
Partnerships with employers in secondary and special schools

February 2020



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Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2019-2020. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, Careers Wales, leadership teams and staff of secondary and special schools, local authorities and regional consortia. It may be of interest to the Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, work-based learning providers, further education colleges, universities and employers who offer work-related experiences to learners.

The report examines the range of partnerships and links that secondary and special schools across Wales have with employers. It considers the range of learners' experiences and the characteristics of effective links between schools and employers. The report also examines how senior leaders in schools are starting to consider how to plan for the cross-cutting theme of careers and work-related experiences in the new Curriculum for Wales.

In addition to evidence from school inspections, inspectors visited 23 secondary and two special schools known to have partnership arrangements with employers or businesses. Inspectors also gathered evidence from employers, school and local authority staff and learners. They carried out a survey of employers and scrutinised relevant school and local authority documentation. For further detail on the report evidence base, see Appendix 1.

Background

The Federation of Small Businesses report (Egan, 2017) stated that the development of enterprise education in schools in the UK and across the world had been a notable feature in education systems over the last century, but it had proved difficult to measure its impact. A strong element of enterprise education is employer engagement and the way it can provide access to real-world, work-related experiences for learners.

In January 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government (2008) published "Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds in Wales". This statutory framework was intended to ensure that "young people are ready to take their place in a rapidly changing world within the global economy" (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008, p.2). It set out learning objectives for key stage 3, key stage 4 and post-16 learners.

The Welsh Government made substantial changes to the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in 2015. One aspect of these changes was that the requirement for learners to undertake a work experience placement was replaced by the Enterprise and Employability challenge. This activity was designed to develop learners' skills,

whilst providing opportunities for learners to develop enterprising skills and attributes and enhance employability.

In 2017, Estyn's report, 'Careers: the implementation of the careers and world of work framework in secondary schools', found that partnership working between schools, employers and other organisations had declined substantially since Estyn's (2012) report on the implementation of the Careers and the world of work framework. In addition, the report identified that in most cases schools did not have sufficiently rigorous processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the contributions of partnerships with employers to the Careers and the world of work provision, or clear criteria to measure the impact or value for money offered by external partners.

Prior to 2015, Careers Wales maintained a database of possible work-focused experience placements. This requirement was removed from the Careers Wales remit in 2015 in line with a reduction in funding. Schools were slow to respond to this change and the use of work-focused experience had decreased considerably in the majority of schools surveyed for the 2017 report (Estyn, 2017). In 29% of schools, no learners participated in work-focused experience.

In England, an Ofsted (2016) report '[Getting ready for work](#)' investigated the availability and effectiveness of enterprise education and work-related learning for pupils in secondary schools. Inspectors found that schools often cited the pressures on finance and curriculum time as reasons for not prioritising enterprise education. Opportunities for pupils to take part in meaningful work-related learning or experiences were limited at key stage 4 and business involvement in some schools relied too heavily on personal networks of teachers and parents.

In Scotland, 'Developing the Young Workforce' is Scottish Government's (2014) youth employment strategy. Employer-led regional groups across Scotland aim to connect employers with education. Education Scotland's (2017) report on [Review of the implementation of the Career Education Standard \(3-18\), the Work Placement Standard and Guidance on School/Employer Partnerships](#) found that, although these developments are still at an early stage, most schools have developed their links with local and national employers in order to provide meaningful work-related learning opportunities for young people. In some cases, schools have made significant progress in this area, offering a wide range of courses in consultation with employers, leading to the provision of industry-relevant qualifications.

These findings from England and Scotland highlight the need for Wales to consider carefully how best to develop partnerships between schools and employers as they design their new local curricula. The Welsh Government has funded a few initiatives that are designed to support and encourage schools to develop partnerships with employers. These initiatives are explained in the next sections.

Business Class

Business Class is partnership developed between the Welsh Government, Careers Wales and Business in the Community (BITC). By bringing together schools and businesses, Business Class aims to improve learners' understanding of the world of work, enhance their career choices and develop their employability skills. Depending

on the needs of the school, support is provided across four key areas:

- Leadership and governance – head teacher mentoring
- Curriculum – running industry workshops
- Enterprise and employability – interview skills, CV writing and work experiences
- Wider issues - including community involvement and parental engagement

The Education Business Exchange (EBE)

EBE is a database facilitated by Careers Wales that is designed to give employers the opportunity to work with schools to develop curriculum programmes for learners directly linked to business, employers and work experience. Employers agree to be added to the database and indicate what activities they can offer schools. Careers Wales business engagement teams facilitate the communication between schools and employers.

