

Employer engagement in education: literature review

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Education and Employers Taskforce



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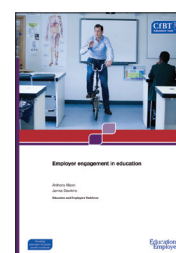
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Education and Employers Taskforce

The Education and Employers Taskforce was established as a charity in 2009. Its vision is to ensure that every school and college has an effective partnership with employers to provide its young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential and so secure the UK's future prosperity. The Taskforce places a high value on research, working with leading UK and international scholars to better understand the potential impact and most effective delivery of employer engagement in education. Towards this end, the Taskforce runs annual research conferences, hosts free monthly seminars at its London offices and makes available through its website (www.educationandemployers.org/research) direct access to numerous relevant research publications, many of which are summarised. A free fortnightly e-bulletin informs subscribers of UK and international research developments. The Taskforce also runs free programmes for British schools and employers, allowing them to connect for free across a range of different activities; see www.inspiringthefuture.org. All the work of the Taskforce is underpinned by a Partnership Board which includes the main national bodies representing employers and teaching staff.



In addition to this paper there is a separate publication (*Employer engagement in education*) which analyses and discusses the evidence provided here. This paper can be downloaded from: www.cfbt.com/research



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Introduction, purpose and methodology

The subject of this paper is employer engagement in education. In this, the authors consider the range of different ways that employers can support the learning and progression of young people in British schools. The paper draws on a wide range of source material to ask: What are the typical benefits of different types of employer engagement? Do expected benefits vary by discrete types of pupils, by attainment level or destination intention, for example? How can teaching staff make best strategic use of employer engagement to support their pupils to succeed in education and then in the workplace? The questions present a first attempt to develop coherent frameworks for understanding the ways in which young people can and do experience the workplace and working professionals whilst still in education.

Arguably, there has never been a more important time to take stock of employer engagement in British education. The importance is twofold. Firstly, over recent years there has been a flourishing of serious UK and international research into specific questions related to employer engagement in education. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Learning for jobs* (2010) and the Harvard School for Graduate Education's *Pathways to prosperity* (2011) both provide a compelling international endorsement of the value of employer engagement to young people's educational experiences. In the UK, conferences in 2010 and 2011 organised by the Education and Employers Taskforce¹ have provided settings for a new research community to come together to exchange insights and perceptions.² The publication early in 2014 of the first collection of serious essays on the theme of employer engagement in education (Archer, Mann & Stanley, forthcoming) will break further new ground. This wealth of new research material reflects a decade of government activity, including the introduction of a statutory requirement for work-related learning in 2004 and the Wolf report in 2011, both designed, in different ways, to increase the role of employers in education.

Recent changes to the policy environment provide the second rationale for attempting this collation of current understanding. The implementation of the Wolf review requires schools and colleges to think afresh about how they will provide young people with experience of the workplace at post-16. Indeed, from 2013, for the first time, it is a requirement of all young people's programmes of study that they must include a spell of work experience, with schools and colleges explicitly expected by government to 'increase their engagement with employers' through such activities as workplace visits, enterprise projects, mentoring, work shadowing and workshops. What's more, changes in careers provision places a clear onus on secondary schools to oversee such provision to young people, with new accountability data published on the destinations of former pupils.³ As a result of changes in government policy, it is much more difficult for schools to look to their local authority or Education Business Partnership Organisation to guide activity. Schools need to make their own decisions, often in very new ways, and to do so with full confidence they must have access to good quality evidence on what works and why it works. A primary objective of this paper is to help meet this need.

The purpose of this paper then is to unwrap and disaggregate what happens when a young person in a learning environment comes into contact with the working world. The paper considers the range of common employer engagement activities (work experience, job shadowing, career talks, workplace visits, enterprise projects etc) and asks what can each be expected, typically, to give to

¹ See www.educationandemployers.org/research

² Essays from the 2010 Taskforce conference were published in a special edition of the *Journal of education and work* in 2012.

See <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjew20/25/4>

³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/qandlearning/programmes/b00223495/post-16-work-exp-enterprise-educ>



a participating young person in terms of employability skills, attainment and employment outcomes, and changes in insights and attitudes. Moreover, it explores whether different types of young people, as defined by attainment levels, learning difficulties and engagement patterns, can be expected to gain particularly from different types of activity.

This paper presents a review of research literature relevant to typical employer engagement activities and the primary outcomes (attainment and employment) considered. Given the relative paucity of high quality research material on employer engagement activities, the widespread inconsistent use of terminology to describe the same phenomenon, the availability of much research of interest in public – rather than academic – literature, and the fact that insights of value are often to be found in works addressing outcome areas rather than describing process, simple key word searches of research databases are unlikely to fully provide material of greatest value. Rather a critical exploration of literature is undertaken, following links between papers and drawing on the considerable library of research materials compiled by the Education and Employers Taskforce.

A review of the literature

A familiar starting point in literature considering the impact of employer engagement in education is the initial lament over the lack of robust data on the impact of activities (AIR UK, 2008; Bartlett, 2009; Gillie, 2012).

There is no shortage of literature on employers and/or business involvement in education. Much of this literature, however, was excluded from the scope of this review, mainly because it is largely anecdotal..., or not evaluated to even modest scientific standards. There is a particular shortage of studies of employers' links with education that have used robust research designs... that can provide robust evidence of an impact. (AIR UK, 2008: 28)

It is not, however, that high quality reviews and evaluations have been undertaken and that the results have been found to be confusing or negative, but that there have been far too few serious attempts to test the impacts of employer activities using the accepted minimal standards used in the social sciences. This review of the literature begins with a review of published evidence related to different types of employer engagement activity (Part A) and then proceeds to consider the impacts of such activities from the perspective of the attainment and employment outcomes (Part B) which they are widely considered to support.



Part A: What different employer engagement activities give to young people

Work experience and related activities (job shadowing, part-time working and pupil volunteering)

In the British educational tradition, a short period of work experience has become a common element of school life. In non-selective secondary schools, a period of one or, more likely, two weeks' work experience placement during Year 10 has been a typical experience for more than 80 per cent of pupils, making it the most commonly experienced employer engagement activity undertaken by pupils during their school years. A comparable proportion of young people from grammar and independent schools also leave secondary education having undertaken a placement, but much more commonly (as shown in Table 1 below) during Year 12 or Year 13 (aged between 16 and 19). In the UK, experience has been typically designed to provide a taste of the real working world. To the Department for Children, Schools and Families/Department for Education, it has been understood as 'a placement on an employer's premises in which a student carries out a particular task or duty, or range of tasks or duties, more or less as would an employee, but with an emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience' (DfES, 2002: 6).

In terms of impact, work experience has been long thought to provide a range of positive outcomes for young people. As Brian Lightman, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, has said:

'There is no doubt in my mind that work experience can make a significant difference to the motivation, attainment and progression of students. As a headteacher I have seen attitudes to school of many young people completely transformed as a result of their highly positive experience on a placement. Those who lacked the necessary motivation or maturity to work to their full potential have often returned from placements fuelled up as a result of an experience which can genuinely be life changing. Other academically high-achieving pupils have been challenged to aim even higher and broaden their experience.' (cited in Mann, 2012: 3)

Table 1: Participation in work experience by age and school type attended – views of young Britons aged 19–24 (Huddleston et al., 2012)

		Non-selective with sixth form	Grammar with sixth form	Independent with sixth form	N
Work experience	Yes	90%	86%	84%	649
	No	10%	14%	15%	82
	N	530	122	79	731



The 2012 report *Work experience: impact and delivery – insights from the evidence* (Mann, 2012) presents research findings exploring the positive influence of work experience placements for young people in terms of clarification of career aspirations, admission to higher education, academic attainment and employment. In the discussion below, findings from that report are augmented with a deeper consideration of research literature.

As Brian Lightman's comments suggest, there is a widespread belief among teaching staff that something meaningful happens to young people when they go out on a work experience placement. Surveys of teaching staff have routinely recorded majorities agreeing that pupils return from placements more mature and with greater confidence (Hillage et al., 2001: 110; Eddy Adams, 2008: 37), a view endorsed by pupil surveys (National Support Group for Work Experience, 2008: 20). In terms of impact on attainment, perceptions are also consistent with polls routinely supporting the view that positive links exist between placements and academic application and success.

As set out in Table 2, the Department for Children, Schools and Families' 2007/08 survey of 15,025 teenagers following their return from work experience found that high proportions agreed that the placement had changed attitudes towards education (National Support Group for Work Experience, 2008).

Table 2: Pupil perspectives on changed attitudes to education following work experience placements (National Support Group for Work Experience, 2008)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I understand better why it is important to do well at school	50%	40%	7%	2%
I am more prepared to work hard in lessons and my coursework	42%	47%	9%	2%

Hillage et al.'s 2001 survey of 742 young people concurred, with 52 per cent agreeing that after work experience they 'felt more interested in doing well at school' (p. 113) and 67 per cent of the 1,032 pupils polled by the CBI in 2007 agreeing that 'work experience has helped me understand why learning at school is important to getting a job' (CBI, 2007: 31). Survey evidence suggests that any positive impact on attainment largely stems from such attitudinal change – an enhanced regard for the value of education and qualifications improving motivation – and consistently two-thirds of both 700 classroom teachers with experience at KS4 and/or KS5 surveyed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in 2012, and 684 work experience coordinators agreed that pupils were more motivated after placements and only six to seven per cent less motivated (Mann, 2012: 20-21).

Given the teacher perspective that the primary relationship between work experience and attainment lies in enhanced motivation, it might be hypothesised that impacts would be most strongly felt among learners of low and borderline attainment levels and have their least effect on high achievers who commonly possess high levels of motivation. For borderline pupils, arguably extra application could be tangibly connected to achieving a clear target. Certainly, this is a view captured in focus



group material presented in this collection. Half of teaching staff surveyed by NFER agreed that the chances of borderline pupils successfully achieving five GCSEs A*-C increased as a result of placements, 46 per cent arguing that no effects could be perceived and five per cent feeling that the placement actually reduced the likelihood of achieving the goal (Mann, 2012: 22). The last finding will be of particular interest to practitioners concerned that time out of the classroom may lead to a reduction in achievement, negating any other positive impacts found.⁴

The link between work experience and attainment is a high priority for future research. Teacher and pupil perceptions of positive impacts are consistent. Limited international research has also suggested that comparable placements enhance motivation, leading to better educational outcomes (see Smith & Green, 2005: 56 for an Australian perspective). However, little attention has been given to attempting to quantify the scale of impacts in themselves and in comparison to other potential interventions. Equally, little research has been undertaken into the relationship between the timing of interventions and their impacts. If enhanced motivation is the most significant educational output from a placement, it would be optimal to time placements – and/or activities providing comparable insights – for as early as possible in the school year.

