

The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge's submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Education Inquiry into Literacy



Prince's Trust

Background

The announcement of the merger between The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge was made in February 2011. We are two organisations with the same aim: to help disadvantaged young people in the UK find the motivation, self confidence and skills they need to change their lives. With the numbers of young people not in education, training or employment rising and record youth unemployment figures, we are responding to a growing need by combining our support services so that together we can reach more young people than ever before. Next year we will work with 50,000 young people.

Educational underachievement: the extent of the problem

Over 10 percent of 16-24 year olds in the UK have no qualifications.¹ Compared to other OECD countries, the UK has one of the highest proportions of 15-19 year olds outside education and one of the greatest wage penalties for leaving education without secondary qualifications.² These young people are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The majority of young people The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge work with have low or no qualifications. We support young people who are at risk of exclusion, are truanting or are already outside the education system. 78% of young people on Trust programmes are educational underachievers (do not achieve 5 GCSEs grades A*-C) and around half of the young people both organisations work with (The Prince's Trust worked with over 46,000 young people last year and Fairbridge supported 3,500) have low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Our research estimates the cost of educational underachievement for the current generation of young people aged 17-24 at £22 billion³.

What we do to help: our programmes

Fairbridge and The Prince's Trust provide education which is complementary to mainstream schooling, with The Trust becoming an awarding body last September. We work with thousands of community partners including schools, pupil referral units, FE colleges, Youth Offending Institutions and voluntary organisations. Our programmes are designed to re-engage young people with learning and are a step towards more formal education through addressing their underlying issues. We aim to improve young people's life chances before they become alienated from education or entrenched in unemployment.

The young people we help often have chaotic lives, but the programmes we run work in re-engaging them with learning. We believe to make a difference to levels of literacy not only should we intervene before

¹ The Prince's Trust, (2010). The Cost of Exclusion

² OECD, (2010). Education at a Glance. Indicator A1: To what level have adults studied? Accessed at: http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3746,en_2649_39263238_45897844_1_1_1_1,00.html#d

³ The Prince's Trust (2010) The Cost of Exclusion

young people leave school but that their underlying issues must be addressed at the same time as academic progress.

Example - The Prince's Trust xl clubs and Fairbridge Centres

We work in partnership with schools and outside mainstream education provision, such as Pupil Referral Units and Young Offending Institutions, to run our Prince's Trust xl clubs.

Most Prince's Trust xl clubs provide a personal development programme aimed at young people aged 13-19 at risk of underachievement or exclusion from school. The clubs typically operate in schools on a 'closed' 2 year programme with between 10 and 15 members. They meet for at least half a day per week and, guided by an Adviser, the young people are encouraged to work together to achieve goals relating to their education, training and future lives.

Prince's Trust xl clubs can also be successfully delivered through Pupil Referral Units (PRU), schools for young people with severe emotional and/or behavioural difficulties (EBD), Pupil Support Units (PSU)/Secure Centres, Community Youth Centres, Young Offender Institutions (YOI), Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and FE Colleges. Over 1,500 young people were supported through these outside the mainstream clubs last year.

The flexibility of the programme means that it can be adapted to work within the constraints of time and setting in a particular school/centre. For example, YOIs often run it as an intense programme over a six-week period. Some youth clubs and FE colleges on the other hand will run it over the course of a year. Outside the mainstream, clubs are usually smaller in size dependant on how many people there are who would benefit from the programme.

Together, young people work towards The Prince's Trust Qualifications accredited by Ofqual, which gives young people an award, certificate or diploma sized qualification in five activity areas including citizenship and entrepreneurship. Last year (2010/11) we ran 1,084 clubs, supporting 11,552 young people. 98% of whom were educational underachievers (at risk of not reaching Level 2 – 5 GCSEs A*-C).

Prince's Trust xl club outcomes for last year:

- 79% were convinced to stay on in education
- 14% went on to employment
- 7% on to volunteering

Total of 88% positive outcomes⁴.

- 94% said they would recommend it to others
- 90% felt their skills had improved
- 89% had increased their personal development.