This database aims to give schools the freedom and confidence to develop employer-supported, curriculum-enhancing programmes for their learners. The EBE is part of Careers Wales Vision (2017) – ‘Changing Lives’, which aims to facilitate better links between schools and employers. EBE provides support for young people to develop their careers through a range of activities, including:

- visits to industry that focus on the curriculum
- work or business simulations, involving workshops with employers
- work-related community participation through volunteering
- industry days or careers fairs
- extended work placements for identified learners

Initially, the project started as a pilot in Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Ceredigion between November and December 2017, with the project being launched officially in January 2018. In January 2020, there were 13,853 employers registered on the Exchange. Careers Wales has, to January 2020, trained 233 schools and pupil referral units across Wales to use the EBE¹.

Big Ideas Wales (BIW)

Big Ideas Wales is an initiative led by the Welsh Government to develop an entrepreneurial culture in Wales to support the delivery of the Economic Action Plan, and is part-funded by the European Union. BIW operates in several schools across Wales, providing opportunities for entrepreneurs to deliver one or two-hour workshops to explore enterprise. The events are designed to provide an inspiring engagement with entrepreneurs, explore the entrepreneurial mind-set, generate ideas and develop an understanding of business creation.

Valleys Task Force

The first ‘Our Valleys: Our Future’ delivery plan was published in July 2017. Aligned to this initiative, the Welsh Government announced Community Focussed School

¹These figures were obtained from Careers Wales as part of our evidence gathering.

Business Manager pilots in nine areas from July 2018 to complement the School Business Manager pilots announced in 2017. Seven of the Community Focused School Business Manager pilots intended to support the delivery of the initiative by increasing connections between local communities and schools in the East, West and Central Valley areas. The focus of a number of pilots was on jobs, skills and entrepreneurship.

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) project

The STEM Cymru's 'Girls into STEM' programme has allowed groups of girls to visit high profile employers to see the opportunities on offer for girls to work in the technical industry. They can explore the prospects for future employment and apprenticeship pathways.

Existing curricular arrangements and proposed changes

The current arrangements are that work-related education forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered learners aged 11 to 16 at maintained schools and focuses on skills that would be relevant in the work place. Careers education on the other hand focuses on advice that will guide learners in making decisions about further training or education or on entering the world of work.

One of the four purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales is to develop successful, ambitious learners who are ready for life and the world of work. In the published [guidance](#) (Welsh Government, 2019), careers and work-related experiences is a cross-cutting theme to develop across all areas of learning and experience, for 3 to 16-year-olds. The proposed new curriculum arrangements state that age-appropriate careers education will be available within each area of learning and education (AoLE). Where appropriate, relevant work-related experiences will also be available. Specifically, careers education will also be included within the Health and Wellbeing AoLE, to reflect the importance of career-related decisions on learners' health and wellbeing. This AoLE emphasises skills such as responding to challenges and developing positive relationships that are integral to learners' later careers.

Careers and work-related experiences guidance will be developed to support practitioners. All schools will need to ensure that due regard is given to this guidance when planning careers education and work-related experience activities for learners as part of the new curriculum. The guidance will be delivered in partnership with a range of key stakeholders.

Recently, the Welsh Government has funded a pilot of the Gatsby Good Career Guidance Benchmarks (Holman, 2014) across the Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. The benchmarks define world-class careers guidance with a view to them being used across Wales in due course.

Main findings

- 1 Where schools engage well and work closely with employers, learners have a better understanding of the world of work and the skills and attributes they need for the future. The effectiveness of this partnership work usually depends on the vision and drive of the headteacher, senior managers and school staff.
- 2 Schools engage with employers in a variety of ways. Many schools offer learners a suitable range of work-related experiences, including experiences that are part of the curriculum, themed days when the usual timetable is suspended, extra-curricular activities, visits to places of work, or through visiting speakers.
- 3 Only a minority of schools now offer work experience² for learners. This is because many schools have been slow to respond to the change in Careers Wales responsibilities. Where schools have maintained a member of staff responsible for careers, they often still provide learners with opportunities to participate in work experience. For example, one school visited in North Wales has a broad network of about 130 employers and nearly all Year 10 and Year 12 learners undertake work placements during the summer term. A few schools collaborate to fund the costs of ensuring that work placements are safe and secure for learners, and that employers are vetted. However, generally, learners are expected to arrange their own work placements, with some support from the school for learners who struggle to achieve this.
- 4 A few schools have developed mutually beneficial links with local businesses. One school has strong links with a steel-making site. Learners can visit the site to see how the plant operates and learn about the value of apprenticeships. In another school, learners interested in engineering work with a local toy manufacturer gain useful real-life experiences, using computer-aided design and developing prototypes for new toys.
- 5 Many of the schools visited engage with the Education Business Exchange initiative and invite employers (for example the armed forces, the police force and the construction industry) to visit the school to talk to learners about their careers. These visits often include completing mock application forms and taking part in interview role play. One school has a strong partnership with two construction companies that visit the school to focus on the skills required for the industry, including communication, leadership and team working.
- 6 Many schools offer a wide variety of enterprise activities through the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. For example, some schools use the Dragons' Den concept from television to encourage learners' entrepreneurial skills. Learners are taught to develop business plans, and to work out costs, sales, profit and loss to enable them to promote a product to potential investors from local businesses. A few schools provide work-related experiences within the community, mainly through the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. For example, one school has particularly strong