Equally, analysis remains to be undertaken as to the comparative attainment benefits gained from comparable experiences such as volunteering and engagement in part-time work. Available studies do suggest that links are observable here too (John, 2005: 646; Crawford et al., 2011) raising questions of whether optimal impacts are felt where pupils undertake activities most closely linked to career aspirations which would tend strongly to be in work experience rather than in volunteering or particularly part-time work (Mann, 2012: 27; Fullarton, 1999: 10). Equally, the question remains as to whether shorter periods of work experience, for example in job shadowing, or comparable experiences designed to foreground questions surrounding the link between work and education provide comparable levels of impact to the traditional two-week placement. In one small Scottish study (N=98), 93 per cent of employers felt that a one-week placement was effective in increasing pupils' understanding of the workplace, enhancing career choices and developing employability skills, with two thirds of respondents stating that one week was enough (Eddy Adams, 2008: 37).

For higher achievers, the impact of work experience can be most clearly seen in influencing access to higher education. Work by Steve Jones, the Education and Employers Taskforce and others has shown that work experience is a common criterion in the admissions procedures of selective British universities, with experience in an arena related to degree subject a typical requirement of some courses (for example medicine, dentistry and veterinary science) and highly advantageous across the great majority of undergraduate courses (Mann et al., 2011; Mann, 2012; Jones, 2012; Waller et al., 2012; Hodgkinson & Hamill, 2010). A growing literature suggests strongly that, in being able to allow pupils to demonstrate their understanding of careers related to courses of study, work experience – and also to some extent volunteering (Brooks, 2007) – provides young people with resources of considerably greater value than does part-time work, which rarely allows pupils insight into professions related to university study (Jones, 2012; Mann, 2012).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a clear finding of Huddlestone et al.'s 2012 study of the engagement of high-performing independent schools with employers was the determination to provide pupils with workplace experiences of direct relevance to university admission. Based on detailed interviews with relevant staff in six high-performing English independent schools, the report noted:

⁴ Hillage's 2001 report on work experience provides evidence to temper views about the scale of change experienced by young people during and after their placements. Although majorities of teaching staff and pupils argue that placements positively change pupil attitudes, statistical analysis of pupil perceptions pre- and post-placement show, with the exception of views about increased confidence in problem-solving, that only modest difference between attitudes were recorded (Hillage et al., 2001: 114-115).



Interviewees were keenly aware that work experience, in particular, was often highly desirable or an essential requirement for influencing successful admission to highly competitive university courses. Interviewees noted that where undergraduate courses related closely to specific vocation, for example medicine, work experience (and other employer engagement activity) could provide excellent opportunities for pupils to show insight and commitment to careers linked to intended courses of study.

Interviewees held a strong view that often relevant work experience would make a difference to the success of applications and cited first-hand advice from Russell Group university admissions tutors who commonly visited schools to speak to pupils... consequently, schools worked hard to ensure that pupils were aware of the importance of securing attractive and relevant work experience and that they presented it effectively within their personal statements in UCAS applications. (Huddleston et al., 2012: 12-13)

The report further sets out survey evidence (p. 27) highlighting the significantly higher value ascribed by the former pupils of independent schools to the influence of work experience undertaken while at school in helping admission to higher education than their state-educated peers. Whereas one quarter of the former pupils of non-selective state schools agreed that their work experience placement was of value to university admission, more than two in five (42 per cent) of those educated in the independent sector agreed.

The variation in perception speaks to both the timing and delivery of work experience. As seen above, young people educated in the private sector are far more likely to have undertaken placements over the age of 16 and with university admissions as an ambition. They are, moreover, likely to have been well placed to have sought placements through informal networks (parents, friends, governors) than through an Education Business Partnership Organisation or comparable intermediary organisation. Where individuals within such social networks work in professions of interest to pupils, opportunities for accessing career-relevant placements are high.

The insight speaks to a significant issue in the delivery of work experience – the extent to which benefits gained from it relate to the social backgrounds of pupils. In the British educational setting typically half or more of young people in any cohort have found their own work experience placements raising significant concerns among observers (Francis et al., 2005: 33). Osgood, Francis and Archer argued in 2006 that such delivery practice has the ‘effect of exacerbating and extending inequality of opportunity’ (p. 316) as individual choices are significantly constrained by varying degrees of cultural and social capital (attitudes, expectations and networks). This is a perspective shared by Hatcher and Le Gallais (2008) whose work with five schools of varying social compositions in the English West Midlands found:

There was a correlation between school socio-economic status (SES) and the educational value of the placement. Students at the high SES school were much less likely to undertake menial tasks and much more likely to undertake responsible tasks and work shadowing, to be treated as a colleague and to receive mentoring in a professional context... If work experience is about learning about labour, it is about how working class kids get working class placements and middle class kids get managerial and professional ones. (Hatcher and Le Gallais, 2008: 71, 73)



The example of law provides a useful case study illustrating the influence of social background on access to placements. As shown by Mann et al., 37 per cent of law courses offered by Russell Group universities explicitly state that it is desirable that young people gain access to work experience in a legal setting prior to applying for university entry. However, access to such placements is significantly more difficult for those young people who do not have informal access to legal professionals through existing social networks. As Francis and Sommerlad (2009) show, nearly 35 per cent of the 600 UK legal firms they surveyed only offered work experience through informal contacts, and fewer than 10 per cent ran formal, open competitions for placements (p. 71).

The work of Hatcher and Le Gallais has focused on one school which bucked the trend of socially-determined work experience placements. The school in question manages the work experience process, working to source placements that stretch a young person's aspirations. Such an approach is seen to provide a much higher proportion of 'professional' placements than would be expected given the school's social composition. To Hatcher and Le Gallais, only through such approaches can career aspirations be genuinely broadened, rather than simply reproducing existing attitudes and expectations. The authors also observe such an influence on the gendered approach to placements and in doing so provide validation for the work of Francis et al., whose 2005 survey of 566 Year 11 pupils found tight correlations between gender and work placements and yet 36 per cent of girls and 14 per cent of boys stated a desire to try a non-traditional work placement.

The studies of the impacts of social class and gender on approaches to, and experiences of, work experience placements suggests a weakness in the historical British model of the single episode of two weeks' work experience at a single place of work. Rather, to challenge preconceptions and to encourage and enable pupils to embrace experiences outside of comfort zones shaped by broader societal forces and immediate sense of 'normality', the conclusion reached by Hatcher and Le Gallais (2008) is that schools should demonstrate greater agency in shaping multiple experiences of diverse workplaces for all types of pupil (p. 77).

A number of studies have challenged the extent to which suitable work experience placements have been available to young people seeking specific occupational interests. Hodgkinson and Hammill (2010) have argued that the 'utopian ideal of all civil engineering undergraduates having a relevant (work experience) placement is unobtainable' (p. 135). Neilson and McNally (2010) have found that placements in nursing are equally sub-optimal and often of very poor quality. The issue of supply and demand relates to both pupils' interests (structured as they are by cultural and social environments) and employer supply (Hatcher and Le Gallais, 2008: 35; Francis et al., 2005: 32; Mann, 2012: 29).

The question of whether work experience reflects the actual character of the labour market is important as it is widely agreed that placements are a highly effective means of helping young people to decide on career choices, providing them with very useful information about their progression through education and transition into work. Survey evidence – as shown in Table 3 – typically shows that two thirds or more of teaching staff and pupils agreed that placements helped in such career decision making and navigation (Eddy Adams, 2008: 37; Mann, 2012: 11-16; Francis et al., 2005: 42; Hillage et al., 2001: 110; CBI, 2007: 31; National Support Group for Work Experience, 2008: 20).

Table 3: Pupil perspectives on changed attitudes to education and career progression following work experience placements (Mann, 2012)

Results of three surveys investigating the link between and changes in young people's views on careers choices, 2005–2008.

Survey team, year of survey: reponent statement	Number (sample size), age	% agreeing strongly/finding very helpful	% total agreeing/finding helpful
National Support Group for Work Experience (2008): 'I am clearer about what to do in my future education and career (post 16)'	15,025 (15–16 yrs)	33%	75%
London Metropolitan University (2005): 'Encouraged/discouraged you from choosing work like this'	566 (15–16 yrs)	N/A	60%
Loughborough University (2005): 'Work experience was helpful in making a post Year 11 decision'	18,989 (16–18 yrs)	34%	65%

As seen from the perspective of a young adult aged between 19 and 24, as set out in Table 4, past participants in work experience placements undertaken through schools and colleges felt that the placement helped them to decide on a career – especially where the placement was taken over the age of 16 – where some three quarters of survey respondents felt the placement to have been useful (in any way) and nearly one third felt that it was of a lot of use to them in helping to make decisions about their career.

Table 4: Young adults' perspectives on the value of work experience placements (Mann, 2012)

Age at which the work experience was undertaken	Perceived utility of work experience in terms of...			Number
	deciding on a career	getting a job after education	getting into higher education	
14–16	50% useful in any way (13% a lot of use)	25% (7%)	19% (4%)	588–609
16–19	74% (29%)	48% (21%)	47% (18%)	120–123
At both ages	76% (31%)	47% (20%)	51% (24%)	81–96

Perhaps surprisingly given the consistent endorsement of work experience as a means of shaping career decisions, relatively little work has been undertaken to try and conceptualise what it is that



happens within the work experience placement. Two studies, however, do provide insight. Smith et al.'s 2004 review of short (two-week) placements within Australian school-based vocational training programmes argued:

Work placement has been shown to have significant advantages in assisting young people towards a post-school decision, and the opportunity to develop insights into the world of employment at a general level, and insights into at least one specific form of employment. These outcomes of work placements provide students with increased agency over the decisions they make on eventual employment and onto the processes they use to achieve these. (Smith et al., 2004: 268)

From a comparable British perspective, the work of Raffo and Reeves in exploring the impact of periods of extended work experience on lower-achieving Key Stage 4 pupils describes means by which young people can undergo important changes as a result of, and in response to, experiences gained:

What we have evidenced is that, based on the process of developing social capital through trustworthy reciprocal social relations within individualized networks, young people are provided with an opportunity to gain information, observe, ape and then confirm decisions and actions with significant others and peers. Thus, everyday implicit, informal and individual practical knowledge and understanding is created through interaction, dialogue, action and reflection on action within individualized and situated social contexts. (Raffo and Reeves, 2000: 151)

Work experience can therefore be seen as providing an entrance into the world of work. And, indeed, a number of studies have described the way in which young people have frequently secured offers of part-time employment following their placement (Shamash & Shoemith, 2011; Eddy Adams, 2008: 37; Mann, 2012: 28; Hillage et al., 2001: 113).⁵ The offer of employment is significant in that whereas upwards of half of teenage Britons who combine study with part-time working have been employed in the retail or hospitality sectors, analysis shows only one in five of work experience placements to be in these sectors (Howieson et al., 2010: 6; Francis et al., 2005: 28).

