

Developing Links between Schools and Employers – From the Schools Perspective

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Executive Summary

Northumberland Information Network were asked by learn2work to investigate what links schools would ideally like to develop with employers. This is in response to the introduction of DfES requirements for work-related learning in September 2004 and a concern that the current 'offer' learn2work makes to schools has developed gradually and incrementally over time and is not necessarily customer focused.

The information contained in this report is based on interviews with fourteen High Schools and five Special Schools in Northumberland conducted during 2004.

Role of work-related learning and links with employers

- **Linking school and work:** Links with employers were seen as essential for developing pupils' understanding of how their education related to the real world and the relevance of what they learn in school to their future career. Making this link is important for motivating pupils and raising aspirations, and particularly for disaffected students and Special Schools.
- **Preparation for work:** Contact with employers was thought to be an important opportunity for students to identify and develop employability skills.
- **Personal development:** Development of personal skills including self-confidence and self-esteem. This was seen as particularly important for Special Needs students.
- **Delivery of curriculum:** Contact with employers was seen as an important teaching method because pupils respond better to 'real' people and to real experiences. Employers were also seen as a source of expertise and particularly useful for vocational subjects.

Support for the Implementation of QCA Work-related Learning Framework

- The QCA framework for work-related learning consists of nine topics or elements. Some schools felt their priority for support was assistance with the implementation of specific elements of the framework.
- Of these schools, five saw elements four and seven (see below for details) as priorities for developing further support and links with employers.
Four: Develop awareness of the extent and diversity of local and national employment opportunities.
Seven: Learn from contact with personnel from different employment sectors
- Other schools felt that support with the implementation of specific work-related learning qualifications was a priority for delivering the QCA framework.
- The importance of ensuring all students have access to work-related learning for the Government requirements was stressed, that it should not be dependent on subject choices.

Barriers to Links with Employers

The major barriers identified by schools:

- **Time:** The most important barrier. Issues fell into three interrelated categories:
 - Staff time: Insufficient time to locate employers, plan and prepare activities etc., as well as time for contact with other staff to work on work-related learning.
 - Full curriculum and timetable: Time limitation caused primarily by the number or curriculum requirements and the limited length of the school day.
 - Administration time: Time consuming nature of risk assessments, paper work and CRB checks required for activities with employers.
- **Costs and Funding:** Costs include transport, administrative support and supply cover. It was felt that there is a lack of funding to set up and run work-related learning projects with employers.
- **Staff Opinions and Priorities:** Some staff can be negative or unenthusiastic about activities with employers. It was felt that this was because they lack understanding of work-related learning and its use to their subject, it was seen as a staff development issue.
- **School/Employer Understanding:** This is seen as a fundamental problem, including employers not understanding schools' limited flexibility with timetables, curriculum and planning cycles. Other concerns included the ability of employers to work with children and the usefulness of the type of activities they were willing to provide. The costs to employers were also seen as a barrier and some schools noted that there are often no benefits to employers.
- **Number and range of local employers:** The significant lack of large employers in the County and the very limited range of industries/roles mean schools feel it is difficult to find employers that can provide the 'right' experience in terms of fulfilling curriculum requirements or personal development aims.
- **Liability:** This is a source of concern that Work-related Learning Coordinators felt is putting teachers off taking pupils out of school to employers.
- **Organisation of External Support:** There is some confusion over the organisation of external support available to assist schools with developing links with employers.

Head Teachers Perspective

- The scale of time and cost barriers are highly dependent on the resources available to a school and future plans effecting a school, e.g. 'Putting the Learner First'.
- Benefits and incentives to employers are very important, suggestions included access to school facilities or training grants.

Activities with Employers

- **Activities that nine or more schools rated as ‘very useful’ to develop further:**
 - Mini-enterprise, workshops, talks/presentations/seminars, taster days and work experience, both in blocks and regular short placements.
 - It is seen as essential that activities fit into the school curriculum, timetable and planning cycle, and contribute to delivery of QCA work-related learning requirements.

Recommendations for the Development of Schools’ Links with Employers

- **Assistance implementing the Government’s work-related learning requirements:** The QCA framework for the delivery of work-related learning consists of nine elements. A number of schools felt that elements four and seven were priorities for assistance. Other schools require assistance with implementing specific work-related learning qualifications to deliver the requirements.
- **Development of Activities:** Work experience, both blocks and regular placements, mini-enterprise, talks/presentations and taster days were most popular. They should be developed in line with curriculum requirements and the work-related learning framework.
- **Locating Employers:** Assistance with locating suitable employers.
- **Developing understanding between employers and schools:** Working with employers to develop understanding of the curriculum, planning and timetable requirements of schools and of the skills and requirements of students.
- **Database/Directory:** Of employers and what they offer.
- **Networking/Conferences:** To learn from other schools and work with employers to address barriers.
- **Assisting with locating funding:** Assistance locating and applying for funding for work-related learning activities/projects.
- **Assistance with administration:** Including risk assessments and County Council paper work. Development of electronic and online forms.
- **Develop coordination and promotion of support currently available:** Preferably with one central contact.
- **“What would you like us to do?”:** Development of this type of support would be extremely valuable.

1. Introduction

The Northumberland Information Network was asked by learn2work to carry out research into the links schools would ideally like to develop with employers.

Learn2work is the Education Business Link Consortium in Northumberland. Their role and function can be summarised as follows;

“It brokers relationships between schools and businesses for the exchange of expertise, information and people. Through a vast range of work-related experiences for youngsters mentoring projects and business simulations both sectors learn from and motivate each other.”¹

Learn2work functions as the umbrella organisation for a consortium of partners that deliver a variety of work-related learning experiences. It is the role of learn2work to assist member organisations to operate coherently across the county.

Work-related learning comprises a broad range of activities which enable students to learn about the world of work and is seen by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) as an essential part of fully preparing for adult life. It is defined as:

“planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work and working practices and learning the skills for work.”²

This research has been commissioned partially in response to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introducing new statutory requirements for work related-learning at key stage 4 in September 2004. The QCA state that direct experience of the world of work should be at the heart of work-related learning provision, therefore schools will need to develop links with the world of work. Additionally, the DfES are planning to implement statutory requirements for Enterprise in 2005 which is closely related to the delivery of work-related learning and also requires links with employers. Secondly, there is a concern that the current ‘offer’ learn2work makes to schools has developed gradually and incrementally over time and is not necessarily customer focussed or driven.

The results of this research will be used to assist in amending the current provision to schools from learn2work and with the designing of new provision.

¹Learn2work fact sheet

²QCA (2003) Work-related learning for all at key stage 4: Guidance for implementing the statutory requirements from 2004 Page 2

This report:

- Summarises the importance and role of work-related learning in schools.
- Identifies where schools may require assistance in implementing the DfES requirements on work-related learning.
- Identifies the barriers schools face in developing links with employers.
- Investigates demand, to find out what links schools would ideally like to develop with employers.
- Puts forward recommendations for future provision of support to schools for work-related learning.

2. Methodology

In order to investigate schools' opinions on developing links with employers for key stage 4, interview questions and a questionnaire were developed.

Face to face interviews were conducted with Work-related Learning Coordinators at eleven of the High Schools and five of the Special Schools in Northumberland. It had been intended to carry out face to face interviews with Work-related Learning Coordinators at all fifteen High Schools in the County but despite major efforts it did not prove possible to arrange interviews with four of them. A list of High Schools whose Work-related Learning Coordinators participated in interviews can be found in Appendix A. The interviews were designed to investigate:

- Why schools felt work-related learning was important;
- Their priorities for the implementation of DfES requirements;
- To investigate the barriers and support schools require to develop links with employers.

A copy of the questions that formed the basis of the interviews can be found in Appendix B.

A questionnaire was also developed to look at the demand for different types of activities that schools and employers could carry out. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. The activities were drawn from a number of sources to reflect the full range of types of links with employers. Questionnaires were left with the Work-related Learning Coordinator at each school, to hand out to each subject area, in order to try and identify whether subjects had demand for particular activities. However, only a low number were returned despite efforts to chase them up.

A pilot was carried out for the interview and questionnaire with Ponteland Community High School.

In order to investigate the strategic view of work-related learning three Head Teachers were interviewed. The schools where no interview of Work-related Learning Coordinator had taken place were chosen. The schools were Coquet High School, Haydon Bridge High School and Astley Community High School. The three schools also give an appropriate rural/ urban split to reflect any difference in opinion due to location.

3. Role of Work-related Learning and Links to Employers

The introduction of statutory requirements for work-related learning by the DfES illustrates the importance they place on this issue for today's students. The QCA see the rationale behind providing students with work-related learning as follows:

“Work-related learning develops students' employability and helps to prepare them for life in the increasingly complex and changing world of work. It improves motivation by helping students see how their school work relates to the world of work. It also prepares students for further education and training and to make informed decisions about courses and careers. Work-related learning is as important for students who are going on to higher education as it is for students who are going straight on to the world of work.”³

In order to establish the schools' opinion on this issue they were asked why they wanted to develop work-related learning and links with employers. Work-related learning coordinators interviewed were universally positive towards the importance of work-related learning and links with employers, as would be expected for teachers in this position.

Linking School and Work.

The majority of schools saw this as the primary reason why work-related learning was important. The general opinion was that contact with employers was essential for developing pupils understanding of how their education related to the real world and the relevance of what they learn in school to their future career.

“Fundamentally it gives children an opportunity to understand the world of work and relevance what they learn in school to the world of work.

“For a lot of kids, it's surprising, but the penny doesn't drop that doing well in school relates to doing well in employment.”

In agreement with the QCA, schools thought that making this link was important for motivating students and also for raising their aspirations.

“It raises aspirations and motivates some students to achieve their potential.”

“Lot of students in this area are potentially 3^d generation unemployed. They don't understand the structure of the working day, and find it hard to manage school days. Some of these problems, can be addressed through work-related learning, it raises aspirations.”

³ QCA (2003) Work-related learning for all at key stage 4: Guidance for implementing the statutory requirements from 2004

Special Schools in particular saw contact with employers as an important method of raising the aspirations of their pupils. They commented that it was essential so that pupils realise that there are opportunities out there for them.

“They need practical activities with employers so they realise they are perfectly capable of work.”

On the other hand, there is a difficulty with raising the aspirations of Special Needs children as they may be seriously limited in what they are capable of achieving. Therefore links with employers must provide realistic opportunities in order to raise aspirations or it may have the opposite effect.

The schools felt that direct contact with employers was necessary for pupils to make this link between school and work, to have first hand experience of employers or to be told about the importance of school by employers.

“Kids don’t see links with employers and the real world, don’t see the relevance. If an employer came in and said they need English, maths etc., even though the job’s not directly related, it has much more impact with kids. Needs to come from the horse’s mouth to tell them it’s important.”

