular the focus on the Gatsby benchmarks, there is a clearer and more positive vision for school careers advice and guidance than has been the case over the past few years.

Yet it is crucial for policy makers to recognise the time and effort needed at local level to deliver effective employer involvement and develop sustainable relationships between schools and employers. The findings from our interview with employers, as well as the experience of Reed in Partnership staff delivering Young Careers, suggest that:

- 1 Localised, intensive support** is important in supporting employers and schools to develop sustainable relationships. The Young Careers pilot illustrates that developing sustainable employer/school relationships and planning and organising employer encounters takes a considerable amount of time and effort on the part of both employers and schools. We think that there is huge scope to expand the innovative approach that the London government has taken in other regions of the country, especially those areas where we know from CEC research that there are "cold spots" in terms of school careers advice and guidance.
- 2 The role of the school careers leader** or champion needs to be a stable post that is properly resourced. With such competing demands on school resources, it is welcome that some funds have been available for training and support for careers leaders, but only 500 secondary schools and colleges are likely to benefit from this direct support. We think that government should consider making further funds available to help support and train up school careers leaders if this proves insufficient.
- 3 Employers engaging with schools** have hugely positive feedback on **how interesting and enjoyable** it is for them as a valuable two-way learning process. We would like to encourage all employers to get in touch with their local CEC enterprise co-ordinator or other local network and **get involved**.

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Oral evidence to the Education Committee: The Work of Ofsted, 16 September 2015.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>

<sup>3</sup>Careers strategy: Making the most of everyone's skills and talents, Department for Education, December 2017.

<sup>4</sup>Unlocking talent, fulfilling potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education, Department for Education, December 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Careers strategy: Making the most of everyone's skills and talents.

<sup>6</sup>Contemporary Transitions: Young people reflect on life after secondary school and college, Anthony Mann et al, Education and Employers Taskforce, 2017

<sup>7</sup>Making the Grade: Does involvement in activities with employers impact the academic achievement of young people? Elnaz T. Kashefpakdel, Jordan Rehill and Anthony Mann, November 2017.

<sup>8</sup>Skills for Londoners: A draft skills and adult education strategy for London, June 2018

<sup>9</sup>Hidden in plain sight: Young Londoners unemployed yet unsupported, London Youth, 2018

<sup>10</sup>"My son taught me a lesson about university", Paul Johnson, Institute for Fiscal Studies, January 2018.

<sup>11</sup>[https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.datapress.com/london/dataset/skills-for-londoners-2018-strategy-consultation/2018-06-05T13%3A50%3A41.82/Skills%20Consultation\\_Qualitative%20Findings\\_Opportunities%20for%20young%20people\\_FULL%20REPORT.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.datapress.com/london/dataset/skills-for-londoners-2018-strategy-consultation/2018-06-05T13%3A50%3A41.82/Skills%20Consultation_Qualitative%20Findings_Opportunities%20for%20young%20people_FULL%20REPORT.pdf)

<sup>12</sup>Unlocking talent, fulfilling potential.

<sup>13</sup>Skills for Londoners: A draft skills and adult education strategy for London, June 2018

<sup>14</sup>Enfield Borough Profile, 2017, Enfield Council

<sup>15</sup><https://www.educationandemployers.org/teenage-apprenticeships-awareness-deficit-by-dr-elnaz-kashefpakdel-for-fe-news/>

<sup>16</sup>Unlocking talent, fulfilling potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education, December 2017

<sup>17</sup>Employer involvement in schools: A practical guide for headteachers, National Foundation for Educational Research, 2013

<sup>18</sup><https://www.tideway.london/our-community/education-programme>

<sup>19</sup>Employer engagement in education: Insights from international evidence for effective practice and future research, Education and Employers and the Education Endowment Foundation, January 2018.

<sup>20</sup>State of the Nation 2017: Careers and enterprise provision in England's schools, Careers and Enterprise Company

## Contact us:

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