A rare Australian study by Fullarton (1999) compares pupil perceptions on the comparative value of work experience and part-time working. The survey finds minimal difference in perceptions across a range of questions surrounding typical employability skills (such as communicating effectively and working in a team) and in terms of understanding the workplace, but considerable difference in terms of enhanced career insights. It raises a question in relation to the relative value of work experience placements in comparison to part-time teenage working in providing young people with experience of value to the later labour market. A number of studies have used longitudinal data to demonstrate a positive correlation between teenage part-time employment and later positive adult employment outcomes (Ruhm, 1997; Crawford et al., 2011) and this is a link endorsed by the OECD which argues that teenagers who worked part time while still in education, or who combined study and work through vocational education, experience much more successful transitions into work than peers who undertake a 'study first, work later' model (OECD, 2010). Crawford et al.'s British study uses longitudinal data to explicitly compare the employment and earnings outcomes of young people who at age 16/17 either combined full-time study with part-time work or who solely undertook full-time study – and finds that the former group consistently achieved better outcomes as young adults:

⁵ Studies suggest that between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of young people feel that some possibility of continuing paid employment emerges from their period of work experience.

Individuals who were in full-time education with some work at age 16/17 have a particularly low probability of being NEET by age 18/19 (only 7 per cent) compared to 16 per cent for those [just] in full-time education. (Crawford et al., 2011: 55)

Studies have also shown that when part-time working is less than 10–20 hours a week, there is rarely any negative impact on attainment levels or the decisions to stay on in education (Dustmann and van Soest, 2007).

The evidence suggests therefore that school-mediated work experience can provide young people with experiences of benefit to their later working lives that are comparable to part-time teenage employment. This insight takes on significant meaning when it is realised that the reported proportion of young people undertaking part-time employment has fallen considerably over recent years – from more than half of older teenagers to less than 25 per cent (UKCES, 2013). In such circumstances, the onus of schools to provide experiences which can no longer be delivered by the marketplace grows.

A largely unexplored question within the serious research literature is whether young people can be expected to gain through participation in volunteering exercises in comparable ways to work experience and/or part-time employment. It can be easily imagined that volunteering exercises will often have characteristics commonly found in explicitly work-based experiences. Through volunteering, young people can be brought into contact with working professionals and exposed to career cultures and opportunities – experiences can be of long duration allowing skills to be built up through practice. Given the ‘rich and eclectic range of approaches’ (Ofsted, 2011: 4) to volunteering by schools, generalisation is very difficult. However, as reported in Ofsted’s recent thematic review:

The great majority of young people spoken to by inspectors thought that volunteering had helped them to develop important skills and attributes such as advocacy, team-working, motivation and resilience. Others reflected on their developing sense of responsibility and service to others. Improving employment prospects was a key feature for some, while for others volunteering had helped to develop their political awareness and civic engagement.

Evaluating the impact of volunteering presents genuine challenges. Commonly, the senior managers interviewed in the [13] schools and colleges visited asserted that dedicating curriculum time to volunteering helped raise academic standards... [some] colleges cited improved retention and attendance rates. (Ofsted, 2011: 4-5)

In considering specific types of pupils, the reviewers found that volunteering was an effective means of supporting the needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged young people by developing their confidence and building their social skills (p. 6). Addressing barriers to volunteering, Ofsted’s online survey of 328 young people found that a high proportion (43 per cent) of those who did not volunteer agreed that not knowing what can be done and/or how to get involved was a major barrier preventing activity (p. 15). Of young people who had volunteered, motivations were split between altruistic desires to have a ‘good feeling/the knowledge that you have helped’ (40 per cent of sample) and those who focused on more tangible outcomes – 35 per cent combined citing the desire to gain experience, new skills or take part in something that ‘looks good on a CV’ (p. 25).



Most young people saw volunteering as a means of enhancing their future employment prospects, regardless of their background. Evidence for this claim was firm. Sixth formers spoken to pointed out the importance to them of having a worthwhile experience on their CV to discuss at their university interview. Other learners could point out how volunteering had helped them decide on future study or given them insights into the world of work. A student taking a community volunteering qualification explained how volunteering in the care sector helped her understand the skills and qualifications required to work with the elderly and in other associated careers such as podiatrist or paramedic. (Ofsted, 2011: 26)

Careers talks, career networking and mock interviews

Over recent years a number of influential international studies have highlighted the importance of involving employers in making careers information and advice available to young people. The OECD's 2010 thematic review, *Learning for jobs*, devotes a chapter to the subject. The report authors argue that in the context of a fragmenting and increasingly complex labour market, the importance of career education is of growing.

Individual career guidance should be a part of a comprehensive career guidance framework, including a systematic career education programme to inform students about the world of work and career opportunities. This means that schools should encourage an understanding of the world of work from the earliest years, backed by visits to workplaces and workplace experience. Partnerships between schools and local firms allow both teachers and students to spend time in workplaces. Research studies suggest that young people particularly value information on jobs and careers if obtained in a real workplace and through contacts with working people. Through such experience young people can be introduced to some of the choices they will face in their professional and learning pathways. (OECD, 2010: 85)

This is a viewpoint endorsed by researchers (Symonds et al.) from Harvard University's Graduate School for Education (see *Pathways to prosperity*, 2010) and in the UK by Ofsted in the particular context of effective action to reduce the likelihood of young people experiencing periods of being not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Ofsted, 2010; Deloitte, 2010; see also Hughes & Gratton, 2009).

The importance of employer-provided careers information is explained by Wright (2005). He describes the way that young people apply greater value to information which is interpersonal, experiential and direct, information which is gained first-hand in a trustworthy setting. As reported by the Royal Society, young people respond positively to external 'role models.'

Role models are seen as intrinsically interesting just because they are not teachers and are therefore not associated with discipline and school; they are not 'strict' like teachers. Their relationship with the ideas they are conveying and the reasons for their presence in the school are seen by the children as different to those of teachers. Their work in the 'real world' and their obvious enthusiasm for their subject and ability to bring SET [Science, Engineering and Technology] to life, combined with the absence of an explicit teacher/student relationship all help to engage the young people directly with the ideas. Teachers point out that there are rarely any behavioural problems among pupils taking part in role model schemes. (Royal Society, 2010: 4)

Such 'hot' information is seen by young people as being more likely to be impartial and reliable than other materials, such as those encountered on the internet (Howieson et al., 2009; Lord &



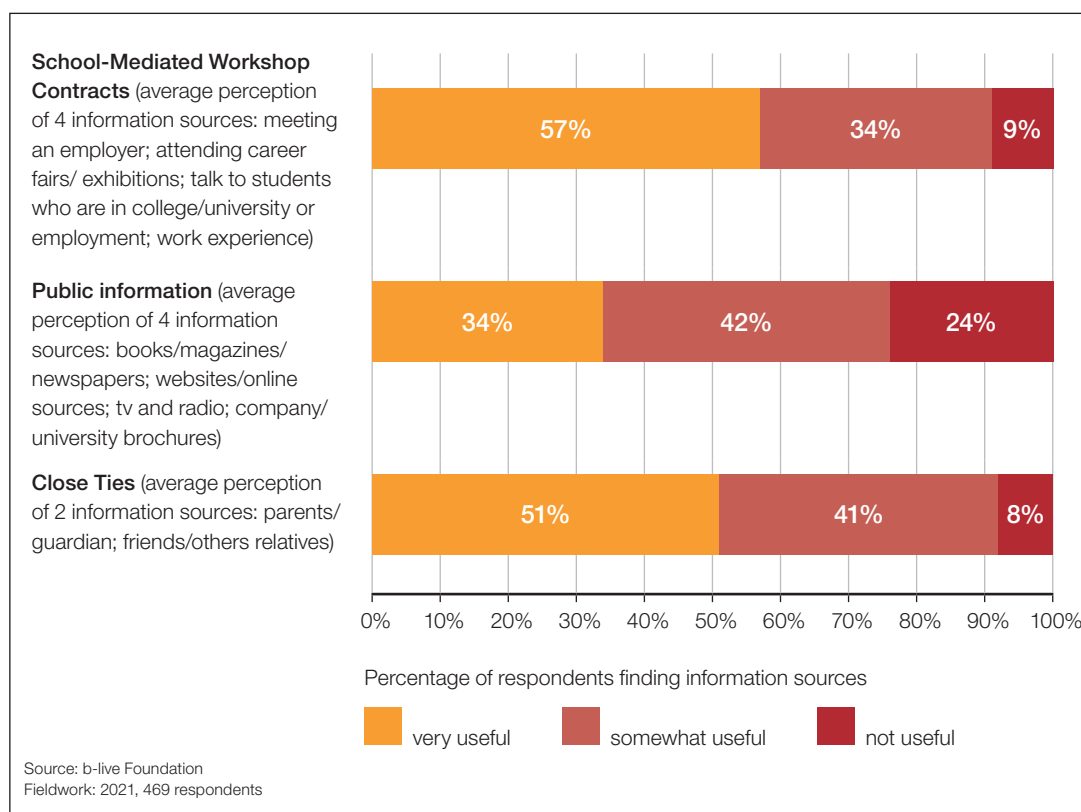
Jones, 2006). As Archer et al. describe, young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly likely to express such a view of the information available to them in decision making. This conceptualisation of information sources can be further developed. As categorised in Table 5, it is information from workplace contacts which is both believable and broad.

Table 5: Conceptualising sources of careers information available to young people

Source of information	Reach and reliability
Family and friends	Narrow in scope but reliable in content
Internet and media	Broad in scope but unreliable in content
School-mediated workplace contacts	Broad in scope and reliable in content

The relative value of workplace contacts is illustrated in Table 6, setting out the perceived utility of the three different sources of information to 469 teenagers surveyed by b-live in 2012.

