Give Yourself the Edge: How to do great employer engagement

This guide is for senior leaders and teachers in schools and colleges. Links to underpinning evidence are provided if you would like to investigate aspects in more detail.
Why partner with employers?

A culture of employer engagement in schools/colleges is essential to prepare young people for today’s complex world of work. Employers need to be valued as equal partners recognising the importance of proactive engagement in education to their business. Employer engagement in their education is important for all young people so they can take advantage, and make best use, of all their talents.

Specifically, the purpose of employer/education partnerships is to help young people to:

- make well-informed career decisions
- be aware of the requirements of the world of work from an early age
- reflect on the relevance of what they learn at school to their futures
- develop social or personal skills, including employability skills
- develop networks in the world of work during and after leaving school
- benefit from a culture of expectation and aspiration
- progress their admission to university courses or apprenticeships
- develop their knowledge of local and national skills gaps
- increase their engagement in, and motivation to, learn
Levels of partnership and definitions

Key factors to consider before starting to build partnerships:

Types of employer engagement

What type and level of activity do you want to develop initially and/or how do you want to further extend your existing engagement? The following diagram illustrates different types of employer engagement with examples:

School level

Leadership and governance e.g.

- Involvement with governing bodies
- Financial and in kind support
- Support staff development

Teacher level

Curriculum support e.g.

- Develop and advice on relevant curricula
- Create curriculum-linked resources
- Create lesson resources related to areas of expertise

Student level

Skills and awareness e.g.

- Work experience
- School/workplace visits
- Apprenticeships/training schemes
- Mentoring

Commitment levels

What level of commitment from your partner employer(s) do you want to develop initially and/or what level are they happy to provide? For example, one source defined employer involvement and engagement:

*Employer involvement means that employers actively participate in activities such as the design, implementation and assessment of a qualification or an ongoing programme of work experience involving preparing young people and enabling reflection and consolidation of learning.*

*Employer engagement tends to refer to less involvement, for example employers being surveyed or providing work experience with little or no involvement with the school or the young people before or after the work experience.*


Routes to employment

When considering how to build partnerships with employers, be sure all stakeholders (teachers, employers, senior managers, young people and their parents) are aware of the possible routes to employment and how they interlink so they are able to provide informed support to career decision making.
Skilled employment

Higher education (undergraduate degree) → Bridging provision (where appropriate) → A levels and/or applied general qualifications** → Transition year (if appropriate) → GCSEs and technical awards

Higher education (levels 4/5 technical education) → College-based technical education including placement in industry → Transition year and/or traineeship (if appropriate)* → GCSEs and technical awards

Degree apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships → Employment-based technical education, e.g. apprenticeship with at least 20% college-based education → Transition year and/or traineeship (if appropriate)* → GCSEs and technical awards

* Where a student does both, the traineeship will follow the transition year. Students doing both the transition year and a traineeship may progress directly to employment.

** Some students will move directly from A levels and/or applied general qualifications to degree and higher apprenticeships.

Source: Department for Education Skills Plan Post-16 Skills Plan: pg 15 Figure 1 (http://feweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf)
Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships offer an alternative (to A Levels) route to employment. Apprenticeship levels and their equivalent educational levels are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Equivalent educational level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 GCSE passes at grades A* to C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 A level passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>4,5,6 and 7</td>
<td>Foundation degree and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>6 and 7</td>
<td>Bachelor’s or master’s degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Become an apprentice (https://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide/overview)


Traineeships

A traineeship is an education and training programme with work-experience that prepares young people for their future careers by helping them to become ‘work ready’.

Designed to help young people aged 16 to 24 who don’t yet have the appropriate skills or experience, traineeships provide the essential work preparation training, English, maths and work-experience needed to secure an apprenticeship or employment.

How to build partnerships

Secure senior leadership buy-in and develop a receptive institution-wide culture

Successful change to become an outward-facing institution, that partners with employers in the best interests of young people, begins with establishing school- or college-wide buy-in to the need for change.

Buy-in from senior management in schools and businesses is essential. A named person should drive school-employer links and partnerships. A clear vision and strategic thinking of what the collaboration seeks to achieve is required.

Developing a vision and business case will ensure senior leadership and all staff commitment to achieving a shared goal. See ‘features of successful school-employer relationships’ (pg 22) at the following link for more information on the importance of having a clear vision of what your school-employer relationship wants to achieve.