“We bring in the Royal Navy – they can get across how important it is to get 5 GCSEs. It’s better coming from someone real rather than a teacher.”

A number of Work-related Learning Coordinators highlighted the link between work-related learning and inclusion and motivation of disaffected students.

“The primary reason for links with employers is keeping kids on board, particularly extended work experiences. Not losing kids from school. They’re still gaining qualifications and becoming employable..”

This role was particularly important at some of the Special Schools and is in agreement with the key findings of QCA work-related learning base-line study (2004).

Preparation for Work

Apart from raising awareness of the link between school and work, links with employers were also seen as important for developing employability skills. Contact with employers gives students an opportunity to identify and develop these skills but also for schools to find out the skills employers require.

“Best possible way of preparing young people for work.”

“Contact with employers improves students’ employability skills, it allows them to identify and develop them. Pupils are here 5yrs, then into the big wide world, they have apprehensions and we try to fudge the boundaries by providing contact with other adults. Informally it shows them what other people’s jobs are like and the skills required.”

Personal Development

As well as employability skills Special Schools in particular highlighted the benefits of links with employers for personal development. Work-related learning experiences give students the opportunity to develop self-esteem and self-confidence, to handle new people and situations. Special Needs children in particular may find it harder to cope with new situations and contact with employers in the ‘real world’ can help them develop the skills required to make the step into employment.

Delivery of Curriculum

Several of the Work-related Learning Coordinators viewed contact with employers as important for delivery of the curriculum, particularly for vocational subjects.

“It is important because for some subjects the curriculum tends to include involvement with businesses, particularly vocational courses. Therefore, there’s supposed to be lots of real world experience/relevant material.”

Only two schools mentioned the new statutory requirements as a reason why contact with employers was important and then in terms of its importance to those subjects that may not see the immediate relevance of employers, such as English.

Four schools mentioned the importance of contact with employers for providing expertise that teachers may not have in order to deliver the curriculum.

Over half of those interviewed felt that contact with employers was essential as a teaching method, that pupils respond better to real experiences and to people other than teachers.

“It puts subjects in some sort of context, breaks up the monotony of being told how the world works by teachers.”

“Pupils learn by doing, learn by experience. Work-related learning is one of the most important learning experiences, contact with employers means they are being taught by experts who are up to date. We do lots of work on learning strategies, we’re really keen to do more work-related learning.”

4. Implementation Of QCA Requirements For Work-Related Learning

In September 2004 the Government introduced a statutory requirement for schools; that schools include work-related learning within the curriculum for all students at key stage 4.

The QCA produced a guidance document to assist schools with the implementation of the requirement which contains a non-statutory framework setting out suggested minimum experiences for all young people. “This framework comprises nine elements, which cover the range of learning opportunities that together would deliver the statutory requirement.” (QCA 2003)⁴

Learn2work identified the implementation of these requirements as an area where it may be of assistance to schools. High Schools were asked what assistance they required for the implementation of the requirements and which elements are priorities for developing links with employers.

Students on the roll of Special Schools must be taught the national and other statutory requirements such as work-related learning but it should be adapted to the pace and progression of the young person as indicated by the terms of their statement and review.⁵ This means that although Special Schools are required to implement the requirements, they are not required to implement them in the same way as High Schools. They only need to provide work-related learning activities that are relevant to their students, as opposed to implementing the framework in the way High Schools are likely to. Therefore, the Special Schools did not see implementing the framework for work-related learning as a priority for developing links with employers.

A significant number of schools stated that they are currently working on the implementation of the QCA framework, carrying out audits of current activity and developing plans for implementation. Because of this some schools were not in a position at this point in time to identify their support needs.

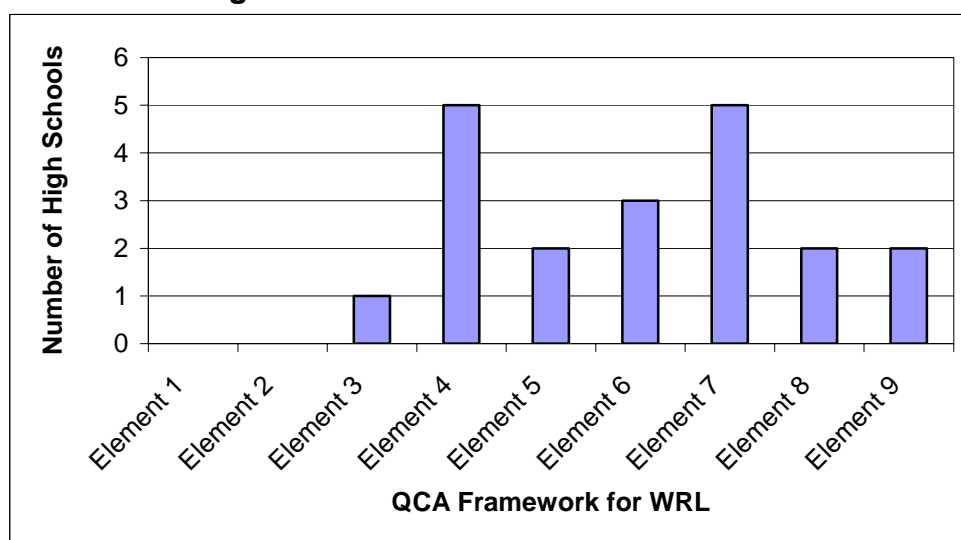
⁴ QCA (2003) Work-related learning for all at key stage 4: Guidance for implementing the statutory requirements from 2004.

⁵ QCA (2004) Designing a personalised curriculum for alternative provision at key stage 4.

4.1 Priorities for additional support: Elements of the Framework

Figure 1 illustrates which elements of the QCA framework schools stated as their priorities for further support from learn2work with implementation. The graph clearly shows that elements four and seven are their priorities. However, it must be noted that some schools highlighted more areas than others as priorities and five schools did not express their priorities in terms of the elements of the QCA framework. The issues they raised are set out in 4.2.

Figure 1: Number of Schools Requiring Support With Each Element of the Work-related Learning Framework



Element 1: Recognise, develop and apply their skills for enterprise and employability.

Element 2: Use their experience of work, including work experience and part-time jobs, to extend their understanding of work.

As illustrated by the Figure 1 none of the schools identified elements one or two of the framework as a priority for assistance with implementation. Schools generally felt that they were happy with current provision or that these elements could be delivered through existing mechanisms such as PHSE lessons and two week work experience.

Element 3: Learn about the way business enterprises operate, working roles and conditions, and rights and responsibilities in the work place.

Although only one school highlighted this a priority area for assistance, another two indicated that although it is not a priority it is an area that would benefit from development. General opinion was that although this area is touched on in PHSE lessons or the ‘Be Real Game’, it would benefit from involvement of employers, real work based people, not teachers.

“..it’s taught in the classroom; a controlled environment – which is just not good enough.”

Element 4: Develop awareness of the extent and diversity of local and national employment opportunities.

This area was highlighted as a priority by five of the High Schools, with a sixth seeing it as an important area for further development. The importance of getting up to date and quality information was a common issue. This element of the framework was the one most schools stated as a priority. The reasoning behind this comes from lack of time and awareness of teachers to get the full picture, and the importance of students knowing what is out there and available, particularly in areas where their horizons might be limited:

“Their world is what they see out of their window”

Element 5: Relate their own abilities, attributes and achievements to career intentions and make informed choices based on an understanding of the alternatives.

Only two schools saw this as a priority. One school in particular viewed this as being important for those pupils that do not intend to go to university. There was concern that the school was “heavily go-to-university” motivated, but as it is a Comprehensive it has the full range of abilities. It was felt that there is not enough information on the alternatives, and that talking to employers about alternatives and the attributes and abilities required would allow much more informed decisions.

Element 6: Undertake tasks and activities set in work contexts.

Three High Schools viewed this element as a priority for external support. It was thought that vocational subjects generally had links to employers built into their teaching. Although these subjects would benefit from developing and improving links with employers, the concern was primarily about getting real world work contexts for those students that do not select vocational courses.

Element 7: Learn from contact with personnel from different employment sectors.

This element of the framework was highlighted by a significant number of schools as a priority for support. Finding contacts with a variety of different sectors is seen as a challenge and an area where links with employers are essential and external support is very important to making these links. The issue of locating employers and finding employers in different sectors is discussed in detail in section 5 on Barriers to Developing Links with Employers.

Element 8: Have experience (direct or indirect) of working practices and environments.

Although two schools saw this as a priority for support, the majority of schools felt that this element could be delivered satisfactorily under the current provisions, particularly through work experiences. However, the quality of work experience placements is essential to this and is discussed further in section 7.2.2.

Element 9: Engage with ideas, challenges and applications from the business world.

This is an area that would benefit from external support but was only seen as a priority by two schools.

“Would be good if we could link in and identify real problems in local companies.”

Summary

The two elements of the QCA work-related learning framework that most schools highlighted as needing further support to implement are four and seven:

Four: Develop awareness of the extent and diversity of local and national employment opportunities.

Seven: Learn from contact with personnel from different employment sectors.

4.2 Other Support Required

Qualifications/Specific Work-related Learning Lessons

Three of the High Schools are considering introducing specific lessons or qualifications to handle the implementation of the requirements. Qualifications mentioned:

- AQA 'Preparation for working life'.
- Half GCSE in Work-related learning probably CCEA Level 1/Level 2 GCSE in Learning for Life and Work.
- NCFE vocational learning qualification, probably NCFE Level 1 and Level 2 Certificate in Employment Skills.

Assistance with implementing these qualifications may be required once plans are finalised and details of the syllabus are known in detail.

4.3 General Issues for Implementation of Work-related Learning Requirements

A common issue raised was the problem of ensuring all students have access to work-related learning and coordinating it across all subjects. This is in order to fulfil the requirements and to ensure that all students receive the benefits discussed in section 3. There was concern that work-related learning was not consistent across subjects. It was thought that subjects such as business studies and vocational courses were reasonably good but that more academic areas were often rather limited. Schools stressed that access to work-related learning should not be dependent on subject choices and the importance of ensuring it was available to students who do not take any vocational subjects. This issue was closely related to the problem of Work-related Learning Coordinators knowing of all work-related learning going on within the school; and the importance of spreading the message that it is important and useful to all subjects.

“Work-related learning is built in to the vocational courses, such as catering, business studies, leisure and tourism and health and social care. However kids opt into these courses, so some get these links to employers and some don't, depending on which courses they have chosen. So for those not doing vocational courses – how do they get real world experience?”

*“Ensuring **everyone** gets this is a big undertaking”*

“Business studies is very business focused – there's links with a business for every unit. But how is this spreading across the school? More of a subject issue than of implementing certain elements of the QCA framework.”

