



# Employer involvement in schools

## A practical guide for headteachers



## About The NFER Research Programme

Against a backdrop of economic recession, high youth unemployment and a sustained reduction in public funding, the task of supporting young people to make effective post-16 transitions into further education or employment is highly challenging. This document is based on a literature review produced under **The NFER Research Programme**, as part of the **From Education to Employment** theme. Collectively, these reviews identify strategies for assisting young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) to make effective post-16 transitions into further learning, or into employment.

The literature reviews in the NFER **From Education to Employment** series build on another piece of recent NFER research (Spielhofer *et al.* 2009), which identifies three discrete sub-categories of young people aged 16–17 who are NEET. These sub-groups are:

- ‘open to learning’ NEETs – those young people who are most likely to re-engage in education or training, in the short term
- ‘sustained’ NEETs – those young people who can be characterised by their negative experience of school, involving high levels of truancy and exclusion, and low academic attainment
- and ‘undecided’ NEETs – those young people who may be similar in some respects to those who are ‘open to learning’ NEET, but are dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them and their inability to access what they want to learn or train in, and/or in their preferred ways of doing so.

Through these literature reviews, NFER offers school leaders and others an unique perspective on the research and evidence-based practice over the preceding five years in this field, and also identifies gaps for future research in the area.

## Ofsted Common Inspection Framework

As a result of discussions with school leaders, this guidance has been mapped where possible against the current Ofsted Framework, effective as of January 2012. This mapping is shown in shaded boxes at the right-hand side of each bullet-point (where such a connection is relevant), using the following abbreviations:

**AoP:** achievement of pupils at the school

**QoT:** quality of teaching in the school

**B&S:** the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school

**QLM:** the quality of leadership in and management of the school

**OE:** overall effectiveness

The numbering given (for example AoP 41: 6, OE 46: 3, etc.) after the abbreviation indicates the particular paragraph and bullet-point within the Ofsted Framework which applies to that particular statement in this guidance, as appropriate. In some cases, however, there will not be an appropriate direct and explicit connection to be indicated in this way.

## About this document and the literature review on which it is based

This document offers practical guidance for school leaders and teachers, based on the key messages emerging from the NFER publication *Employer involvement in schools: a rapid review of UK and international evidence*. This literature review explores what the recent research evidence can tell us about the different ways that employers and schools can engage with one another, the principles underpinning successful engagement and effective practice. It also touches on the potential impact of these on young people.

Please note that most of the research evidence behind this topic emerges from secondary school settings. This guidance, therefore, is particularly useful to school leadership and management, as well as teachers and career advisors, at that level. However, there is clearly also some relevance here for primary schools and their heads and governors, as early exposure to the links between education and work can have a variety of beneficial results for pupils, both in their primary school experiences and further along the educational and employment pathways. Additional examples of guidance for primary schools can be found on the website for professionals working in careers education, information, advice and guidance ([www.cegnet.co.uk](http://www.cegnet.co.uk)) under the projects and initiatives tab.

## Guidance on employer involvement in schools for headteachers, mapped to the Ofsted Framework

Perhaps now more than ever, links of various kinds between schools and employers have a strong and positive role to play in the success of both groups – and most importantly for the success of pupils while they are in school, and beyond. This includes their progression into further education, training, and/or into employment, after the end of the compulsory stage – and thus in addressing the NEETs issue. Employers' involvement in your school can help forge practical and conceptual links between classroom learning and the real world, strengthening the sense of purpose, ambition and direction for your pupils.

The literature review investigated a number of interlinking questions, and the resulting key messages for school headteachers are grouped here under three main headings:

- in what ways can employers best be involved in the life and activities of your school?
- what makes such involvement successful for all concerned – and especially for your pupils?
- what sorts of impacts can be expected for your pupils, your school and the employers as a result of this engagement?

### Types of employer involvement in schools

There are three main ways that employers can engage with your school:

- at the whole-school level, in its leadership and governance
- at the level of the teacher and classroom – through their support for, and development of, the curriculum
- at the pupil level, in developing their skills and knowledge – through work experience, workplace visits and work-related learning.

[QLM 45: 1, 3-5; OE 46: 3, 5 & 6]

## Employers' involvement in leadership and governance

- The relationship-building process embodied in this kind of engagement, although not directly connected to pupils and their learning can be vital for your school. The school can benefit from the commercial skills of volunteer employers and business people, and their insights and advice in decision-making, communication and team-working. They can therefore 'add value' practically at governance level, as well as through helping to shape and maintain the mission and ethos of your school.
- The employer also benefits from involvement with a school, which you can use to encourage partnerships. In some places, such connections support growth for local industry, and therefore the supply of jobs and other opportunities for businesses themselves.
- Moreover, employer involvement at leadership and governance level in professional development, and similar connections with staff, can mean recommendations of pupils that are to everyone's advantage.