² Work placements offered by employers for learners

links with the health and social care sector, and learners visit care homes to gain social skills through talking to residents. Another school has links with community projects that provide work-related experiences in gardening.

- 7 Nearly all schools visited hold an annual careers fair for their learners, to which they invite local and national employers, colleges, universities and other providers. Learners attend the fair to talk to employers and discuss their career options, but many schools do not measure the impact of these careers fairs well enough.
- 8 Where employers engage well with schools, they can use initiatives to promote apprenticeship programmes within their organisation. They raise learners' awareness about the skills and attributes required to be successful in the job market. One employer commented on the benefit to their own staff development, by giving staff the opportunity to work with young people in preparing them for the world of work.
- 9 In a very few local authorities, staff have a strong understanding of the economic labour market in the area. One local authority has a dedicated education, employment and training team that work directly with schools to promote and facilitate work-related education and partnerships with employers. This helps teachers to promote an understanding of the world of work through the curriculum.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 Consider carefully the cross-cutting theme of careers and work-related experiences, and how learners can develop as enterprising, creative contributors, when they design their new curriculum
- R2 Consider how they can enhance learners' understanding of the work place by providing a wider range of real experiences in partnership with employers
- R3 Evaluate the impact of partnerships with employers and of work-related experiences on learners' understanding of the world of work

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R4 Ensure that local curriculum planning takes good account of careers and work-related experiences and involves employers

The Welsh Government should work with Careers Wales and other partners to:

- R5 Evaluate the impact of the Education Business Exchange, Business Class, and Big Ideas Wales programmes
- R6 Produce guidance to support school staff in making links with employers

1 The types of engagement links schools have with employers

10 Schools currently engage with employers in a variety of ways. They offer learners work-related experiences, including:

- Short blocks of work experience
- Visits to industry
- Visits from employers
- Work-related community participation
- Enterprise activities
- Coaching and mentoring
- Careers fairs

Short blocks of work experience

11 Work experience is provided at the discretion of each school. It forms part of the Careers and the world of work curriculum. It is the responsibility of each school to provide a programme of work-focused experiences for their learners.

12 Only a minority of schools now offer work experience for learners. This is because many schools have been slow to respond to the change in Careers Wales' responsibilities. Schools who have maintained a member of staff responsible for careers often continue to provide learners with opportunities to participate in work experience. In one school, pupils have opportunities to seek work experience during the school holiday periods. This is facilitated by a learning coach from Careers Wales. The school also holds a 'Work-related Week' in place of the traditional work experience model. This has received positive feedback from learners.

13 In another school, all learners undertake work experience for one week during Welsh Baccalaureate fortnight. Many of the arrangements are made by parents and learners, before being reviewed by school staff. The work experience process is managed by a learning coach, who has a database of employers that are able to provide work placements. Most of the learners in key stage 4 said that the work experience had helped them to develop a range of skills such as working with others in a professional environment, and to gain an understanding of the workplace. The experience also helped learners to improve their confidence. Nearly all learners who undertook work experience thought that it was beneficial. Although no learners undertook work experience in an area in which they hoped to pursue their career, the experience confirmed those sectors in which they did not want to work.

14 Four schools in north Wales visited as part of this thematic review offer a wide range of work experience. This is mainly due to the commitment of the school staff and parents. For example, one school has a broad network of approximately 130 employers and nearly all Year 10 and Year 12 learners undertake work placements during the summer term. A few local schools collaborate to fund the costs of ensuring that work placements are safe and secure for learners, and that employers are vetted. However, in other schools, learners are generally expected to arrange their own work placements, with some support from the school for learners who struggle to arrange this.

