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Start Small;
Dream Big
Primary careers
pilot programme

THE CAREERS &
ENTERPRISE
COMPANY

Insight briefing 2: The promise of primary

Early insights on the impact of career-related learning in primary schools from Wave 2 of The Careers & Enterprise Company's Start Small; Dream Big pilot.

About the pilot and Wave 2

This is the second of three insight briefings on the early promise of impact and outcomes from The Careers & Enterprise Company's (CEC) careers pilot for primary schools – Start Small; Dream Big - backed by the DfE.

The insight briefings report on the three waves of activity being rolled out as part of the pilot. [Insight briefing 1](#) was published in July 2024 and the final pilot evaluation report, which will include commentary on Wave 3, will be published later in 2025.

When it comes to careers education, the earlier you start the better.

Young people start forming ideas about the jobs and careers they want to do when they grow up at an early age. Those ideas are influenced by what they see around them: their peers, parents, other adults and, of course, teachers.

To shape their ambitions and aspirations, young people need to see and meet a wide range of people from the world of work. The goal is to challenge stereotypes and widen horizons - keeping them as broad as possible for as long as possible. This is particularly important for those in disadvantaged communities who often lack sufficiently wide social and professional networks and where there can be a limited range of local businesses.

That is why the CEC has launched its careers pilot for primary schools – Start Small; Dream Big. Over two and a half years, the [CEC's national network of Careers Hubs](#) will reach hundreds of thousands of pupils and thousands of primary schools in targeted disadvantaged communities across the country.

The pilot and its associated evaluation of the outcomes and implementation has been designed over three distinct waves to enable the programme to test and adapt during each successive phase of implementation as it extends reach and deepens practice.

This insight briefing captures early insights from the second wave of the pilot. 11 Careers Hubs (partnerships between CEC and Combined and Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships) were selected to participate in the second wave of the pilot: Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Devon, Plymouth & Torbay, Dorset, Norfolk and Suffolk, East Sussex, Solent, Somerset, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, Swindon and Wiltshire, Tees Valley Combined Authority and delivery partner SIPs, with support from the West Midlands Combined Authority Careers Hub.

419 primary schools were recruited to the start of the wave. These participating institutions had higher levels of disadvantage than the national average, with an average Free School Meal rate of 29% compared to the national average of 25%. A third and final wave is currently being implemented by other Careers Hubs.

There were high levels of engagement from pupils and teachers in the baseline surveys, which was included as part of their onboarding process. Engagement in the endline surveys was lower. The sample has been checked for representation and is large enough to enable us to draw insight.

Alongside support from a Careers Hub, the pilot is based on two key interventions:

- Training for teachers (delivered by Teach First) to support them in developing their knowledge and practice of career-related learning and improve their confidence in having careers conversations with pupils and parents.
- Connecting schools with employers giving pupils the opportunity to meet people doing different jobs and see what the world of work is all about.

One goal of the interventions is to enrich the day-to-day curriculum with career-related content and learning – taking it from the margins to the mainstream.

Early indications from the first two waves of the pilot show real promise, including a range of positive outcomes for schools, teachers, pupils, parents and employers.

Looking ahead, laying the foundations of career-related learning in primary offers the opportunity to smooth the transition between primary and the careers education system in secondary schools.

Impact of Wave 2 of the pilot

The top three early insights from the second wave of the pilot follow a similar trend to the first:

“It has been a whirlwind of learning and adapting but I have really enjoyed being part of it - and seeing aspirations raise at such a young age has been very inspiring.”

Careers Hub staff member



Insight 1

Gender stereotypes fell – particularly among girls

Girls showed increased interest in typically male dominated sectors. There was a 30% increase in Business and Finance, and notable rises in Sport and Fitness (15%), Digital (14%), and Law (13%). In addition, schools saw a 20% improvement in girls' career knowledge, alongside a 50% larger increase in their understanding of employer expectations and salary insights bringing them on a par with boys' knowledge levels. . 87% of teachers said pupils' feeling restricted by stereotypes decreased, and more than a third of parents (35%) said they now had a better understanding of how stereotypes could restrict their children's job choices.