General Comments

For several of the elements of the framework that were not seen as priorities for support, work experience was highlighted as the mechanism for fulfilling requirements. One school in particular saw improved and developed work experience as critical for delivery of a work-related learning programme. However, this is dependent on improvements to the current work experience programme to ensure compliance with the requirements. This is discussed further under 'Work Experience' in Activities Section 7.2.2. It should be noted though that the QCA framework specifically states that "a single activity (such as work experience) cannot alone offer the full range of experiences needed. A combination of opportunities will be necessary to deliver the statutory requirement."⁶

⁶ QCA (2003) Work-related learning for all at key stage 4. page 8.

5. Barriers To The Development of Links with Employers

If links are to be further developed in the future it is important to understand what schools perceive to be the barriers to working with employers. Therefore, Work-related Learning Coordinators and Head Teachers were asked their opinions on what is currently limiting links with employers.

5.1 Time

Almost every High School interviewed stated time was a major barrier to developing links with employers. Time issues fell into three interlinked categories.

A. Staff Time

It was felt that time limited the development of links with employers in terms of Work-related Learning Coordinators and other staff members finding time to organise links and activities with employers. Time to locate and contact employers, plan activities, pre-visit preparation, the visit itself and the follow-up. Also lack of time to make contact with other staff members and the development of an understanding of work-related learning across the school.

“While teaching a full timetable there’s no way I can take the whole thing forward and sort it out. For the Enterprise pathfinder - some money had to be spent on the freeing up of teacher time.”

B. Curriculum Requirements and Timetable

This limitation on staff time is caused primarily by the very full timetable and curriculum requirements. Carrying out work-related learning and work with employers means not doing something else, disruption to other subjects, students miss other lessons and teachers not being in the classroom consequently disrupts teaching of other students not involved in the activities.

“If teachers are involved in this type of activity with employers it means they are not teaching – therefore there is the cost of cover and disruption to other pupils. Need staff teaching. Schools and teachers have targets to meet in terms of grades etc. – pressure is on this, it’s difficult to balance with other things such as work-related learning.”

“How do you get 110% out of 100% of time?? There’s always going to be a

tension.”

*“They don’t like teachers out of school – it’s hard to fit things in between lessons. There is supply cover available but that’s not **me** in the classroom. It causes disruption to teaching and continuity.”*

The curriculum requirements teachers must fulfil mean that any work-related learning activities with employers must be tied very closely to the curriculum, it simply cannot be a bolt on.

“The most basic reason why we can’t do this is time in the curriculum – 24 hours a week which are all taken up with GCSEs – pulling them out of lessons all the time is just not feasible. Therefore it needs to be very closely linked into curriculum – to assist in delivery. Needs to be sold to teachers that it will help – not just losing teaching time”

C. Administration Time

The issue of the time consuming nature of the administration required to work with employers was raised by seven of the eleven High Schools interviewed. Three main areas of administrative tasks were identified; risk assessments, CRB checks and paperwork associated with the County Council for visits. The main issue is that the quantity of paper work is very time consuming to complete.

“CRB checks and health and safety, risk assessments – are all very time consuming. E.g. a one hour trip to Boulmer requires three or four hours of preparation.”

Those schools that did not see administration as a barrier to developing links with employers all had support staff of some description with responsibility for this side of the organisation.

“We have two half time people to deal with this, as a part of enlarging links with local businesses. Both very able, which takes the burden off subject teachers for what are really administrative tasks.”

However, some schools held the opinion that risk assessments had to be completed by the party leader;

“Risk assessments have to be done by the party leader as it says that person has done all the checks. At the end of the day if you take them out - you need to have done it yourself in case something goes wrong as you can’t turn round and say you ‘just signed it’.”

Some schools felt that some of the paper work was not necessary or could be carried out more efficiently if bureaucracy was reduced, better systems were in place and there was

greater use of electronic forms of communication, therefore saving time. For example:

“Another source of frustration are County Council schools visits forms. They need to be completed by both school and employer and there can be difficulties in gathering all necessary info, getting all signatures etc. Anything anyone could do to make this process simpler would be very good. “

“Electronic forms would help as everything has to be done on paper, therefore done from scratch each time.”

CRB checks were generally not viewed as a serious barrier, as it was unusual for employers to be alone with students. Mentors were stated as an example of when CRB could be a problem. It was felt that if they were carried out in advance they were generally not a barrier unless employers did not want to be checked.

5.2 Costs and Funding

Half of the High Schools interviewed mentioned costs as a barrier to developing links with employers. Costs mentioned were related to transport, paying for administrative support such as for risk assessments, insurance, cost of supply teachers to cover for teachers out of normal lessons and costs associated with arranging events.

“What do you cut out to pay for work-related learning?”

For some rural schools travel costs were highlighted as a particular issue, due to students having to travel further to find appropriate employers.

A number of schools highlighted funding for projects as an issue limiting the development of links with employers. For example funding sources and initiatives are often short term and keep changing. It was felt by some that at the moment there weren't enough sources of funding available to support the development of work-related learning, but some schools seemed more 'clued-up' than others on potential sources.

“Funding streams stops and everything changes – successful projects come to an end.”

“We're seeking funding to enable pupils doing NVQs to spend a day each week on placement. But there's problems obtaining funding - time taken for funding to come through in relation to the academic year, identifying correct pot etc..”

In relation to the issue of time, the current Enterprise pilot was highlighted as a successful mechanism – were some of the funding had to be spent on freeing up teacher time to enable the development of this agenda.

“The Enterprise Coordinator has been allocated time this year which is great, but what about the future?”

5.3 Staff opinions/Priorities

The majority of Work-related Learning Coordinators referred to staff opinions and priorities as a barrier. This relates very closely to the issue of time and the full curriculum discussed in section 5.1. Many staff simply do not see work-related learning as a priority, their priority is to deliver a very full curriculum. The general opinion was that a few teachers were enthusiastic, particularly in vocational subjects, some staff could ‘live with it’, while a minority were very negative and might not let students out of lessons etc.

“Staff priorities are to get GCSE work completed. The busy curriculum means it’s hard to get teachers interested.”

Several schools saw this as a staff development issue, that there was a lack of understanding of what work-related learning is and how it could contribute to subjects.

*“Some staff would say that their priority is their subject - but this is **not** the case. They **have** to include work related learning – this is a learning issue for staff.”*

“There’s a lack of understanding about what work-related learning is about. Some teachers can be negative in response to anything new or with a different hat – because they are so busy.”

“There is a lack of time/opportunities to make other staff aware of what is available to them. Opportunities to ask how work-related learning could help them. I’m sure there are lots of opportunities if I had a chance to discuss this.”

5.4 School/Employer Understanding

A fundamental barrier to the development of links with employers that a number of schools raised, was the lack of understanding of each other and a mismatch between what schools require and what businesses can give.

The main area identified as a barrier was employers’ lack of understanding of the limited flexibility schools have, in terms of curriculum that must be covered, the timetable, the pattern of the school year and the relatively long planning cycle.

“Schools have limited flexibility, both in terms of time and also topics they want to cover/be involved in due to demands for the curriculum. Think this lack of flexibility can mean schools are seen as being negative.”

“I’m currently planning for next September, activities for next year need to be

organised now to be properly fitted in to the curriculum and timetable. Bolt-ons or last minute offers are really no good.” (December 2004)

“xxx and xxx came in to work with the children. A project was developed with 6th formers which ran very successfully until exam period – the pupils cannot put all their effort into both things, and as they want to do well in their exams the project was pushed aside a little. Employer links require understanding of the other pressures on pupils at different times so that projects are able to run, and continue to be such a success. “

It is not just the content and timing of the activities that needs to be right, the form of the contact needs to be appropriate in order to deliver the benefits that were discussed in section 3 such as using contact with employers as an effective teaching method. This issue of suitable activities is discussed further in section 7.1.

“Employers offer video clips, CDs, talks, power point presentations but that’s like the kiss of death. You never get pupils to be involved or convert them through talking to them, it is not the way to do it. Businesses want the recognition but don’t really have time to do what really benefits the children - they have no time to engage in the more desired activities.”

Several schools highlighted the importance of getting the right people to work with students. There was concern that many employers simply don’t have the skills required to work with pupils, for example how to speak to them.

“One of the biggest concerns is getting the right person in, if they’re not tuned into kids. It can turn kids off rather than on if you get the wrong person. Need people that are very good at speaking to students at a level. Not treating them like kids, but on a level so they understand.”

*“There is a difference between a very good public speaker and being good at talking to kids. It can be **very** different.”*

However, some schools noted that there is a general assumption from employers that their people are able to work with kids. One school commented that employers that had worked in the school might have become a bit demoralised, as the kids aren’t always very appreciative.

Schools were aware that the costs to employers of working with schools could be a barrier, particularly for small businesses. Costs referred to included the time required to develop and carryout the activities that are really beneficial to schools (those that assist in delivering the curriculum), as well as monetary costs such as insurance.

“Employers need to have health and safety and liability insurance, so there can often be financial costs to the employer. Would it be possible to have a certificate that says ‘we are covered to have kids in our premises’ over simplification, but

that idea?”

“I have the feeling that there is a willingness amongst employers to get involved but not the time to do what is useful, take kids around etc.”

It is interesting to note that although several schools mentioned the costs to employers, few mentioned the benefits to employers of being involved with schools. Those that did raise this issue were very aware that businesses needed to get something back from their involvement with schools.

“We often have links but they fizzle out because employers didn’t get anything back.”

It is important that understanding and benefits flow both ways between schools and employers.

5.5 Number/range of local employers

A barrier almost every school raised was the limited number of large employers in the County, and some schools also commented on the range of industries available. This perception is substantiated by the InfoNet Employer Database, as there are only just over 100 private businesses in Northumberland that employ more than 100 staff. This problem was perceived to be worse for the schools in rural parts of the County.

As previously discussed, forming links with employers needs to provide the right experience for students, fulfilling curriculum requirements or personal development objectives. Therefore, it is important to make contact with organisations that are suitable, whether that is in terms of the time they have available, the industry they are in or the range of positions and structure the organisation has. Work-related learning coordinators repeatedly mentioned the difficulties in knowing ‘who else is out there’, who they should contact and finding out what they can offer. Those schools that felt they had good links with employers were very concerned that there was a danger of asking too much of them, due to the limited number of suitable employers in the area.

“One of the problems is our isolation and rural location. We’ve always had very good links with local businesses, but the type of employers is an issue. We don’t have access locally to large structured organisations. No access to organisations with research and development, call centres, distribution management etc etc. This is an issue we are currently struggling with.”

“Due to our location there are serious problems finding larger organisations and also organisations in certain sectors, such as engineering. This also results in a

further cost due to transport to relevant businesses etc.”

“It’s difficult to locate people, find out who’s available and what they can offer.”

Several schools also highlighted the difficulties in maintaining links once they have been made.