- 15 In very few cases, schools do not always forge strong links with parents and carers to ensure that they are fully informed about the work that the schools do with employers.

Case study 1: Llanidloes School

The school employs two work experience co-ordinators who make sure that work placements are effectively managed and are a positive experience for learners.

The co-ordinators help prepare learners for their work placement. They ensure that all learners are provided with safeguarding and health and wellbeing guidance from the school's health and safety officer before they go on work placement.

Two co-ordinators, who are Institute of Occupational Safety and Health trained, carry out pre-placement visits to all employers to provide information about the learners, evaluate health and safety procedures, and carry out the necessary insurance checks.

The co-ordinators help learners to set targets about what they want to achieve from their work experience. All learners complete a work placement diary to encourage reflection on their learning and skills development. Co-ordinators visit all learners during their work placement to review their progress and check on their welfare.

The co-ordinators carry out an annual review of learners' experiences on work placement, using feedback from learners and employers to refine the list of recommended placement providers. They maintain strong relationships with learners, their parents and carers and participating employers. For example, teachers discuss work placement opportunities during one-to-one meetings during Year 10 parents' evenings.

Visits to industry

- 16 A few schools have developed useful links with local businesses that are mutually beneficial to the school and business, enabling learners to learn about the world of work. One school has strong links with a steel-making site in Port Talbot. Learners can visit the site to see how the plant operates and learn about the value of apprenticeships. In another school, engineering learners work with a local toy manufacturer. These learners gain real life experiences using computer-aided design (CAD) and developing prototypes for new toys.
- 17 In one school, the science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) enrichment programme seeks to engage learners with business and industry wherever possible. For example, involvement in STEM Cymru's 'Girls into STEM' programme has allowed groups of girls to visit high profile employers. They find out about the opportunities on offer for girls to work in the technical industry and explore opportunities for future employment and apprenticeship pathways.

Visits from employers

- 18 A few schools engage with employers who visit the school to talk to learners about careers in the armed forces, police force and the construction industry. These visits often include mock application form completion and interview role-play. For example, one school, has a strong partnership with two construction companies. These companies visit the school to focus on the wider opportunities in construction, including communication, leadership, team working and collaboration. The school runs a 'have a go' week that enables learners to experience, for about an hour, different careers, such as hairdressing, catering and construction. Through a business engagement adviser, the school organises enterprise and university talks. Learners are encouraged to complete a job-matching quiz. They engage well and are motivated to pursue different career options. Many learners feel positive about the way the school takes into account their interests when investigating work-related opportunities.
- 19 Another school has many partnerships with local businesses, including a partnership with a construction contractor who is refurbishing and extending the school. The contractor carries out mock interviews and curriculum vitae development. Where learners are successful, the contractor offers a place on an apprenticeship programme. One school works with Barclays Life Skills in Year 10 and Year 11 to develop employability skills, including completing job application forms. The school also offers partnerships for vulnerable learners. For example, the school works with learners aged 11 to 16 years old who are risk a becoming not in employment, education or training (NEET) through the Cynnydd project. This project helps them to develop social skills and resilience and prepares them for work when they leave school. This school also invites employers to the school to discuss careers with learners as part of an 'aspiration day'.

Work-related community participation

- 20 A few special schools provide work-related experiences within the community. For example, one school has particularly strong links with the health and social care sector, where learners visit care homes to gain social skills through talking to residents. Another school has a number of initiatives with community projects such as 'Green Wellies' that provide work-related experiences in gardening. One school works well with community organisations to find work placements for vulnerable pupils, such as those with Downs Syndrome, and provide support for local parents as part of their work on citizenship and community.
- 21 Another school has developed strong links with a local animal welfare charity. This was initially a work-related community project. Following its success, the school developed the project for a small number of learners who were experiencing challenges at school and were at risk of becoming disengaged and lacking in confidence and self-esteem. The school linked this work to a level 2 BTEC qualification on Countryside and Environment. There has been a significant impact on learners' attitude, attendance, personal pride and learning. Learners said that they enjoyed the freedom, flexibility and responsibility provided by the work-related experience. This school also has well-established links with a number of community parks and primary schools where learners carry out ground works and gardening activities, such as building a wild life garden.

Case study 2: Ferndale Community School

The school serves a disadvantaged area in the Rhondda Fach valley. A lack of local employment opportunities is compounded by poor transport links to other areas. The school tries hard to combat these disadvantages. It has established the Fern Partnership community enterprise, which provides local employment outside the school, including in the Flying Start nursery and the local library. The school uses the partnership to provide work 'tasters', work experience, and Year 11 apprenticeships to learners who would otherwise have no opportunities to experience the workplace.