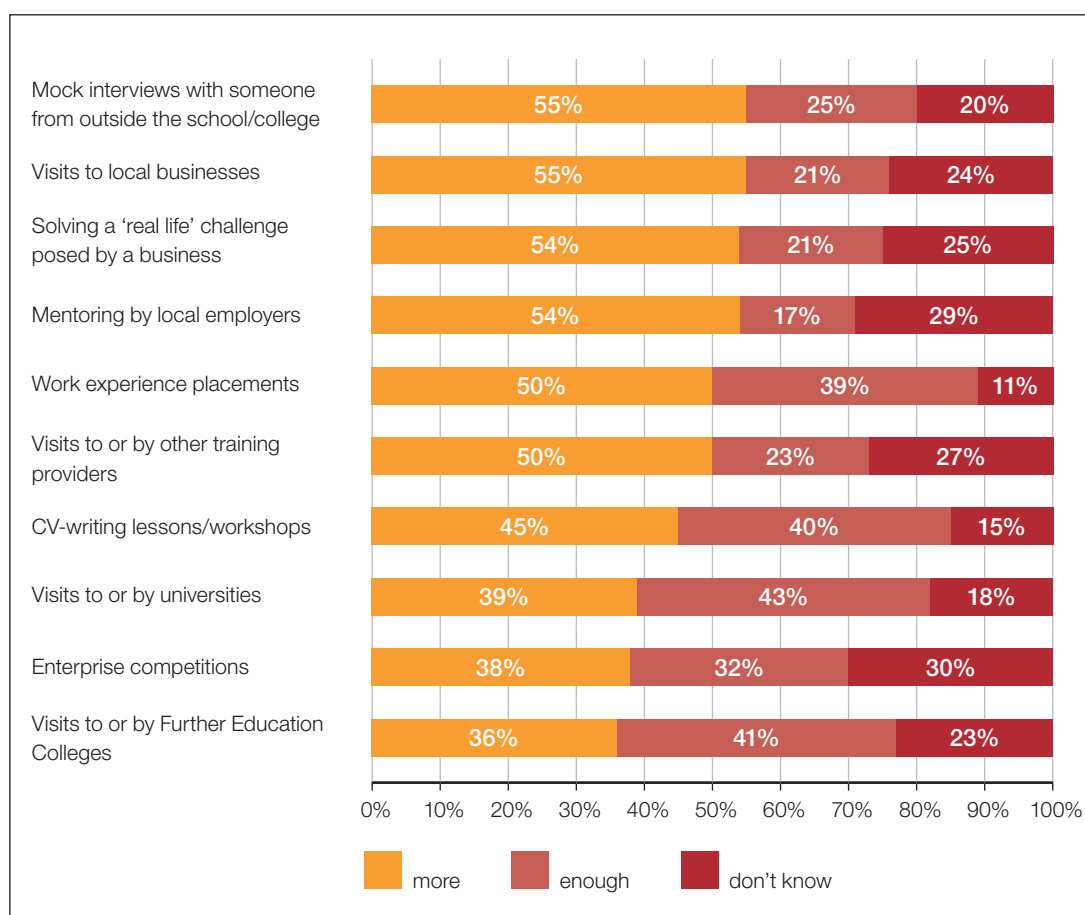
Table 6: Perceptions of young people (12–16) on the usefulness of different sources of information experienced in influencing career choices (Mann & Caplin, 2012)





Certainly, surveys consistently report that young people value opportunities for workplace contacts arranged through school and would welcome high levels of employer involvement in careers-related provision (QCDA, 2009: 5; Deloitte, 2010: 16, 56, 60). Ipsos MORI's 2009 survey of 368 Year 11 pupils found that 94 per cent agreed that 'being taught how to write a CV' and 92 per cent that 'learning interview techniques' would be helpful to them in doing 'what you want to do in the future' (Tu & Highton, 2013). YouGov's survey of 2,198 young people aged between 11 and 24 for Edge, as set out in Table 7, is illustrative of this: demonstrating high levels of demand for mock interviews and CV workshops as well as workplace visits (YouGov, 2010).

Table 7: Young people's attitudes towards school-based employer engagement activities: proportions stating more, enough or don't know (YouGov, 2010)



Surveys of teaching staff provide comparable results. The poll of 500 Key Stage 4 teachers by QCA in 2004 showed that 45 per cent felt it was very important for young people between the ages of 14 and 16 to 'listen to or speak with a visitor from business' (career talks) with a further 41 per cent arguing it was fairly important (QCA, 2004, section 3; see also Mann et al., 2010: 46-47; Wagstaff, 2009). Demand is high, and yet only 11 per cent of young adults surveyed by YouGov on behalf of the Education and Employers Taskforce in 2010 could recall speaking to three or more working professionals about careers while still in education (Mann, 2012).



Evidence of the impact of such career-related pupil exposure to the workplace is growing. Deloitte's 2010 study for the Education and Employers Taskforce drew on data supplied by b-live to explore links between the volume of such employer contacts and confidence in progression. Based on a sample of 333 teenagers aged 13 to 17 (with statistical controls in place to ensure that results were not distorted by age), the study found that young people who had spoken to four or more employers about careers were significantly more confident about their career ambitions than peers reporting fewer contacts (Deloitte, 2010: 55).

Across studies touching on employer-provided careers advice, little attention is given to whether any specific types of young people (boys or girls, high fliers or low achievers etc.) might particularly benefit from the intervention. However, a number of studies do suggest that it may be young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds who have most to gain from such interventions. As Sabates et al. state:

As more youth strive for post-secondary education and professional jobs, information about prospective occupations and alignment of occupations and educational ambitions becomes increasingly important for youths' ability to plan effectively for their future. (Sabates et al., 2011: 17)

Studies using British longitudinal datasets which have explored the long-term implications of uncertain or 'misaligned' teenage career aspirations – where young people at age 16 mis-estimate the educational requirements needed for specific occupations – have found that there are significant consequences linked to underestimates of qualifications required for preferred career ambitions. Young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are systematically more likely to fall into this category (Sabates et al., 2011; Gutman & Schoon, 2012; Yates et al., 2011) and consequently are more likely to be able to benefit from reliable interventions. Young people do almost uniformly possess high career ambitions, but ambitions are commonly developed with little regard for actual labour market demand and very often pupils lack relevant information about the breadth of opportunities potentially open to them and how to realistically achieve their goals (Croll et al., 2010).

Workplace visits

There has been very little research into the value of workplace visits to young people and how they might be experienced in different ways by different types of young people. Available materials suggest that such visits are valued highly by young people and teaching staff and seen as having the greatest impact for younger pupils. Hatcher and Le Gallais (2008: 77) argue that workplace visits are especially effective in giving young people a critical understanding of the world of work and the vocational relevance of education with benefits greatest for young people in Year 9 or younger. Huddleston et al. (2012) describe how high-performing independent schools take part in activities like 'Take Your Daughter to Work Day' during Key Stage 3.

Survey data suggest that visits to workplaces are held in high regard by pupils and teaching staff (McLarty et al., 2009). Edcoms' poll of 400 school leaders (evenly split between primary and secondary heads, but of unknown sampling approaches) in 2007 found that 58 per cent of primary schools engaged in off-site visits as did 91 per cent of secondary schools – making the activity the most popular means of engaging employers at primary level and the second most popular at secondary level from a range of options (Edcoms, 2007). Unpublished Education and Employers Taskforce polling of 201 school leaders (who took part in a 2010 campaign week to bring employer leaders into schools) found that 58 per cent felt that workplace visits were 'very important' (with a further 22 per cent stating that such visits were 'important') to them as a means of connecting with



employers. Twenty per cent of respondents felt that such visits were 'very difficult' to organise with a further 18 per cent agreeing that they were 'difficult' (Education and Employers Taskforce, 2011). The b-live 2010 survey of 333 teenagers for Deloitte found that 62 per cent of respondents wanted their school or college to provide more workplace visits (Deloitte, 2010: 56).

Business mentoring

The literature surrounding mentoring is rich, but frustrating in that frequently it provides loose definitions of the type of mentoring encountered. In this study, interests lie in business mentoring, which can be defined as a relationship involving multiple contacts between a young person and a working, largely non-expert adult with the purpose of improving pupil understanding of workplace issues and opportunities, managed and enabled through an educational provider. Consequently, mentoring programmes that focused more upon emotional well-being or personal development characteristic of some forms of adult-youth mentoring are excluded from this brief review. Mentoring generally has been poorly served by research, with few studies seriously exploring whether evidence of positive impacts for young people are to be found (Bartlett, 2009: 16; Hall, 2003: 10, 15; Linnehan, 2001: 311)

Rose and Jones' study of a six-month mentoring project connecting disaffected young people aged 11–14 with largely untrained adults, most of whom were employee volunteers, found 'evidence of positive impact upon the attitudes and behaviour of the young people involved. The teachers interviewed were enthusiastic about the change that they had witnessed', highlighting sustained improvements to attendance and engagement in education as outcomes experienced by some three quarters of pupil participants (Rose & Jones, 2007: 3, 8–9). Bartlett also found, within a review of three studies looking at the impact of relevant mentoring schemes on disaffected young people, that benefits were most likely to be found in the development of soft skills, in raising aspirations and in supporting the development of a greater sense of personal agency within pupil participants (Bartlett, 2009: 17-19)

Green and Rogers carried out a detailed study in 1997 of the impact of business mentoring, over a 10-month period, on 29 Year 10 pupils identified as being on the borderline of achieving five GCSEs (grades A–C) and who were identified by teaching staff as potentially benefiting from the programme which connected them with volunteers working for British Telecom. This study captured the views of teaching staff who argued that pupil participants increased in confidence, maturity and in their social skills. They found, moreover, evidence of attitudinal change in terms of improved motivation in class, increased completion of homework assignments and higher levels of attendance – suggesting a positive link with attainment at 16 (Green & Rogers, 1997: 25, 34-36).

The link between business mentoring and attainment is considered in one of the highest quality studies of the impact of employer engagement in education: Andrew Miller's review of the impact of a programme on the attainment of young people at Key Stage 4 who took part in a year-long mentoring programme (the last two terms of Year 10 and the first of Year 11) with face-to-face meetings of one-hour duration taking place every two to three weeks. Those young people selected to take part in the programme had been assessed as being on the borderline of achieving five GCSEs and were felt by teaching staff to be under-achieving or lacking in motivation. Miller found that 75 per cent of the young people taking part in the study agreed that the mentoring experience had had a lot of impact on their motivation to work hard in GCSE subjects (Miller, 1998).



