



ACTIVATE  
LEARNING

# PROJECTS WITH EDUCATION PROVIDERS: HOW-TO GUIDE



## INTRODUCTION FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Activate Learning's strategic aim is to build a talent pipeline for business. We want to support young people to develop the technical skills, attributes and soft skills that will enable them to thrive in their future lives and careers. To do this, we work with employers to understand what they really want and need from our students. This supports our aim to lead the field in designing and implementing an innovative curriculum developed in partnership with employers - as showcased in this guide.

### Sally Dicketts CBE

Group Chief Executive  
Activate Learning

## LEPS AND THAMES VALLEY CHAMBER

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this guide is to provide businesses and their employees across the Thames Valley with an overview of what it is like to work with an education provider to develop an educational project.

Such work brings many benefits to businesses in the region, including support in meeting Corporate Social Responsibility aims, the ability to influence what curriculum is taught and how it is delivered, a means of creating a talent pipeline for business, and opportunities for employees to develop skills in communication and mentoring.

There is also the satisfaction to be derived from supporting young people to fulfil their potential, through supporting the development of their technical skills and employability attributes (or soft skills), and their literacy and numeracy. Research has shown that projects such as those outlined here are among the most effective means of engaging students and supporting their learning.

In this guide you will find an overview of the project planning process, case studies detailing what our students have gone on to achieve through doing this work, a Frequently Asked Questions section to address any queries you may have, details of opportunities to work with college outside of project work, and a series of references to other sources of information.

Other questions or feedback are always welcome:

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## INTRODUCTION

Within any local area, businesses and education providers have much to gain from meaningful collaboration. According to the CBI, "effective schools and college partnerships with businesses have a key role to play in raising levels of attainment and smoothing the transition to work" (CBI, 2018). Closer to home, the most recent OxLEP skills reports emphasises that "the role of employers cannot be underestimated" in the development of a local skills base. Adding "we require more employers engaged in helping shape curriculum design" and "we need more employers helping inspire and influence young people through deeper and more meaningful interactions between education and employment" (OxLEP, 2016).

Partnerships between businesses and education providers promote academic achievement and help to ensure students develop the skills, behaviours, and attitudes they need to be valuable employees with successful careers. Among the benefits of collaboration with schools and colleges cited by local employers are:

- The ability to influence what and how curriculum is taught
- The opportunity to fulfil CSR requirements
- The ability to help develop specific skills in relation to skills shortages
- The means of creating a talent pipeline for business that will help address issues surrounding recruitment
- The ability to get schools and colleges to focus on soft skills
- The opportunities for employees to develop skills in mentoring and teaching
- Opportunities for marketing and communications

At Activate Learning we are focussed on developing a "talent pipeline for business", meaning that we help our students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to enter the workplace. We also encourage them to foster their essential attributes, the behaviours and attitudes that will help them succeed in work and life. To achieve this we work with local employers to educate, employ, inspire, sponsor and train our students.

A key part of the way we deliver vocational education at Activate Learning is through projects co-designed and delivered with employers. This guide is designed to provide an overview of the way a "gold standard" project is put together and to answer some of the questions that you, as an employer, may have. There are of course many other ways that employers can, and do, contribute to Further Education and you will find a list of these opportunities towards the back of the guide.

Of the businesses surveyed by the CBI in 2018, 72% reported having links with schools and colleges. We think this is a really positive finding and this guide is intended to support even more employers to undertake this valuable work.



## RESEARCH CONTEXTS

### The benefits of employers and education providers collaborating on projects

Employers supporting schools and colleges in their work can have a significant impact on outcomes for students:

Young people who reported having 4 or more engagements with employers were 86% less likely to be NEET

Young people who experienced helpful employer engagement activities earned up to 16.4% more than those who did not take part in activities (Mann et al., 2017).

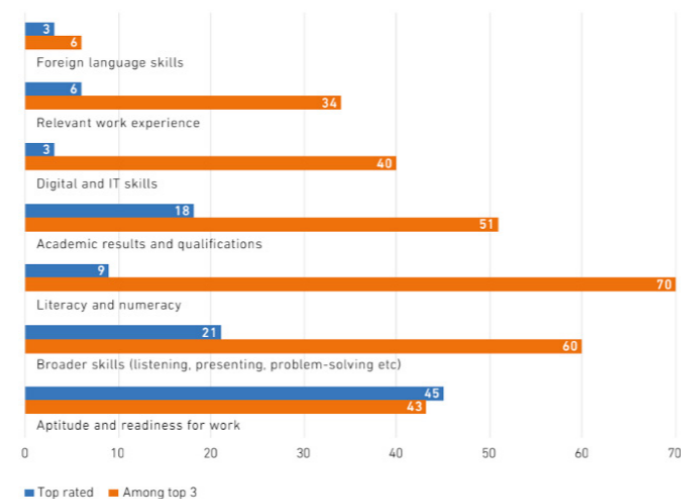
Enterprise games, of which co-created projects are one example, are one of the most effective ways of engaging students with employers (Hanson et al., 2017).

