

Report

THE POWER OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

How businesses have
enhanced the curriculum to
improve life outcomes for
young people



REPORT

HOW BUSINESSES HAVE ENHANCED THE CURRICULUM TO IMPROVE LIFE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

This report focuses on examples of how businesses have entered into long-term partnerships with schools to deliver a new kind of real-world learning within the curriculum. Sustained interventions with business are more likely to reach disadvantaged young people, contribute to closing the attainment gap, promote social mobility and grow a diverse talent pool for future jobs; however, this work is not always visible or celebrated. This report seeks to change that and shine a light on how schools and businesses have been working together to transform learning and life outcomes both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Much has been said and written about the dire impact of COVID-19 on young people's education and wellbeing. The UN has called the pandemic a "generational catastrophe". But let's not deceive ourselves that all was well prior to the pandemic.

In 2019, 4.2 million children in the UK were living in poverty, which equates to 30% of all children.ⁱ The educational attainment gap had stopped closing between disadvantaged children and their wealthier peers. Disadvantaged pupils in England were 18.1 months of learning behind their peers by the time they finished their GCSEs.ⁱⁱ

During the pandemic, the situation has deteriorated still further. Numbers claiming and applying for free school meals have dramatically increased. The impact of school closures and lost learning has also disproportionately affected pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The effect of this has

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY (BITC) MEMBERS REFERENCED IN THIS REPORT

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| • adi Group | • Goldman Sachs |
| • bp | • KPMG |
| • Coventry Building Society | • Salesforce |
| • Deloitte | • Siemens |
| | • UBS |

been the equivalent of undoing a third of the progress made in the last decade to close the attainment gap.ⁱⁱⁱ

Basic literacy and numeracy skills, which unlock access to social and economic participation, have fallen. And, most recently, an interim analysis commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), indicates a particular learning loss in mathematics^{iv} which will exacerbate skills shortages for employers



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What is the current role of business in the curriculum?

Schools have a statutory requirement to facilitate their students to engage with business to meet the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#) for career guidance. Whilst the benchmarks require schools to engage with business, to bring careers into the curriculum, there is no requirement to deliver the kind of sustained curriculum-linked interventions we set out in this report. Yet, these interventions are the ones that will make a real difference to the attainment gap if delivered for a sustained period.

In 2020, BITC's Curriculum Taskforce commissioned a small-scale qualitative research project to explore the opinions of teachers regarding the role of business within the curriculum. The resulting [Business Working within the Curriculum Research Report](#) highlighted that teachers believe business involvement within the curriculum has several benefits for students and teachers, including:

- greater student awareness of the jobs and careers available to them and broader student experiences;
- an uptick in the aspirations and confidence of students;
- increased credibility for what is being taught which is provided by the business and industry context and a subsequent reaffirming of learning; and
- the opportunity to develop new learning within a business context.^v

In prior research, which considered a broader range of work-related learning interventions, the Education and Employers Taskforce concluded that young people who experienced interventions from an employer were less likely to find themselves not in education, employment, or training (NEET).^{vi}

A further piece of research asked teachers to identify activities which they felt were particularly effective in helping young people to:

- develop four key employability skills;

- increase their attainment; and
- achieve a range of important outcomes out of education.

There was a consistent view by teachers that employer engagement was beneficial overall, but teachers felt that lower achievers particularly benefit from the opportunity to develop skills through activities which achieve sustained engagement with the working world.^{vii}

Similarly, BITC's research has found that sustained opportunities for real-world learning with employers was particularly beneficial for underconfident, lower-achieving pupils.

The case for business involvement

The need for skills and knowledge transfer by business to fill existing and emerging skill gaps means responsible business must invest in supporting children and young people to access and engage with a broad and balanced curriculum to develop:

- **Basic skills** – literacy, numeracy, and basic digital skills;
- **Essential skills** – highly transferable skills such as teamwork, listening, and problem solving, as set out in the Skills Builder Universal Framework. (For more information about how to support the development of Essential Skills please visit [Essential Skills Toolkit](#); and
- **Specialist and technical skills** – those skills which are specific to a particular sector or role such as modern foreign languages or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

In the process of supporting young people to develop skills and knowledge, businesses derive numerous benefits including:

- **Closing the skills gap** – ensuring that young people are engaged and interested in the skills and knowledge that a business needs, whether this is literacy and numeracy, modern foreign languages, technology, science, or essential skills. Business has a key role to play in

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demonstrating their relevance and driving engagement.

