



The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network



Research

BUSINESS WORKING WITHIN THE CURRICULUM



Short version of the report

BACKGROUND

The impact of COVID-19

This research was conducted just before the start of lockdown in March 2020, but many of the insights are more relevant now that young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, are not able to access learning in the same way as before.

Before COVID-19 there were already 4.6 million children in the UK living in poverty. Progress in closing the GCSE attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had come to a standstill. Between 2017 and 2018, the gap widened slightly, by 0.2 months, to 18.1 months.

Since COVID-19 and school closures, the situation is worsening, and Ofsted has warned that the educational attainment gap is widening. Disadvantaged young people with less educational support due to limited access to technology and the supportive structure of school are being disproportionately impacted.

The need for skills and knowledge by business to fill existing and emerging areas of skills gaps is still relevant now to help the economy recover and business to thrive. Businesses will need young people to have a solid educational foundation in a range of subjects taught at school including English, Maths, Science, Modern Foreign Languages, Art & Design, Computer Science etc for them to have the fundamental building blocks from which to adapt and grow, in line with the needs of business. If periods of lockdown or restricted movement become the norm, businesses are likely to want to recruit young people who can work effectively remotely when only in receipt of information via online communication tools. This awareness and confidence needs to begin whilst young people are still at school.

There is a strong case for businesses to continue to seek out opportunities which enable them to support the learning and progression of students and ensure they can access talented young

people who have both the knowledge and skills to operate in a new world.

COVID-19 could potentially prevent business volunteers from resuming the full breadth of their volunteering in schools for an unknown period. It is important to ensure students can still access opportunities which support them to feel more engaged with the curriculum and its relevance to life after school.

To ensure that disadvantaged young people are not left behind and businesses are able to access a broad and rich talent pool, it is important that they continue to support young people within the curriculum and adapt the way they provide this support so that young people can still access it.

This change is being recognised in education and already the Careers and Enterprise Company are prioritising Gatsby Benchmark 4, which engages business volunteers within the curriculum. This is a pragmatic way to ensure ongoing business commitment, but it also presents an opportunity for businesses to focus their engagement on encouraging young people to engage with core knowledge and skills development which they'll need for future employment.

Examples of schools and businesses working together within the curriculum

Business involvement within the curriculum comes in different shapes and sizes. Examples from Goldman Sachs, Ikano Bank, KPMG, Fujitsu and UBS can be accessed by visiting [Business in the Community's \(BITC\) Playing Fair Education Toolkit](#). You can also [visit adi Group's Pre-apprenticeship Programme](#), [Coventry Building Society](#) and Siemens, which are working with [University Technical Colleges](#) for additional examples.

Schools also use teaching resources and videos in class and sometimes these have a link to industry, but this is predominantly only in STEM subjects. Examples can be viewed by clicking the links here: [Siemens Education](#); [bp Education Service](#)

Why was the research commissioned by the Curriculum Taskforce?

The Curriculum Taskforce exists to scale up co-creation between business and schools within the curriculum and contributing to closing the attainment gap. To inform the planning of the Curriculum Taskforce, a small-scale research project was undertaken in February and March 2020 to explore the opinions of teachers regarding the role of business within the curriculum. The project investigated why they choose to work with business, whether their expectations were met and why things can go wrong. Seventeen unstructured interviews took place with teachers at mainstream and special schools in different parts of the country including one school in Scotland and one in Wales. It was not possible to secure an interviewee in Northern Ireland within the research timeframe, so this perspective is not currently represented. A mix of experiences were included from teachers at different points in their careers, teaching different subjects and having limited through to long-term experience of working with businesses within the curriculum. Interviewees were sourced via BITC's schools' network and support from the Careers and Enterprise Company. Most of the schools have a population with above national average eligibility for free school meals.

This is an abridged version of the report that is publicly available to share the key insights for all business and school partnerships to benefit from.