The evidence suggests that business games and enterprise competitions can have a significant and observable impact on cognitive abilities, employability skills, personal effectiveness, knowledge and career readiness



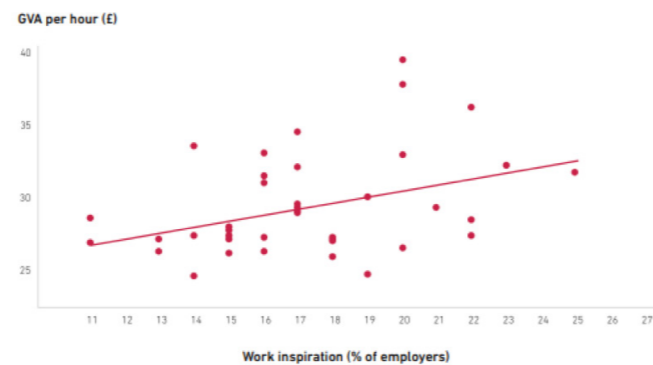
Employers are particularly focused on recruiting school and college leavers with literacy and numeracy and broader “soft” skills, all of which can be developed through co-designed projects (CBI/Pearson, 2018):

Exhibit 2.1 Most important factors in recruiting school/college leavers (%)



On a broader scale, there is a correlation between employer engagement with students via schools and colleges and with economic productivity within a particular region (CBI, 2017):

B: Businesses offering work inspiration vs productivity by LEP\*



\* Work inspiration is the aim of instilling a passion in students to plan for their future careers, through means such as site visits, mentoring, mock interviews and enterprise competitions.

## POLICY CONTEXTS

In recent years employers have expressed concerns about local skills gaps and about the readiness of young people for work. The government has responded with a series of policies intended to provide training in technical, literacy, numeracy and soft skills. T Levels have been introduced and apprenticeships have been reformed.

### T LEVELS

From 2020, T Levels will provide alternative technical qualifications equivalent to A Levels. They will include training in technical knowledge and skills, English, maths, digital skills and soft skills. Students will need to undertake an industry placement of at least 45 days.

The fostering of close ties between education providers and employers is one of the key ways both sectors can prepare for T Level qualifications

### APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

Apprenticeships have been transformed with a shift in emphasis away from a purely technical qualification towards a more holistic approach focussed on ensuring that apprentices develop all the skills, knowledge and behaviour needed to be successful in their chosen role.

Employers are actively involved in developing the standards for relevant occupations.

**For more information see the Department for Education and Institute for Apprenticeships websites.**



# ACTIVATE LEARNING CONTEXTS

At Activate Learning, our approach to designing and delivering education is closely aligned with national and local priorities to develop well-rounded individuals with the technical knowledge and skills and also the broader attitudes and behaviours needed to be successful in their future lives and in employment. Here are some things you might hear about while working with Activate Learning.

## LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

We have a learning philosophy comprising “brain”, “emotion” and “motivation” that guides the way we develop learning experiences for students.

We use cutting-edge educational practice to ensure that students are able to learn the skills and information they need (“brain”). We are also mindful of the range of emotions that can enhance or impede an individual’s ability to learn and we are careful to account for these in our approach (“emotion”). Finally, motivation is crucial, and we aim to support students in finding and developing their own motivations to succeed.

