

CASE STUDY

KPMG: ENHANCING LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

This case study outlines the partnership between KPMG and the Economist Foundation.

Background

KPMG began a partnership with the Economist Foundation in Summer 2019 to further enhance its support in schools for numeracy in its broadest sense and to enable social mobility. Basic skills such as numeracy, literacy, and essential skills are the primary ways the company has targeted its support, as it sees these as the building blocks of social mobility and providing opportunities to volunteer and support communities is core to its values.

The Economist Educational Foundation already delivers a programme that develops critical-thinking and literacy skills through discussions about the news and responded to a request from KPMG to develop a numeracy programme which would also engage their employee volunteers. For the Economist Foundation, a Numeracy in the News programme was a natural next step, so it developed a partnership with KPMG to create the programme.

KPMG has an algorithm developed by the Bridge Group which identifies target schools in areas of high deprivation. KPMG is also a Careers and Enterprise Company Corner Stone Employer in 4 areas.¹



What did KPMG deliver?

Prior to COVID-19, the programme began by delivering half day 'Numeracy in the News' workshops for 15 schools across the UK at KPMG offices. The sessions were led by the Economist Educational Foundation and supported by KPMG volunteers.

There were whole class and smaller group activities focusing upon numeracy, including analysing data, statistics and making decisions. The workshops considered how statistics and data can be interpreted and presented differently depending upon individual perspectives and points of view. KPMG volunteers use statistics and data daily as well as scanning the media, so they were able to illustrate how they would use the information in their jobs.

The Economist Foundation designed the materials in collaboration with KPMG and successfully



delivered five face-to-face sessions before lockdown in March 2020. Each workshop involved 28 students and 7 KPMG volunteers.

Dealing with the impact of COVID-19

With ten workshops still to deliver, KPMG and The Economist Educational Foundation worked together to develop an online, interactive version of the programme.

Firstly, the resources for both teachers and parents were re-worked and published on their website, available for free to facilitate home-learning. The ten remaining workshops were brought together into one large online workshop in November of 2020 and delivered over a school day. The organisations worked together intensively for four months to design the online event programme (to take place on a mix of MS Teams and Zoom) and plan the logistics.

Delivery on the day brought together students and teachers from 10 schools and KPMG from sites UK-wide via Zoom and MS Teams, where they could meet and get into smaller online breakout rooms.

Linking to numeracy in the news at the time, the morning session focused upon the US election and the afternoon session focused upon COVID-19, including numbers accessing furlough. In breakout sessions the topics were explored in detail with a KPMG volunteer.

For the new online version of the programme, a panel session was included between the morning and afternoon sessions. The panel comprised of senior colleagues from KPMG including:

- Catherine Burnet, Regional Chair in Scotland
- Yael Selfin, Chief Economist
- Karl Edge, Regional Chair for the Midlands

They talked about how they use numeracy and the news in their jobs:

"I USE PERCENTAGES TO COMPARE HOW DIFFERENT COMPANIES ARE GETTING ON. I LOOK AT PERCENTAGE GROWTH WHICH ENABLES ME TO COMPARE TWO THINGS."

Catherine Burnet, Regional Chair in Scotland,
KPMG

"NUMERACY IS A TOOL FOR WHAT WE DO AS ECONOMISTS."

Yael Selfin, Chief Economist, KPMG

"IT ALL COMES BACK TO NUMBERS."

Karl Edge, Regional Chair for the Midlands,
KPMG

The pandemic presented challenges but also opportunities for the delivery of the programme. Working online increased KPMG's reach into disadvantaged communities which are geographically more challenging to travel to from KPMG sites on a regular basis. The programme developed into:

- A 6-week Numeracy in the News programme for 25 schools which is now embedded within the delivery of the Economist Foundation's core offer (Burnet News Club), delivered over the course of a school year.
- Creation of a 6-hour package of multimedia Numeracy in the News teaching resources, made freely available to any school.
- KPMG volunteers support students online via The Economist Educational Foundation's online platform, reaching young people across the UK. The volunteers develop pupils' numeracy, critical-thinking and literacy skills by asking questions and giving feedback. All volunteering takes place online at a time suitable for the volunteers. Teachers and global topic experts from the Economist Foundation check all messages, ensuring safeguard checks and facilitating on-going project progress between KPMG volunteers and students.

- Live visits are also organised so that KPMG volunteers can interact with students to ensure a personal connection.

Factors for success

Regular communication

Regular communication between partners, particularly when setting up a new programme, is always critical, but during the early weeks of the pandemic the partners were talking daily.

Ongoing project management calls are in place on alternate weeks to monitor progress and discuss and resolve challenges. By being flexible, the partners have been able to grow the reach of the programme and ensure children continue to benefit whilst face-to-face contact in schools is restricted.

Preparing volunteers

Every half-term, The Economist Foundation runs training for KPMG volunteers, helping volunteers to understand how to work with students. So far, 120 volunteers have been trained. This includes the kinds of questions to use with the students to help them think further. Using easy to understand language and avoiding jargon is also covered as part of the training.

Accountability of key staff

To develop, modify and ensure the effective ongoing management of the programme, a lead manager from KPMG with a background in teaching, liaises with a lead manager at the Economist Foundation. Both managers are accountable for the success of the programme against the agreed objectives and each reports progress to their respective senior management teams on a regular basis. The programme is a core part of KPMG's wider corporate responsibility strategy, and its flagship volunteering programme for numeracy.

Outcomes and impact

The Economist Educational Foundation measures impact primarily using the Skills Builder Universal Framework impact standard, and by surveying teachers and pupils.

The Burnet News Club meets Skills Builder's level 4 impact standard, as teachers provide baseline data on their pupils' skill levels at the start and end of the programme, and the Foundation compares pupils' progress with a control group.

To assess the impact of partnership activities on pupils' attitudes to numeracy and their numeracy skills, pupil, teacher and volunteer surveys are used. Young people in the programme make 150% more progress in Skills Builder critical-thinking and communication skills: problem-solving, creativity, speaking and listening.

The quotes below give a sense of some of the impact achieved as a result of the partnership:

Young people

- "It taught me the importance of numeracy in work."
- "[I liked] learning about what people's job roles were at KPMG."
- "I found that we felt together even when across Zoom."
- "[We did] statistics, numbers, problem-solving, thinking deeply/outside the box, consolidation of numbers."

Teachers

- "[Students learned] awareness of numbers and the concept of the magnitude of some of the figures they were discussing."

Volunteers

- "I actually got to talk to the students quite a lot compared to other experiences, and I think using us to give prompts and feedback was good."
- "I felt like the employer perspective during the tasks was really beneficial."

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REFERENCE

ⁱ <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers-volunteers/cornerstone-employers>