“Problem has always been keeping it going once established. Often one offs – that’s it until next year. Established relationship where there was regular contact would make it a lot easier. However people move on etc.”

5.6 Liability

A further barrier to developing links with employers, particularly in relation to pupils going out of school, is the current situation regarding liability should anything go wrong. As well as the paper work generated in terms of risk assessments, as discussed previously, this is a source of genuine concern for many teachers. Some professional associations are now recommending staff simply do not take students out of school.

“Some staff are really put off by risk assessment. The consequences of something going wrong can be very off putting for teachers given the current climate and recent high profile incidents.”

5.7 Organisation of External Support

Some of the schools expressed confusion over the organisation of external support, the number of organisations, changes of names and not knowing what they do. A couple of schools felt that they currently received information but that it was sporadic and not joined up. This lack of understanding of the support available is seen as limiting schools ability to form links with employers.

“I tend to forget ‘who runs what’.”

“I wish it was all under one hat – not lots of separate bits – I never know who to go to.”

5.8 Summary of Barriers

The major barriers to schools developing work-related learning and links with employers are time and cost and those factors that contribute to time and cost such as a full curriculum and administration. However, the other important barrier that needs to be addressed is the lack of understanding between employers and schools.

6. Head Teachers' Perspective

As described in section 2, it was important to speak to Head Teachers to gain a more strategic overview of where links with employers and work-related learning fit into schools management and planning.

The major issues which arose from discussions with the three Head Teachers were related to the barriers of time and cost as identified previously. While all Heads were very positive about the importance of contact with employers and work-related learning to today's students, the scale of the barriers of cost and time were dependent on the resources available to the school as well as future plans including 'Putting the Learner First'⁷. The issues of how resources are distributed to schools and the potential impact and timing of the 'Putting the Learner First' and 'Schools for the Future'⁸, are above and beyond the scope of this report but nonetheless have an important impact on the future of links with employers.

On the one hand, a school was working on a very tight budget in a rural area and had serious doubts over their ability to implement work-related learning and links with employers to the extent the students deserve. On the other hand a school with the opportunity of new buildings and funding opportunities in the near future has a range of exciting plans to embed employers and the community and facilities for vocational training into their new school. The two schools mentioned reflect the different attitudes resulting from availability of resources. This underlines the fact that contact with employers and work-related learning has financial and time costs and that without sufficient funding it will be seriously limited. This is very frustrating when schools view contact as important.

An issue highlighted by the Head Teachers in particular was the importance of ensuring there were benefits to the employers. Suggested mechanisms for encouraging contact with schools included the use of school facilities such as IT suites, tax breaks and training grants for those taking on long term work placement students.

With regard to the barrier of employers and schools understanding of each other, Head Teachers raised the issue of employers not realising or understanding the skills of pupils. They felt that the general transferable skills and IT skills that students now develop at school could be valuable to employers during placements. It was felt that employers would be more

⁷ Northumberland County Council (2004) Putting the Learner First. www.northumberland.gov.uk/learning

⁸ www.bsf.gov.uk

keen to be involved in schools if they were aware of these skills, therefore there was a job to be done in educating them.

The interviews highlighted that work-related learning is something else which, while very important, had to be fitted into a tight timetable and budget. However, in the context of a more flexible curriculum it is essential to develop and embed it in school activities. Intentions are good but in practice the logistics of having pupils out of school frequently are very difficult and challenging.

7. Activities with Employers

Work-related learning coordinators were asked their opinions on what links they would like to develop with employers in terms of the types of activities they would find useful. A list of possible activities was drawn together and used to collect quantitative data on which activities were seen as being of most use and as a basis to collect further qualitative information on each activity. Questionnaires were also left with each school to distribute to all subject areas to determine if any activities are particularly useful to certain subjects. However, insufficient were returned from most subjects, despite attempts to chase them up, to show any patterns. The maximum number returned for any one subject was five. For those subjects which returned five questionnaires I have highlighted were four or more of those schools rated an activity as 'very useful' for their subject.

7.1 General Issues

An issue that was frequently raised by schools was related to the barrier of schools and employers understanding each other, as previously discussed in section 5.4. In relation to nearly all activities, schools made the comment that the activity would be great, as long as it fitted into the curriculum and that it simply couldn't be an add on. The importance of sitting down with employers to discuss what the employer can offer and what the school requires was frequently raised, and also the importance of doing this in sufficient time for school planning cycles.

"We have been in contact recently with xxx who want to make links with schools. It's a process – need to sit down and discuss what we need and what they can give. Importance of matching schools needs, and not so a company can tick a box."

It was suggested that in order to improve businesses' understanding of the school curriculum they were provided with the schemes of work that all schools have, for as many subjects as possible.

Given the new Government requirements for work-related learning, any activities developed should also be designed to fit within the QCA framework and contribute to its delivery, and provide evidence for inspection.

Again in relation to the barriers discussed previously, many schools reiterated the issue that it was not only important that the activities fitted with the curriculum, but that the nature of the activities and the ability of the employers to relate to students were essential for links to be

valuable learning experiences. As previously discussed in section 5.4 for example, talking at students may have the opposite effect to that intended. This issue was particularly acute in Special Schools. Activities would generally need to be more practical and not based on sitting and listening or writing and broken up into short sections in order to retain their attention.

In general the Special Schools had a slightly different opinions on how useful some activities are for their students, both in comparison to the High Schools and to each other dependent on the type of Special School. For example, in one Special School the needs of the children are such that the only really useful links to employers is work experience, particularly extended work placements. This school felt that all other activities were ‘not at all useful’ for their pupils.

7.2 Activity Specific Comments

Figure 2: Number of Schools Rating the Further Development of Activities as ‘Very Useful’

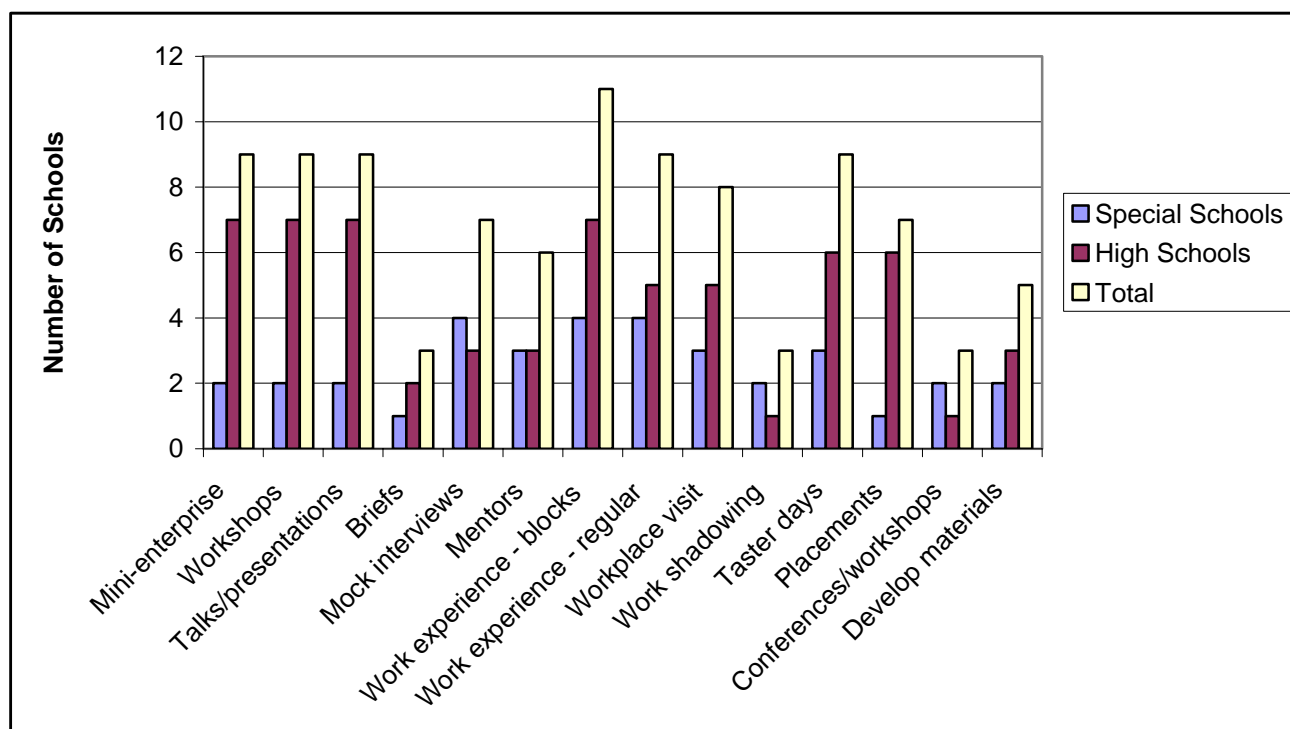


Figure 2 illustrates which activities schools viewed as being ‘very useful’ to develop further with employers. The graph does not show how valuable each type of activity is to schools, for example some schools viewed mini-enterprise and work experience in blocks as very important for work-related learning but were happy with current provision, therefore did not

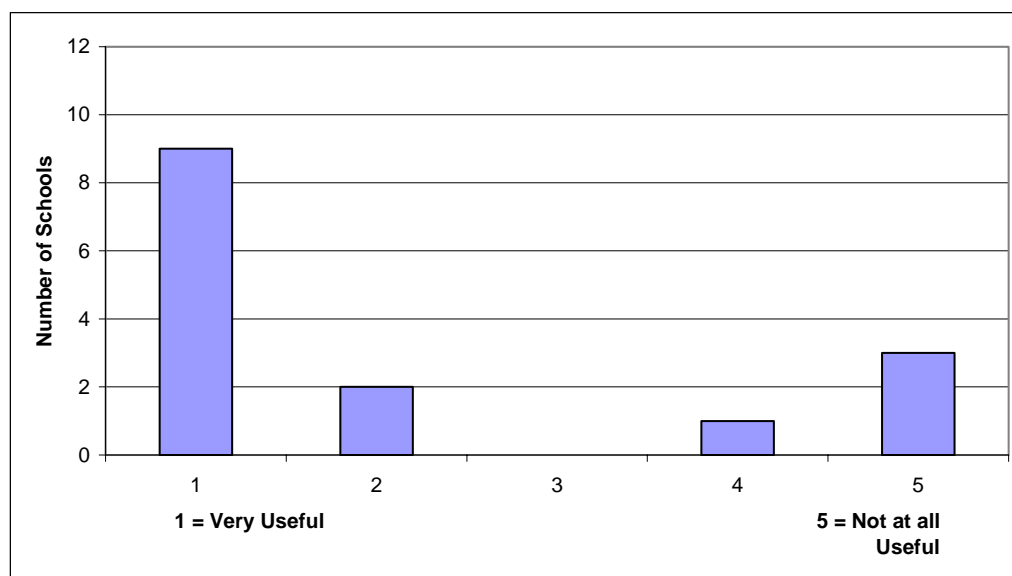
rate their further development as ‘very useful’.