## ATTRIBUTES

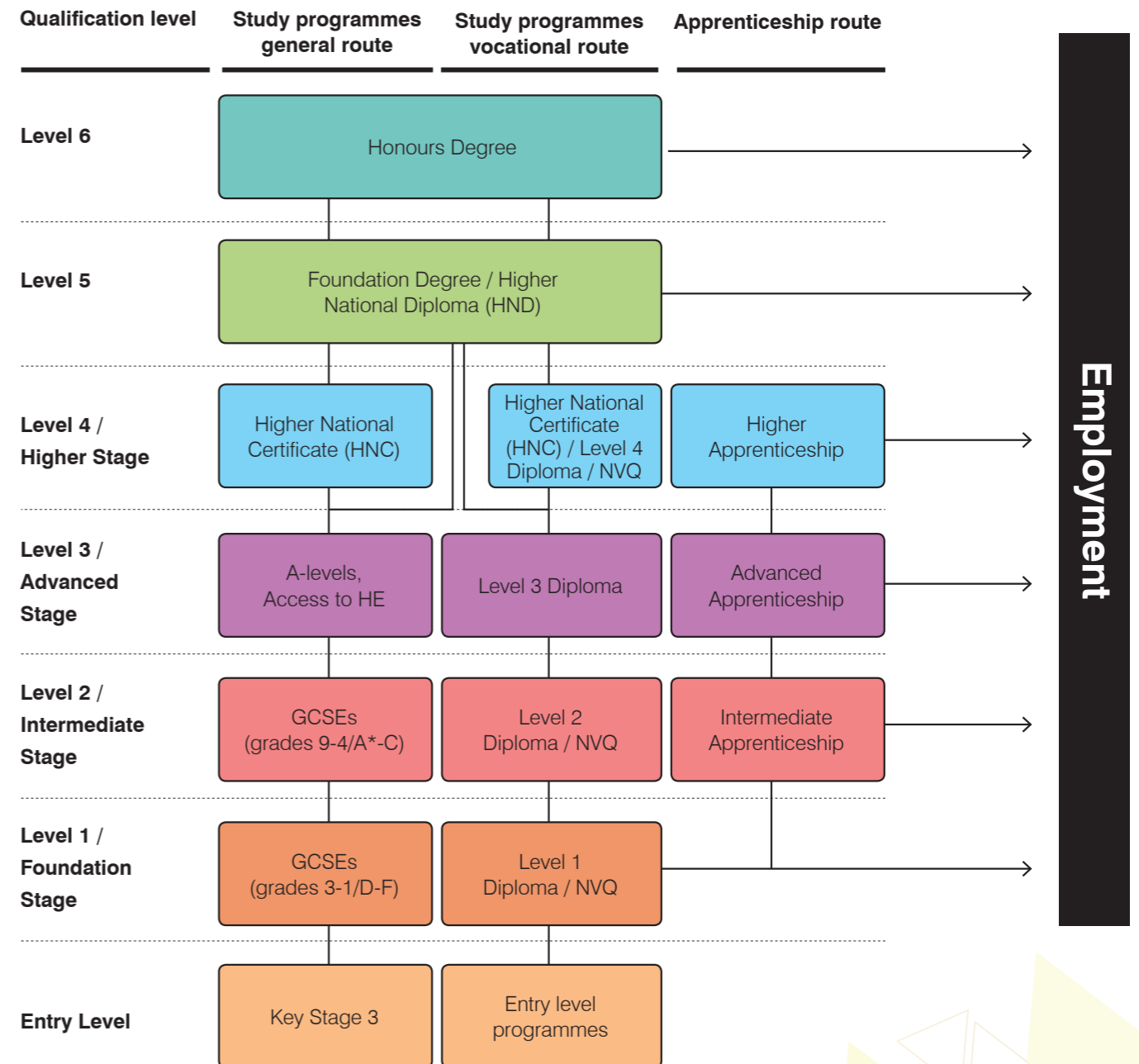
Our response to demands for improved soft skills amongst young people leaving education is a set of Attributes, or attitudes and behaviours, that have been developed in partnership with employers and other groups. We aim to embed opportunities for developing these into all our learning experiences.

<b>Professional</b> 	<b>Confident</b> 	<b>Enterprising</b> 	<b>Resilient</b> 	<b>Aware</b> 
<b>Digital</b> 	<b>Motivated</b> 	<b>Problem solver</b> 	<b>Adaptable</b> 	<b>Empathic</b> 
<b>Numerate</b> 	<b>Independent</b> 	<b>Business minded</b> 	<b>Self-reliant</b> 	<b>Self-aware</b> 
<b>Communicative</b> 	<b>Inquisitive</b> 	<b>Resourceful</b> 	<b>Commitment</b> 	<b>Reflective</b> 
<b>Customer focused</b> 	<b>Positive</b> 	<b>Risk taker</b> 	<b>Capability</b> 	<b>Respectful</b> 
<b>Team player</b> 	<b>Proactive</b> 	<b>Leader</b> 	<b>Perseverance</b> 	<b>Mindful</b> 

**DON'T QUIT**

# QUALIFICATION STRUCTURES

While working with an education provider you will hear a range of different qualifications and levels referred to. This is how they all fit together:



## CO-PROJECT DESIGN: EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Co-curriculum design, when employers and education providers work together to design and deliver a project or course, can be a powerful means of communicating knowledge, skills, and essential attributes to students. It allows employers to contribute to the development of the kinds of employees they want to see in the workplace, and allows education providers to tailor their provision to meet the needs of the local economy, creating a talent pipeline for business.

