

APPG for Education Inquiry Call for Evidence: Do schools prepare young people for their future careers?

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by APPG

Deadline for submissions: 13th June 2016

In its 2015 Education and Skills Survey, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) found that over half of employers were concerned that in the future there would not be enough people available to fill skilled job roles. The report stated that, “The [education] system must change, with more focus on developing the aptitudes and attributes that set young people up for success in both work and life – which matter much more to employers when recruiting than academic results alone”.

Others, however, take a different approach, suggesting that the balance has swung too far towards skills in recent years, to the detriment of the transmission of knowledge in the classroom. Schools Minister Nick Gibb identified at the Education World Forum earlier this year that the government has “reformed the national curriculum in England to put in much of the subject knowledge that previous governments – under the influence of the 21st century skills movement – had taken out”. He cited Daniel Willingham, professor of cognitive science at the University of Virginia, who “explains how the ‘thinking skills’ most prized by schools and employers are dependent upon background knowledge”.

What value should we place on the need to promote other skills that prepare our children for the future, besides strictly academic ones? Is there a role for teaching skills in the classroom, or should teachers focus on imparting subject knowledge? If this is the case, how can young people acquire the attributes that the CBI and others believe are necessary for the workplace?

This APPG for Education inquiry will examine how well our schools are preparing young people for their future, with a particular focus on their readiness for the workforce.

If we are to develop a more productive workforce that will contribute to our growing economy what does this mean for our schools? Are young people experiencing the right balance between acquiring the requisite subject knowledge and developing the skills and understanding that will make them employees who creatively enhance the productivity of companies? Should schools be helping young people to develop soft skills, IT skills and a flair for entrepreneurship? What are the skills, knowledge and understanding that world-class employers look for in the expanding area of apprenticeships? Are we providing our schools with the correct framework and sufficient resources to prepare our young people for the world of work?

We intend to develop a clear set of practical recommendations, so that the inquiry is useful to educationalists and policymakers, parents and young people.

The APPG is keen to engage with a wide range of organisations and individuals including schools, colleges and universities; teachers, lecturers and education professionals; young people and representative bodies; employers and representative bodies; parents and carers; educational publishers and suppliers; and other stakeholder organisations.

Terms of Reference

The Inquiry seeks written evidence in response to the following questions:

1. What should our schools be focusing on in order to prepare young people for the future?

We should first recognise that against an increasingly challenging policy and funding landscape, many schools deliver extremely high quality education and learning provision to young people. In Cheshire East we are lucky to have excellent schools operating in our Borough. However, improvements can always be made, and we are aware that not all areas enjoy such a strong position. Often enhancement of skills is achieved through more effective partnership working rather than assigning full responsibility to schools. Industry must play its part by clearly articulating the skills it requires from its existing and future workforce, and working with local schools to ensure teachers and governors understand those skills and the employment opportunities available for young people possessing them.

Whilst academic achievement and subject knowledge are important, it is also crucial that our young people have exposure to, and the opportunity to acquire, wider transferable / employability skills.

The ultimate goal is to provide our young people with the highest quality education and learning which leads to employment opportunities, sustainable employment and career fulfilment. Therefore, schools should focus on not only subject knowledge, but those skills required by employers, particularly those skills identified as lacking in young recruits.

Whilst we should not expect all young people leaving school and/ or college to have all the skills required to seamlessly enter employment, we should aim to address the current employer view that too many young people are not work ready and lack basic skills such as communication, time management, team work and resilience.

In an increasingly competitive employment landscape, if schools do not recognise and seek to address the wider skills businesses are looking for, they are not preparing young people in the best way to enter into the world of work (and / or further education and training).