The school is a major provider of work and community support in the area, and so helps to open up the wider community to the benefits of education and training.

The school has an effective partnership with a housing association that provides a variety of services to the school, including work placements and work experience for learners. School staff also take opportunities to work with companies in the area, inviting them into the school to speak to learners and provide information about jobs and training.

The school provides extension activities for more able learners, as well as practical work-related support. It provides extensive personal support for learners and families and also seeks to widen horizons and broaden experiences beyond the local area.

Enterprise activities

- 22 Many schools offer a wide variety of enterprise activities through the Welsh Baccalaureate. For example, schools use the Dragons' Den concept from television to encourage the development of learners' entrepreneurial skills. Learners are taught to develop business plans, and to work out costs, sales, profit and loss to enable them to design and promote a product to potential investors from local businesses. One school runs an enterprise week, during which groups of learners plan a business enterprise and pitch original products to a business. This school has also run RAF STEM days for 300 learners over the last three years. During these days, learners apply their scientific knowledge and skills to create a propelled glider.
- 23 The school also runs a competition in partnership with Eon Rheidol Power Station to develop a number of products such as an underwater remotely-operated inspection vehicle, and an anemometer and wind-direction finder for turbine locations. In another school, learners noted that the Welsh Baccalaureate enterprise project is useful if they want to go into business and were able to explain how the project enabled them to take on different responsibilities in a group.
- 24 At one special school, learners with complex needs make crafts for Mother's Day, Easter and Christmas to raise funds for learners to go on school trips.

Coaching and mentoring

- 25 Nearly all schools visited coach learners on employment skills, such as writing a curriculum vitae and preparing for interviews. A few schools invite local employers in to school to carry out mock interviews with learners and give them feedback on their strengths and where they can improve.

Careers fairs

- 26 Nearly all schools visited hold an annual careers fair, often facilitated and organised by Careers Wales. They invite local and national employers, colleges, universities and other providers to be present. Learners attend the fair to talk to employers and discuss their career options. In one school, all learners attend a careers fair organised by the local university, which includes local and regional employers. The staff noted that this high profile event has a significant impact on linking learners to potential career pathways. In another school, learners in Year 9 attend a careers fair organised by Careers Wales that is held at the Royal Welsh showground. Many schools do not evaluate the impact of the careers fair or gain information from employers and learners to plan future events better.
- 27 In general, only a few learners are aware of the full variety of pathways available to them. Nearly all learners are guided to courses at university or further education colleges. Very few learners are aware of other opportunities for further study, such as apprenticeships. Variations in Careers Wales funding and remit have contributed towards inconsistencies of impartial advice and guidance.
- 28 Many schools often use Careers Wales webinars about specific pathways such as the fire service and the police force. The webinars are a useful resource for teachers to explain to learners about the different career pathways and choices. But many learners and teachers find the Careers Wales website difficult to navigate when trying to find information about their choices, particularly learners with additional learning needs.

2 The characteristics of schools with effective links with employers

- 29 Where schools have effective links with employers, they typically display the following characteristics:
- Strong vision and commitment from senior leaders
 - Learners engaged in work-related experiences that impact on their wellbeing, employability skills and career choices
 - Strong, purposeful links with employers
 - Appropriate deployment and development of staff who know their learners and their career aspirations, and who understand how to prepare learners for the world of work
 - Use of labour market intelligence and tracking data to understand the local economy
 - Evaluation of partnerships with employers
 - High-quality partnerships with other providers, national initiatives and engagement with parents

Strong vision and commitment from senior leaders

- 30 In a few schools, senior leaders have a clear vision and sound strategic planning in relation to the new Curriculum for Wales. In this context, they have developed a variety of stimulating work-related experiences. They have a strong sense of moral purpose and understand why it is important to help learners gain employability skills. Senior leaders communicate the importance of partnerships with employers well to all their staff. They are fully committed to forging strong links with employers and recognise the valuable contribution they make.
- 31 In schools that have a strong focus on providing work-related experiences for their learners as a priority, learners benefit from well-established arrangements with a wide range of local and national employers. A few schools have strong links with the Business Class initiative and work with a number of high profile employers, such as the Principality Building Society, Tata Steel, Bluestone and Aberthaw Power station. A few schools have developed their partnerships with local employers such as local radio stations and gardening companies.