### HOW DO I DEVELOP A PROJECT WITH COLLEGES?

While working with colleges you will not be expected to create and/or deliver materials and courses independently. The first stage of any discussion about work on a particular project should include a conversation about the time and contributions you and/or your organisation will be able to make and about your level of involvement.

The teachers you are working with will provide leadership and guidance on the design of projects, on the development of project materials, and on the delivery of the project in the classroom - but there is a great deal of flexibility around how the process of project development takes place.

With regards to time-commitment, you may only be able to offer a couple of hours' consultancy on the topic of a project and to visit the college once to talk to students - or your organisation may have a team of people able to contribute to the development of resources and to attend college on a regular basis.

As a result of this flexibility, timelines for the development and delivery of projects will vary. Delivery may take place over the course of a term (roughly 12 weeks) or half a term (roughly 6 weeks). The minimum lead-in time for the development of a project would be roughly a term. But again, all of this is dependent on the amount of time you as an employer are able to commit to.

### SITE VISITS

These can be extremely valuable learning experiences for students and can add an extra element of interest to a project. While on site, it is useful for students to get a sense of the way the business operates day-to-day, to talk to people in different roles (apprentices, for example) and, if applicable and possible, to gain a little hands-on experience. Ideally students will have the opportunity to undertake work before and after the visit that will help them make the most of the experience, by developing questions to ask employees for example, or by being directed to things they should pay particular attention to.



### STEP BY STEP

#### Step One: Company buy-in and making contact

What do you as an employer want to get from this partnership and what are you able to contribute in terms of time and information? Which schools and/or colleges are based closest to you? Or which education provider offers courses that are best aligned to your organisation? Once contact has been established, what does the college, school, or individual teacher want to get from the project (e.g., industry knowledge, development of soft skills, maths and/or English development, improved student motivation, etc).

#### Useful resources

Teach Too 'Implementing Teach Too Principles', which provides a way in which employers and education providers can assess their own readiness for collaboration, and a 'Business Case Planning Tool'. Both documents can be found at: [www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/teach-too-programme/teach-too-resources](http://www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/teach-too-programme/teach-too-resources)

#### Step Two: Establishing knowledge and skills

Get to know the level of the students. Match curriculum requirements to industry requirements. Think about embedding English, maths and ICT.

#### Useful resources

See Teach Too's Co-curriculum Development and Delivery Toolkit: [www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/teach-too-programme/teach-too-resources](http://www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/teach-too-programme/teach-too-resources)

#### Step Three: Determining the authentic driving question

What will be the driving question of the project? How does this link to real-world problems in industry? Think 'bigger context': what are the bigger social issues at stake?

#### Step Four: Information and inquiry

How are students going to get the information they need? What can you, as an employer, provide or direct students and teachers to? Work with teachers to decide on balance of guided learning and independent study (this will largely depend on the particular group of students).

#### Step Five: Developing attributes and soft skills

What are the key attributes, behaviours and soft skills that students will need in your industry? What are current job seekers lacking? Work with teachers to develop individual and group activities that will help to develop these attributes.

#### Step Six: Student voice

Provide students with opportunities to make decisions about work undertaken and products produced. Ask for regular feedback throughout the project and at the end.

#### Step Seven: Critique and revision

Develop a culture of critique with students reflecting on the quality of their own work and that of others. Build in opportunities for formative assessment and feedback from you and from the teacher.

#### Step Eight: The publicly presented product

Create an authentic context in which students get to present to you and receive your feedback. Work can include written documents, artefacts, websites and presentations.

# CASE STUDIES

Activate Learning works with a range of employers to support curriculum development.

**A-LEVELS, ACCESS TO HE, BUSINESS, SCIENCE AND TOURISM**

**CREATIVE ARTS**

**LIFESKILLS**

## ED NOLAN, ESTIMATOR BEARD CONSTRUCTION

Beard is a multi-award-winning construction company.