(https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/REIS01)

Case study

The importance of senior leadership buy-in

There was a general perception from the Raising Aspirations Team at a secondary academy that work experience, employer engagement and the systems and processes used to develop employability skills had improved over the previous year largely due to having a dedicated team led by a newly appointed Raising Aspirations Director who was a member of the senior leadership team.

Source: Case study four
(https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01)
Dedicate time/develop capacity to build partnerships

Ensure that you have a dedicated team that has the active leadership of a senior leader who also has dedicated, ring-fenced time allocated to the role and can provide strategic direction.

Case study

Time dedicated to develop holistic programme

Key to one school project for re-engaging young people at risk of disengagement at Key Stage 4 was working with external organisations to develop a package of support that provided young people with an understanding of the world of work. The programme involved:

- assertive (academic) mentoring
- targeted careers guidance and support with CV writing from an external provider
- a variety of trips, including a skills show/workshop day, further education (FE) taster days, and away-day team activities (for some activities, students join students from the other schools participating in the project)
- tailored work experience opportunities

(https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/IMPE04)
Case study

Top Tip

Develop a dedicated team led by a senior leader

- In creating a dedicated team, aim to develop an approach to work experience which offers an extensive experience of the world of work for all young people and embed it across your whole institution.
- Ensure that the dedicated team has the active leadership of a senior leader who also has dedicated, ring fenced time allocated to the role and can provide strategic direction.

Developing a dedicated team

Students in the sixth form of Pimlico Academy largely follow an academic programme with the vast majority studying A Levels. The Academy’s Raising Aspirations Programme, implemented by the academy’s Raising Aspirations Team and led by the Raising Aspirations Director, aims to encourage, and support all of its students to set their sights high and broaden their ambitions. There was a general perception from the Raising Aspirations Team that the systems and processes used for work experience and employer engagement had improved over the last year largely due to having a dedicated team led by a newly appointed Raising Aspirations Director.


Start small, audit, plan and do it well

To gain an overall picture of your institution’s current position and to identify areas for further development, carry out an audit of existing employer-related activities. In many schools and colleges there are a number of interactions with employers but they are not coordinated across the school or college. Carrying out an audit helps to create a single shared picture of the current position, allowing you to build on strengths and identify gaps. Examples of audit tools are below:
Audit Tools

Careers guidance and employer involvement should be embedded in the school culture. The Gatsby audit framework (http://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/programmes/good-career-guidance) (below) provides a good overarching assessment tool to help you monitor your current activity. This can help you plan your next steps.

1 A stable careers programme
   Every school and college should have an embedded programme of career education and guidance that is known and understood by students, parents, teachers, governors and employers.

2 Learning from career and labour market information
   Every student, and their parents, should have access to good quality information about future study options and labour market opportunities. They will need the support of an informed adviser to make best use of available information.

3 Addressing the needs of each student
   Students have different career guidance needs at different stages. Opportunities for advice and support need to be tailored to the needs of each student. A school’s careers programme should embed quality and diversity considerations throughout.

4 Linking curriculum learning to careers
   All teachers should link curriculum learning with careers. STEM subject teachers should highlight the relevance of STEM subjects for a wide range of future career paths.

5 Encounters with employers and employees
   Every student should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment activities including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes.

6 Experiences of workplaces
   Every student should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities, and expand their networks.

7 Encounters with further and higher education
   All students should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and vocational routes and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace.

8 Personal guidance
   Every student should have opportunities for guidance interviews with a career adviser, who could be internal (a member of school staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These should be available whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all students but should be timed to meet their individual needs.
To further develop the Gatsby framework, the North East Local Enterprise Panel is piloting the careers benchmarks. They have worked with Gatsby to develop an online tool called Compass. Recently, all schools and colleges in the UK were informed about the launch of Compass — Careers Benchmark tool (http://compass-careers.org.uk/). Compass is a self-assessment tool for schools and sixth forms in England that they can use to gain a greater understanding of their careers education and guidance provision and to compare their provision to the Gatsby Benchmarks as well as the national average. It has been co-funded by The Careers & Enterprise Company (https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/) and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (http://www.gatsby.org.uk/). Compass works by asking schools to answer a series of questions about the careers and enterprise provision they offer. It’s available at Compass (http://www.o2i.org/node/3701).