Case study 3: Ysgol Nantgwyn

The school communicates well with parents by text messages, Twitter and the school website. It has strong links with local employers who advertise work placements on the school website. The school's careers adviser makes sure that parents and learners are aware of the opportunities and actively brokers work experience.

Learners from all age groups take part in a worthwhile range of projects and experiences. There is an effective link to Business Class with the Principality Building Society, which provides a variety of sessions to

learners, including financial literacy and reading sessions. The school also has good links with a wide variety of other local and national firms.

The school's science department promotes both apprenticeships and academic pathways. It is particularly active in encouraging girls into engineering and takes part in international competitions and challenges, winning the global Lego league tournament for programming robotics. The girls who were involved have now moved into tertiary education and come back to school to coach a Year 9 group for the next competition.

The school has two enterprise projects for learners who need extra support. One group makes and sells products made out of recycled wooden pallets. The other group, in an original project, has written and published a user guide on how to stay safe online by playing a popular online game. The activity was led by learners and introduced them to a wide range of skills, including graphic design and entrepreneurial thinking. By selling their publication, they are able to buy online accessories for the game and take part in international online competitions.

As an all-age school, staff begin work-related education for primary-aged learners and also target learners ready for their next steps at the end of key stage 4. As a result, more learners know where they are going to continue their academic or vocational studies at the end key stage 4.

Case study 4: Pen Y Dre School

The school serves a highly disadvantaged area. Senior leaders and staff are proud of the school's role in the local community. The school aims to keep academic and vocational pathways open for all learners.

The school has good partnerships with a variety of local industries across the Heads of the Valleys area. In particular, there is a strong, long-standing partnership with Legal and General Insurance through the Business Class initiative. The employer meets regularly with school staff and tailors the services it provides to the needs of the different cohorts of learners. The company's liaison manager writes bespoke programmes that are specific to the needs of the school.

These programmes aim to raise aspirations and self-esteem for those learners most in need, as well as providing work-related education and experiences for all learners. They offer a variety of opportunities including mock interviews, coaching, financial literacy lessons, and employability workshops.

Learners engaged in work-related experiences that impact on their wellbeing, employability skills and career choices

- 32 In schools where learners have the opportunity to participate in meaningful work experience, this helps them to gain valuable skills and insight into future career paths. In these schools, learners are prepared and supported well by taking part in mock interviews or learning how to write a Curriculum Vitae. They are briefed well prior to attending the work placement and debriefed at the end of the experience. In a few schools, teachers use tailored approaches to meet the individual needs of the learner. They match learners with suitable employers skilfully to provide the most appropriate support to ensure learners' wellbeing and prepare them for a successful adult life.

Strong, purposeful links with employers

- 33 Many schools have developed strong links with a wide range of local and national employers. In the best cases, these schools use employers well to provide work-related experiences. For example, one school has an effective partnership with Bluestone, their Business Class partner. This constructive working relationship has had a positive impact on addressing the needs and aspirations of learners. Learners and their families recognise the value of these opportunities and acknowledge the importance of developing employability links within the local community.
- 34 One school, working with partners through Business Class, ran a six-week programme to introduce 14 learners to work-based learning. The school had recently been involved in a refurbishment programme. During this time, they utilised their close working relationships with the contractors to provide apprenticeship training for all Year 11 learners. The company also delivered a series of skills-based presentations, along with Curriculum Vitae modelling and mock interviews. Of the four learners who were short-listed for an interview, three secured an apprenticeship place on leaving school.
- 35 A few schools have strong links with the Education Business Exchange (EBE), which enables them to engage with employers and invite participating businesses into school to give presentations and talks to learners about career opportunities. For example, as part of a local building project, Costain staff visit a school to talk about the variety of career pathways available to learners, particularly promoting non-stereotypical roles, such as girls in engineering.
- 36 One school was part of the pilot for EBE and had training delivered by Careers Wales on how EBE could be used. A few middle leaders are beginning to use the EBE tool to find ways of integrating work-related experience into the schemes of work, for example using a carpet fitter to give input into mathematics lessons. Careers Wales has identified this school as delivering good practice and invited the school to present to networks of employers and school leaders. Overall, many of the schools visited do not use the EBE database enough to engage with employers or to arrange work-related experiences.