Most Fairbridge clients have 'multiple needs', such as homelessness, substance misuse or a history of offending. Of the 3,500 supported last year 85% went on to achieve something tangible. They returned to the classroom, started a college course, got a qualification, found a job or chose to remain in the Fairbridge programme to continue their development.

Fairbridge centres are based in 15 of the most disadvantaged areas of the UK. They offer intensive long term support for young people who are most in need.

⁴ Some young people were taking part in more than one of these at the time of measurement; the overall positive outcome percentage avoids double counting.

In November 2010, Fairbridge conducted our first national annual survey of all young people and their referral agencies. 397 young people responded to the survey across all 15 Fairbridge teams.

- 61% felt that they had improved their literacy skills since being at Fairbridge
- 91% felt that they had improved their communication skills since being at Fairbridge
- 69% felt that they had improved their chances at getting into or staying in school since being at Fairbridge

Case studies of young people on our programmes are found at the end in the Appendix.

Attitudes of young people and employers

The propensity for low literacy skills amongst disadvantaged young people, and the decline in the numbers of jobs for low skilled workers, is leaving them even further behind in the job market in the current economic climate than their more qualified peers. The latest research by the Confederation of British Industry, which was very critical of schools, showed:

- Of 500 firms, 42% of employers are not happy with school leavers' use of English. Even among graduates, 12% of employers provided remedial literacy training.
- There are 13.5m jobs that will need to be filled by 2017, but over half will be for managers, professionals and technical occupations. Whilst there is a continued need for low-skilled workers, overall numbers of these jobs have declined.

Among young people themselves, age makes a huge difference to realising the importance of literacy. 90% of young people The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge work with leave school at 16 if not before. When asked in focus groups why they did this young people told us it was because "it was the normal time to leave school" and all their friends were doing the same⁵. Young people in their twenties said how much this had negatively impacted on their lives:

"Hell yeah, it has had! If I haven't dropped out of school I would have learned to read and do maths"
(Aaron, aged 21)

Prince's Trust xl club Advisers:

"Often with literacy it is not to do with ability, it is about confidence. Young people who find it difficult to read and write learn very quickly to cover it up, either with challenging behaviour or general lack of interest. If a good teacher can show a young person that it is achievable and they are not thick then this is half the battle." (Adviser, London)

"From what I have seen young people feel, if they have poor literacy skills, that they are not smart or good enough and that they are destined to fail. They lack confidence and usually hide behind these issues".
(Adviser, Northern Ireland)

Government policies

Largely we welcome the Government's reviews and intentions to improve young people's levels of education. We believe there should be a zero tolerance approach to young people's illiteracy. However as stated above this will only be achieved for those with multiple disadvantage through more holistic support. So for example the recent announcement that young people must get their GCSEs grades A*-C in English and Maths by the age of 19 will only be achievable if the barriers that young people face are tackled first, such as lack of confidence mentioned above.

⁵ NEET research with 30 young people on The Prince's Trust Team programme 2010

What practical steps can be taken to improve and maintain literacy rates:

We believe practical steps should include supporting extra curricula programmes such as The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge Centres to provide more in-depth one to one support for young people who are facing numerous barriers to educational success. Our programmes help to move them towards achieving the more formal qualifications needed to survive in a more competitive job market.

For example the informality of Prince's Trust xl clubs is cited as a help to building confidence outside the usual classroom environment. The use of pictures, video and discussions means the focus is moved away from reading and writing to more talking, listening and doing. This in turn builds young people's confidence as they no longer feel worthless but can see that they can still contribute in a positive way. The Prince's Trust xl club is not a substitute to more formal education, but operates alongside and complements it.