To help you plan further actions, here are two specific tools on careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and work experience that you can use to support action planning:

**Careers engagement: a good practice brief for leaders of schools and colleges.**

This brief highlights the principles of effective careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) as evidenced and agreed by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL); the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL); the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER); and the 157 Group. It outlines how to audit and establish CEIAG priorities (including employer engagement); how to put plans into practice using some suggested methods and tools; and, finally, how to review, evaluate and revise the plan.

*Source: Careers Brief (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/99944)*

**Top Tips for senior leaders in schools and colleges:** How to provide meaningful experience of the world of work for young people as part of 16 to 19 study programmes.

*Source: Work experience audit (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA02)*

**Use connections with the world of work**

Having established senior leadership buy-in and conducted an audit of existing employer activities, make a list of all your institution’s possible connections (including governors’) with the world of work so that you can make the most of these links to progress your priorities. Alumni, parental and governor networks are used routinely in independent schools to secure experience of the world of work for students and develop their social capital. You will also want to check what other organisations, such as Education Business Partnerships, operate locally to help you make connections to employers.
One of our governors professor X is... senior at an NHS foundation trust... we had a meeting and wanted [pupils] to go in and do some work [experience], and they did quite a lot of work and they produced presentations to the board, to the CEO, in the foyer of [large London hospital]... all their photographs, all their recommendations and they have to do that and they have to stand up and give a speech about it. Now that is putting them on the spot, it may be a bit uncomfortable, they have to do the work... but it's going to resonate far more if they do that than if they shadowed [someone] (Teacher pg 20)

One of the obvious advantages that independent schools must have and you must find this in almost every survey you do of a school that there is always this point of reference from boys and girls that have been at the school... who have become successful... ok, they're asked to come back... so we're very, very lucky...so I think this is what one of the aspects of privilege is, not about how much money you've got but how you have this contact... (Teacher pg 18)


Be proactive with corporate and SMEs

Engage with large corporates and small - and medium - sized employers (SMEs) and raise awareness of your school or college within your local business community. Once contact is established, take the lead in briefing the employer on the type of activity they want to be involved in, by for example providing notes on the expectations of both the employer and the school or college. This takes time but results in more focused and impactful activity which is targeted at the students’ level and interests. Where this doesn’t happen, activity can be disappointing for both parties. Keep in contact with the employer and provide updates on student progress.

You can approach businesses in different ways – appealing to the Corporate Social Responsibility element of a large company, or pitching the opportunity to work in your school to help secure their future workforce.

Often SMEs are harder to engage but it is vital that young people are aware of them as they will employ the majority of young people entering the workforce.

How schools, colleges and SMEs can work together to improve young people’s employability skills: connect card
Improving employability

How small businesses can work with schools and colleges to improve young people’s employability skills

Why should I take an interest in young people’s education?

Opportunity to: investigate local potential recruits, e.g. through apprenticeships; shape employability skills; pass on enthusiasm for my sector; develop tomorrow’s workforce; influence teaching to make it relevant to the local economy.

What am I going to get out of the relationship?

Opportunity to: meet potential apprentices; get involved in the local community; be promoted in the school e.g. logos on the website or around the school; benefit from better-informed recruits.

What different ways are there to get involved?

You could: take part in a careers education activity; support a course project or mock interviews; host workplace visits, work experience or teacher placements; advise on the curriculum; become a school governor.

How much time will this take?

It's up to you: the commitment could be one hour a week, a month, a year, or a few weeks. Your choice! Advance planning is recommended - schools and colleges work to different schedules to the world of work.

How do I make it happen?

Contact your local school or college, or inspiringthefuture.org; identify your key contact and use these five questions to guide an initial discussion.

www.nfer.ac.uk/employability

Evidence for Excellence in Education
Improving employability

How schools and colleges can work with small businesses to improve young people’s employability skills

What will our young people gain?

**Improved employability skills;** access to and awareness of the world of work, especially SMEs (the largest group of employers in the economy); opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships; smoother transition to employment; better careers information; improved student commitment to their studies.

What will our school/college gain?

**More outward focus;** staff awareness of diversity of jobs; fulfilment of careers guidance duty; better understanding of real workplace skills.

How can employers get involved?

**In many ways,** as a school governor; providing more relevant project work; workplace visits; work experience; student mentoring; career talks; teacher placements; mock interviews; supporting employability activities; building relationships with local employers.

How much time will this take?