Considering the outcomes of a more intense US programme wherein older pupils (average age 17.8 years) were connected with business mentors on a weekly basis, Frank Linnehan has found reliable evidence of young people's attitudes towards education becoming more positive and, where relationships lasted for more than six months, attainment improving against control groups (Linnehan, 2001; 2003). Important studies by David Neumark and Diane Rothstein, drawing on US longitudinal datasets, provide further evidence of the positive impact of business mentoring on attainment. Comparing the trajectories of comparable teenagers, one study found that those who took part in mentoring in school were significantly more likely to progress to higher education than comparable peers (Neumark & Rothstein, 2006). Considering solely those young people whose teenage social characteristics suggested would be unlikely to progress to higher education, the research team found mentoring to be positively associated with progression into higher education, as were participation in job shadowing and school enterprise projects (Neumark & Rothstein, 2005).

Enterprise competitions

Studies of enterprise activities in school have also been hampered by inconsistent use of definitions. At a high level, studies of enterprise-related education can be placed on a spectrum describing initiatives at one end which are characteristic of Entrepreneurial Education (being related to running one's own enterprise) and at the other, a broader pedagogic approach most commonly known as Enterprise Education and typically consisting of a broader focus on applied, experiential, work-relevant learning processes with a relatively light interest in preparation of young people for ultimate self-employment (Coiffait et al., 2012: 9). Both types of enterprise activity have suffered from a paucity of research, which has changed only slowly over recent years (Athayde, 2009: 481; Athayde, 2012: 711; McLarty et al., 2010). This paper focuses attention on literature relevant to Entrepreneurship Education, such as one-day or longer-duration competitions on the model of 'Dragon's Den', 'Young Chamber' or 'Young Enterprise' as discrete learning activities commonly used in British education. In such activities, employee volunteers commonly play the role of mentors to pupil groups and/or judges of entrepreneurial competitions.

Research into the impact of such activities is limited and inconclusive. The work of Rosemary Athayde in a British context has used longitudinal surveying and control groups to test the effectiveness of participation in year-long enterprise programmes to influence teenagers' perspectives about, and their tested aptitude for, self-employment. She finds that participation in an enterprise project is related to an increased desire for ultimate self-employment and increases in 'enterprise potential' as measured by an attitudinal survey (Athayde, 2009; 2012). Using statistical analysis and working to control for self-selection bias, Athayde provides strong evidence of impact, but offers limited conclusions over the extent of impact. By contrast, the work of Hessel Oosterbeek and colleagues finds that participation in the year-long Junior Achievement (Young Enterprise) programme observed in the Netherlands does not 'have its intended effects: the effect on the students' self-assessed entrepreneurial skills is insignificant and the effect on the intention to become an entrepreneur is even significantly negative.' Using statistical analysis to measure results against a control group, the Dutch study is also highly convincing. It does deal with a slightly older cohort than Athayde (93 per cent of the Dutch sample are 21 or under) as the Dutch students are enrolled at a post-secondary vocational college – the equivalent of a US community college – and undertake the programme as a compulsory – rather than optional as in the UK – element of their study (Oosterbeek et al., 2008; 2010). Further work is required to understand better what happens to young people when they take part in such activities.



Less contentious is the view that participants in enterprise competitions develop an increase in knowledge useful to a self-employed future, such as awareness of available sources of advice and general awareness of opportunities for entrepreneurship (Botham & Sutherland, 2009; Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004; Roffe, 2010). Such views are endorsed by a number of studies into teacher attitudes, suggesting that enterprise competitions are educational tools held in high regard by participating teaching staff as means of supporting successful school to work transitions for young people (McLarty et al., 2010; Lodestar Management Research, 2007).

In 2010, the Department for Education published an *Evaluation of enterprise education in England*, the final report by McLarty et al. from a significant research project looking into the delivery and impact of such activity. The report includes a short, limited literature review, highlighting the UK and some international material (it does not cover works by Athayde or Oosterbeek). The review is frank in that much of the available literature focuses on reactions to enterprise education (young people’s and teachers’ views on enjoyment, engagement and perceived effectiveness of the intervention) or in acquisition of new skills, knowledge and attitudes. It finds that ‘qualitative, non-academic evaluations and reviews... frequently cite improvements’ in young people’s employability skills and positive attitudinal changes towards education. The authors further argue that ‘many evaluations and reviews include testimony from heads and teachers that Enterprise Education helps engage and retain young people at risk of disengagement.’ From another perspective, Huddleston et al. (2012) highlight the considerable popularity of enterprise competitions in high-performing independent schools.

Enterprise education was heavily promoted by the Labour government (1997–2010). Since the May 2010 election, dedicated funding to secondary schools, linked to the costs of delivering enterprise education and to national organisations tasked with supporting provision in schools, has been discontinued. In such circumstances, it is meaningful to ask whether schools intend to continue provision in enterprise in general and in entrepreneurship education in particular in less supported environments. A summer 2012 survey of 281 secondary school teachers, reported by Dawkins, Coiffait & Mann, showed steady continuing expectation of relatively high levels of provision with two thirds of respondents agreeing that all young people, regardless of ability levels, should take part in some form of enterprise and entrepreneurship education as part of their schooling. Pressed on the barriers preventing greater levels of activity, staff were three times as likely to highlight practical barriers, such as the tightness of the timetable, rather than lack of clarity on the learning and progression benefits of such engagement. The survey suggests that teachers with direct experience of enterprise education are clear about its value.

The work of Ingrid Schoon provides a more theoretical framework for understanding how and why entrepreneurial school-age activities may influence adult outcomes. Drawing on British Cohort Study data, Schoon and colleagues test for correlations between children and adolescent characteristics and adult self-employment status. The work finds, as does Athayde, that a primary determinant of adult self-employment is having a father who was self-employed himself, suggesting direct close proximity to a role model can shape later behaviour. Schoon and colleagues further find that teenage interest in ultimate adult self-employment is positively correlated with such an entrepreneurial employment outcome as is evidence of childhood effectiveness in working effectively with peers, especially in teams (Schoon & Duckworth, 2012; Obschonka et al., 2012).

The work of Laura Black and colleagues draws a link between such teenage attitudes and outlooks and later outcomes, and provides an explanatory factor for potentially understanding variations in impact observed by other authors:



The evidence reported in this paper indicates that experience of helping someone run a business plays a significant role in shaping pupils' world view to include 'starting a business' as a viable career option. We have argued that one explanation for this may rest with the tacit knowledge acquired through such experience which changes the way one interprets the world and, consequently, shifts the students' world view regarding realistic life choices. This suggests that the most effective way to integrate the possibility of 'starting a business' into student occupational horizons is to provide them with the experience of assisting someone else in running a business. Given that differences in type and intensity of experience seem to matter in our data, school-based activities which are too inauthentic (i.e. not genuinely entrepreneurial), inactive or brief are unlikely to affect 'worldview'. (Black et al., 2003: 17-18).

Curriculum enrichment and real-world learning resources (including work-related learning qualifications)

Over the last decade a number of new learning programmes rich in work-related learning and aimed at young people aged between 14 and 19 were introduced by the government in England and then heavily evaluated. In published reviews of Student Apprenticeships, the Increased Flexibility Programme, Young Apprenticeships and Diplomas, significant insights are given into how young people respond to learning programmes based on the strong and broad engagement of employers in shaping learning environments. Such programmes are also commonly found overseas, notably in the US, where evaluations have provided striking results. Survey data suggests a high level of demand from schools for 'curriculum-linked lesson resources and activities' from employers – with 88 per cent of 200 primary headteachers and 92 per cent of 200 secondary headteachers surveyed by Edcoms in 2007 asking for more such materials. As schools and colleges reconsider post-16 provision in light of the Wolf review, reviews provide insights of value.

Ofsted's 2007 review of the Young Apprenticeship programme – through which schools offered a more varied curriculum at Key Stage 4, rich in employer engagement (including 50+ days of work experience) and aimed at pupils of average and above average ability – suggested high levels of relevance in preparing young people for the world of work. Reflecting on interviews with employers engaged in delivery of the programme, the reviewers noted:

Employers also identified benefits in the programme for their own organisations. In young apprentices they saw young people who were developing the skills and aptitude to progress in their industry. The young apprentices would join the labour market with desirable skills and an understanding of different aspects of the vocational area. These would enable them to make a fuller contribution to an organisation when they entered full-time employment. Employers in some vocational areas saw the programme as a means of introducing more able students to vocational areas which they might not otherwise have considered... Some employers also used the programme for assessing and recruiting potential employees. Young apprentices have gained employment as a result of successful work placements. (Ofsted, 2007: 13)

The Ofsted inspectors' assessment of the enhanced employment prospects enjoyed by graduates of the Young Apprenticeship programme is validated in a rare social return on investment analysis looking at the impact of the programme. Undertaken by the Education and Employers Taskforce in collaboration with BakerTilly, the analysis identified productivity uplifts of up to 8 per cent to be expected from employment of former students in related sectors, and that the gains (to individuals and society of the programme) 'significantly exceed the costs of funding' the qualification (Clifford et al., 2011).



Analysis by the Young People's Learning Agency published in 2011 showed high levels of progression (95 per cent) from some 1,500 Young Apprenticeships into further education and training. While such progression levels are unusually high, given the generally high prior achievement of pupils it would not seem surprising. However, the fact that one fifth of former pupils progressed directly onto adult apprenticeships does represent an unusually high progression rate. Young Apprentices achieved well in their GCSEs as well, with higher proportions achieving five GCSEs (either with or without English and mathematics) than Year 11 pupils in their schools (NFER, 2010).

Like the Young Apprenticeship programme, the Diploma drew on a curriculum developed and delivered with the involvement of employers and real-world learning resources. In contrast to Young Apprenticeships, Diplomas were also taught at 16–19 as well as 14–16 and designed to be relevant to learners of all ability ranges. Formal reviews by Ofsted and NFER (on behalf of the Department for Education) consistently identified effective employer engagement within teaching and learning practice as a highly successful element of the qualification design.

Direct engagement with companies and organisations were seen as making learning relevant and exciting... The advantage of connecting to the 'real world' in encouraging motivation (including motivation to attend school) was noted by many students, as it had been by those teaching Diplomas. (Lynch et al., 2010: 48)

Learners were motivated by practical and active learning and the opportunities to apply their learning to work-related contexts. As a result, they made good progress in these lessons. (Ofsted, 2010: 4; see also Ofsted, 2009: 13)

Ofsted inspectors argued that the best examples of Diploma delivery provided pupils with 'a range of inputs and visits, which significantly enhanced their learning and enthusiasm for the subject.' The reviewers concluded that in almost all the Diploma teaching group visited, students 'were well motivated by the applied nature of their learning and the opportunity to work in realistic vocational contexts'. (Ofsted, 2009: 36)

While evaluations of Diplomas have comparatively little to say about the experiences of different types of learners undertaking the qualification, Haynes and Richardson's 2010 review for the DfE of university admissions' perceptions and practice does conclude clearly that the Advanced Diploma, taught at 16–19, was well regarded by senior staff and seen as a very appropriate qualification for admission to higher education.