### Work undertaken with Activate Learning

“We partner with Activate Learning to assist with project-based learning modules linked to construction courses. We base the modules on construction projects that Beard is working on at the time. This means that we can give students “live” drawings and documents to read, understand, analyse and measure. As a result, students gain greater insight into how important their maths and English skills are to their chosen industry.”

### Benefits of Doing this Work

“As a business, we need to be proactive in the development of the future workforce and the project work we do is the perfect way to contribute and help students understand the standards the industry expects from them. This work also provides an excellent opportunity for our own employees to gain experience in public speaking and in mentoring, both useful skills in business, which will help further their careers. Finally, our work with the college is a great opportunity to fulfill our CSR duties. It provides a good example of how we are engaged with the community and in the development of the local area.”



## GEMMA HOOD, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, VOLUME

Volume is an award-winning global AI agency.

### Work undertaken with Activate Learning

“By using our technical skills and approach with clients, we have been able to construct an engaging brief for students – encouraging them to learn how to develop a virtual-reality (VR) application. We’ll be showing them future trends in VR and augmented reality (AR), whilst highlighting the value immersive solutions can bring to a challenge. We will run through how we would deliver a technical project, understanding the key steps for a seamless delivery. Meeting designers and developers first-hand will hopefully open the students’ minds and motivate them to start their new project!”

### Benefits of Doing this Work

“My background is in HR, so from my point of view, I’m thinking ‘how can we close the skills gap? How can I start to build talent pools of the future?’ Actually, some of the roles we are recruiting for here at Volume don’t even exist in the industry yet. We’re almost crafting and building teams on what we’re learning. We’re so cutting edge in what we’re delivering. Working with students, they can see what we’re doing day-to-day and we can start to grow and build those talent pools for the future.”



**LIFESTYLES**

**SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC**

**TECHNOLOGY**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PROJECTS

### How much time will working on a project take?

This is entirely flexible and will depend on how much time you are able to give. You may wish to act in a consultancy role, contributing just a few hours of your time, or you might want to make multiple trips to college to support students in lessons. If you have colleagues who would also like to participate, you may decide to divide the time between you.

### How do I make/sustain contact with education providers?

Schools and colleges are always keen to engage with employers and many will have named representatives on their websites or dedicated webpages. Some education providers will organise their own employer-engagement events while others will attend networking events organised by local enterprise organisations; keep an eye on social media for information about these. Many educators are on LinkedIn and can be contacted that way.

### How can I make links between the skills and knowledge needed for the workplace and those needed for college qualifications?

When talking to educators, think about the key tasks that you or others within your organisation undertake day-to-day and the technical skills that make this possible. Also think about which soft skills, such as communication, are essential (use the Attributes table on page 5 to decide what these might be). Your contact within the education provider will then be able to tell you how the technical skills match to particular qualifications and how soft skills might be fostered through lessons and other learning opportunities.

### Models of delivery

The options here are endless and will largely depend on the nature of the project you want to develop, the activities undertaken in your industry, the facilities available, and the number of students you want to involve. This will also depend on the students involved. Some students will benefit most from talks and independent working time while others will need more traditionally structured sequences of lessons. Also think about what you will be most comfortable with. You might feel confident presenting to a large group of students or you might prefer circulating around the room talking to small groups.

### What should I expect when taking part in a session for students?

You will have the opportunity to decide your role in the session beforehand and your contact at the education provider will work with you to organise this. You might want to lead or contribute to a whole-class session, particularly once you have got to know the students, or you might want to coach, mentor, or mock-interview individual students, or take part in a panel listening to student presentations (or a mixture!). Generally, you will be free to deliver content while educators attend to classroom management, including timings of activities, behaviour, and distribution of materials.

### How can I assess the impact of my project?

Decide what you might need evidence of impact for, such as marketing materials or CSR reports. The educator you are working with will be able to support the gathering of information. It is likely that he or she will also be measuring impact and there will be some crossover in what you are trying to find out. You may want to give students a short questionnaire at the start and end of the project asking for their views. If you want to delve a little deeper, achievement in qualifications at the end of a module or course of study can be useful and attendance data can be a helpful way of gaining some insight into student motivation.

## WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

### WEBSITES

Business in the Community: [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)

The Careers and Enterprise Company: [www.careersandenterprise.co.uk](http://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk)

Careers Development Institute (CDi): [www.thecdi.net](http://www.thecdi.net)

Class Careers: [www.classcareers.co.uk](http://www.classcareers.co.uk)

Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL): [cavtl.excellencegateway.org.uk](http://cavtl.excellencegateway.org.uk)

The Edge Foundation: [www.edge.co.uk](http://www.edge.co.uk)

Education and Employers: [www.educationandemployers.org](http://www.educationandemployers.org)

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): [www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk](http://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Founders4Schools: [www.founders4schools.org.uk](http://www.founders4schools.org.uk)

Gatsby Foundation: [www.gatsby.org.uk](http://www.gatsby.org.uk)

Inspire the Future: [www.inspiringthefuture.org](http://www.inspiringthefuture.org)

Speakers for schools: [www.speakers4schools.org](http://www.speakers4schools.org)

STEM Learning: [www.stem.org.uk](http://www.stem.org.uk)

Work Finder: [www.workfinder.com](http://www.workfinder.com)

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

CBI (2017) *Unlocking Regional Growth: Understanding the Drivers of Productivity Across the UK's Regions and Nations*. London: CBI.

CBI/Pearson (2018). *Educating for the Modern World*. London: CBI.

Collins, J. and Barnes, A. (2017). *Careers in the Curriculum. What works?* [online] London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

Denoël, E., Dorn, E., Goodman, A., Hiltunen, J., Krawitz, M., and Mourshed, M. (2017). *Drivers of Student Performance: Insights from Europe*. [online] London: McKinsey and Company.

Education Endowment Foundation (2016). *Improving Level 2 English and Maths Outcomes for 16 to 18 Year Olds*: Literature Review.

Gatsby Foundation, Good Career Guidance (2014). [online] London.

Hanson, J., Hooley, T. and Cox, A. (2017). *Business games and enterprise competitions. What works?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

Hanson, J., and Lucas, B. (2016) *Learning to be employable: Practical lessons from research into developing character*. [online] London: City and Guilds.

Mann, A. (2012). *It's Who You Meet: Why Employer Contacts at School Make a Difference to the Employment Prospects of Young Adults*. [online] London: Education and Employers.

Mann, A., Kashefpakdel, E.T, Rehill, J. and Huddleston, P. (2017) *Contemporary Transitions Young Britons Reflect on Life After Secondary School and College*. [online] London: Education and Employers.

Mann, A., Rehill, J., Kashefpakdel E.T. (2018). *Employer Engagement in Education: Insights from International Evidence for Effective Practice and Future Research*. [online] London: Education and Employers.

McLoughlin, F. (2014). *CAVTL: One Year Review*. London: CAVTL.

OxLEP (2016). *Oxfordshire Skills Strategy: Building a 21st Century Skills Ecosystem*. Oxford: OxLEP.



## GLOSSARY

### BTEC/ PEARSON

Business and Technology Council vocational qualifications organised and awarded by Pearson that enable learners to progress to university or work.

### CITY AND GUILDS

Organisation supporting skills development for the workplace, including through the organisation and award of vocational qualifications.

### CURRICULUM

All of the subjects studied at a school or college.

### GFE COLLEGES

General Further Education Colleges: colleges providing technical and professional education and training.

### GRADES

GCSE subjects, including maths and English, are now graded using numbers instead of letters, with 9 being the highest grade obtainable and 1 the lowest. A “standard pass” (the equivalent of the old “C” grade) is a 4.

### LEVELS

Level 1 equates to GCSE old grades G-D (now 3-1); level 2 equates to GCSE old grades C-A\* (now 4-9); level 3 is equivalent to A Level.

### NVQS

National Vocational Qualifications are work-based qualifications designed to ensure individuals have the skills and knowledge they need to undertake a particular job.

### RESIT POLICY

It is a legal requirement that students who did not achieve a grade 4 (old grade “C”) in maths and/or English when they were sixteen must continue to re-sit these subjects, either until they pass, or until the year they are 19 at the time of enrolling for a course.

### SCHEME OF WORK/ LEARNING

A detailed plan of what students will learn lesson-by-lesson and week-by-week on any particular course. These are usually written by teachers to meet the requirements of a particular qualification while taking the wider curriculum of the college into consideration (through the integration, for example, of Attributes).

### STUDY PROGRAMME

Courses of study for 16-19 year olds that include core technical or academic qualifications; maths and English GCSE if the student does not already have a grade 4 (old grade “C”) in those subjects; work experience and other activities designed to support transition into employment or further study.

### T-LEVELS

New qualifications, designed with employers, intended to provide a technical equivalent to A Levels. Students will develop the knowledge and practical skills needed for a particular industry or occupation and will undertake extended industry placements of up to 60 days.