Advisers views on what works:

- **One to one or small group work** - "What works well is when young people are taught either one to one or in small groups and set short goals, their achievements are monitored and achievements are recognised."
- **Being associated with something positive** – "Prince's Trust xl clubs can be hugely beneficial in building the confidence and helping with resilience if there are knock backs. Being associated with a positive image such as the club and being viewed in a different way by their school has a profound effect on their ability to engage with tasks that would have previously frightened them."
- **Teacher's targets** - "Another interesting technique that a number of our schools are using is setting the teachers targets on a weekly basis for a group of underachieving young people on what they actually learn in the lessons, therefore testing how well there are able to embed their learning. For example in one school in Hampton, the teachers are tasked with 5 pupils each and those young people have to achieve their Maths and English GCSE, they have an extra lesson a week with the teacher and then another lesson with the Head who tests what they have learnt. The teacher is then held accountable if the pupil is not learning."
- **Taking into account young people's environments** - "I feel adapting to the outside environment that young people exist in and adapting teaching methods to suit the needs of the individual will help improve and maintain literacy rates. To do this there has to be a better understanding and acceptance within schools of the issues young people face."
- **Consistency across primary and secondary schools** - "Being consistent with literacy starting from a young age/primary school and building on literacy skills the whole way up through to secondary."

The influence of factors such as technology and transitions between school stages

An Adviser's view:

"What I understand this to be is the effect of technology such as computers/iPhone and texting has had on literacy. I have seen that it has had an impact on the way young people read and write. With regards to spelling, computers now have built-in spell checks so this aid prevents people from learning from spelling mistakes but at the same time it can help identify how a word should be spelt. Also with texting, the language young people use to text is abbreviated and this has an effect on them when it comes to writing essays. Also as information is so readily available on the internet this can compromise how young people understand information. This may not be all negative, but as young people progress through school they will come into contact with it more and more and this needs to be considered when piecing together curriculums. Also young people who struggle with literacy sometimes find that being able to use a computer gives them extra support when completing assignments etc. "

Appendix: Case Studies

1. The Prince's Trust

Alisha Llewellyn

Even at primary school, Alisha's behaviour was violent and she could not understand why she was always so angry. It took until she was 14 for her to be diagnosed with partial deafness and ADHD. After being removed from several schools, she finally joined a Prince's Trust xl club at Smart Project Llanelli. At first, Alisha was very negative but she slowly grew in confidence and, importantly, began to support others in the group. Within a year Alisha achieved her xl Bronze and Silver Awards, the first time in her life she had received a certificate. The difference the programme has made to Alisha is monumental. She has changed from an angry, confused and violent girl to a supportive, hard working and ambitious one who is coping with her hearing problems and her ADHD. She is now studying Travel and Tourism at Swansea College and hopes to become a holiday representative and see the world.

Dominic Grove

Dominic was taken into care at the age of 9 and was forced to move away from his family and school friends. He could not settle in the new school or the area and was constantly being excluded. After starting secondary school, Dominic was moved from care home to care home and became known to the police because of the various anti-social activities he was engaged in.

Dominic had been out of education for a number of years when he came to an alternative education provider, the McKee Centre. He was living with his gran and her partner and started attending one morning a week, eventually requesting to come in full time. The centre signed Dominic up for The Prince's Trust xl club.

At first he struggled to work with the other young people on the course, wanting to do everything his own way. His self-esteem and confidence was at a very low and he wouldn't engage with the team activities and often opted out. But through the support of his Adviser and the other young people in The Prince's Trust xl club he started to come out of his shell. Through the course Dominic decided he wanted to pursue a career in media and applied to study Level 2 Media Studies at the local college. He was accepted and has now completed the course and even won a college award for his commitment. Next year he is going on to study for his Level 3 National Diploma in Media Studies.

2. Fairbridge - Kiesha

When I first heard about Fairbridge I thought same old, same old...but once I did Access I realised it was different to anything I'd tried before. I'd been in trouble quite a bit with the law and was living in a hostel when I heard about Fairbridge. I'd finished school but dropped out of college as it wasn't working for me...Access took me seriously out of my comfort zone – sleeping in a tent was not something I'd done before!

I've done loads with Fairbridge over the last year....I recently took part in an art project where we were able to make up characters that reflected parts of ourselves...I want to help young people who are going through the same tough times that I was. My lyrics in the performance are about that. I don't want others to go down the same path that I have. There needs to be more help for young people in situations like mine. I've found it really hard to get a job because of my previous convictions. It gets you down.

Fairbridge works because you can relate to the staff. It's really important to have this. They've helped me stay focused and I'm now looking to do an apprenticeship in Childcare through a local college. It's work-based so I'll still be able to get some proper experience.