[QLM 45: 1, 3-5; OE 46: 3, 5 & 6]

## Employers' involvement in supporting and developing the curriculum

- Joint curriculum planning and development between teachers and employers can have a number of positive outcomes. It can extend the range and depth of learning experiences for your pupils, and also help to develop their employability and life skills.
- Businesses can work with you on identifying current (and upcoming) local economic and employment needs, to develop your curriculum and thus improve the 'fit' between learners moving on from your school and the skills and qualification demands employers both face and set.
- At the more everyday classroom-practice level, you can often obtain useful lesson resources and specific learning activities of varying kinds from local and national employers (particularly from third sector and media-based organisations).

[AoP 41: 2 & 6; QoT 42: 1 & 8 – and 43; QLM 45: 1-3; OE 46: 1 & 6]

[AoP 41: 2 & 3; QoT 42: 1 & 8 – and 43; QLM 45: 3 & 4; OE 46: 1 & 6]

[QoT 42: 1, 3, 8 – and 43; OE 46: 2 & 6]

## Developing the skills and knowledge of learners through involving employers

- Involve employers at all levels of your school's operations (for example: governance and leadership, curriculum planning, resourcing and activities, classroom visits and mentoring/shadowing for individual pupils) to raise pupils' aspirations and careers awareness in general, as well as their specific competences. Do however note that activities which support these linked outcomes are usually separate and different.
- Developing links with employers may be more important and impactful at different points in the learner journey – for instance, where there are strong patterns of worklessness, employer involvement at the primary school level will help to present strong role models and affect career awareness and aims at a crucially early stage for pupils who may be more at risk of becoming NEET.
- Involving employers can help to ensure pupils develop a wide range of skills and knowledge, for example, basic skills such as literacy and numeracy to more generic employability skills such as team work and communication.

AoP 41: 1, 3, 4 & 6; QoT 42: 1-4, 8-10 -- and 43; B&S 44: 4; QLM 45: 1-3; OE 46: 1-3, 5 & 6]

- There are many different ways in which to partner with employers. Some of the types of involvement you may want to explore are the provision of specialist lessons, offering pupils new prizes with a vocational focus, promoting role models from particular ethnic and similar sub-groups in the community, trade training, and school-based enterprise activities.
- Employers also have a clear role to play in enhancing the careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision in your school. Make it as easy as possible for them to contribute, and ensure that all stakeholders see the benefit for them in building relationships and long-term partnerships in this area. Indirectly, many or all of the involvements mentioned in the ‘supporting and developing the curriculum’ sub-section immediately above can be strengthened still more, through work experience placements, workplace visits and work-related learning.

AoP 41: 1, 3, 4 & 6; QoT 42: 1-4, 8-10 – and 43; B&S 44: 4; QLM 45: 1-3; OE 46: 1-3, 5 & 6]

### Employers’ engagement through work experience placements, visits and work-related learning

- These interrelated activities are some of the highest-profile and most valuable ways of involving an employer in your school. Early preparation of work experience, such as visits and classroom learning that is explicitly work-related, can help make these activities more effective and are valuable in themselves.
- Some forms of work experience differ from the one-week experience placement that you may be used to. For example,
  - **work experience:** a planned learning opportunity usually lasting up to four weeks
  - **‘virtual’ work experience:** via computer-simulated workplaces
  - **job shadowing:** observing a competent worker throughout the day
  - **co-operative education,** linking coursework with a placement
  - **job twinning:** allowing another pupil to join a peer on a co-operative education placement
  - **apprenticeships:** formal longer-term, paid and largely work-based programmes.
- It is important to organise work-related learning opportunities for pupils who display behavioural or other significant problems in school as they may be less often considered for such activities. However, these students can thrive in them and gain considerably (often returning those gains to the classroom, corridor and playground).
- It is important to avoid duplicating existing social divides and inequality in matching your pupils to opportunities, however. This means that, often, schools need to be quite directive, or to use careers professionals and other systems to find placements, rather than depending on the pupil. This produces better chances of a placement that challenges stereotypes and expectations. You also need to ensure that the pupil, staff and the business share clear, agreed understandings of the aims and ground rules. Close supervision of various kinds will of course be needed throughout.
- Employer engagement can mean pupils travelling to a workplace, or businesses coming into a school. In the highest-performing schools in England, networks of former role models pupils are key sources of speakers, helping to reinforce pupils’ aspirations through providing role-models who have recognisably familiar backgrounds, perspectives and narratives.

[AoP 41: 3 & 6; QoT 42: 1, 3, 6 & 10 – and 43; B&S 44: 1, 3-5; QLM 45: 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7; OE 46: 1-3, 5 & 6]

- Mentoring schemes, whereby professionals mentor pupils, can be an effective way to influence student's decisions about their career and contribute to their feelings of engagement towards careers. These schemes can involve face-to-face discussions or they can be virtual, but one-to-one mentoring, rather than group mentoring, is particularly effective. Schools might consider approaching retired professionals and tradespeople as mentors to pass on their knowledge.
- Other kinds of work-related learning your school can develop and support include workshops and enterprise projects and related activities.