Figure 2 shows that the priority activities are slightly different for Special Schools and High Schools, this reflects the differences in why links with employers are important as discussed in section 3.

7.2.1 Employers coming into Schools

Mini-enterprise activities (e.g. set up a company, experience marketing, accounting, production and management etc.)

Figure 3: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Mini-enterprise Activities



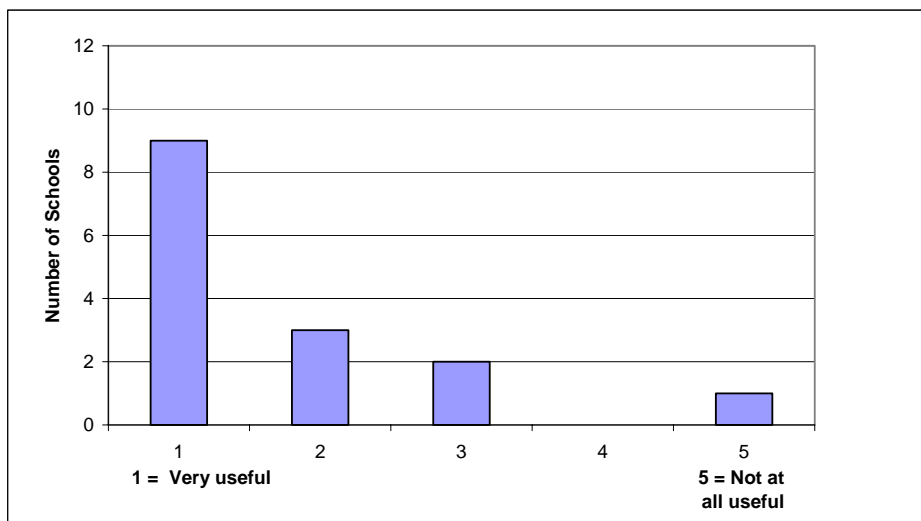
As illustrated in Figure 3, nine schools saw mini-enterprise as being a ‘very useful’ activity to further develop with employers. A number of other schools thought that this was a very important activity for work-related learning and obviously enterprise, but they were happy with current provision of this activity. One issue that was frequently raised regarding the development of mini-enterprise activities was that there are often only a small number of students involved. The new work-related learning requirements and forthcoming enterprise requirements mean it is going to be important that all students have the opportunity to participate in this sort of activity.

“Very useful to all students, whatever their ability. Stretches more able and gives confidence to the weaker ones, for example they may not be most intelligent in the class but might be an excellent sales person.”

Five schools returned questionnaires from their business studies/economics departments, of which four rated mini-enterprise activities as ‘very useful’. All five responses received from Maths Departments rated mini-enterprise activities as ‘useful’.

Workshops in school (e.g. enterprise, employability, office simulations, finance, industry days etc.)

Figure 4: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Workshops

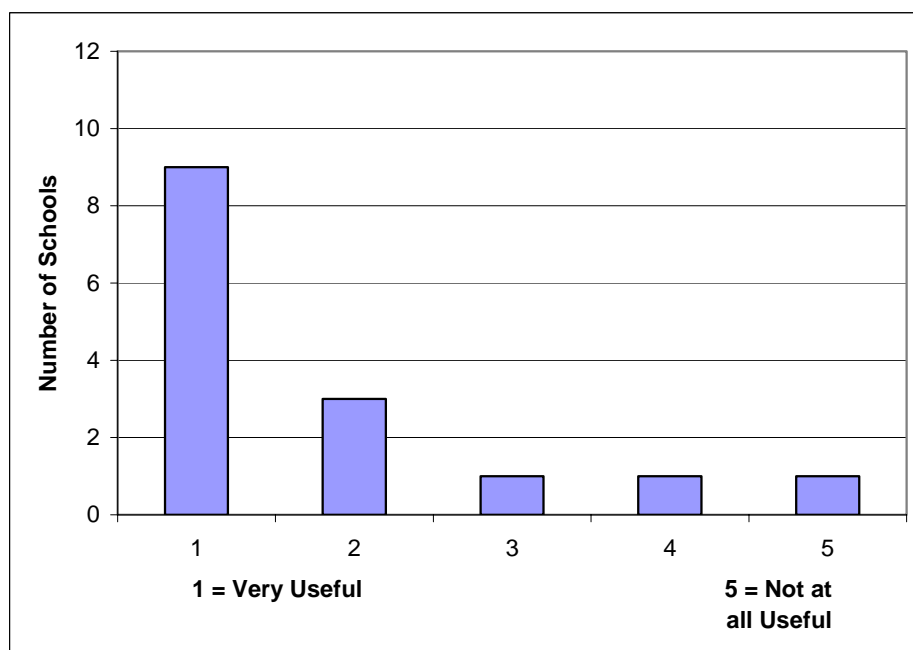


Workshops were an activity a lot of schools valued and wanted to develop or develop further. Many of them already run workshop type events with employers, such as industry days. However, there was a strong feeling that they should be improved and developed, with more companies or a better range of industries.

“We have an industry day each year. Every year we write off to 50 or so companies – usually only get about 15.”

Talks/presentations/seminars (Employers visit schools to support teachers in their delivery of a specific subject.)

Figure 5: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Talks/Presentations/Seminars



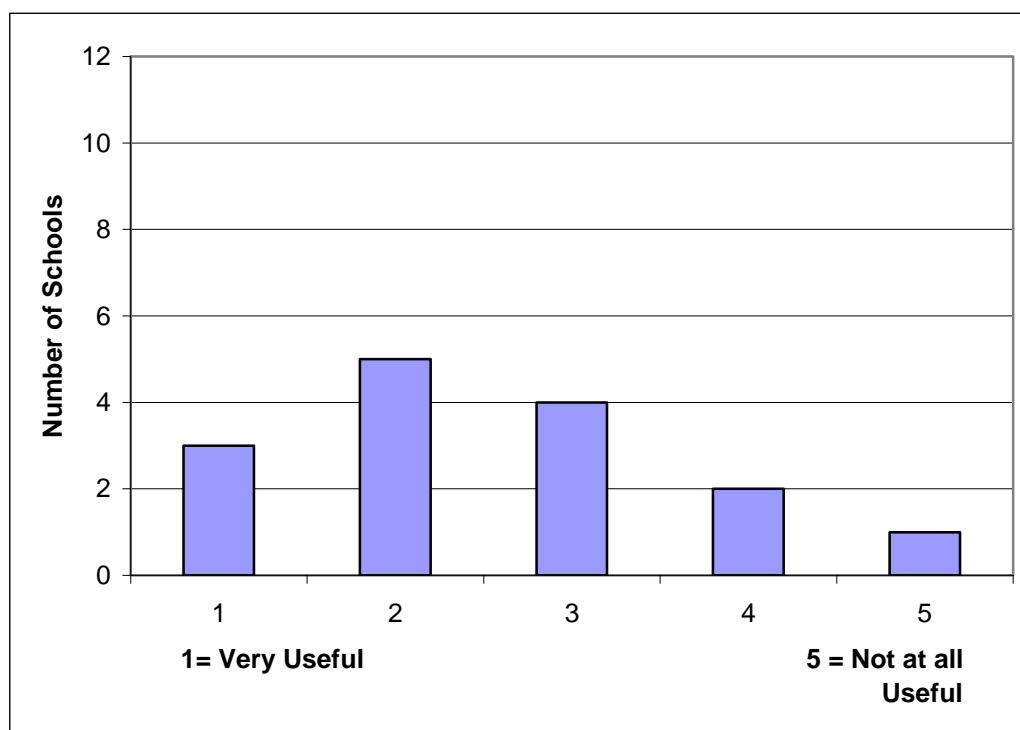
Nine of the schools interviewed viewed talks/presentations/seminars as a ‘very useful’ activity to further develop with employers, and a further two saw them as ‘useful’ to develop.

One area identified as a potential topic was career opportunities, such as apprenticeships.

“It would be good if companies came in to promote what apprenticeships they have available, what skills they require etc. etc.. Also need to be better timed in relation to when people are leaving school. This would have a motivating effect on kids and would benefit the companies in the long run.”

Briefs (Employees set a brief based on relevant material for that subject, e.g. mechanic/maths, artist/art & design)

Figure 6: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Briefs

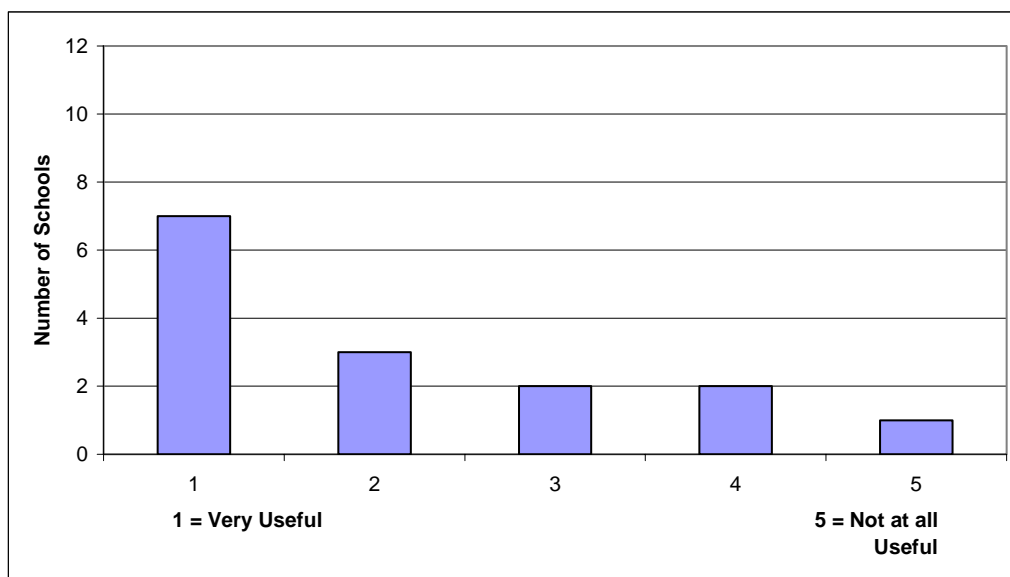


There was particular concern that this activity should be tied into the curriculum. Opinion was mixed and some schools were not sure how well this type of activity fitted in. However, other schools saw particular parts of the curriculum where this type of activity would be very useful.

“For example, for A-level Art and Design they need to work with a client. At present they often end up contriving something – e.g. their Mam acts as client. Would be very useful to have contact with employers for this type of thing. There are probably lots of examples where this type of thing could help deliver other subjects but that I’m not familiar with them.”

