

Introducing primary children to the world of work

1 BACKGROUND

In the [*Career Strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talent*](#) published by the Department for Education in December 2017, there was an emphasis on the role of primary schools in introducing children to the world of work and the government's plan to test and fund career activities that works. This is the first time that in any government publications tribute is paid to the important role of early years in developing children's career attitudes and aspirations. Looking at the past social mobility reports, from Coalition government's [*Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility*](#) (2011) to recent reports by the [*House of Lords Select Committee*](#) (2016) and the [*Social Mobility Commission*](#) (2017) there is no reference to the vital role that primary schools play in raising aspiration, broadening horizons and connecting children's learning to their future lives, or to the need to tackle stereotyping that children often have about jobs. Therefore, it is great news that the significance of career learning is acknowledged by the policy makers and some resources are allocated to develop it further.

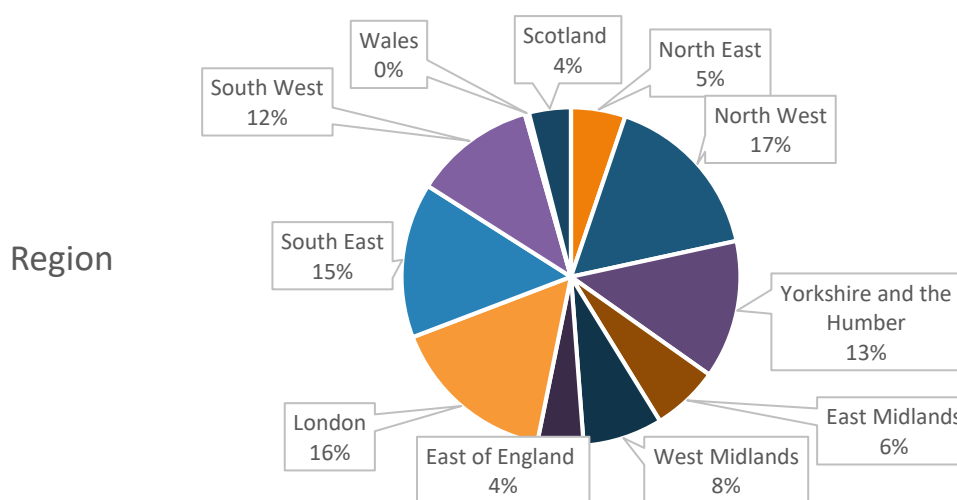
This opportunity is valuable for organizations who have been working in this area, however, there is limited robust evidence exist in the UK showing what exactly works and what has been done in primary education in a comprehensive review.

At Education and Employers, we have laid out evidence to show why working with primary schools children is vital and its impact on [*academic achievement*](#), challenging gender stereotyping and changing attitudes. In a landmark research published in January 2018, [*Drawing the Future*](#), we showed the role of gender in career aspiration of 7-11 year olds and how social capital and social media can have large influence on who children want to become when they grow up. In the same survey, we asked children about how they heard about their dream job and a very small number of them indicated through school; which is one of the key messages of the report with regard to the what primary schools are doing to help children hold less stereotypical views about their future and more realistic aspirations about the world beyond classroom walls.

In March 2018 the charity Education and Employers in collaboration with National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and Times Education Supplement (TES) decided to launch a survey to find out how primary schools in the UK are responding to the career strategy and what their approach to the issues discussed above is. The survey is aimed to highlight very simple themes and will be used for follow up some in-depth analysis of what works in primary what is the landscape of career learning looks like in early years of children's education.

2 THE SURVEY

The survey has gone out in March 2018 to a network of schools through NAHT, TES and Primary Futures. We have received 250 responses from across the country. The majority of the respondents are head teachers (29%), deputy head teachers/ member of school's senior leadership team (22%) and classroom or subject teachers (26%). The majority of schools who responded to our survey are large size schools educating 200 plus children.