- **Development of staff** – providing engagement and development opportunities for staff by sharing expertise, knowledge, and skills with young people in curriculum subjects relevant to your business.
- **Future talent pipeline** – creating a pipeline of diverse talent for your business or supply chain by reaching out to young people and working with them for a sustained period.
- **Learning from young people** – applying the perspective and skills of young people to your business challenges, perspectives; this aids innovation.
- **Strengthening community links** – raising awareness of your business in the community through developing sustained trusted relationships.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

For businesses who are looking to replicate the success of the businesses we interviewed, the following section provides a summary of success factors found across multiple examples. This list is not exhaustive, but by drawing on real-life examples of businesses who are currently working with schools, it will hopefully provide a good starting point for any business looking to support learning in schools:

- Start small
- Build a relationship over time and have clear, shared objectives
- Don't reinvent the wheel
- Plan for an upfront investment of time
- Seek feedback and formally monitor progress
- Communicate regularly and establish accountability
- Train and empower volunteers to take ownership
- Keep reporting outcomes and impacts
- Explore the benefits of virtual activities

- Integrate [Essential Skills](#)

Start small

For all of the examples, the relationships and the activity started small, through either working with just one school, one activity or working with an education broker (an external organisation that acts as an intermediary to facilitate the connection between a business and a school) to support and guide the business throughout their engagement.

Build a relationship over time and establish clear, shared objectives

Many of the examples began with:

- someone from a business joining a school's board of governors;
- someone developing a relationship with a key person at the school, for example, a member of the school leadership team, school careers' leader, or a subject teacher; and
- finding a key person at the school who was passionate about engaging with business and saw working together as an investment in their students.

“IT IS CRITICAL TO HAVE THE BUY-IN FROM THE SCHOOL SO THEY CAN DEDICATE THE TIME TO WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTEERS AND CO-ORDINATE THE ACTIVITY WITH THE STUDENTS. WITHOUT THE PASSIONATE TEACHER WHO BELIEVES IN THE VALUE OF CONTEXTUALISED LEARNING IT ISN'T POSSIBLE TO DELIVER A PROJECT OVER A NUMBER OF WEEKS.”

Masudur Rahman, bp

In all cases, an initial needs analysis was conducted to identify mutually beneficial objectives. The clarity of purpose which emerges from this exercise will support a deeper, sustained relationship.

Don't reinvent the wheel

For businesses who created their own programmes, they did so after developing

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knowledge and expertise of working with schools and students and building relationships with education stakeholders to develop activities in partnership to meet mutual need. In some cases, businesses have used the experience of working with an education broker to develop the same or similar activities through or alongside the broker but adapted to reflect their own business context.

Both ways of working can be successful, and businesses choose the most appropriate method according to their own culture, existing experience of working in education, level of resource available and the scale of what they wish to achieve. The majority of the examples within this report began with the support of an education broker. As the businesses have developed their expertise and strengthened their partnerships over time, a greater number now work without the support of a broker.

‘WORKING WITH CBS VOLUNTEERS AND VISITING THE SITE TO DO REAL-LIFE MATHS HELPS TO SHOW HOW IMPORTANT MATHS IS, ESPECIALLY IF PARENTS OF PUPILS STRUGGLE WITH MATHS AND BUDGETING, THE CHILD CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE VIEW OF MATHS WHICH WORKING WITH CBS VOLUNTEERS CAN HELP TO CHANGE.’

Claire Nicholson, Henley Green Primary

An established relationship between organisations enables the development of trust and understanding where both parties feel ready to innovate and tackle some of the more challenging issues. There are also examples in this report, which illustrate how new relationships have led to innovation, but these have been in response to the business ‘tendering’ for a like-minded partner.

Plan for an upfront investment of time in the early stages

In school, learning is sequenced so that children build their knowledge and understanding gradually so that they are ready to be introduced to new or more advanced learning in the right order. In the

majority of cases, the activity in the examples was developed and planned an academic year in advance of commencing the project or activity.

‘HAVING THE SAME VOLUNTEERS YEAR AFTER YEAR AS THE CHILDREN MOVE THROUGH THE SCHOOL MEANS THAT CBS VOLUNTEERS KNOW WHAT THE PUPILS HAVE DONE BEFORE. THEY HAVE BUILT A RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM AND THEY CAN HELP THEM TAKE THE NEXT STEP.’

Henley Green, Primary teacher

In all examples, the business and volunteers set aside time to talk through ideas for the project, interacted back and forth between the school and the education broker, and agreed the best time of year to deliver the project. The activity then became integrated into curriculum delivery within the school.