Appropriate deployment and development of staff who know their learners and their career aspirations, and who understand how to prepare learners for the world of work

- 37 Teachers and other school staff are generally highly committed to supporting learners in participating in work experience. A few schools overcome logistical pressures for staff by allocating blocks of time for mentors to visit widely-dispersed work placements. In the best cases, schools have experienced co-ordinators who serve as a point of contact between the school and partner employers. They communicate clear expectations about the need for meaningful and challenging tasks that take account of learners' abilities and aptitude. They help learners prepare for the placements, for example by ensuring that they all receive useful safeguarding and health and wellbeing guidance from the school's Health and Safety Officer. At the end of the work placement, employers complete an assessment that co-ordinators use effectively to write a beneficial formal feedback report for each learner.

Use of labour market intelligence and tracking data to understand the local economy

- 38 Many schools have a reasonable understanding of the local economy and employability opportunities within the local area. For example, one school gives all Year 9 learners a valuable and informative careers booklet that provides them with useful information about the local economy and labour market. A few schools have formal systems to track learner destinations and can inform future planning of learners' career choices.

Case study 5: Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) local authority

RCT local authority is strongly committed to the importance of work-related experience and the role that the local authority can play in supporting schools. The local authority education, employment and training team (EET) works directly with schools to promote and facilitate work-related education and partnerships with employers. The team maintains a database of employers who are able to offer work-related experiences for learners. Members of the EET visit schools to provide information about apprenticeship pathways, work experience opportunities and work-related education.

The local authority has a high number of apprenticeships in the council with a few members of staff gaining qualifications through the apprenticeship training programme. They are currently investigating how they can take on more apprentices through the City Deal initiative.

The local authority produces a summary of labour market information for schools and post-16 curriculum planning aims to consider the gaps in the local curriculum based on this information.

Staff in the local authority have a strong understanding of the economic climate in the area. They have a dedicated education, employment and

training team that work directly with schools to promote and facilitate work-related education and partnerships with employers. This helps teachers promote work-related experiences through the curriculum.

The local authority runs a number of different programmes including:

- **Communities for work.** This programme works with eight areas in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Staff work with 16 to 24-year-olds who are not engaged in education and training (NEET). It is a bespoke individual programme to find what each individual wants to achieve and to explore the barriers that are preventing this. The programme is about building confidence and self-esteem. Once these issues have been addressed, staff discuss the interests of the learner and procure training to enable the learner to meet their ambitions.
- **Platform 1 and Ignite.** These programmes are designed for people with learning disabilities to help them develop independent living skills. Staff look for opportunities for people to engage in volunteering within the local authority's internal services and undertake voluntary work placements.
- **Employment pathway.** This programme is designed to improve essential skills. The programme works with 47 employers who have current job vacancies. These employers help develop the programme for the people they would like to employ. The programme is tailored for individuals to achieve the qualifications required by the employer. Each individual who achieves their qualifications is guaranteed an interview. For example, six young people were employed by Whitbread, a leading brewery, on completion of the programme.

Evaluation of partnerships with employers

- 39 In a very few schools, leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of work experience, careers fairs, advice and guidance, and visiting speakers systematically as part of their self-evaluation processes. In the best cases, they identify some of the strengths of their work in this area, and have systems in place to measure success accurately. They also clearly identify areas for improvement and drive forward change and improvements.

Case study 6: Ysgol Bro Myrddin

Every learner goes on work experience towards the end of Year 10. Almost all learners are matched to work placements by the head of year, who interviews each learner to explore the suitability to their career plan to the experience and skills an employer can offer. All employers are given the opportunity to complete feedback forms about each learner. Teachers discuss the experiences with learners when they return to school and use this feedback to evaluate the experience and debrief learners.

High-quality partnerships with other providers, national initiatives and engagement with parents

- 40 The most effective schools have well-established links with other providers, such as further education institutions and universities, to support learners' career choices. A very few schools also develop strong links with work-based learning providers and staff encourage learners to consider the apprenticeship route for learners to pursue as another pathway for career success.
- 41 Many schools visited are successfully involved with and make effective use of a number of national initiatives, such as Business Class (BC), Education Business Exchange (EBE) or Big Ideas Wales (BIW), or work closely with Careers Wales. Many schools say that they tend to use EBE to engage with employers to visit school for talks rather than as a tool to source work experience. Special schools visited reported that EBE only targets employers for mainstream learners and not those learners with additional learning needs. Almost all schools visited highly value the work of BIW as a resource to engage motivational speakers to present to learners.
- 42 The most effective schools have strong engagement with parents and carers both as a resource for providing links with local businesses and employers and for developing impartial advice and guidance on the variety of careers pathways available to their children. One school is in the early stages of re-introducing a parents' forum and friends of the school initiative. They are starting to build an extensive alumni network to help to secure greater employer involvement in future curriculum provision.