Both the Diploma and the Young Apprenticeship were developed in the light of a series of experimental learning programmes rich in work-related learning introduced by the Labour government of the mid-2000s. Such programmes targeted in a large part, but not exclusively, learners who demonstrated disaffection with educational provision, and reviews suggest strongly that they proved effective in supporting higher levels of attainment from this pupil cohort. The Student Apprenticeship was trialled in the West Midlands, providing young people aged between 14 and 19 with 6–9 months of 'real experiences of the workplace while continuing their compulsory or further education.' McCoshan and Williams' 2002 review of the programme for the Department for Education and Skills reported 'considerable anecdotal evidence... gained from both teachers and pupils, which viewed the initiative as having a decisive impact on improvement in attainment levels' (p. 3).



Student Apprentices viewed the initiative as having a significant impact upon their educational motivation. Key factors were:

- *Demonstrating the relevance of academic study to employment*
- *Increasing student awareness of occupational entry requirements*
- *Broadening horizons by providing a glimpse of 'life after school'.*
(McCoshan & Williams, 2002: 3)

The review concluded that:

The pre-16 model made an important contribution to broadening the horizons of pupils, particularly the disaffected. Student Apprenticeship participation provided a range of taster courses and encouraged pupils to raise their aspirations while gaining initial work-related skills.

The post-16 model enabled students from across the ability range to gain valuable work-related skills and experience, and make a significant contribution to 'live' work. (McCoshan & Williams, 2002: 1)

The Increased Flexibilities for 14-16 Year Olds programme ran with more than 90,000 young people over the last decade and was assessed by reviewers from NFER. The programme included significant work-related learning and involvement of employers, notably as visiting speakers, and found that higher outcomes in attainment were achieved than by comparable pupils not undertaking such provision (AIR UK, 2008: 17-18). Reviewers found that gains were greatest among pupils with lower levels of attainment at Key Stage 3 (Golden et al., 2006: 3). As discussed in greater depth below, the work of sociologist Carlo Raffo has also demonstrated the way in which learning programmes rich in employer engagement have provided educational opportunities valued positively by pupils who were formerly disaffected or disengaged learners.

From a US perspective, and again as discussed in detail below, four studies follow young people into the early labour market following engagement on learning programmes, comparable to British Diploma or Young Apprenticeships, which combine first-hand workplace engagements with academic study. Each study reports positive wage premiums associated with participation compared to control groups. The review of the US version of the Careers Academy programme is of particular interest as it segments learners by characteristics, suggesting risks of drop-out prior to high school completion at age 18 and finding that the highest wage premiums accrue to those young people most at risk of drop-out.



Part B: Employer engagement strategies to secure specific outcomes

Increased engagement and attainment

Does employer engagement in education increase the attainment of young people? If so, to what extent can it have such a positive impact? Are there specific groups of young people for whom it might be expected to have such a benefit? And how can positive impacts be optimally secured?

The best overview of the links between employer engagement and attainment is the 2008 rapid literature review *The involvement of business in education: a rapid assessment of measurable impacts* by research consultancy AIR UK on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. That review initially found more than 150 academic and public UK and international studies of potential relevance to its key research question. Close reading however found that only 15 studies used methodologies sufficiently robust and transparent to provide a reasonable test of whether school-mediated employer engagement has a positive impact on the attainment levels of pupils. Of the 15 US and UK reports, all the related programmes of employer engagement activity were found to have a positive impact on young people's achievement in school or in the later workplace. Of the 15, eight were found to have reliably shown positive impacts in attainment. None showed that attainment had reduced as an opportunity cost from taking part in the employer activities (AIR UK, 2008).

From a UK perspective, the report authors highlighted Miller's 1998 study of business mentoring on borderline pupils at Key Stage 4 which looked at GCSE achievement against YELLIS projections. Comparing an intervention group of 90 mentored pupils against a control of 93 non-mentored pupils across seven schools undertaking two different forms of mentoring (one-to-one and group mentoring), Miller found that the intervention group achieved GCSE results which were four per cent higher than that of the control group when compared against YELLIS predictions (Miller, 1998). Miller found high proportions of mentored pupils agreeing that their approach to education had changed as a result of the mentoring experience:

- 70 per cent agreed that mentoring had affected their desire to do well at school
- 66 per cent agreed that mentoring led to spending more time on coursework
- 55 per cent agreed that mentoring led to spending more time on homework
- 55 per cent agreed that mentoring led to paying more attention in class
- 38 per cent agreed that mentoring led to handing work in on time more often
- 35 per cent agreed that mentoring led to working more thoroughly.

Miller's results are in line with a US 2001 study which combined business mentoring with extended work experience for students aged 15–18. The study by Frank Linnehan found that young people taking part in the programme for more than six months experienced a statistically significant improvement in grades of 1.25 per cent to 7.5 per cent better than those of a control group (Linnehan, 2001).

A comparable British business mentoring review undertaken by Green & Rogers in 1997 provided similar results from its survey of teaching staff responsible for mentored pupils. High proportions



of teachers reported improvements in attainment-related behaviours. While such improvements, particular in attitudes towards schooling, are high and on a par with those reported by young people in the Miller survey, impacts on academic progress were more modest (with one third of teaching staff perceiving progress to have been ultimately negative). Over 90 per cent of teachers registered an improvement in pupils' motivation, attitude, confidence, maturity and social skills. However, only 33 per cent registered an improvement in ability (progress).

'School-based improvements in attendance, work rate, completion of homework or assignment were registered by up to 17 per cent of mentees,' Green and Rogers note, 'but the most consistent impact was concerning attitudes towards GCSE grade targets' (1997: 34).

The two mentoring studies, albeit using small numbers of participants, did investigate whether positive impacts were particularly experienced by pupils of distinctive characteristics. Both studies argued that the lower the prior attainment levels, the greater the impact of mentoring. Pupils with the highest prior achievement, Miller has argued, experienced the lowest levels of additional motivational impact from their mentoring experiences as they were already well motivated (Active Learning Research Associates, 2009: 14).

The AIR UK review also identified three significant reports commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families between 2004 and 2006 exploring the impact of the Increased Flexibilities for 14–16 Year Olds Programme (Golden et al., 2005; 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2006; see also Burgess & Cowen, 2009) on pupil attainment. The programme piloted new learning approaches for young people at Key Stage 4 who were 'most at risk of disengagement' from mainstream study. The review found that pupils with lower attainment at Key Stage 3 (level 4 and below) than peers experienced greater improvements in Key Stage 4 attainment than peers who entered the programme with a track record of higher achievement, but to a then unknown extent (Golden et al., 2006).

The qualitative evidence from the study provides a rich source of information which has been triangulated to present an assessment of the impact of the programme across [15] case study areas. This indicates the positive achievements associated with involvement in the programme are contributing to... attainment levels that represent significant outcomes for some pupils, particularly for those that might otherwise have withdrawn from learning completely during Key Stage 4, achieving very few qualifications, if any. (Burgess & Cowen, 2009: 2)

Reviews of successor programmes equally rich in employer engagement, the Diploma and Young Apprenticeships, were also positively perceived. Ofsted reported that in 2009:

The effectiveness of implementation of the 14-19 reforms generally, in raising attainment and extending the range of provision for young people, was at least good in 20 of the consortia, and satisfactory in the remaining three. The impact of a range of initiatives was particularly evident in the increased participation and achievement of young people who might otherwise have been in danger of disengagement from education and training... while it is often difficult to link GCSE-equivalent attainment directly to particular changes in provision, successes on new vocational courses and young apprenticeship programmes in some areas were clear contributory factors. (Ofsted, 2009)



Considering employer engagement as a specific pedagogic tool within the Diploma, the Ofsted reviewers observed that the best quality engagements 'greatly enhanced [pupil] understanding of, and enthusiasm for, the Diploma' and 'significantly enhanced [pupil] learning and enthusiasm for the subject'. (Ofsted, 2009)

From a different perspective, in 2010 the National Audit Office estimated the impact on GCSE results. Comparing the science GCSE results of schools engaging, or not, in the STEMNET ambassador programme, matching data through the National Pupil database, it found statistically significant higher levels of attainment (0.525 percentage points) linked to participation in the STEM employee volunteering programme (National Audit Office, 2010).

As Table 8 highlights, reviews of teacher perceptions are notably consistent in their endorsement of the link between employer engagement and enhanced pupil motivation, engagement in education and ultimately increased attainment.

Table 8: Teacher perceptions on the influence of work experience on pupil motivation: findings from five studies

Hillage et al. (2001) Work experience Survey of 1,091 English secondary schools. 63% response rate. N = 673	i. % agreeing that work experience motivates pupils to work harder in school (strongly agreeing)	67% (16%)
	ii. % agreeing that work experience leads to good quality coursework (strongly agreeing)	20% (5%)
Edcoms (2007) Survey of 200 secondary headteachers	% agreeing that employer engagement increases pupil attainment	73%
KPMG (2010) Opt-in survey of 49 secondary school headteachers	% agreeing that employer engagement increases pupil attainment	85%
NFER (2012) Survey of 700 KS4/5 teaching staff with experience of pupils undertaking work experience UK (Mann 2012)	'What impact, if any, do work experience placements have on the motivation of KS4/5 pupils at your school?'	
	i. More motivated (total)	68%
	ii. Much more motivated	17%
	iii. Less motivated	6%
	'Focusing on pupils who are currently achieving near the borderline of key attainment targets (such as 5 GCSEs A*-C or equivalent), to what extent do you think that work experience placements increase these individuals' chances of reaching these targets?'	
	i. Increases chances (total)	50%
ii. Greatly increases chances	7%	
iii. Reduces chances	6%	

Pearson/Education and Employers Taskforce (unpublished – fieldwork 2012) Survey of 366 KS4/5 teaching staff	‘What impact, if any, do work experience placements have, in general, on the motivation of KS4/5 pupils at your school/college?’	
	i. More motivated (total)	82%
	ii. Much more motivated	25%
	iii. Less motivated	2%
	‘Focusing on pupils who are currently achieving near the borderline of key attainment targets (such as five GCSEs A*-C), to what extent do you think that work experience placements increase these individuals’ chances of reaching these targets?’	
	i. Increases chances (total)	64%
ii. Greatly increases chances	13%	
iii. Reduces chances	3%	

Pupil surveys express comparable views that young people return from work experience more motivated to engage in education.