**Time needed will vary,** but it is important to agree timescales and aim to build long-term relationships. Advance planning is recommended - businesses are driven by different schedules to schools and education.

How do I make it happen?

**Contact** your local SMEs directly or inspiringthefuture.org; consider parent and/or governor business networks; identify your key contact and use these five questions to guide an initial discussion.

www.nfer.ac.uk/employability

Source: Connect card

(https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/IMSL03/IMSL03.pdf)
Actively involve employers to prepare young people prior to work experience placement

- Invite local employers to support the preparation of young people for their work experience placement.
- Prepare young people for their placements by ensuring they have a mindset that will support them to proactively engage with employers before, during and after a placement.
- Ensure there is ‘best fit’ between the young person and the employer offering the placement.

Encourage young people to be prepared to engage proactively with employers

Pimlico Academy believes that ‘smart matching’ between the young person and the placement is vital in terms of, for example, the interests of the young person and the skills targeted for development (such as hard knowledge-based skills or softer employability skills). A member of the team also explained that ensuring that the young people have the right ‘mindset’ is important: ‘They need to be active rather than passive. They need to ask questions. They need to be inquisitive. They need to think about how they present themselves. They need to consider: “what can I learn and what do I want to learn from this experience?” We also work hard to encourage them to reflect about their experience and what they have learnt.’

Involve employers in preparation for placements

At Oldham College, prior to embarking on a work experience placement, employers have come into the college and provided master classes and other forms of employability-related support and guidance to students. In addition, to raise the profile and status of work experience, students have also been required to submit CVs and be interviewed for a placement, reflecting on the process and competitive nature of securing employment.

Have a well-regulated system to record, monitor and review work experience

Have a system to monitor work experience

At Chichester College, all student work experience is monitored, with hours of activity logged and an online Enterprise Passport for each student, where they can reflect on achievements and skills learned. These can then be used for job or Higher Education applications. Work experience was now ‘more formalised and auditable, so no student can slip through the net. Staff wanted a clear policy, with no grey areas about what is approved experience. We have clarified the number of hours per student and ensure that each student has a personalised path’.

TOP TIP

- Evaluate your work experience offer to ensure it is meeting its objectives and is reviewed regularly.
- Set up a system for young people to reflect on their experiences and how they have benefitted them.

Source: How to provide meaningful experience of the world of work for young people as part of 16 to 19 study programmes (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA02)
Link/connect practice across the school

Using the outcome of your audit (see step 3 above) start to connect practice across departments/faculties. This will enable you to make fuller use of connections and present a joined up picture to the employers you work with. Coordination of projects, curricula and practice across the school or college is critical to oversee and link employer engagement generally as illustrated in the case studies below.

Case study

Role of coordinators

In one college, a large proportion of funding had been used to employ three work experience coordinators with dedicated time available to visit employers to discuss the needs of placements from the perspective of the college and the company. As a result of these conversations, some areas of industry had expressed an interest in working closer with the college through, for example, providing employability talks to students, while in other cases, helped to develop new relationships and secure placements across new sectors. When visiting employers, the coordinators will engage in conversations about the range of opportunities the college can offer. One coordinator said: ‘[it’s] not just [about] creating the relationship around work experience, it’s the whole package’.

Source: Evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/WEXX01+)

Case study

The use of a coordinated project

UTCs were designed to build relationships with a range of business partners. One UTC makes all pupils do a core project (which links practice and curricula across the college). The UTC’s Business Relations Manager, said the UTC has achieved profound employer engagement ‘to a very large extent’. When the UTC was launched, they undertook a particular style and type of employer engagement. At the heart of this is the core project which every student undertakes. The purpose is to enthuse and inspire students. Business sponsors mentor students in this real-world learning environment, run at the UTC, which aims to help students develop technical and ‘soft’ skills and builds a competitive spirit – a character trait the UTC tries to instil (UTC Business Relations Manager).
Thinking creatively and joining up across curriculum area are vital for example if young people in a school want to be ‘football stars’ then have a theme of football across the curriculum and years to include topics such as nutrition; health; exercise; physiotherapy; marketing; branding etc. Schools need to extend their thinking and connect practice and embed in the culture of school’

Careers Enterprise Coordinator.