Insight 2

School careers provision and leadership commitment improved

Teachers' careers-related knowledge and skills improved; 60% included careers content in the curriculum (up from 18% at the start) and 54% of schools had a formal written careers strategy in place (up from 10%).



Insight 3

Employers valued working with primary pupils and want to do more

69% said they now understood the benefits of working with primary schools and 91% said they were strongly committed to continuing the work.



Insight 1

Gender stereotypes fell, particularly among girls - pupil careers knowledge and confidence rose, and teachers and parents noticed a difference

The evaluation of Wave 2 found important evidence of a fall in the influence of stereotypes that can start to limit career interests and choices – particularly among girls.

Overall, schools saw a 20% improvement in girls' career knowledge, alongside a 50% larger increase in their understanding of employer expectations and salary insights bringing them on a par with boys' knowledge levels.

Girls' career interests broadened and boosted

- Business & Finance up 30%
- Digital up 14%
- Law up 13%

Job interests by the end of the wave were less gender biased. For girls, this resulted in increased interest in 'Admin, business and finance' (up 30%), 'Sport and fitness' (up 15%), 'Digital' (up 14%) and 'Law' (up 13%). There were also significant increases in 'Construction and building' (up 8%) and 'Creative' (up 5%).

Teachers and parents also noted the breaking down of gender and other stereotypes. 87% of teachers said there was a decrease in their pupils' feeling they were restricted by stereotypes about their job choices. 83% said their pupils had increased confidence about having equal access to jobs and careers.

More than a third of parents (35%) said they now had a better understanding of how stereotypes and biases could restrict their children's job choices.

There was also good evidence of an increase in pupils' general understanding of the world of work. This was shown in a 9% increase in average scores for 'learning about different jobs other than those of my family/carers'.

This was further supported by an 8% increase in knowing what skills employers are looking for and a 5% rise in knowledge about lots of different types of jobs and careers amongst pupils.

There were encouraging signs of an even greater impact on disadvantaged children (those on FSM) who were 33% more likely than pupils overall to report they had learned more about different jobs beyond those of their parents or carers (12% v 9%) and 20% more likely to say they now knew more about lots of different jobs and careers (6% v 5%).

"I had to consider the way I've limited children, perhaps by not allowing them to see their true potential or opportunities that are there. You know, mainly from ignorance. I wasn't quite aware myself, so just being able to think about ways I can make sure my practice is more inclusive."

Teacher



Insight 1

Gender stereotypes fell, particularly among girls - pupil careers knowledge and confidence rose, and teachers and parents noticed a difference

The data are reinforced by qualitative research with teachers which suggested learning about diverse careers at school had helped pupils think beyond their initial ideas and consider a broader range of options. For example, pupils talked about how they had initially thought about becoming YouTubers but discussion at school had helped them “open it up a little bit more” and consider being a poet or an engineer.

Teachers also said pupils spoke with enthusiasm about employer encounter events. These encounters had stimulated their thinking about future career options, often opening up ideas about jobs they had not previously considered or known were available to them.

Teachers commented positively on the impact of the pilot on pupil confidence: 83% reported their pupils' confidence about future employment options available to them had increased.

There were positive signs from parents that children were talking more about careers at home and showing increased understanding of the subject. More than a third of parents (37%) said they were having more conversations with their child about the world of work. Of these parents, 36% said their child had been bringing up the topic and 11% reported the school had been engaging with parents about careers. More than a third (36%) said they now talk to their child about more varied jobs and careers. A third of parents also believed that their child's understanding of the world of work had increased as a result of the pilot.

“One of the activities that the children keep talking about was the Medical Mavericks at the Great Western Hospital. Year 6 pupils went there, and they really enjoyed it. It was a very hands-on experience to be able to do some of the activities and also talk to people within the NHS and hear what they do.”

Teacher



Insight 2

School careers provision and leadership commitment improved

Evidence shows that the second wave of the pilot made notable progress in upskilling teachers and schools in career-related learning (CRL). Teachers' confidence in talking to pupils about a wide range of careers was up 27%; their ability to identify and teach key skills needed by pupils improved by 19% and their ability to explain to pupils the biases and stereotypes in the work world improved by 20%.