Mock interviews & other career management skills

Figure 7: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Mock Interviews

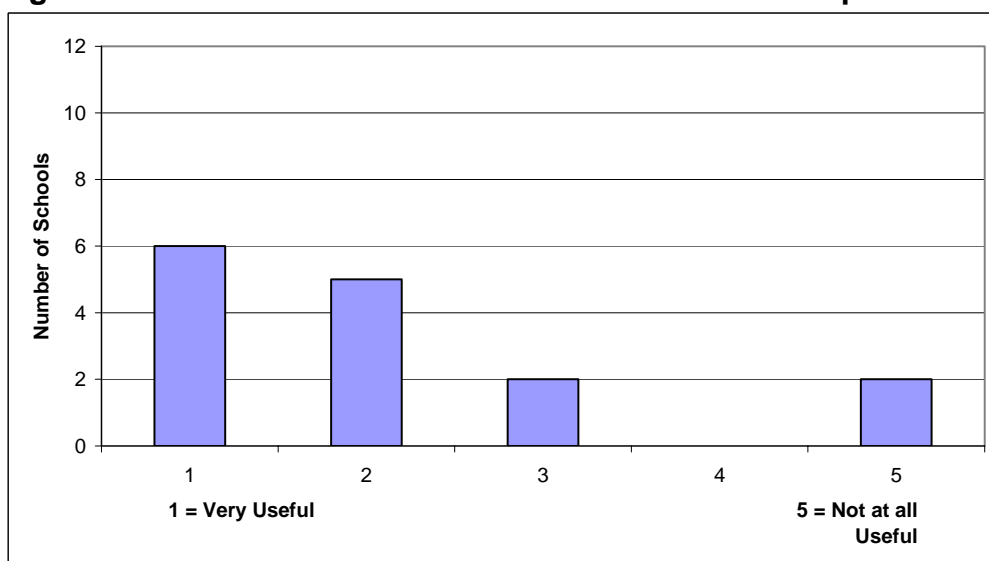


Of the seven schools rating this activity as ‘very useful’ four were Special Schools. Although many of the High Schools viewed this as an important element of work-related learning most were happy with the current level of provision, for example through Connexions or school staff. Therefore, they did not feel that in comparison to some of the other activities it was a priority for developing links with employers.

“Mock Interviews need to be with people from industry, not retired. Often get retired business people volunteering but they are often out of date and not be able to cope with today’s students.”

Mentors (e.g. involving individual pupils meeting with volunteers from local business on a regular basis)

Figure 8: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Mentors



Mentors were seen as a ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’ activity to develop with employers by eleven of the fifteen schools. However, a number of schools thought that this was not an activity that needed to be developed for all pupils, but only for particular students. Most of the schools felt that mentoring would benefit disaffected pupils, or those that are underachieving, to help motivate them to fulfil their potential. Mentors were also seen as important in activities such as mini-enterprise. The importance of meeting individuals’ needs was highlighted. This means getting the right mentor is essential, someone the student could relate to. This is related to the barrier of the ability of employers to work with pupils. It is also related to the barrier of CRB checks, as leaving pupils alone with mentors was viewed as a potential problem by some schools. Some employers might not feel comfortable with the situation, but privacy was seen as an important element of mentoring.

“Again, importance of getting the right person. Both would need to be clear on why the pupil and mentor are together. It might help students that are struggling and the more able but underachieving might benefit – help get them back on track. This is very dependent on individual needs.”

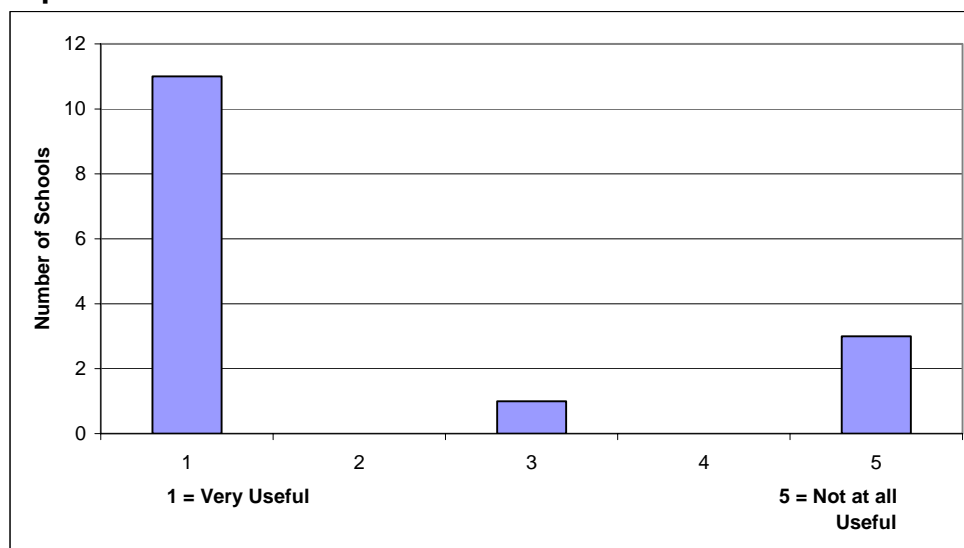
7.2.2 Pupils Going out of School

Work Experience

Work experience was viewed as the key activity for the delivery of work-related learning and contact with employers. It was seen as a mechanism for delivering a lot of the benefits outlined in section 3.

The major issue that arose regarding work experience of both types was the quality of the placement, this is essential for the delivery of the benefits outlined. This is quality in terms of the employer’s attitude and planning of the experience, so pupils undertake suitable and useful tasks while they are there, as well as in terms of finding a placement in an appropriate industry or department. Special schools particularly saw the correct placement as essential for their pupils. To meet their particular needs it is important to get placements where the employers empathise with these needs and are more understanding than would be required for non-Special Needs students. Getting a suitable industry and role is also essential for these pupils.

“We’ve had problems getting suitable placements. They can often be beyond them, such as large engineering companies etc.. They therefore can’t see the point.”

Work experience - blocks (e.g. one to two weeks blocks)**Figure 9: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Block Work Experience**

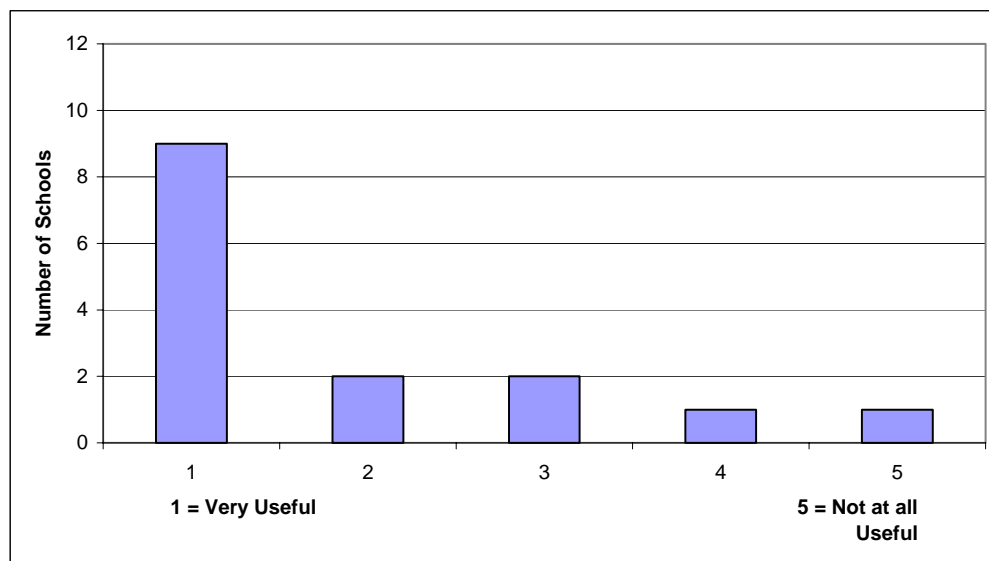
As Figure 9 illustrates, eleven of the schools interviewed saw the development of work experience as ‘very useful’. Schools’ current level of activity was by far the highest for work experience, so this high number of schools saying it should be developed reflects its importance in delivering work-related learning and also the scope for its development. It was generally seen as beneficial for all students. Several schools commented on the need to make work experience a more worthwhile activity as described above. One school in particular saw work experience as the key to delivering the Government requirements, if it was developed and enough quality placements could be found. The issues raised included how to ensure pupils had quality placements (e.g. not just sweeping the floor), and finding suitable employers for so many pupils. The latter was particularly acute for the schools in the rural areas of the County.

“Trident record sheet could have a lot more info in it that would be helpful for the requirements. Teachers checklist and questions could be more focused to allow measurement, to provide evidence for Ofsted”.

“We need to have more input with employers. We have an agenda we want to get out of experiences but how do we get training to that many places? Who does all that?”

Work experience - regular short experiences (e.g. half a day once a fortnight etc.)

Figure 10: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Regular Work Experience



Of the nine schools identifying the development of extended work experience as ‘very useful’, four were Special Schools. This is related to the role of engaging disaffected students in school that a number of schools see extended work placements fulfilling.

“For disaffected pupils extended work placements are more positive than keeping in school all the time.”

It was seen as particularly useful for Special Needs students in preparing them for leaving school and moving into employment, if possible, making the move more gradual.

It was also seen as an important mechanism for delivering more vocational courses.

“Really for more vocational courses – especially for students that aren’t academic, it can help keep them engaged in school and just concentrate on core GCSEs. More effective than keeping them in which also affects everyone else.”

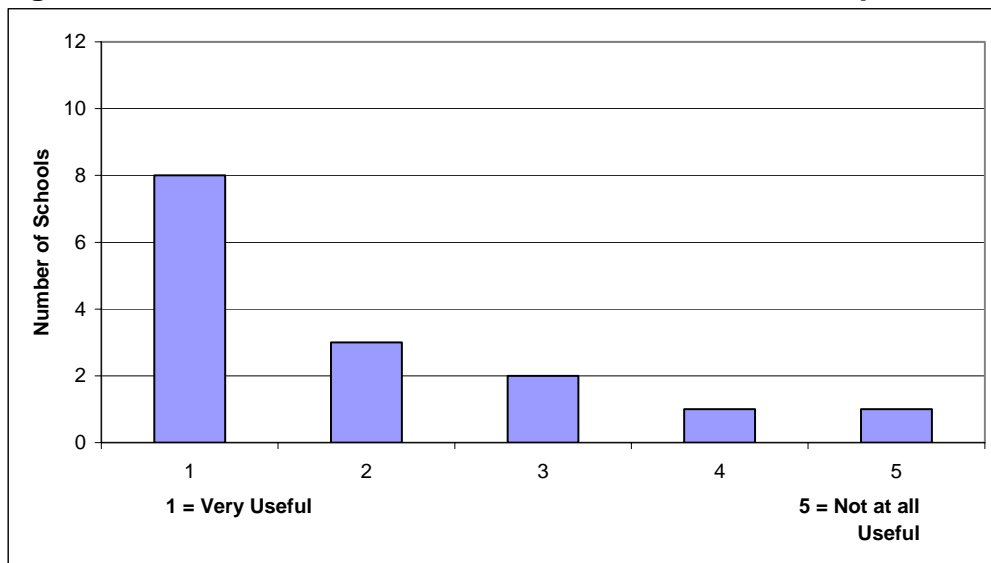
However, other schools felt extended work experience placements would be of benefit to all students.