Table 9: Pupil perceptions on the influence of work experience on school engagement: findings from two studies

National Support Group (2008) Survey of 15,025 young people aged 14–16 after completion of work experience. Non-segmented	i. % agreeing that following work experience: ‘I understand better why it is important to do well at school’ (strongly agreeing)	90% (50%)
	ii. % agreeing that following work experience: ‘I am more prepared to work hard in lessons and my coursework’ (strongly agreeing)	89% (42%)
CBI (2007) Survey of 1,034 young people (seven schools) aged 14–16 after completion of work experience. Non-segmented	i. % agreeing that ‘Work experience has helped me understand how learning at school is important in getting a job’ (strongly agreeing)	66% (22%)
	ii. % agreeing that ‘There are things that I learned on work experience that have helped me in my school work’ (strongly agreeing)	39% (5%)

The surveys suggest that a high proportion of young people will gain some positive attainment benefit from their employer engagements; that benefits stem much more from attitudinal change (a ‘wake-up call’ to the value of qualifications and education in general) than from a better contextualisation of learning or improved skills of relevance to classroom work.⁶ The survey evidence suggests that a meaningful proportion of young people, between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of pupils, could be expected to significantly benefit from their employer engagements.

⁶ From an Australian perspective, Smith & Green (2005: 56) argued that workplace experiences serve to motivate young people, increasing staying on rates/school completion by persuading them of the importance of qualifications and providing them with a better sense of direction.



The results are in keeping with Hopkins' 2008 research which explored the meanings of work-related learning involving considerable opportunities for employer engagement with 50 Year 10 and 11 pupils in four English secondary schools. Hopkins argues:

It is clear from the findings of this research that, on the whole, students feel that work-related learning programmes are having a significant beneficial impact on their attitudes to school, their views of themselves and their transferable skills sets... it would seem that work-related learning programmes can make a significant contribution to enabling disaffected pupils to become re-engaged and motivated in their education and thus help address underachievement and social exclusion. (Hopkins, 2008: 17-18)

Two 2004 surveys suggest those young people gaining most from employer engagement are likely to be in the lowest performing quartile of the pupil population. Asked whether work-related learning (which would include a significant element of employer engagement) was highly significant to helping different ability pupils in 'achieving their life goals' over 60 per cent of responding senior managers in non-selective state schools said that this was the case for pupils in the lowest attainment quartile compared to some 25 per cent for pupils in the upper quartile. Asked how important they thought that work-related learning was as part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum for pupils quartiled by attainment levels, 81 per cent of 500 responding KS4 teachers thought it to be very important to pupils in the lower attainment level quartile at KS4 compared to 33 per cent in the upper attainment quartile.

Focus groups undertaken by the Education and Employers Taskforce provided similar results, suggesting that a higher proportion of lower achievers (90 per cent) than higher achievers (70 per cent) could be expected to see a positive impact on their attainment flowing from their employer engagements. Focus group respondents argued that the primary causal factor linking employer contacts with attainment lay in improved motivation – with higher performers typically more motivated than lower achievers, the likelihood of a positive 'wake-up call' consequently was seen as less likely.

The focus group did explore for the first time the nature of the way that different pupils grouped by prior (Key Stage 3) attainment levels impacted positively on young people:

Table 10: Most beneficial activities in terms of prior attainment levels, according to teacher focus groups

Lower 25%	Literacy support, mentoring, work-related learning qualifications, work experience (11 days+)
Middle 50%	Careers advice, work experience (10 days or less)
Higher 25%	Careers advice, enterprise activities (one-day events), subject-related provision (STEM/MFL), work experience (10 days or less)



Both focus group and survey material suggest that many pupils on the borderline of achieving five target GCSEs have much to gain from employer engagements that provide a 'wake-up call'. Such pupils are particularly well placed to benefit: attainment targets are within their grasp and potentially obtainable through greater application to study.

The 2008 AIR UK literature review for the Department for Children, Schools and Families identified a number of high quality US reviews evaluating programmes rich in employer engagement. Henderson & St John's 1997 study of pupils (aged 12–14) streamed into three randomised streams found that those receiving mathematics curricula which engaged local employers and universities scored one third higher on test scores than a control group (Henderson & St John, 1997). From a different perspective, Swail & Kampits' 2004 study of university students asked about the range of activities these young adults had undertaken while at school and found the attainment levels of those young people who had engaged in school work-related learning or volunteering programmes were three per cent higher than those of their peers.

The single best study of work-related learning programmes is Kemple's 2008 review of US Career Academies (Kemple with Willner, 2008). The study is unusual. It follows, over eight years, 1,500 young people who at the start of the project all expressed interest in enrolling in a Career Academies programme. Half of those interested were randomly selected for inclusion on the programme and half allocated to a control group. The results of the study are very interesting as they show that the two groups of students – those who undertook the Career Academies programme and those who were allocated to the control – both achieved at comparable (high) levels on leaving high school, progressing in similar proportions onto higher education. The Career Academies sample did not attain more highly than the control group.⁷ However, it did go on from this starting point to do significantly better in the labour market – see discussion below. The study suggests that researchers may be well advised to look for improvements in attainment linked to employer engagement activities among those young people whose motivation to engage in education is weaker and whose prior attainment is lower. High-achieving, highly motivated pupils who see the value of qualifications and education to their long-term success and immediate sense of self-worth and well-being are still likely to benefit from employer engagement activities, but in different ways from their peers and not so much in terms of enhanced attainment.

From a different US perspective, Hamilton and Hamilton's review of the Cornell Youth Apprenticeship Project which combined work-based and classroom learning also found no evidence of improved attainment, if uncovering evidence of enhanced labour market progression. The study concluded that the focus of the project had been too heavily on the development of technical skills among participants and had taken for granted the fact that the participants would gain access to new, useful information about the value of education to their long-term employment prospects. The reviewers concluded:

We arranged for young people to be placed in workplaces where they could learn work-related skills, and they succeeded. We hoped they would work harder in school and choose to take more rigorous courses because they could see at work why academic achievement is important. We learned from this effort that teachers, counsellors, parents and workplace mentors need to understand and communicate to [learners] the vital importance of academic achievement. This did happen in a few cases with positive results for individual [learners]. (AIR UK, 2008: 26)

⁷ A comparable US project – the Lansing Area Manufacturing Partnership – identified by AIR UK, shows similar results. Those young people enrolling on the project were high achievers who experienced no evidence of enhanced attainment, but did improve their labour market prospects – see discussion below (MacAllum et al., 2002).



Improved transitions from education to work

Literature surrounding the impact of school-mediated employer engagement on the transitions of young people from education into work is growing. A key analysis of the impact of school-mediated employer contacts on the labour market outcomes of young adults is Mann & Percy (2013). Correlating the salaried earnings of 169 young adults against the number of employer contacts recalled while at school or college (aged 14–19), the study finds statistically significant wage premiums of up to 18 per cent. The link between school-mediated contacts and higher earnings is found after controls are put in place, including highest levels of qualification and school type attended (non-selective state; grammar; or independent school/college).

Mann and Percy draw on a range of related studies to contextualise their findings. There have been four US longitudinal studies, each using control groups, which have looked for evidence of wage premiums related to programmes of study rich in employer engagement. Evaluations undertaken by Boston-based social enterprise Jobs for the Future (1998), the Applied Research Unit of Montgomery County Public Schools (2001) and MacAllum et al. (2002) followed high school graduates one to six years into the labour market. In each case, participants were brought into contact with employers, undertaking work experience and significant classroom involvement, within largely academic learning programmes focused on relevance to discrete vocational areas, such as IT, healthcare or automotive industries, undertaken through the final years of high school. Each review shows alumni of the programmes to be enjoying higher levels of earning – across a range of 6.5–25 per cent more than control groups.⁸ While such results are striking, lack of transparency over methodologies used in creating control groups and low sample sizes suggest that findings should be treated with some caution.

Most persuasive is the 2008 evaluation, undertaken by research agency MDRC, of the labour market outcomes of the alumni of the US Career Academies, a learning programme combining academic and technical curricula around a career theme delivered in partnership with local employers providing work-based learning opportunities (Kemple, 2008). As Orr et al. (2007) demonstrate, student participants in Career Academy programmes are significantly more likely to have taken part in employer engagement activities such as work experience and related work-based learning experiences than their high school peers.⁹ The Kemple study followed 1,764 young people randomly assigned into either a group which undertook the Career Academies programme between ages of 15 and 18 or a control which did not. Eight years after leaving high school, researchers explored the labour market outcomes of 1,428 of the original respondents (82 per cent of intervention and 80 per cent of control groups) and found that while the two groups attained and progressed to higher education in similar proportions, alumni of the Career Academies programme enjoyed earnings 11 per cent higher than their peers. The earnings of the quartile of young people whose characteristics suggested the highest risk of dropping out on enrolment in the programme were 17 per cent higher than the comparable control group (Kemple, 2008: 11, 25).

⁸ The different studies introduce a range of control variables in testing for wage premiums: Applied Research Unit, Montgomery Schools: background characteristics, post-secondary college and work activities, months worked; MacAllum et al.: duration of employment, hourly wages; and Kemple: student demographic and family characteristics, educational attainment, including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, middle school attendance rates, geographic location of academy, graduation cohort, duration of employment, hours worked per week, weeks worked per month and hourly wage. The methodology applied by Jobs for the Future is not sufficiently transparent to determine variables applied.

⁹ Orr et al. (pp. 190-191) surveyed comparable groups of senior year high school students enrolled on Career Academies programmes and those not enrolled. Investigating participation levels across 37 potential high school college and career planning activities, the study found statistically significant variation ($P < 0.01$) across eight areas primarily within the field of career-related work-based learning experiences, including three activities wherein employer contacts would be confidently expected – job shadowing (which was undertaken by 43 per cent of the Career Academies group against 15 per cent of control), work-site visits (43 per cent v. 16 per cent), employer talks at school (68 per cent v. 38 per cent); and four which might include employer contacts – school-based business or enterprise (59 per cent v. 31 per cent), work-readiness classes (55 per cent v. 19 per cent), practice Interviews (35 per cent v. 14 per cent); and one which would not be expected to include any such contact – talk with teachers about careers (78 per cent v. 56 per cent).



In comparing the character of US programmes with the British tradition of employer engagement, Mann and Percy argue that the benefits observed, in the UK context, are more likely to relate to improvements in the cultural or social capital of young people than in terms of human capital accumulation: interventions typical of the British education system are of short duration, unintegrated into the curriculum and provide limited opportunity for skills accumulation, whether technical or employability skills. Interventions even of short duration are, however, a highly effective means of giving young people access to non-redundant, trusted information, providing insights into the labour market, the breadth of job opportunities it presents and routes into potential occupations.

Surveys have routinely demonstrated the high regard that young people have for employer engagement as a means of accessing useful information about the labour market. As set out in Mann and Caplin (2012) and summarised in Tables 5 and 6, employer contacts are perceived by young people to be of particularly high value, providing access to information which is both reliable and broad in scope (see also Hopkins, 2008: 218).

The findings of Mann and Percy align with a series of recent studies of longitudinal datasets which have looked at the correlations between teenage attitudes about, and perceptions of, the labour market (and their potential place within it) and later employment-related outcomes. The work of Ricardo Sabates and colleagues, published in 2011, has drawn on longitudinal data in the British Cohort Study, to show that teenagers aged 16 who underestimated the qualifications needed for professional careers went on to earn eight per cent less at age 34, receiving lower hourly pay and working fewer hours, than peers (Sabates et al., 2011).

There is some suggestion in the literature that the positive impacts of school-mediated employer contacts are experienced in different ways by different types of young people. A 2004 survey of 342 headteachers or work-related learning managers in English non-selective state secondary schools found that 65 per cent of respondents felt that work-related learning with its rich levels of employer engagement was 'highly significant' to pupils in the lowest quartile of attainment in being 'helped to achieve their life goals' compared with 35 per cent of the middle-performing quartile of pupils and 25 per cent of the highest-performing quartile (QCA, 2004b, 18); a view endorsed by Key Stage 4 classroom teachers in the same year (QCA, 2004a). This view from the chalkface would align with the analysis of Scott Yates and colleagues who found that school-to-work transitions are 'often characterised by fragmentation, uncertainty and movement in and out of various options, especially for the poorest-off and those with lower levels of human and social capital.' The study found that those young people from low SES groups were nearly as twice as likely as those from high SES groups to be uncertain about their career aspirations (ten per cent v. six per cent) or misaligned in their ambitions (52 per cent v. 28 per cent) at 16 (Yates et al., 2011, 3-4, 15-16).

Research shows consistently that many young people have a limited understanding of the labour market and that access to appropriate information varies considerably. As Paul Croll and colleagues argued:

Children have very unequal levels of knowledge of the nature of progression through the educational system, the different routes available and the qualifications they will need both to enter higher education and to enter different occupations. Some children are highly knowledgeable on these matters, while others are confused and uncertain. Virtually all children want 'good' jobs but they have very varied information about what they will need to do to obtain them... Schools need to think about the information children need at the very beginning of their



secondary school careers, the options available to them and the choices they will need to make.
(Croll et al., 2010: 168)

A number of other studies which have looked for evidence of young people's understanding of ultimate labour market opportunities have reached similar conclusions: for a great many young people, understanding of the breadth of employment opportunities and effective entry routes into desirable jobs is very limited. An overview of key British studies is given in Mann et al.'s 2013 report *Nothing in common* which goes on to compare the career aspirations of 11,000 British teenagers with the UKCES's projection of the distribution of 13.5 million new and replacement jobs due to appear in the UK economy between 2010 and 2020. As the title of the report suggests, a simple statistical test shows that the two datasets have nothing in common. In such circumstances, it becomes understandable why high volume of short duration career-focused employer contacts will allow young people significantly better insights into their actual labour market prospects and opportunities.

Sociologist Mark Granovetter's empirical research into the dynamic character of social capital provides a helpful conception of the power of social networks to provide tangible value to an individual. Conceptualising this as 'the power of weak ties', Granovetter has evidenced the way in which adult workers with broader, shallow networks – people who know a lot of people a little – are able to use contacts to gain access to reliable and relevant information about job vacancies, increasing their likelihood of securing preferred positions (Granovetter, 1995). A number of researchers have taken Granovetter's insight and applied it effectively to the experiences of young people. Analysing longitudinal data, Lance Erickson and Steve McDonald, for example, have found significant links between volume and character of non-parental adult social ties (including, but not exclusively employers) enjoyed by US teenagers and ultimate employment success as young adults (McDonald et al., 2007).

Moreover, a series of studies have described teenage social capital accumulation to be a process which is dynamic and susceptible to change through such interventions as school-mediated employer engagement. Leonard (2005) has illustrated the means by which young people in Ireland in search of part-time employment demonstrate resourceful and active approaches to developing networks with adults outside of the family, accumulating and using social capital to access paid work. Leonard argues that the young people in her studies show agency in their use of social capital, working networks strategically to secure objectives. The ethnographic work of Carlo Raffo and colleagues (2003; 2006) on pupils at risk of disengagement from education offers a first-hand observation of the processes by which young people gain information and insights of value to their own navigations through the school-to-work transition. Drawing on a close study of Manchester pupils aged 14–16 in extended school-mediated work experience placements, Raffo and Reeves (2000) argue that:

there is also evidence in our research of individual young people having their social relations enriched by outside, yet authentic and culturally appropriate, significant others. In these situations, individual strategic decisions about life choices are being affected by external agencies and actors – external in that they are potentially beyond the structuring influence of locality and class. This results in these individualized systems of social capital for individuals becoming more open and fluid, with outside, symbolically rich, resources impacting more freely on their lives.
(Raffo and Reeves, 2000: 153)



Consequently, it is possible to put forward a conceptualisation that school-mediated employer engagement operates on a deficit model: that it provides young people with resources (i.e. reliable, relevant information) which they would otherwise lack. Given that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – for example the two million British children being raised in workless households – typically lack the breadth of occupationally relevant networks through family ties possessed by more middle-class pupils, it can be imagined that such disadvantaged pupils have the most to gain from school-mediated interventions. However, this cannot be taken for granted. Important work by McDonald et al. (2007), drawing on US data, has shown that while it is young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the most to gain from expanding their access to non-redundant trusted information through social networks, it is typically those from more advantaged backgrounds who gain the greatest benefit from such networks.

Ofsted (2010) reviewed effective practice in strategies to reduce NEET numbers and identified employer engagement as a means of improving understanding of the world of work, recommending that employers become more systematically involved in the design and implementation of programmes. The perception that employer engagement can and does improve the ultimate employment prospects of young people is endorsed by evidence from the National Employer Skills Survey undertaken biennially by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Questioned, without prompt, on skills and attitudes perceived to be lacking among young recruits taken on directly from education in the preceding two to three years, it is the 'lack of working world, life experience or maturity' that leads the concerns of employers, with 23 per cent of those with experience of recruiting 16-year-olds making such a judgement compared to four per cent citing poor literacy or numeracy skills (UKCES, 2011: 35). The significance of such working-world insight to successful employment provides a context for understanding the significantly positive relationships witnessed between volume of employer contacts experienced at school/college and lower rates of NEET experienced as a young adult (see Mann, 2012; Percy and Mann, forthcoming).

School and college governance

Finally, it should be noted that school interest in employer engagement extends beyond interest in supporting classroom teaching. There is also growing interest in working with employers to support school governance. A number of reviews have looked at the role of such governors – who typically will not have had a direct relationship with the school prior to appointment.

The 2008 School Governance Study carried out by the University of Bath concluded that:

The involvement of businesses and their employees in school governing is greatly appreciated by schools, employee volunteers themselves and the businesses that are most proactive in supporting their employees' volunteering activities. (Balarin et al., 2008: 60)

More recent research digs into the factors behind this appreciation. Work undertaken by Anne Punter and John Adams at the University of Hertfordshire, on behalf of the School Governors One Stop Shop (SGOSS), provides compelling evidence of the importance of employee governors. Over 2009 and 2010, the Hertfordshire team surveyed and interviewed more than 100 employee governors (recruited through SGOSS), chairs of governing bodies and headteachers, in order to understand what additional value, if any, came from the contribution of the employee governor.



Questioning all three parties in the same school or college allowed the team to triangulate results and capture the professional opinions of school leaders on the performance of the employer-supported governors; and found particularly high benefits to schools across a number of related roles, including:

- challenging the [school] leadership to effect improvements for pupils
- challenging the [school] leadership to ensure all pupils' needs are met
- getting to know the strengths and areas for development of the school
- supporting the headteacher and senior management team
- holding the [school] leadership to account for the performance of the school.

Punter and Adams find strong parallels to the role that the employee governor plays in the role that a non-executive director typically plays in business governance structures. Considering the results, the authors note:

Most significantly, these roles are the most central to the governance function. It is a point worthy of emphasis that schools value most highly the SGOSS governors' contribution to the most important aspects of governance.

The roles are the distillation of that 'non-executive director' approach that provides the objective checks and balances for the Executive, while being supportive and committed. Many of the respondents asked for clarification of the term 'non-executive director' in the interview, as it is not used in the Ofsted documentation and is not part of a shared vocabulary in education. As soon as a definition was offered, however, respondents were swift to acknowledge the relevance of this term to the role of their SGOSS governor. (Punter & Adams, 2010: 12)

The work of Chris James offers further insight. He argues:

The composition of school governing bodies is specified by legislation but there is some flexibility. Good schools take advantage of this flexibility to recruit the governors they need and to enhance the quality of their governing bodies. Research evidence shows that the specific functional skills of individual governors, such as expertise in financial management, can be very useful. However, the most important qualities are those that relate to being able to scrutinise the work of the school – to ask the difficult questions – and to having the inter-personal skills to make that kind of contribution in a helpful way in a group setting. Those are the capabilities that lead to effective school governing and they are typically the skills that are developed in the work-place.

'Good school governing' contributes to the management of the school, and good school management enables the teachers to teach to the best of their abilities. In this way, the skills and capabilities developed through employment can enhance the effectiveness of school governing bodies, which in turn can contribute to enhancing the work of the teachers. This kind of relationship is supported by research undertaken by the University of Bath which shows that there is a link between the effectiveness of the school governing body and school performance. (Mann et al. 2010: 51)



Work led by Professor James and Steve Brammer (University of Bath) on behalf of CfBT Education Trust deepens our understanding both of the importance of the school governor as 'a significant educational and community leadership responsibility' and the impact that governors have on school performance. As James and colleagues stress, the 'lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence for a school; it is a substantial disadvantage.' Comparing survey results from headteachers and governors using school performance data from 545 primary schools and 169 secondary schools, the study finds that schools vary in the extent to which they found it easy to recruit governors, suggesting that the targeting of employee governors may be an effective means of strengthening the governing body of schools in most disadvantaged settings. There was evidence that high-performing schools attract governors, especially those with professional occupations. Such governors may be expected to have a strong 'starting capability' for governing. There was some evidence that attracting governors to schools that were not performing well was more difficult. This may well play into the relationship between effective governance and pupil performance (James et al., 2010).



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