In Cheshire and Warrington the LEP has established a private sector only Skills Board who have identified a number of skills young people lack when they leave full time education, and which put them at a disadvantage when applying for jobs and training opportunities. These are:

- customer service and communication skills
- entrepreneurship
- analytical and reporting skills
- problem solving skills
- project management
- people and team management skills
- ICT skills

2. Should schools play a role in developing skills, or should subject knowledge be prioritised?

Skills should be embedded into the wider curriculum alongside subject knowledge. It should not be a case of either or, or that focusing on skills results in less time to teach subject matter. We recognise this may mean developing new and innovative models of teaching and learning in some cases, but there are examples of excellent practice where projects successfully bring together the two.

Local industry feedback aligns to the national view that skills should be given parity to subject knowledge to ensure our young people have the skills required to progress into employment and or training.

However, it should be noted that national funding policy does not always align to this view. To allow schools to embrace skills development, changes are required at national level to place priority and emphasis on this activity.

Schools should understand the wider community in which they exist, including the economic landscape. This is to understand the local growth and key employability sectors, where future jobs will be located and what skills young people will need to take advantage of these opportunities.

However, this requires capacity that many schools do not have and furthermore, economic intelligence does not easily flow into schools and where it does the language and presentation can be a barrier. This is where Local Authorities and LEPs can have a significant role in supporting schools by sharing intelligence and data, in a user friendly and digestible way, engaging in a two way skills conversation on a regular basis, and facilitating links to local employers and project opportunities that develop wider skills. For example Cheshire East Council commissioned a Study by Pye Tait in 2015 into Skills Needs in the area, including Deep Dives into two priority sectors – Advanced Manufacturing and Rail. The reports included significant employer input and excellent sector skills demand intelligence. The reports have been shared with local partners including schools and colleges, to support more effective alignment of provision and employer needs.

It should also be noted that digital/ technology skills are a cross cutting skills need that local employers from all sectors reference as a gap. Some of this relates to operating skills, but increasingly employers are reporting a lack of technical 'build and creation' skills.

3. Who should be responsible for ensuring that young people develop soft, financial and entrepreneurial skills?

Employers would not describe these skills as 'soft', these transferable skills are often seen as important, if not more, than qualifications.

Responsibility should be through a partnership between schools, employers, local authorities and LEPs. However, if schools were held to account for delivery of these skills through the inspection framework, this would increase parity and focus.

If employers are serious about wanting to ensure a pipeline of suitably qualified young people to meet their workforce needs e.g. address skills shortages, replacement demand and new technologies, they need to clearly articulate what these skills are and work with schools and local education and learning providers to shape curriculum, raise the profile of their sector and inspire young people to enter into those careers. Teachers are not, and should not be expected to be, experts in all sectors and career pathways and there is a clear responsibility for industry to support this activity to develop its future workforce.

Employers often cite that they would like to better engage with local schools but don't know how. In Cheshire East the Skills and Growth Company has been established by Cheshire East Council and will support employers to engage more effectively with schools and colleges.

4. Do education providers have the resources to prepare young people for the workforce?

Education providers often do not have the resources, and in some cases the skills knowledge and links to employers, to fully prepare young people for the workforce. This could, in part, be addressed nationally through funding reform.

However, by facilitating strong links with local employers schools can develop programmes which embed these skills through short term projects, summer activities, work experience and input into curriculum without a heavy financial burden, however, staff capacity is required and in some schools this can be a challenge.

Cheshire East Council has established The Skills and Growth Company, and ASDV, to "create employment opportunities for all and ensure everyone has the opportunity to work". The company has five Key Performance Indicators, one of which is to "Ensure education provision meets employer needs".

The Skills and Growth Company is supporting schools to prepare young people for the workforce by sharing intelligence on growth sectors and current/ future employment opportunities and skills needs, and facilitating links to local employers to increase partnership working, collaboration and work experience opportunities.