THE RESEARCH

The Teachers (Interviewees)

A key finding of the research is the way in which teachers articulated their views, specifically their overwhelming positivity regarding the role of business within the curriculum.

Benefits of school business engagement within the curriculum

All the teachers who participated in the interviews believed that business had a role to play within the curriculum.

Interviewees referenced the following benefits for students by involving business in the subjects they teach:

- Knowledge of jobs, careers and developing broader student experiences
- Aspiration, confidence and behaviour for learning within a subject
- Business and industry context and credibility of what is being taught
- Reaffirm learning or develop new learning within a business context

Reaffirming learning in context was very powerful as was building student confidence, aspiration and behaviour for learning within a subject.

Implicit within the benefits outlined by interviewees was the role that business plays in engaging students within an area of the curriculum. The interviewees talked about how this can enhance their students' progress towards achieving improved academic results.

'Reaffirming the learning already covered in a previous lesson - a fresh face delivering, it tends to stick better'

'Visits to companies are useful to help consolidate knowledge'

'...we're in a very deprived area and we have to do things differently... It's about aspirations for us, as well, some of them might never have met someone who has worked in social media'

Lower achievers / Disadvantaged learners / Underconfident learners

- Sustained ongoing activity with business volunteers such as mentoring, project-based learning or work experience were felt by interviewees to be beneficial for students, particularly lower achievers. A report called [Towards an employer engagement toolkit: British teachers' perspectives on the comparative efficacy of work-related learning activities by Anthony Mann, James Dawkins and Rachael McKeown](#) also indicated a similar

view regarding which interventions are most effective for lower achievers.

‘Yes, you will get destination data [post 16-year-old progression], if you've got a high-achieving child then they will go anyway (without the involvement of business) but for the lower achieving child, it helps’

However, ensuring there were enough suitable activities to enable every child to gain experiences with business and providing a range of sustained engagements at scale was not felt to be practical by all interviewees.

‘It is a difficult one because in an ideal world, you would like that (referencing project-based learning with business) but it is quite hard to manage from a logistics point of view and it depends what year group they're in, it depends at what point in the year it is and the willingness of staff really to be able to support it’

- Technology or media such as video was felt to support under-confident or less engaged students with business volunteers before they meet. It also meant that teachers could access interviews with businesses ‘on-demand’ which they reported can really help when ensuring the correct sequencing of learning and fitting within a school timetable.

‘...Sometimes we get a bit more engagement (from students) using video because they might ask me more questions [than a visitor from a business] and then I might go away and ask those questions to the entrepreneur because for some of our students sometimes they won't.’ [ask questions]

- Involving parents in relationships with businesses was also felt by interviewees to have a positive impact upon to students’ aspirations

Business knowledge and expectation

Interviewees were able to share their views regarding why activities had sometimes not worked as expected with some businesses.

- Expectations by some businesses
- Experience of some business volunteers

Interviews recalled occasions when a business had set ideas and expectations regarding what they wanted to deliver. This can mean that the activity doesn’t ‘fit’ with the requirements of the school in terms of sequencing of learning, accessibility to all student’s ability levels within a class and some of the content is less relevant.

*‘Businesses can have specific ideas regarding what they’d like to deliver which aligns with their expertise and experience. This is welcomed by the teachers but there is also a need for the business to be able to offer this at the right point of the year within the curriculum delivery so that it is **sequenced** correctly for the students learning.’*

Interviewees also recalled occasions when business volunteers had not engaged the students sufficiently and the detrimental impact that can have upon student engagement during the session and afterwards.

‘So, a businessperson’s expectations of a young person maybe a little bit too high’

‘We operate differently in education and sometimes it requires a bit of training for those businesses to get the best out of young people.’

Interviewees suggested that open communication, the willingness to adapt the offer or using a third-party broker to help create the right 'fit' between the business and the school are useful.