3 FINDINGS

We started the survey by asking whether primary schools have heard about the career strategy and the mention of career learning in primary. The majority of the respondents weren't aware of this (67%). Only around 33% have heard about the mention of primary career learning in the government publication in 2017. We then asked from those who hear about it whether they had discussions in their school on how to act upon this. From this sub-sample of respondents 54% had talked about the implications of the policy for their provisions (43 individuals, of which 31 are member of senior leadership team and head teachers).

In our past studies we have seen that researchers believe it is important to start introducing children to the world of work from early age, as early as pre-school sometimes. So we asked schools at what age they believe children should start learning about jobs and the finding echoes what we already located in the literature. 47% of those who responded to this question believed children should start learning about the world of work at reception and under the age 5 and around 21% think year 1-2 are the most appropriate age.

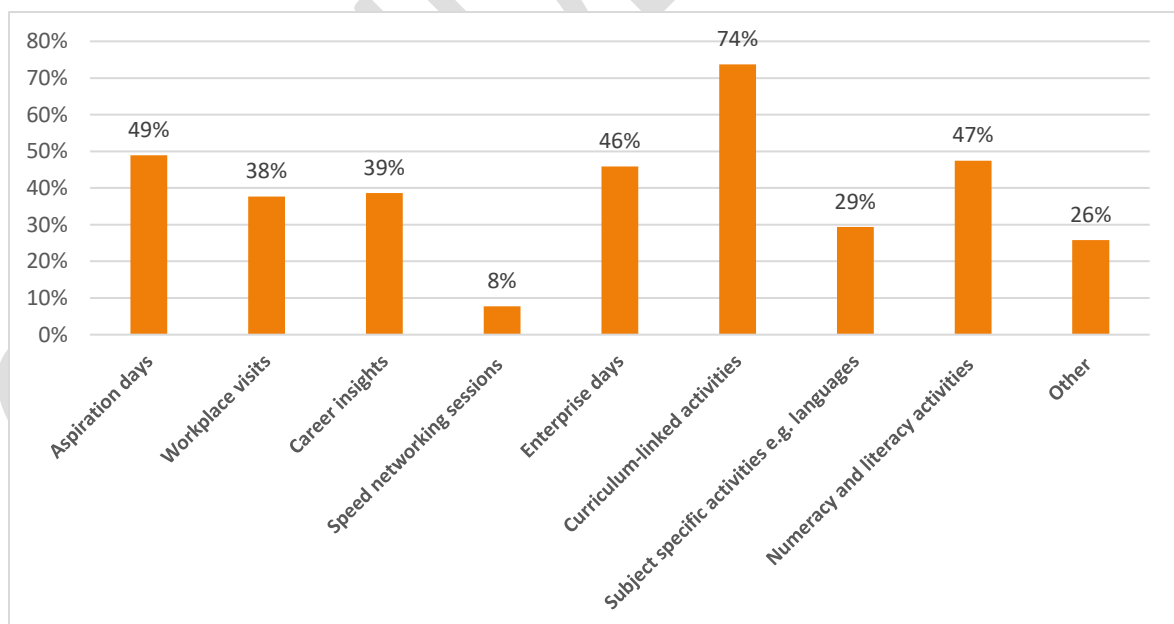
Table 1. At what age do you believe children should start learning about the world of work?¹

Age 5 and under	114 (47%)
Age 5-7 (year 1,2)	50 (21%)
Age 7-9 (year 3 and 4)	32 (13%)
Age 9-11 (year 5 and 6)	28 (11%)

In the second part of the questionnaire we were keen to find out more about the type of activities primary schools deliver to introduce children to future jobs, if any. 81% of the respondents said they organise activities in their school with the aim of increasing children's understanding of the world of work. This is very interesting as the majority of the schools said they didn't hear about the career strategy, yet they are already doing activities to support children's career learning. Most of the schools who do organise these type of activities they run them on yearly (43%) or termly (41%). There is a smaller group of schools run regular activities for instance on every month (9%) or every week (7%).