60%

of teachers reported career-related learning (CRL) had been included in the curriculum (up from 18%)

There was also evidence of considerable improvements for schools, with many reporting an increased leadership commitment to CRL and intending to continue beyond the pilot. 76% of teachers stated their Senior Leadership Team (SLT) was engaged in embedding CRL at their school (up from 46%) and 60% of teachers reported that CRL had been included in the school's curriculum (up from 18%).

"This pilot has fitted in perfectly with our academy drive to expose pupils to a wider range of careers. The scheme has supported us in delivering more opportunities and thinking wider."

Teacher

There was a 64% increase in teachers saying their school helps pupils understand changes in career patterns and trends and 61% increase in those saying their school helps pupils understand the changes happening in the world of work.

There was also a 32% rise in teachers saying their school supports pupils to challenge assumptions about what jobs are the right ones for them and a 29% increase in them saying they support pupils to challenge

43%

increase in teachers helping pupils to understand workplace stereotyping

ideas that certain jobs are right for either men or women. There was a 43% increase in those saying they help students understand how stereotyping affects the workplace.

By the end of the wave, there was a 67% increase in schools saying they were now part of a network of primaries embedding careers in learning. There was a 66% rise in those saying they engage parents in career-related plans and activities and a 53% increase in schools saying they now had links to local employers.

"This whole school approach has helped to raise the profile of careers, enhance the pupil engagement through visits, given aspirations for our children's future, made the partnership between families and parents in our community stronger, challenged stereotypes, helped to focus the job roles children are exposed to."

Teacher



Insight 3

Employers valued working with primary pupils and want to do more

Employers successfully delivered 844 encounters across the 11 areas, attended by nearly 89,000 pupils - 41% of the employers taking part were SMEs.

There was evidence that in-person employer encounters had considerable impact on pupils, particularly in terms of learning, with over half of pupils (57%) attending encounters either in an assembly or an in-class presentation.

Employers considered their involvement in the wave a worthwhile experience. 97% were satisfied with their engagement with schools and 79% were impressed with their relationship with their Careers Hub.

91% of employers that participated were strongly committed to continuing to engage with local primary schools.

89,000

pupils reached through employer encounters

“My industry is always crying out for new females and I love being able to show that stereotypes don’t apply in what I do. The children were brilliant and had so many great questions for me at the end.”

Employer

Next steps

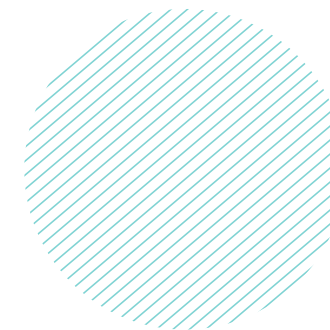
Delivery of the CEC's Start Small; Dream Big pilot continues to build on Waves 1 and 2 to include Wave 3, which will end in March 2025. 21 of the CEC's 44 Careers Hubs will deliver the pilot in local communities across the country.

The emerging evidence shows that starting careers education early in primary school not only broadens children's knowledge about the wide range of career choices available to them but is effective in challenging and breaking down limiting stereotypes, particularly among girls.

With the right support and professional development, primary schools and teachers are keen to bring career-related learning into their curriculum and develop a more strategic approach within their schools.

Employers also recognise the benefits of and see value in starting careers conversations and inspiration early. It is important to capitalise on this enthusiasm to build and deepen further employer engagement across all levels of education, so there is continuity in young people's opportunity to see into and experience of the world of work.

Over the next year, data and evidence from the primary pilot will continue to expand to provide richer and authoritative insight into what works best to achieve optimal outcomes and impact in career-related learning in primary.



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Associated Wave 2 delivery partners:

Cornwall &
the Isles of Scilly
CAREERS HUB

Devon, Plymouth
& Torbay
CAREERS HUB

Dorset
CAREERS HUB

Norfolk
& Suffolk
CAREERS HUB

East Sussex
CAREERS HUB

Solent
CAREERS HUB

Somerset
CAREERS HUB

South Yorkshire
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Swindon
& Wiltshire
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Tees Valley
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