Aim to provide a range of employer activities

Employers enrich education delivery through a range of activities including curriculum enrichment and real-life learning, for example:

- Providing curriculum materials
- Site visits
- Career talks
- Real-life projects/challenges
- Themed days (e.g. enterprise days), mentoring
- Work experience

Case study

Realistic and aspirational work experience placements

At Walker sixth form in Newcastle work experience placements are designed to mirror the ‘real world of work’ as far as possible to achieve maximum benefit for students and employers. This includes, for example, ensuring that the placement day starts and finishes at the same time as regular employment, not college times and the placement activities are as ‘hands on’ as possible, within health and safety parameters. In addition, a key provider of work experience highlighted the need to be cautious about offering placements in areas where there were not likely to be any employment or apprenticeship opportunities in the near future so as not to falsely raise expectations or set students up to fail. A member of staff observed that the: ‘real world experience really helps their communication skills – being in the work environment almost forces them to improve their skills’.
The industry needs people with experience, so this type of activity helps a lot – it gives you transferable skills.

(Young person, Chichester)

I interacted with customers, but I also attended meetings. I was doing a proper job, and that will be very helpful for when I apply for jobs in the future.

(Young Person, St Brendan’s Sixth Form College)

It’s a lot easier… because when you’re actually working with an employer, a real industry client… deadlines are really important. There are real deadlines. There are no extensions. It helps you towards working with deadlines and application. I know a lot of work is like that.

(Young person, Birmingham)

This guide is based on case studies carried out as part of a qualitative project to highlight effective and innovative approaches in terms of the work experience strand of study programmes, commissioned by the Department for Education and carried out by the NFER.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01

Source: How to provide meaningful experience of the world of work for young people as part of 16 to 19 study programmes (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA02)
Case study

The impact of work experience on Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LLDD)

LLDD at this college were involved in running a café with support from their learning support assistant or job coach. This support was considered crucial for the company to offer placements to a number of students at the same time. The students work alongside other staff and volunteers in the café three days a week on an ongoing basis. They undertake a range of activities such as cooking, running a lunch club for the over 50s, preparing food, staffing the café, taking orders and dealing with money. The café was rated five out of five for hygiene and the students keep the kitchen clean themselves. At first, the LLDD were not sure what to do and were shy - ‘then you see them blossom and come out of their shells’. At first ‘they wouldn’t say boo to a goose but they gain in confidence’. The students won an award for their volunteering work. The experience has equipped them with the necessary skills for employment such as working with others and enhanced their confidence. The employer felt that the students would be missed by staff and the community if they were not undertaking placements at the café, noting that ‘It is good for business and good for the community. It is good for building relationships across the community’. She felt it had helped to reduce the stigma the community associated with this group of young people.

Source: Evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/WEXX01)

Consider ways that employers can enrich education delivery

Don’t stop at work experience – think about other ways in which employers can deepend and enrich your pupils’ connection to the world of work. The following tips from the Education and Employers Taskforce suggest a diverse range of ways to make the most out of employer activities and their benefits:

1. A lot of little goes a long way when it comes to employer engagement

   Young adults who have greater levels of contact with employers whilst at school are significantly less likely to be NEET and can expect, when in full-time employment, to earn up to 18% more than peers who had no such workplace exposure.

2. Start young and make them think about what they’ve learnt

   The effects of employer engagement can be witnessed most powerfully in influencing attitudes and assumptions which young people begin forming from early childhood (primary years): do girls really become engineers or boys work in childcare?
3. **Pupils should do a load of different things over their school lives**

Teachers with first-hand experience of a wide range of employer engagement activities (careers events, enterprise days, work experience, workplace visits, mentoring etc) argue that different ones are more effective in achieving different outcomes like increasing attainment, helping in decision-making or improving employability skills. Mix it up to in terms of activities to get the best results.

4. **Schools should do something about the fact that all kids are not the same**

Where a pupil is from (socially, economically, geographically) influences their access to, and interaction with, employer engagement opportunities at home and in school, especially when it comes to work experience. Employer engagement should be thought of as a resource. Some young people need more help than others from schools in accessing experiences of real value which speak to their emerging ambitions.

5. **Young people’s view of the labour market is like seeing the world through Mr Magoo glasses (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8GTHXTEvIc) – they need help to get perspective**

Ask teenagers where their aspirations lie and one-third are chasing just ten jobs. Most young people have an incredibly poor understanding of the labour market, their career aspirations routinely have nothing in common with projected labour market demand. With teenage part-time working rapidly dying out, schools are more important than ever in helping explore young people to get any taste of the working world and to explore its breadth.