To show a range of activities in primary schools, the responded selected what they have organised for their children. The result is presented in chart 1.

Chart 1. Activities schools organise for primary children



¹ Around 8% of the responses are not categorised as they were generic comments

The most common activity in our respondents' schools is curriculum-linked activities followed by aspiration days, numeracy and literacy activities and enterprise days. Some of these activities don't involve volunteers from the world of work and schools are able to organise such programmes using their internal staff but it seems that the schools in our sample value the employers' engagement in career learning activities. 94% of the schools think it is important to invite volunteers from the world of work to engage in activities offered to children in primary.

In primary schools which responded to our survey 53% said they have a member of staff who is responsible for organising these activities and 47% didn't have a dedicated person to organise career learning events.

We asked teachers why they think engagement activities such as those they mentioned they organise are important and what outcome they expect from introducing children to the world of work. Table 2 summarises the responses.

Table 2. why introducing children to the world of work is important?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
They can be very influential in broadening children's aspiration	64%	33%	2%	0%	1%
They can bring learning to life and increase motivation	64%	33%	1%	1%	2%
They help to challenge gender stereotyping about jobs and subjects studied	66%	32%	1%	0%	1%
They help children to believe in their abilities (self-efficacy)	50%	44%	2%	0%	5%
They can change children's attitude positively towards school	44%	46%	5%	0%	6%
They can change children's attitude positively towards learning leading to improved academic attainment	44%	46%	4%	1%	6%
They help link school subjects to the world of work	57%	39%	2%	0%	2%
They can help parents/carers to gain insights to the world of work.	30%	47%	10%	3%	10%

The positive impacts of engaging children with career learning activities seems to be very evident. 66% of the teachers who responded to this question strongly agree that introducing children to the world of work can challenge gender stereotyping about jobs and subjects. This is a major issue for schools as children can typically aspire to traditional pathways to future limited to what they hear from their network of family and friends; this in turn has an impact on their decisions about who they want to become when they grow up. Introducing children to the world of work is also believed to be influential equally on broadening aspirations and bringing learning to life, 64% of schools strongly agreed.

Lastly, we asked schools to explain what barriers prevent them doing more with employers in their school.

The majority of our respondents believed time constraints are the major barrier in organising more activities with employers (60%). The second biggest challenge is availability of employers/volunteers and teachers and difficulty in communication and/or scheduling a suitable time for both groups. From the responses we gathered there is a lack of coordination force to arrange connections with local employers. In some areas also employers are not as responsive or engaged which makes it challenging for teachers to approach them easily. And in the third place is curriculum; 22% of the teachers believe that there is too much focus and pressure on achieving data driven results which squeezes the curriculum and restricts time to organise and run activities linked to employers in schools. One teacher specifically told us *“....the curriculum is already overcrowded. I only organise things that fit in with the curriculum objectives I am teaching, but I ask the visitors to be ready to talk about their jobs, alongside the other reasons why I have invited them and invite the children to ask questions about their job.”* Heavy focus on reading, writing and math curriculum appears to stop some teachers to spare time for other activities.

The cost of organising events has burdened some of the respondents, 15% of the respondents believe funding is an issue for schools and under the current economic system things aren't easy and they heavily rely on volunteers.

There are other barriers that the respondents referred to such as DBS checks and the location of schools which are huge challenges in real life. Schools in London for instance benefit from being surrounded by a wide range of employers comparing to schools which are located in rural areas with limited access to local employers and wide range of industries. Safeguarding is also a very serious matter when it comes to children and teachers have to take necessary measurements to reassure the safety of their students which might entail more resources.

Table 3. Challenges for organising activities with employee volunteers

Availability	Curriculum	Cost	Location	Safety	Time	Age	Other	Unsure
28%	22%	15%	2%	4%	60%	2%	3%	2%