

Getting Ready for Work (Ofsted, 2016)

In November 2016, Ofsted published the results of a survey into enterprise education, work experience, employer engagement, financial capability and the promotion of apprenticeships in schools. This briefing looks at:

- why Ofsted was asked to produce this survey report
- their key findings and recommendations
- the limitations of the report
- how schools should respond.

Why survey schools now?

The survey covers a collection of themes that have risen up the political agenda relating to young people's ability to successfully prepare themselves for the labour market. The focus on enterprise education is a follow-up to Lord Young's report on 'Enterprise for All' (2014). Lord Young first promoted enterprise education in the 1980s and it became high profile again in the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's promotion of work-related learning between 2004-10. This report is part of a drive to re-launch enterprise education linked to the establishment of the Careers and Enterprise Company whose existence, the report confirms, is not yet widely-known in schools.

Ofsted was also asked to find out what schools are doing about work experience since the government removed the statutory requirement for work-related learning at Key Stage 4 in 2012.

The timing of the survey was also linked to government concerns about the provision of personal finance education in schools and how well schools are promoting apprenticeships.

Key findings and recommendations

Enterprise education

- Good or outstanding in only four out of 40 schools
- 'evidence from this survey suggests that the delivery of enterprise education is likely to be piecemeal across the secondary school sector' (p.11)
- Key factors in promoting successful enterprise education are:
 - a commitment by school leaders and a senior leader to champion it
 - a common understanding and agreed definition of enterprise education
 - a coherent programme for all pupils with clear learning outcomes and progression for pupils
 - systems in place to assess pupils' progress and monitor the quality of provision
 - an effective programme of training for teachers
 - making effective use of links with employers to ensure that the content of courses is up to date and reflects current business activity.
- In five of the remaining 36 schools, inspectors found careers advice and guidance were well embedded in the schools' provision but enterprise learning was not as clearly coordinated.

Work experience

- 63 out of 109 schools visited by Ofsted in the spring term 2016 had work experience as an expectation for all pupils at Key Stage 4
- Work experience was seen by those schools as important in order to develop personal skills, build confidence and self-esteem and widen pupils' horizons (p.12)
- Reasons cited for not offering work experience included: high cost of delivery, shortage of suitable placements, the recommendation in the Wolf Report (2015) that work experience is more useful post 16, the loss of time to prepare for examinations is a waste
- Inspectors found a wide variety of approaches and quality in the 19 out of 40 survey schools that offered work experience to all pupils at Key Stage 4
- The survey schools judged good or outstanding were more confident in using curriculum time for work experience
- The features of good practice identified by inspectors include: building on students' experience of work immediately after they are back in school, not disadvantaging students who lack the personal contacts to find quality placements for themselves, using work experience to help pupils refine their career choices regardless of whether they enjoyed a particular role or not, embedding the learning opportunities provided by work experience in the curriculum and assessing and evaluating its impact (only 4 out of 40 schools did this).

Employer engagement

- Businesses engage with schools to secure their future workforce, to be altruistic and to meet their corporate social responsibility objectives
- The barriers to engagement include schools that approach businesses without a clear agenda or objectives and do not explain what the time commitment will be
- Engagement between schools and businesses is most successful when it is a key strategic priority for leaders and governors, where a non-teaching member of staff has time to make the contacts and when there is an obvious mutual benefit
- Success also depends on ensuring that partnerships exist between organisations rather than individuals
- The barriers faced by schools include: too many organisations trying to offer them a service, a lack of contacts and geographical isolation which pushes up the cost of running activities.

Financial capability as a key component of enterprise

- Financial capability is important to enable young people to make informed decisions as consumers, employees or self-employed individuals
- The development of young people's financial capability in the schools visited was inconsistent
- Deficiencies include: too dependent on the enthusiasm of individual staff, gaps in provision, lack of systematic teaching, not relevant to the needs and backgrounds of groups of pupils in the school.

Promotion of apprenticeships

- 27 out of 40 schools were good or outstanding in promoting apprenticeships but some only saw them as being for low-ability or low-attaining pupils
- Promoting apprenticeships early from Key Stage 3 is associated with well-performing schools
- Despite an increased interest in apprenticeships (especially in engineering and finance), most pupils give these reasons for still wanting to go to university:

- subject and career interests not being linked to known apprenticeships
 - going to university is what everyone else does and is 'shown in the media as normal'
 - a view that there are no apprenticeships available in the local area and so pupils would have to live away from home and they would rather do that in a university setting with other students.
- Many schools prioritise supporting university applications over direct entry to work or apprenticeship although some schools work hard to avoid this
 - Eight schools have good systems that fully prepare pupils for their post-16 choices
 - Two schools have made particularly good links with further education (FE) providers
 - In the more effective schools, the promotion of apprenticeships and alternative routes at post-16 is part of a wider strategy and prolonged approach (e.g. starting in Year 7)
 - There are too many schools where apprenticeship knowledge is poor to non-existent
 - Many Year 11 pupils perceive apprenticeships as an unattractive alternative to academic study
Pupils and headteachers in some of the schools reported that parents share the same view
 - Six schools suffered from a lack of access to quality apprenticeships in the area
 - For many pupils who live in rural areas, apprenticeships do not pay enough to cover transport
 - Some school leaders foresaw a situation where level 2 apprenticeships have low status, but level 3 and higher apprenticeships have high status and attract science and technical students who gain top A-level grades. However, there is little high-quality vocational training for middle attainers who, as a result, may drift into inappropriate university degree programmes.

Limitations of the report

The report provides some useful insights into the topics it covers but the way the report is framed has serious weaknesses.

Firstly, the coverage lacks coherence which undermines its value to schools. Careers education, for example, should be central to a report entitled 'Getting Ready for Work' but is only mentioned in passing despite the fact that in several of the case studies its significant contribution to the effectiveness of enterprise education, work experience and the promotion of apprenticeships is acknowledged by Ofsted. This report does not help schools to develop holistic approaches to pupils' personal, social, economic and career wellbeing which they need to do.

The definition of enterprise education in the report is limited and limiting. The report suggests correctly that schools should have an agreed definition of enterprise education so that they can be more strategic in their approach but this will not happen with the definition that Ofsted proposes. Schools need a definition of enterprise education which works for PSHE, SMSC, citizenship, careers and the National Curriculum and all subjects. Enterprise education involves much more than "teaching pupils the knowledge and skills they will need to be future employees and potential employers" (p.3). Enterprise education is about enabling pupils to learn and develop enterprising attitudes, values and dispositions alongside knowledge and skills so that they can achieve wellbeing in all their life roles, including work, throughout their lives.

Secondly, the contextualisation of the report is poor. In the introduction, Ofsted chooses to link it to 'the future success and prosperity of the UK in a post-Brexit world' and the need to 'harness home-grown talent and to encourage the creativity and innovation of our young people.' (p.3) as if this is something new. In the UK, we have been promoting creativity and innovation with mixed success since the *Competitiveness* White Papers of the 1980s and even earlier. The real issue that this report

fails to address is why is it so difficult to achieve sustained development in enterprise education in secondary schools?

This leads to the third major weakness in the framing of the report which is its over-dependence on a rational model of curriculum development. Explicit use of systems thinking is needed to fully elucidate the complex issues they found relating to the provision of enterprise education, work experience and the promotion of apprenticeships. Systems thinking enables observers to understand interactions, imbalances, the effects of change in one part of the system on other parts and pressures and resistance both within individual schools and the education system as a whole. A systems approach would help to explain why some schools dare not risk investing in enterprise provision (or careers provision for that matter) as senior leaders perceive that it will distract attention away from the core task of succeeding in the performance tables and Ofsted inspections. In this respect, Ofsted barely acknowledges that it is a significant part of the problem:

‘In the schools where there was limited focus on enterprise learning, school leaders told inspectors that they see themselves as accountable for outcomes narrowly focused around examinations. The development of enterprise was often seen as potentially distracting from delivering improvements around examination results. This was particularly acute in the schools visited that had most recently been judged as requires improvement or inadequate. For example, in one school judged to require improvement, the headteacher explained that his priority was on improving academic achievement and behaviour and that enterprise education was no longer a priority.’ (p.11)

The report says that Ofsted should ‘ensure that inspection judgements take greater account of the coherence and rigour with which schools prepare pupils for employment and self-employment’ (p.5), but this is unlikely to happen without a significant change in culture and systems within Ofsted.

Systemic change will have to occur in schools for the expectations of pupils, parents and staff to be transformed but this report’s weak recommendations do not suggest this is going to happen any time soon.

What actions should schools take?

Schools should:

- Read the examples of good practice in the report to pick up tips about impact and effectiveness
- Develop an holistic approach to developing pupils’ enterprise capabilities
- Proactively support low socio-economic status pupils in securing top quality work experience placements to promote social mobility
- Target pupils with risk aversion and a high time discount rate and support them in making challenging but ultimately economically rewarding choices. Extend the support to their parents, especially those who have never parents participated in higher education, and organise activities for those parents and pupils to improve their opportunity awareness and personal finance capability in relation to both higher education and apprenticeships
- Find out how they can benefit from the work that the Career and Enterprise Company is doing.

You can access the report at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enterprise-education-how-secondary-schools-prepare-young-people-for-work>

Anthony Barnes (January 2017)