3 What are the challenges for schools engaging with employers and employers with schools?

What are the challenges for schools engaging with employers?

- 43 Almost all schools visited reported that there are several challenges in engaging with and developing partnerships with employers. These include:
- School staff say that establishing contacts with employers and developing high-quality work-based experiences are challenging due to the pressures of preparing learners for GCSE examinations.
 - Many schools do not have a co-ordinated, strategic approach to partnership working. Only a very few schools help staff to plan events with employers.
 - Decreasing resources and staff reductions often lead to cut-backs on non-statutory activities such as work-related experiences.
 - There is a lack of a centralised system for planning careers provision and support from employers.
 - Many schools do not have a good understanding of the business landscape in their area and do not keep in contact with the Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses or the Confederation to British Industry.
 - In many schools, staff require training and development to develop the understanding and skills for delivering careers and work-related experiences.
 - Many schools do not develop strong enough partnership arrangements with employers locally. They lack of knowledge of labour market intelligence.
 - Many schools do not take full advantage of their parent base expertise about career paths or to secure work-related experiences. They do not always use the Parent Teachers Association well enough or discuss work-related experiences with their governors.
 - The majority of learners interviewed during visits expect to leave Wales to find work. In many schools across Wales, most learners are not aware of the work available in their local area that would enable them to inform their career choices. In many cases, where learners can secure a work placement, they cannot gain employment as there are no vacancies.
 - In special schools, the tendency of some parents to be over-protective of their children can be a drawback when schools try to provide work-related experiences. Parents are often nervous about their children taking part in supported work experience, or do not believe that they are capable of carrying out such activities.

What are the challenges for employers engaging with schools?

- 44 Our survey of employer opinions suggests that:
- Small employers often lack the time and resources to dedicate to a sustained partnership arrangement.
 - Almost all have concerns about their responsibilities for the health and safety of young people on work experience. Many are concerned about safeguarding and

child protection issues and the current disclosure and barring requirements.

- Most expressed difficulties in trying to make contact with schools.
- Many employers do not understand what work-related experiences schools want to engage in. A few employers are unfamiliar with the Welsh education system. They do not understand academic years and how they relate to the age of learners.

45 Where employers overcome these challenges, there a number of benefits to their business and staff. For example, they can promote apprenticeship opportunities to learners and staff are able to enhance their professional development through working with young people.

Appendix 1: Self-evaluation questions for schools on how working with employers can help them prepare for the new Curriculum for Wales

The following questions may be useful for schools to ask themselves as they begin to think about and prepare for careers and work-related experiences in the new Curriculum for Wales.

- How can we develop new and meaningful curriculum experiences to ensure that learners experience work-related activities?
- How can we build-in more partnership working with employers throughout the curriculum?
- How could we offer high-quality, meaningful work experience for our learners?
- How can we measure the impact of work-related experiences such as careers fairs?
- How does our school link with other schools to plan work-related experiences that share the expertise of local employers and businesses?
- How does our school work with Careers Wales?

Appendix 2: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- visits to 23 secondary schools
- visits to two special schools
- interviews with head teachers, middle leaders and school staff
- interviews with learners
- interviews with employers
- survey of employers
- scrutiny of school documentation
- interviews with local authority officers
- scrutiny of local authority documentation

Inspectors visited a number of secondary and special schools across Wales, chosen for their existing work in developing partnerships with employers. Inspectors also visited a selection of local authorities in Wales during January, February and March 2019. Inspection evidence was gathered from employers, school staff and learners in the form of an aide memoir, interviews and 25 responses to an employer survey.

Schools visited as part of this study were:

- Blackwood Comprehensive School
- Brynmawr Foundation School
- Caerleon Comprehensive School
- Cardinal Newman R.C. Comprehensive School
- Castell Alun High School
- Chepstow School
- Crownbridge Special Day School
- Dylan Thomas Community School
- Ferndale Community School
- Haverfordwest High School
- Llanidloes High School
- Pentrehafod School
- Pen Y Cwm Special School
- Pen Y Dre School
- St Teilo's CIW High School
- West Monmouth Comprehensive School
- Ysgol Nantwyn
- Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi
- Ysgol Bryngwyn
- Ysgol Brynrefail
- Ysgol Friars
- Ysgol Glan Y Mor
- Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin

- Ysgol Syr Huw Owen
- Ysgol Uwchradd Bodedern

Local authorities visited:

- City and County of Swansea
- Newport City Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- Torfaen County Borough Council

Glossary

LMI	Labour market intelligence
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
Work Experience	Work placements offered by employers for learners

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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