[AoP 41: 3 & 6; QoT 42: 1 3, 6 & 10 – and 43; B&S 44: 1, 3-5; QLM 45: 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7; OE 46: 1-3, 5 & 6]

### **Main features of effective employer involvement, and of work-experience**

- A successful school-business partnership should involve:
  - a clear vision of what both parties want to achieve
  - good communication among partners
  - partnership and connection
  - commitment, cooperation and leadership across all stakeholders
  - time to build relationships and for professional development
  - flexibility
  - focus on curriculum
  - well structured programme design
  - consideration of regional economic and development priorities
  - early intervention.
- Successful work experience is marked by nine key features:
  - appropriate and effective matching of your pupils with your placements
  - appropriate and effective preparation of your pupils for the new situation
  - clear, realistic pupil expectations of the placements
  - high pupil awareness of how they can develop and the skills they can gain
  - sufficient time allowed for reflection and evaluation by all
  - tangible outcomes from the work your students undertake
  - links to the individual skills and interests of each pupil on placement
  - rewards for good-quality work
  - possible prioritisation of those pupils who are likeliest to go straight into employment after leaving school

[AoP 41: 2-6; QoT 42: 1-4, 8-10 – and 43; B&S 44: 1, 4, 5 & 6; QLM 45: 1-5 & 7; OE 46: 1-6]

## The impacts of involvement by employers

Good employer involvement can benefit pupils, the school, and even businesses themselves.

### Outcomes for learners

- Broadly, involving business and employers helps your pupils with increased confidence, better understanding of the world of work and may improve attainment, through:
  - increased vocational skills, knowledge and understanding – leading especially to improved work-readiness and transition to either work, or further education
  - better learning outcomes – such as integration of theory and practice and positive attitudes to learning
  - improved health and wellbeing – increased self-esteem, and/or reduced behaviour-management issues
  - greater enjoyment and engagement – leading to higher attendance and more positive relationships with teachers, mentors, and peers
  - better employment and earnings – enhanced opportunities, sustained employment, higher earnings and better careers decisions as well as increased confidence in career choices (leading to better retention
  - improved family life – more stability and harmony.
- In terms of NEETS prevention and reduction, employer engagement can be especially important for those who would normally be disadvantaged in the labour market, helping to remedy poor access to networks and limited support at home.

[AoP 41: 1-6; QoT 42: 2, 4, 5 – and 43; B&S 44: 1, 4-6; QLM 45: 1-3 & 7; OE 46: 1 & 4-6]

### Outcomes for schools and teachers

Among the benefits that schools, their leaders and staff can look for, there may be:

- greater revenues and enhanced resources of all kinds
- strengthened governance
- innovative options for curriculum design and delivery, greater alignment between theory and practice
- an improved profile and reputation in the community
- improved staff skills (for example in leadership, management and marketing)
- better professional development opportunities for staff – through, for example, industry experience and updated subject knowledge
- higher morale, increased enjoyment and increased reflectivity for all staff.

[QoT 42: 1-4, 8-10 -- and 43; B&S 44: 1-6; QLM 45: 1-7; OE 46: 1-6]

### Outcomes for employers

Employers can gain from their involvement in three main ways:

- positive enhancement of recruitment and retention
- increased awareness amongst, and reputation with, the community
- development of their own skills and competencies.

They also report increased self-confidence in their employees, a better understanding of others, and greater job satisfaction and motivation.

[QoT 43; B&S 44: 4; QLM 45: 3-5; OE 46: 6]

This guide is based on a review from The NFER Research Programme which is available for free at [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/REIS01/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/REIS01/)

**Further practical guides for headteachers are available to download from our website.**

**Curriculum and qualification needs of young people who are at risk of disengagement: a practical guide for headteachers**

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RCAQ02](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RCAQ02)

**Careers professionals' involvement with schools: a practical guide for headteachers**

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RCPI02](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RCPI02)

**Preventing young people from becoming NEET: a practical guide for headteachers**

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RSRN02](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RSRN02)



## The NFER Research Programme

This Programme was set up in 2011. Funded by NFER and partners, it is developing partnerships with organisations and individuals who share our commitment to solving unanswered challenges young people face in education. The Programme targets key areas of education, highlighting gaps in existing evidence and conducting new research to provide evidence to fill the gaps. Current areas of focus are: *From Education to Employment, Developing the Education Workforce and Innovation in Education.*

© 2013 National Foundation for Educational Research

**National Foundation for Educational Research**

The Mere, Upton Park,  
Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ

T: 01753 574123

F: 01753 691632

E: [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk)

[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)