“Increasingly we’ll want people out for a day or a half a week as things become more relaxed at key stage 4. Incorporate a days work experience along with everything else.”

“We would like to move this toward not just the disaffected kids. For example, for the higher abilities, a day at Proctor and Gamble, have their aspirations raised etc.”

Workplace Visit (e.g. Students visit local companies to learn about how they operate and what they produce.)

Figure 11: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Workplace Visits

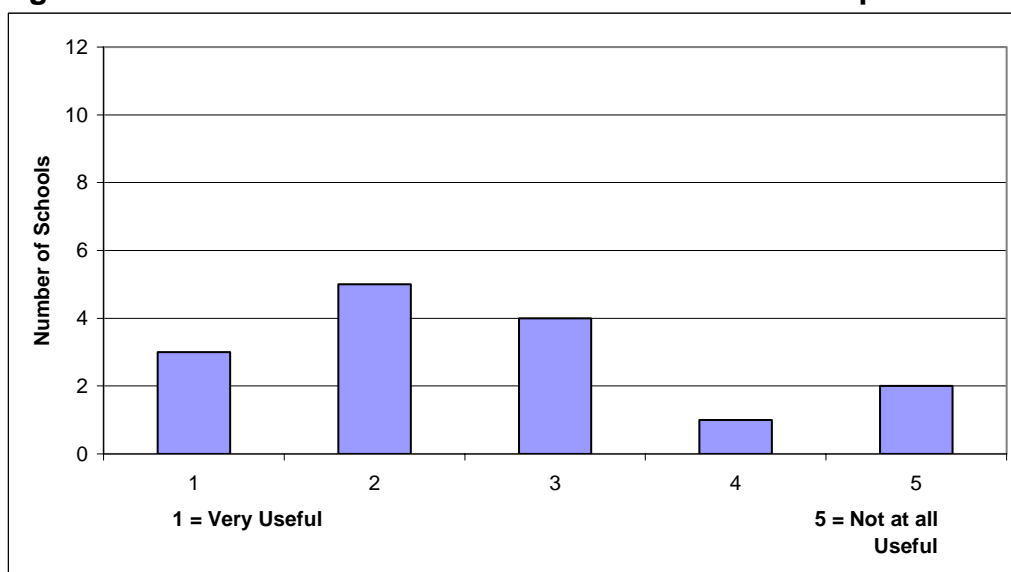


Responses to the development of workplace visits were more mixed, but the majority still viewed them as ‘very useful’. It was felt that such visits added much more to what pupils were being told by teachers. However, other schools felt that workplace visits were out of the question for the majority of subjects due to the number of students involved.

Four of the five Maths Departments that responded to the questionnaire viewed workplace visits as ‘useful’ for the delivery of their subject. Of the five schools that returned questionnaires from Science Departments all of them stated that workplace visits were ‘very useful’ for that subject.

Work shadowing (e.g. with parent, family friend or other employer)

Figure 12: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Work Shadowing



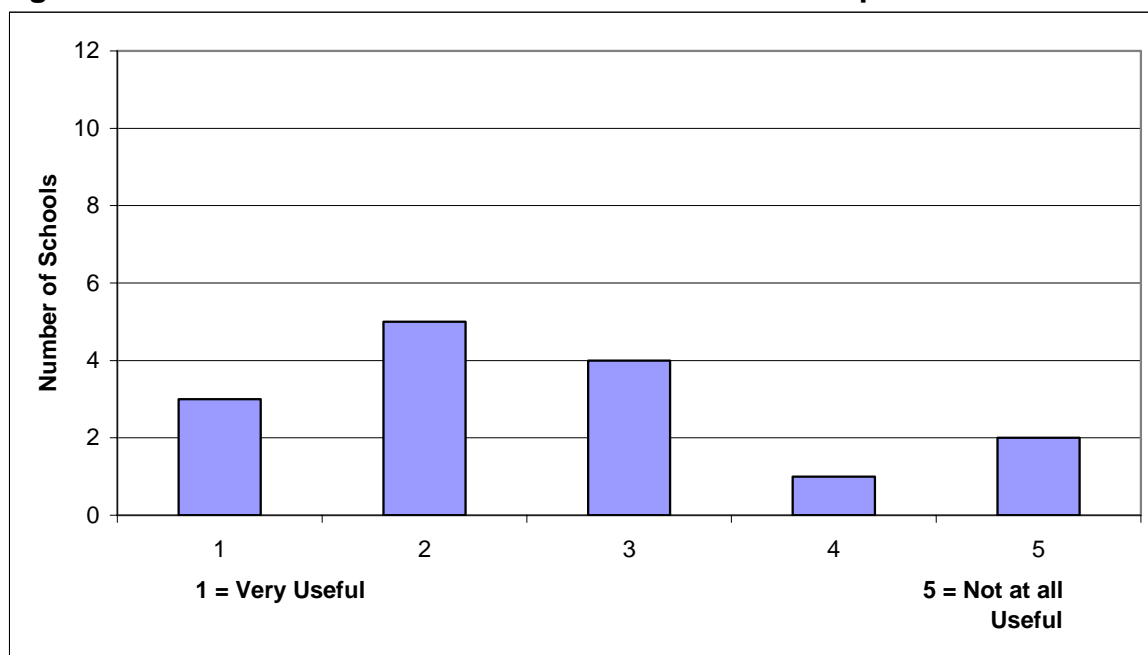
Work shadowing was not seen as a priority for developing links with employers for work-related learning. One school actually saw work shadowing as a negative method of work-related learning:

“I feel the pupils get much less out of it. To get value from work experience pupils need independence, to do things themselves and hard as it is, get there themselves, not to know anyone when they arrive really, as that’s what real life is like.”

On the other hand, eight schools rated work shadowing as ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’. Of these half were Special Schools. The pupils in Special Schools can have low self confidence and might not be used to new situations, therefore work shadowing can provide a stepping stone to the ‘real world’.

Taster days (experience an industry, profession etc.)

Figure 13: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Taster Days



As Figures 2 and 13 show, taster days were one of the most popular options for developing activities with employers. Several schools thought taster days were particularly useful for those who are interested in manual trades or the services.

Special Schools in particular mentioned taster days they are currently operating as exactly the type of activity that benefited their students, and they would like these activities to be developed further. An example that several schools quoted was with a Country House Hotel, where students spend 3 half day taster days over three weeks. Each week they learn

a new skill, such as Silver Service, then progress to serving lunch.

“We would like more vocational taster courses such as (e.g. above), and new links with other industries such as mechanics, construction, joinery etc. would be fantastic.”

Four of the five business studies/economic departments that returned questionnaires rated taster days as ‘very useful’ for their subject.

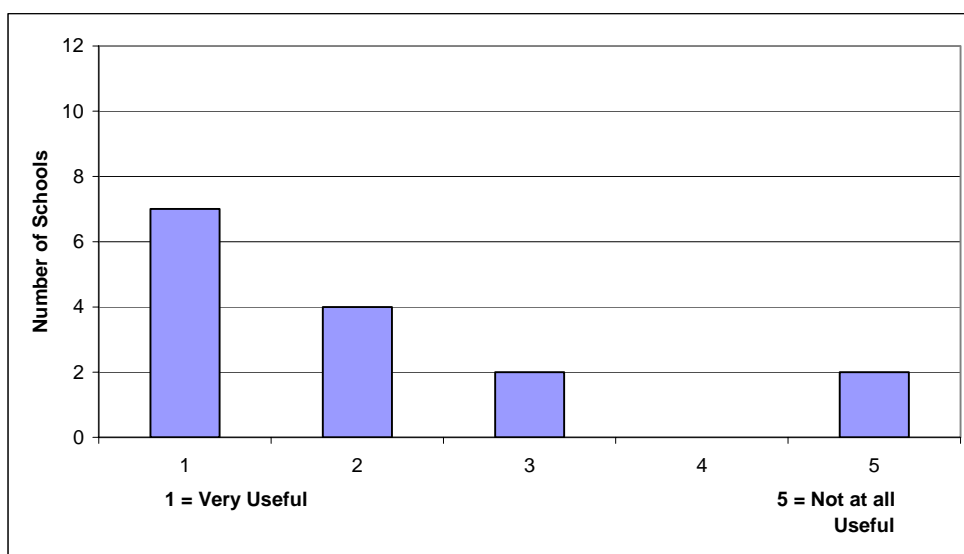
7.2.3 Teachers and Employers

The opinions of the Work-related Learning Coordinators on activities with Employers and Teachers were split. Some schools were of the opinion teachers simply didn’t have time for these activities, that time was too great a barrier to involvement. On the other hand some schools felt that teacher contact with employers was essential for the delivery of work-related learning and in addressing issues such as those discussed of teachers understanding of the relevance of work-related learning to their subjects.

“Definitely need more staff involved with industry/employers – to make them more comfortable with work-related learning.”

Placements for teachers (e.g. a short time in a company or other organisation as a form of professional development)

Figure 14: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Placements for Teachers



The lack of time, as discussed in section 5.1, was highlighted regularly as the main barrier to teacher placements. There was concern in some schools that even the short time period

after exams which is often available for this type of activity, was being squeezed more and more and there was a danger that this type of activity would no longer be fitted in.

“We would love teacher placements but it would depend on staff time, well it’s just not too easy”

A couple of schools felt that teachers should be teaching. One school in particular felt that the perception that teachers are ‘out of date’ and have no experience of the ‘real world’ was out dated and that many teachers had worked in industry before joining the profession or ran their own businesses.