Seek feedback and formally monitor progress

For sustainable relationships, activities which continuously seek feedback and review are able to adapt and remain relevant. Businesses who stop and adapt year after year rather than continuously delivering the same content are more likely to hold sustained relationships. This becomes easier when working with an education broker as they can take a lead role in identifying what needs to be adapted and can brief volunteers.

During the pandemic, businesses that continued to work with schools during school closures and lockdowns reached out to their education partners and asked them what they needed. They were able to invest time in adapting content to be delivered virtually or they broke bigger activities down into component parts to simplify delivery online. An example could be running a shorter CV writing session instead of a day-long careers fair.

Regular communication and accountability

Successful long-term curriculum projects and broader relationships with education should

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include regular planned formal communication to review how the partnership is working against project objectives. Informal on-going communication also helps to troubleshoot small snags or issues before they become problems. In all examples in this report, there is a person in the business and in the school who has senior-level accountability for the project and a person managing the relationship day-to-day. These individuals may do other jobs within the business, which do not directly relate to the work with the school, but they will also hold formal accountability for the work.

‘I DON’T EVEN THINK OF THEM AS GOLDMAN SACHS, THEY ARE OUR PARTNER AND THEY WILL DO ANYTHING WE ASK.’

Francesca Hall, Ark Evelyn Grace Academy

Training and empowering volunteers

Once a project is set-up, engaging more volunteers and setting up networks helps to:

- Keep the time requirement of volunteers to a manageable level as responsibility is shared.
- Create more resilience with resourcing. If multiple volunteers are equipped to deliver volunteering activity, this ensures that schools or partners are not let down in the event of the lead volunteer being unavailable.
- Share the responsibility among more employees to enable volunteers to take a break from volunteering for a while.
- Provide volunteer team lead development opportunities, co-ordinating volunteers, and training new volunteers.
- Provide staff development opportunities, especially around essential skills, which can be integrated into personal development plans.

‘OUR VOLUNTEERING AND GIVING PROGRAMMES ENABLE OUR EMPLOYEES TO BECOME HIGH-IMPACT CITIZEN PHILANTHROPISTS WHO EMPOWER THE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW, HARNESS

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR GOOD, AND STRENGTHEN THEIR COMMUNITIES.’

Alastair Higginbottom, Salesforce UK

Keep reporting outcomes and impact

Reporting outcomes and impacts internally keeps stakeholders, including volunteers, motivated to sustain a longer-term commitment. This was a common theme throughout all the businesses we surveyed.

‘SOME OF THE STUDENTS WHO COME THROUGH THE PROGRAMME COME FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS. THEY MAY NOT BE ACADEMIC; THEY MAY NOT GET MANY OTHER QUALIFICATIONS AND IT IS A HUGE SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT TO SEE THEM PASS THE COURSE. WE’VE NEVER HAD ANYONE JUST PASS – OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS – STUDENTS HAVE GAINED DISTINCTIONS OR MERITS SO I THINK THAT IS WHAT MOTIVATES ME.’

Roy Cumberworth, adi Group mentor

Explore the benefits of virtual activities

Many businesses have adapted some of what they deliver face-to-face to online delivery. Businesses have been able to work with larger numbers of young people, reach disadvantaged communities that they haven’t worked with before (such as more rural communities) and facilitate employees to engage in new volunteering opportunities which previously were not possible.

‘IT CAN BE TRICKY ONLINE AS ONE STUDENT CAN MAKE PROGRESS QUICKER THAN OTHERS. BUT IT’S REALLY EASY TO SLOT IT INTO MY WORKING DAY AS I DON’T NEED TO TRAVEL.’

Alice Cole, Deloitte

Simple communications tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Google Classroom are now

Business in the Community

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common channels from which an employee is able to volunteer without the added travel time this takes from the working day. Some charities are also developing their own online platforms to facilitate communication and activities with young people in and out of school. These also build in the necessary safeguarding to keep everyone safe. It is likely that as COVID-19 restrictions ease and businesses are able to visit schools again, a new blended approach (mixing face-to-face and virtual delivery) may be adopted. BITC's Headteacher Steering Group welcome this approach but have also emphasised the importance of ensuring that face-to-face engagement continues.

Integrate essential skills throughout

Many of the examples have integrated the development of essential skills, such as those in the Skills Builder Universal Framework, into curriculum projects. There is an efficiency in delivering activity in this way as both objectives can be met through one activity.