6. **They don’t know what they don’t know – sometimes a little coercion is right and proper**

Assumptions shape attitudes and attitudes guide decisions and the assumptions that teenagers have about jobs and careers are often very deeply held. Research highlights the long term significance of assumptions, for example, about the type of people who go to university or do an Apprenticeship, the sorts of careers pursued by boys or girls, whether ‘people like me’ do science or not. Career carousels where pupils work their way around a room spending 5-10 minutes with volunteers from a wide variety of different careers is a perfect way to challenge often unspoken assumptions and build confidence through speaking and listening.

**Source:** How to make the most of employer engagement: six tips for school and college staff (2016) Antony Mann (http://www.educationandemployers.org/research/how-to-make-the-most-of-employer-engagement-six-tips-for-school-and-college-staff)
Enriching education delivery through employer engagement

The Employers Advisory Board (EAB) at Oldham college consists of 20 local business representatives and has been highly effective in strengthening relationships between the Digital and Creative Centre (a faculty within the college) and industry personnel. Crucially, this supports dialogue around curriculum delivery in terms of what is required for the award/qualification and what skills, competencies and abilities employers need in their future employees. The EAB has, to date, informed curriculum delivery, modified individual units, improved career pathways and integrated the development of behaviours expected by employers into the curriculum to support students’ employability. A college interviewee observed:

*The industry is rapidly changing and the college has to reflect this and be flexible in what it offers its students to make them employable.*

The EAB is also a mechanism through which senior staff work with employers to encourage their support for the Centre and its students, including developing assignment briefs for students, providing work experience placements and offering continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for college staff.

Impact on students

Students have bought into the ethos of employability and code of conduct promoted by the Centre, illustrated through improvements in student behaviour and the presentation of professional, work-like attitudes and action. Crucially, alongside the development of academic and vocational skills, students are now seen as being closer to work.

Impact on employers

There is a closer integration between industry and the college through which employers are more likely to be able to recruit future employees with the specific skills the creative industries need. College staff and employers are linked together in networks that benefit the local business community and enhance the positive pathways available to students.

Source: Sharing innovative approaches and overcoming barriers in delivering 16-19 study programmes’ principles (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DF1A01)

Use online resources to inform the development of curriculum activities. For example see: Engineering UK (http://www.engineeringuk.com/Tomorrows-Engineers), Careers Ready (https://careerrready.org.uk/employers/lab?area=en), #iwill Resources (http://www.iwill.org.uk/resources), icould.com (http://icould.com), oppsinbucks.org (https://oppsinbucks.org), valuesmoneyandme.co.uk (http://valuesmoneyandme.co.uk) and London Ambitions Careers Curriculum (http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/londonambitionscareers).
Ensure partnerships are mutually beneficial

Know your local employers, understand their needs and develop a flexible solution that benefits all parties. Be receptive to the local context and use innovative approaches to employer engagement.

- Identify a local need and work with local employers to grow a flexible solution that benefits all parties.
- Use innovative approaches to adapt work experience opportunities to local context.
- Be open to working with a wide variety of partners.

**Gaining mutual benefits**

*St Brendan’s sixth form college in Bristol* works with Career Academies UK (CA) to provide employability opportunities for Level 3 students. CA is a national charity, which aims to bridge the gap between the world of work and education, by providing a range of experiences for students, including internships. The internship involves the completion of one or more projects, which are designed to allow the student to apply their subject knowledge, and to provide something of value to the employer. One employer commented: ‘There are benefits for the company – enthusiasm and fresh thinking can be very helpful, and these young people bring energy into the office’. A student observed: ‘As well as confidence, it helped me with my IT studies, because I was able to make links’.

**TOP TIP**

*Creative solutions to benefit all parties*

The Sports’ Directorate at *Birmingham Metropolitan College* has developed a work experience model where its students provide sports coaching and PE sessions in local schools. To develop the model of provision, the college worked with a local provider of sport and physical activity provision in the city. The programme has potential benefits for all concerned: the students gain opportunities for ‘hands on’ experience of working with young people in schools and a pathway to employment; schools have the opportunity to receive structured coaching and PE lessons but with the freedom to use their Sports Premium Funding in other ways; and the local provider of sport and physical activity assisting with the development of the model has access to a pool of skilled people for its services e.g. running school sports clubs, holiday clubs and coaching.