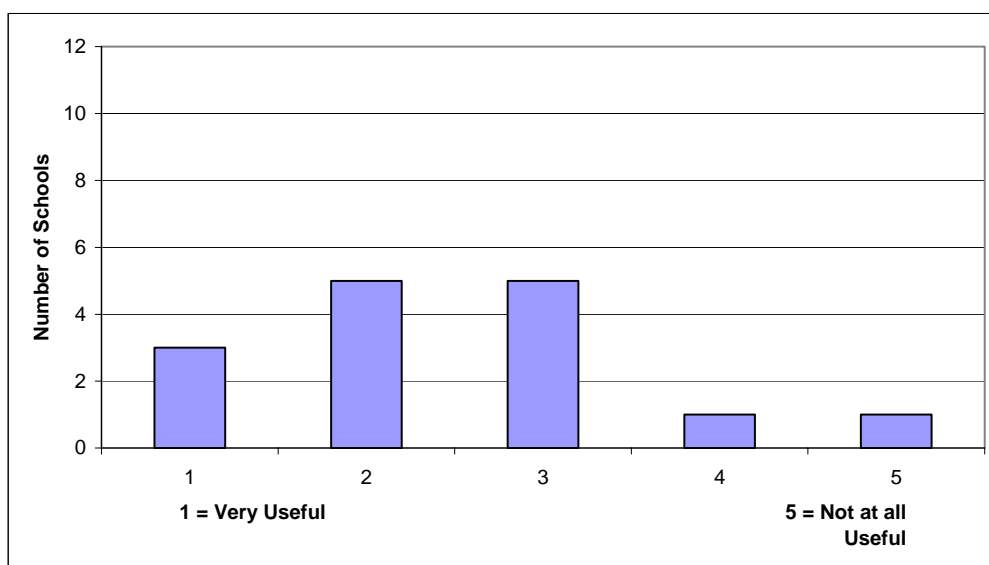
“This is difficult - staff are supposed to be in school teaching.”

However, those staff that said that it would be ‘very useful’ to develop teachers placements were very enthusiastic about the benefits, including teachers getting up to date with the ‘real world’ and understanding the importance of work-related learning to their subject and making contacts for other activities.

“Great – especially if they’re teaching applied subjects, how many have done it in the real world? It would get everyone up to date.”

Conferences and workshops (to look at issues in the curriculum that may be addressed by working with industry)

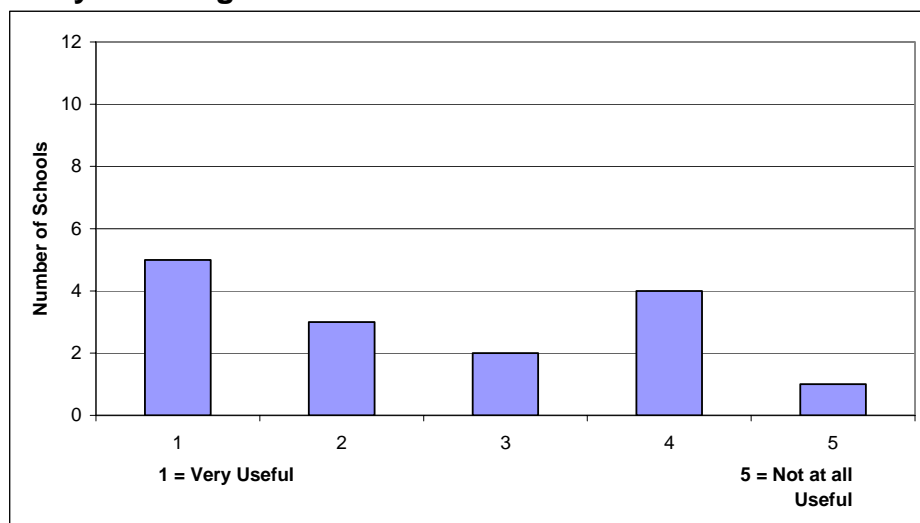
Figure 15: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Conferences and Workshops for Teachers



Conferences and workshops were less popular than placements and the same concerns were raised regarding staff being out of school when they should be teaching.

Work with Employers to develop case study/learning materials

Figure 16: How Useful Schools Rated the Further Development of Case Study/Learning Materials



The opportunity to work with employers to develop local case study material was seen as ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’ to a lot of schools. It was felt that local examples would really add weight to what was being taught.

“Case study materials would be very useful, especially for certain areas, GCSE engineering, Health and Safety, etc. as they are vocational.”

However, some schools felt that plenty of suitable case study material already existed, and that the extra time necessary to develop material with local employers would only be justified if it was linked to some other work-related learning activity, such as a workplace visit.

7.2.4 Other Activities

As well as those activities on the questionnaire some schools had additional activities that they wanted to develop. Primarily these activities were focused on technology, such as the development of quality CDROMs, online resources and video conferencing. However, some schools felt that there are a lot of these products already available, therefore information on what is currently available may be more appropriate than the development of new products in response to this issue.

8. Recommendations for the Development of Schools' Links with Employers

The following recommendations are drawn from interviews and the discussion in previous sections.

Government work-related learning requirements

With the recent introduction of the Government requirements schools generally agreed that external support may be required to assist in their implementation, in particular with elements four and seven of the QCA's framework.

As discussed in section 4.2, several schools are considering implementing qualifications to assist in the delivery of the QCA work-related learning framework. They felt that specific assistance may be required from external organisations to make the links with employers required for the delivery of these qualifications in the future.

A number of schools were still in the process of auditing current activity so they were not yet in a position to say exactly what their requirements are.

Development of Activities

Development of assistance or programmes that facilitate the activities with employers discussed in section 7, in particular work experience, mini-enterprise, workshops, talks/presentations, taster days and extended work experiences. These activities should be developed in line with addressing the barriers concerning fitting into the curriculum and school planning cycle. They should also be designed to fit into the QCA work-related learning framework.

Locating Employers

As discussed in section 5, one of the major barriers to schools developing links with employers was locating the employers, therefore this is a priority for external assistance. It should be noted that schools do not just require links with companies in Northumberland, but also with employers in Tyneside, nationally and in Europe as they can offer wider opportunities. It was felt that these links should be developed by an external organisation, partly because this strategic level would be better than lots of individual schools knocking on

the door.

Developing understanding between employers and schools

As well as locating the employers it was felt that external support would be valuable for developing understanding between schools and employers. An external organisation could carry out the role of educating employers in what schools require and better brief organisations on dealing with students. This could also incorporate the importance of targeting activities and meeting curriculum needs of teachers, as well as educating employers on the skills students can bring to their organisation. It was suggested that it would be beneficial to put the relationship between employers and schools on a more formal basis, for example a memorandum of understanding that spelt out obligations, protocols and procedures. External support would be important for developing this as it would require a good understanding of the relevant legal issues.

Database/directory

Following on from the previous two issues, a lot of schools felt that a directory or database of employers would be extremely valuable in assisting them in developing links. It was suggested that it would be of most use if it had information on contacts, what they could offer, and possibly what they have done before with schools. However, schools recognised that this could cause problems of 'good' employers being asked too frequently to participate in activities and risked putting them off.

Networking/Conferences

In order to develop work-related learning several schools thought that networking and sharing experiences could help address some of the problems discussed in section 5. It was suggested that this sort of networking could also include businesses, to improve understanding. It was felt that external assistance would be required to organise such events.

Assistance with Locating Funding

As cost is a major barrier to developing links with employers, several schools requested assistance with locating and applying for funding for work-related learning projects.

Assistance with administration

Time spent on administration was considered to be a major barrier, therefore any external assistance with paper work would benefit schools in developing their links and activities with employers. Also, models for risk assessments, a move to electronic/online forms where possible and stream lining of systems would all assist schools in saving time

Develop coordination and promotion of support currently available

A barrier that several schools mentioned was confusion over who to contact and that they were not aware of everything available to them. While there is a pack of information available on what the various work-related learning organisations do, clearly there is still some confusion. Therefore, it is recommended that improved coordination and promotion of their various roles and projects is carried out, preferably so that there is one central contact.

“What would you like us to do?”

Some schools had received support in the past where they were asked by external organisations ‘what would you like us to do?’ and went away and organised it. This service was seen as extremely valuable and something that would greatly improve links with employers.

Appendix A: Schools participating in interviews:

- Ashington Community High School
- Astley Community High School, Seaton Deleval
- Atkinson House School, Seghill, Cramlington
- Bedlingtonshire High School
- Berwick High School
- Cleaswell Hill School, Guide Post
- Coquet High School, Amble
- Cramlington Community High School
- Cramlington Hillcrest School
- Haydon Bridge High School
- Hirst High School, Ashington
- Morpeth Collingwood School
- Ponteland Community High School
- Prudhoe Community High School
- Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham
- St Benet Biscop Catholic Voluntary Aided High School, Bedlington
- The Duchesses Community High School, Alnwick
- The King Edward VI School, Morpeth
- The Grove Special School, Berwick

Appendix B: Interview Questions and Questionnaire

Interview Questions for Work-related Learning Coordinators

Name:

School:

Role:

Subject:

1a) Considering the list of activities between employers and schools on card one, please indicate the extent to which your school is currently involved in each activity.

b) Do you have any comments on your schools current activities?

2a) Why does the school want to develop links with employers?

b) What are the main benefits of these links in your opinion?

3) Considering the QCA framework for work related learning, which of the 9 elements would you consider to be your priorities for developing links with employers?

4) What links would your school like with employers?

a) Please consider the activities on card 1, and indicate how useful developing each of these activities would be to your school.

b) Why?

b) Any other activities or comments on activities?

6) What are the barriers to developing links with employers?

a) **Internal barriers**

c) **External barriers**

Questionnaire: Developing Links Between Schools and Employers



Section 1

School:.....Subject:.....Length of Service:

Role/position(s):

.....

Section 2: What links/activities with employers would you find useful?

- The table below contains activities which could enable employers to assist in the delivery of education. Please indicate how useful they would be for the delivery of *your subject*, with **1 being very useful to 5 being not at all useful**.
- If you have any additional comments or ideas please write them on the back of this sheet.

A: Employers coming in to School

	Very Useful				Not at all Useful
	1	2	3	4	5
i) Mini-enterprise activities (e.g. set up a company, experience marketing, accounting, production and management etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii) Workshops in school (e.g. enterprise, employability, office simulations, finance, industry days etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii) Talks/presentations/seminars (Employees visit schools to support teachers in their delivery of a specific subject.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv) Briefs (Employees set a brief based on relevant material for that subject, e.g. mechanic/maths, artist/art & design)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
v) Mock interviews & other career management skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
vi) Mentors (e.g. involving individual pupils meeting with volunteers from local business on a regular basis)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B: Pupils going out of school

	1	2	3	4	5
i) Work experience - blocks (e.g. one to two weeks)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii) Work experience - regular short experiences (e.g. half a day once a fortnight etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii) Workplace Visit (e.g. Students visit local companies to learn about how they operate and what they produce.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv) Work shadowing (e.g. with parent, family friend or other employer)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
v) Taster days (experience an industry, profession etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C: Teachers and Employers

1 2 3 4 5

- i) **Placements for teachers** (e.g. a short time in a company or other organisation as a form of professional development)
- ii) **Conferences and workshops** (to look at issues in the curriculum that may be addressed by working with industry)
- iii) **Work with employers to develop case study/learning materials**

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Working Paper

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