The lack of strong locally focused careers information, advice and guidance in schools is also an issue. We know that Ofsted reported nationally poor CIAG relating to vocational pathways, and this view is reinforced by Cheshire

and Warrington employers. Without resource – both financial and appropriately trained and experienced staff - CIAG in schools will not drive young people to aspire to careers aligned to local labour market opportunities. For example in Cheshire and Warrington approximately 30% of our economy is STEM related, yet fewer than 15% of young people progress into STEM further education.

The LEP recognises that resource is an issue for schools and has therefore developed an ESF project in partnership with the local authorities to deliver an exemplar CIAG model linked to local LMI and employment opportunities to all schools in the sub region. It is envisaged this will highlight the wider skills employers are seeking and support schools to embed these into the wider curriculum.

5. To help the APPG create a practical set of approaches and recommendations:

a. What example are there of schools and colleges preparing young people well for the workforce?

The Young Enterprise Initiative is operating across a number of our schools and is having a positive impact. However, the cost associated with the project can be a barrier to some schools.

Locally we have an initiative called the Pledge which is led by an ex-Head Teacher and supports schools to engage with employers and young people to understand and develop the skills employers are looking for through activities such as; work experience and employment readiness programmes. The initiative was developed through a local Chamber of Commerce and the Skills and Growth Company are working with the initiative to further align to local intelligence and the labour market. It is clear there is a demand for this type of activity as within less than a year the project has a 55% penetration into Cheshire East secondary schools.

The Skills and Growth Company are also exploring links to initiative such as 'Stepping into Business' which promotes STEM activity and skills in primary schools, as we recognise the skills should be embedded at the earliest age.

There are a number of 'offers' to schools from commercial and other organisations to provide support for this agenda, but these tend to be sector focused, adhoc or not aligned to the local labour market and the volume of approaches to schools can also be a barrier. The Skills and Growth Company aims to work with the Council, to support schools to navigate through the options available and select those opportunities most aligned to local needs.

b. What examples are there of employer-led initiatives that have had an impact?

Cheshire East Council commissioned research into the Digital Creative Industries (DCI) sector in the area in 2015, this included the impact of the sector on the local economy and how the sector could be supported to maximise growth. The recommendations highlighted DCI as a growth sector that would benefit from a co-ordinated support offer. As a result the 'DCI Taskforce' was established, Chaired by the Skills and Growth Company, which brings together local employers to address the challenges identified by the sector. The work programme has included skills, including activities to link local employers to young people to share expertise, skills and offer work experience opportunities.

The Barclays Tech Innovation Challenge is another example of an employer-led initiative that has an impact on developing employability skills of school pupils. They have offered this to Year 9 & 10 pupils at local schools for the last 3 years. They invite schools to submit a team and provide them with an Innovation project-brief. Over a period of approx. 12 weeks, staff from Barclays will then provide personal coaching to the students to support them to develop their solutions. At the end of the project, the teams are required to present their ideas back to senior tech staff at Barclays.

Cheshire and Warrington is almost at the conclusion of our FE Area Based Review and one of the key priorities identified by our local employer base, through the Employer Skills Board, to improve FE provision was greater industry collaboration, including co-design of, and investment into provision, sharing of industry assets and access to CPD for tutors. Employers also recognised they have a big part to play in this agenda and that they have a responsibility to engage with schools and colleges to support education and learning. They identified the 'how to engage' as the main barrier. This is the same for schools and in Cheshire East the Skills and Growth Company aims to be that 'glue' to bring industry and education/ learning together.

An example of recent success is the development of a industry led Rail Institute of Technology bringing together local employers with a UTC, FE and HE to provide the career pathways and skills the sector needs both now and in the future to our young people.

We hope to replicate similar success stories for schools as we progress this agenda.

How to submit evidence

The APPG for Education welcomes evidence in response to the terms of reference from individuals and organisations. Submissions should include a contact name, contact details and organisational details as appropriate. The deadline for submissions is Monday 13th June 2016.

We would prefer responses to be submitted by email to educationappg@ranelaghuk.com as an attachment in MS Word format, although you can send your evidence to:

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