**Source:** How to provide meaningful experience of the world of work for young people as part of 16 to 19 study programmes (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA02)
How to maintain partnerships

Value employers as partners

Further to ensuring that employers’ contributions are valued by, and beneficial to both the school/college and the employer, strive to provide a ‘feel good factor’ for employers.

This doesn’t have to be hugely costly in terms of time or resource to be effective. The following example illustrates this point.

Case study

How a UTC Values Employers as Partners

Nurturing employer relationships is key. It is important to understand the expectations of the relationship with the employer. When an employer emails the school, it is important that the email gets answered the same day and you have a conversation by phone as soon as possible. The UTC then invites the employer to visit and gives them a tour of the school. The UTC offers a set of options that meets the range of all levels of commitment. It asks each employer for a number of days’ commitment per year. It is also important to tailor involvement to the business objectives of the employer e.g. identification of talent and recruitment of future engineers and/or a cohesive CSR policy. This approach helps to incentivise employers to engage with the UTC and run hands-on activities. Projects must add value to employers’ recruitment process – this helps employers to gain internal buy-in to engage with schools (UTC Business Relations Manager).

Develop an embedded system for employer involvement

Ideally, employer engagement will be embedded in a systematic way across departments and key stages. The following links provide examples:

a. Resources have been developed by Tideway, the company delivering the Thames Tideway Tunnel (http://www.tunnelworks.co.uk/) ‘super sewer’. They are part of the drive to raise interest and uptake in STEM related careers, develop employability skills in young people, and to support the broader curriculum;

b. Resources have been developed by one secondary academy to introduce a property development course developed by Land Securities in partnership with Construction Youth Trust’s Budding Brunels programme
Recognise that quality of partnerships is more important than quantity

Developing high quality relationships with a small number of employers is a more productive approach than trying to maintain relationships with many employers. The following examples illustrate how one school and one academy developed high quality partnerships with selected employers:

**Case study**

**Working in partnership**

Birmingham Metropolitan College launched its Professional Services Academy (PSA) in 2014. The PSA was developed in response to local research into the needs of employers and highlighted a ‘skills crisis in the Professional Services Industry’.

Working in partnership with leading firms from the financial, legal, accounting and business community, the PSA is the ‘first of its kind in the country’. It is open to students studying AS/A-levels in law, accounting, economics, business studies and mathematics and those on apprenticeships in accounting, business administration and legal studies. Students have the opportunity to join the PSA by application. The PSA programme comprises a structured package of work enterprise and work placement activities that have been developed in partnership with local employers. It aims to ensure that students gain ‘hands on’ experience and develop the skills that local employers need. The college also has an Enterprise Academy. This operates using the same model as the PSA but is for any student with an interest in business. It is made up of a board of general employers. The Enterprise Academy enables students to develop work enterprise skills. Students from across the college work with employers to develop their employability skills.

**Source:** Sharing innovative approaches and overcoming barriers in delivering 16-19 study programmes’ principles (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIA01)
Case study

Working in partnership

The Bulwell Academy Business Advisory Board - or BABAB for short – was set up in 2009. Its purpose has always been to bring business and commercial input to the planning and delivery of career advice and guidance for students within Bulwell Academy. The BABAB comprises of a Chair who is one of the academy governors and 7 other members who represent local and national employers and businesses which operate in the Nottingham area.

The BABAB meets 3 times a year to provide strategic support to the Director of Business and Enterprise around Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG). There is a strong link to the main governing board as the Chair of BABAB reports back to the main board of governors on a twice yearly basis, once focussing on CEIAG strategy and student progression and once focussing on student destinations.

The members of the BABAB bring a business perspective to the academy and help students to understand how their academic career can be developed to support their future work and life ambitions. The strength of the BABAB lies in their ability to articulate the needs of local employers to the academy and members have been instrumental in helping the academy secure the deep rooted and long-term relationships with local businesses that benefit the academy’s students, whether via workplace visits, work experience opportunities or student and staff mentoring.