‘EMBEDDING THE SKILLS BUILDER FRAMEWORK INTO THE PROJECT ALSO ENCOURAGED SOME OF THE TEAM-WORKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ASPECTS NECESSARY FOR THE MATHS CHALLENGE AND MADE THIS REQUIREMENT MORE OVERT AND CLEAR TO THE STUDENTS.’

Liz Wilcockson, Goldman Sachs

WHAT ARE BUSINESSES DOING?

A set of 10 case studies have been produced alongside this report which illustrate what businesses are doing in collaboration with schools to combine curriculum learning with the world of work. These case studies are as follows:

Salesforce have worked with School 21 since its inception to enhance curriculum learning through the development of project-based learning and real-world learning projects for the newly launched computer science qualification.

Coventry Building Society co-created a series of numeracy interventions with Henley Green Primary School which are targeted at all different age groups.

UBS worked closely with Bridge Academy to address local educational needs in Hackney by outcomes improving learning for literacy and numeracy.

Siemens worked with Crewe University Technical College to build a steady pipeline of future talent by inspiring young people in STEM subjects.

bp used project-based learning to raise awareness of careers in the energy sector, and to bring abstract concepts in the science curriculum to life.

adi Group created a pre-apprenticeship programme with North Bromsgrove High School to support students to gain access to their apprenticeship pathways.

Goldman Sachs has established a long-term partnership with Evelyn Grace Academy to create a range of programmes and challenges that support learning outcomes for students.

Deloitte offered virtual tutoring opportunities through the National Tutoring Programme to ensure that the students were supported throughout the pandemic lockdowns.

KPMG created a series of interventions and programmes which sought to enhance numeracy skills, and in doing so, to improve social mobility.

Whilst some summary information has been used in the thematic analysis of this report, the detailed versions of these case studies are available exclusively for BITC members. [Talk to one of our expert team today](#) to learn how membership of BITC can help you get started on your responsible business journey.

These examples bring to life the power of collaboration between business and schools and the remarkable results that can be achieved. If business is serious about building back responsibly

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and learning the lessons from COVID-19, there is no time to be lost in stepping forward to be part of this quiet revolution in the classroom and beyond.

At BITC, we believe it is vital for businesses to engage with schools in a strategic way – targeting the schools and students most in need of support, aligning their engagement with business priorities, and assessing the impact of their interventions. Our expert community advisers use our Business Class framework to support our member businesses to create mutually beneficial partnerships with schools that support students and provide clear and tangible impacts against core business priorities.

Contact BITC's Advisory Team (advisory@bitc.org.uk) to find out how we can support you to engage more strategically with schools and colleges.

CALLS TO ACTION

COVID-19 has seen the educational attainment gap widen between disadvantaged pupils and their wealthier peers. As the Government focuses upon supporting children and young people to catch up on lost learning, business has a role to play.

Businesses need future employees to have a range of skills, knowledge, and experience. which enables them to meet the digital and green skills challenges and adapt to hybrid patterns of working. The knowledge and skills development must begin at school. From basic skills in numeracy, literacy and digital skills to essential skills and experience of the workplace – businesses can play their part.

BITC and the Curriculum Taskforce members ask all businesses to:

- Review your existing education partnerships to make sure that you're having the greatest impact, both on attainment within the curriculum and in your support for disadvantaged learners.
- Use the 'common themes' in this report to guide your partnerships with schools.
- Share your own examples of working within the curriculum with BITC to help others learn from your approach.
- Join the Curriculum Taskforce, learn from your business peers and guide BITC's campaigning work. For more information, please contact nicola.inge@bitc.org.uk.
- Get more information on our Education and Skills advisory offer, and how our Expert Community Advisers can support you to create strategic partnerships with schools, colleges, and other community organisations, please contact: advisory@bitc.org.uk.

Many thanks to the following businesses, schools, and education partnerships who participated in the research and provided the case studies from which BITC have derived these insights:

- adi Group and North Bromsgrove School
- bp and Reach Academy, Feltham
- Coventry Building Society and Henley Green Primary School
- Deloitte and the National Tutoring Programme
- Goldman Sachs and Evelyn Grace Academy (Lambeth)
- KPMG and The Economist Educational Foundation
- Salesforce and School 21
- Siemens and Crewe University Technical College
- UBS and Bridge Academy (Hackney)

The detailed case studies on these partnerships are available [here](#) for BITC members only. For more information about BITC membership please contact our membership team today. For schools and partner organisations who wish to read the detailed case studies, please contact Katy.Neep@bitc.org.uk.

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Talk to one of our expert team [today](#) to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further and drive lasting global change.

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