Impact data

The outcomes and impacts of involving business within the curriculum were mainly being measured by perceptions directly after an activity with a business. Suggestions were made of a link between business involvement with students within the curriculum and the impact this could have upon quantitative measures such as the destinations of students' post-16 (destination data) and exam performance, but this is not proven.

'I couldn't get the results I'm getting now without business supporting me.'

'The students will be very vocal, the students would say [referring to a poor experience] that all of this is very boring, things like that or they'd be frustrated.'

'Demonstrated by the destinations the students go on to get. So, at year 11 and again at the end of sixth form, where the students end up. If they are all placed into decent positions, then we would consider that a success'

Types and depth of involvement by business

The quantity and depth of business involvement within the curriculum varied between the interviewee's schools. Examples given regarding the way schools are already working with business in the curriculum were informed by interviewees' own experiences. Some interviewees were engaging in less intensive activities such as company tours or careers talks whilst others were developing sustained engagement activities such as project-based learning.

'We have a careers advisor, we have skills development Scotland, we've got a number of workers that do that but within the school it's every single teacher's responsibility for DYW (Developing the Young Workforce). So, it's every teachers responsibility to take the curriculum and relate to real life jobs because kids need to be able to link and to see what they are doing in class is relevant to different jobs when they leave school'

Interviewee knowledge of business

Some interviewees felt there would be benefit in them gaining greater exposure to business and industry so they could develop more opportunities to engage their students within the curriculum through business links. Subjects such as English, Modern Foreign Languages, Art and Computer Science were given.

'In the last two days of summer term, all the teachers are going out to do work experience and bring that back to their departments and look at how that can be brought into their curriculum. So for Modern Foreign Languages, for example, one of the teachers is going out to work with a

business who deals with websites and about the translation and making the websites viable for other countries and that's quite exciting for us...having more outside help coming in will help us'

Cross curriculum and project-based learning

There were exciting insights from interviewees who were implementing an approach involving business and community-based organisations across all areas of the curriculum. Initiatives developed in the USA by [Ford Next Generation Learning](#), [The Wood Foundation](#) and promoted by the [Edge Foundation](#) in the UK offer a new approach.

At XP School in Doncaster, the whole curriculum, including GCSE is being delivered in this way and not individual single subject focused lessons. This was achieving academic results and potentially contributes to schools providing a broad curriculum, which is a requirement of all inspection bodies across the devolved nations of the UK.

Other schools were at the early stages of testing new approaches, bringing two or more subjects together and these were found in both academic and vocational qualifications.

'It's all about now developing the whole child, so rather than doing history, geography and humanities it's all combined. More holistic education' [Wales]

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The role of business within the curriculum.

From the perspective of the interviewees, there is a role for business in supporting learning outcomes. Recapping of learning in context and supporting students to build confidence, aspiration and behaviour for learning were all areas the interviewees felt business had a role to play.

Outcome and impact measurement

A key gap found was the limited outcome and impact data available to help assess the quality and effectiveness of businesses working within the curriculum.

Potential for lower achievers / underconfident learners and disadvantaged young people to be further engaged

Where resource constraints exist in schools to manage and oversee sustained engagements at scale, business could prioritise this type of provision for disadvantaged students who may gain more from a sustained experience than interventions which are not sustained.

Exploring the use of technology with a school to understand how to begin building student confidence and breakdown barriers in advance of an intervention with business volunteers can engage students leading to activity progress more effectively once it commences.

Work in partnership with schools to explore the best way to engage parents, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds. Using existing mechanisms such as school newsletters and parents' evenings can provide a starting point.

Training for teachers

Interviewees mentioned business involvement in teacher training on several occasions. Interviewee understanding of business and being able to 'imagine' how a business can be involved whilst also meeting the needs of the curriculum was potentially limiting what was possible. Interviewees who had done other jobs prior to

teacher training felt they were better able to make connections between the curriculum and the workplace.

Business knowledge and expectations

When the expectations of both the school and the business are not aligned, this can result in a poor experience for students. Communication, planning and on-going management were important areas for businesses to be aware of and be willing to engage with.

Some interviewees also suggested that some business volunteers may benefit from training to support them in their role. More generally, interviewees thought that a general understanding of teaching and learning (pedagogy) and curriculum requirements would further enhance the positive role that business already plays within the curriculum.

Business and schools are working together

There is no reason to assume that most schools are not engaging with businesses in support of their students. In England and Scotland, it is a formal requirement. In Wales, the curriculum does not require business involvement although it is required for the Careers Wales Mark.

Some disadvantaged areas are currently well served by the support of businesses because they are within a Government Opportunity Area or Cold Spot. Relationships between businesses and schools are being actively funded and brokered.

Why do teachers decide to deliver one intervention over another?

A consistent set of interventions for engaging businesses were used by teachers, although the interventions were used to meet different objectives and often reflected prior experiences of the teacher and business overseeing them. Because of this variation it is difficult to compare the interventions or to understand which are the most effective based upon the information gained from the interview process, but there would be value in understanding this further to help businesses recognise which interventions are

most effective according to the objectives of the activity with students.

Cross curriculum project-based learning

These approaches warrant further investigation to better understand how impact is achieved as they potentially offer the opportunity to integrate industry and curriculum linked approaches across the whole curriculum.

Next Steps

This is an abridged version of a longer report commissioned by BITC's Curriculum Taskforce members who are currently taking the findings forward. In times of lockdown, when students are not able to access the curriculum in the normal way, the taskforce is investigating innovative solutions to support young people whilst also developing the longer-term skills their businesses need for the future. If you would like to understand more, please contact:

Cheryl.phillips@bitc.org.uk

In summary, the research highlighted that interviewees believe that business involvement within the curriculum has several benefits for their students including a positive impact upon engagement, learning and progression however this is based upon teacher and student perception only. There is currently no formal measurement to track the impact upon destinations or exam results.

There are opportunities for lower achievers, disadvantaged and underconfident students to really benefit from engagement with business in the curriculum, particularly if the engagement can be sustained and there are some interesting innovations using technology to help build trust and break down barriers.

Training or guidance for teachers and businesses could be created which addresses some reasons why business-school activities can fail and provides tools to help prevent that. Planning, communication and on-going management continue to be areas that school business

partnerships need to revisit and ensure are working correctly so they can build upon the trust and mutual understanding they have to work closely within the curriculum.

Further opportunities for schools and businesses to learn from and train each other could open a broader range of possibilities for students whilst enabling business to get the breadth of knowledge and skills it needs.

A further investigation should take place into why some schools are now delivering the curriculum in a completely different way through cross-curriculum project-based learning with businesses and community organisations. This could provide some transformational insights for the Curriculum Taskforce.

CALL TO ACTION

Whilst the country is in lockdown and schools are working to understand how they can support students at home and potentially for the longer term, call your school contacts and ask them how you can support the most disadvantaged students to prevent the educational attainment gap from widening further. Ask how your business can be part of blended learning solutions and mentoring in partnership with teachers to help engage students with their curriculum learning in new ways.

Contact Business in the Community. Work with us to be part of the solution to tackling the disadvantage gap and benefit from the combined experience of the network to create and deliver new approaches to working with schools during lockdown.

Join the BITC's Curriculum Taskforce and be a leader within our network, at the forefront of creating solutions and new approaches to tackling the disadvantage gap.

THANK YOU

Participating schools

St Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary School

Crewe Engineering and Design University
Technical College

Beechcliffe Special School

Norham High School

Reading Girls School

North Bromsgrove High School & Sixth Form

The Bulwell Academy

St Cuthberts Catholic High School

Rednock School

Pentrehafod School

Abbots Lea School

Thanks also to:

Bedford High School

Calton Bolling School

Thank you also to the Careers and Enterprise Company, the Curriculum Taskforce and the Headteacher Steering group members.