Bulwell Academy was recently assessed by Career Mark, who oversee quality standards for Careers Education and Guidance. The report stated:

*Careers and employability is well managed at the academy with the Bulwell Academy Business Advisory Board overseeing career related activity. This board includes wider members of the community to help meet the needs of the learners and the local economy. Employability skills and readiness for work are core principles of the academy. So much so the academy has created its own employability values which are displayed on the walls of every classroom.*
How to move towards profound partnerships

‘Profound’ employer engagement is one of the key characteristics of UTCs. The pattern of employer engagement found in UTCs is:

- stretching across a wide range of activities and involving both staff and pupils
- engaging individual employers in multiple activities relevant to young people through their school careers
- an accepted part of the UTC culture, regularly encountered by students and staff alike.

To move towards profound employer engagement, you need to enable high volumes of varied employer activity which is strategically integrated into school/college provision. You also need to enable close collaboration across

Embed employer involvement in the school/college strategy, curriculum and culture

Having started to link employer involvement across the school/college, move towards embedding practice routinely within the curriculum – not just in PSHE or careers lessons but in the core subjects as well.

Case study

How to develop a curriculum area

A new core project is going to be launched next academic year (November 2016) in one UTC. This is Cisco Internet of Things (IOT) World, a technical project which will focus on developing PHP computer programming skills. Students are given a brief and have to find an IOT solution. The project starts with a whole-day event. The next day students meet Cisco specialists (e.g. mining, retail, utilities) and learn about IOT in different sectors. Students work in teams of four in four half-day workshops with Raspberry Pi modules and components. They learn about how to read bar/QR codes, develop Bluetooth connections to sensory devices and create a visual recognition system. Working in one room, seven or eight teams of students are led by a Cisco project manager to a successful conclusion who also provides one-to-one mentoring. This results in the IOT challenge which is the same for all student teams. This is sponsored by the Institute of Engineering and Technology (UTC Business Relations Manager).
In addition to the online resources to inform the development of curriculum activities above, explore further for ways to embed employer engagement into the curriculum to suit your school’s/college’s needs. For example, Mykindafuture (http://www.mykindafuture.com/Educator/Resources) provides lesson plans, employer guides, and toolkits and teaching notes.


Use lessons learnt

FE colleges and UTCs have extensive experience of working in partnership with employers to inform, review and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of practice and build on what has worked well.

A. Teach Too provide case studies and videos on their Excellence Gateway website. These highlight how employers are supporting providers in the co-design and delivery of vocational programmes: Teach Too initiative (http://tvet.excellencegateway.org.uk/vocabulary/EGresourcetype/Effective%20practice%20example)

B. Students felt that their experience of studying engineering at a UTC was greatly enhanced by the involvement of industrial sponsors. Students valued the involvement of employers and were impressed by the authenticity of industrial engagement:

What I like is that the school’s involved with like loads of companies and it’s not like pretend, it’s real. Like at other schools it’s like just pretend you’re going to do some work for a company but this is real like you’re speaking to the manager of a company and it’s real life, it’s not pretend anymore.

C. Early experience of UTCs and Studio Schools suggests that ‘profound’ engagement may have significant benefits in terms of student motivation, achievement and progression. The pattern of employer engagement found in UTCs stretches across a wide range of activities and involves both staff and pupils; engages individual employers in multiple activities; and is relevant to young people through their school careers; an accepted part of the UTC culture; and regularly encountered by students and staff alike.

Profound engagement is further identifiable through three distinguishing characteristics. Staff and pupils within a typical UTC would be expected to engage with employers: on many more occasions than peers across wider secondary; across a much wider range of activities than peers across wider secondary education and engagement within a UTC would be expected to sit firmly within coherent approaches to teaching and learning and pupil progression.

Encourage teacher placements in industry

Update teachers’ knowledge and confidence in talking about the local labour market by facilitating teachers working with local employers wherever possible. Consider the following two examples of effective practice:

**Case study**

**STEM Insight**

The STEM Insight programme offers staff in schools and colleges a unique chance to experience STEM-related work in industrial or university settings.

Participate in a placement with either an employer or a university, be supported by face-to-face and online CPD, and learn more about diverse career paths and opportunities for students.

*Source:* STEM Insight
(https://www.stem.org.uk/stem-insight)

**Case study**

**Stronger teacher links with employers**

The Employers Advisory Board (EAB) at Oldham college (see above) enhanced relationships with industry further by additionally providing opportunities for staff continuing professional development (CPD), through for example, attending employer meetings and occasional day placements in industry, to help maintain connections within a rapidly changing sector.

*Source:* Sharing innovative approaches and overcoming barriers in delivering 16-19 study programmes’ principles
(https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFIADI)