

Characteristics of effective programmes

A guide to programme design, implementation, delivery and
evaluation from the Careers & Enterprise Company

The information contained in this guide aims to provide a framework of what effective programmes look like and is not exhaustive. Following the guide does not guarantee funding from the Careers and Enterprise Company. This paper is designed to be used in conjunction with The Good Bidding Guide.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Careers and Enterprise Company is an employer-led organisation that aims to inspire and prepare young people for the fast-changing world of work. We bring together schools, colleges, employers and providers to build local networks that deliver well-evidenced careers support for young people.

We invest directly in proven careers and enterprise programmes for young people at school and college in England. To date, over one hundred programmes, with a combined reach of 270,000 young people, have seen an investment of £12million of public money. Three quarters of our investment has been in 'cold spots', areas with most need for support.

Core to our mission is supporting successful organisations to scale their delivery, and to continue to improve the quality of careers interactions for children in schools. One of the ways we do this is through understanding and growing the evidence base. This involves investing in original research, and in supporting the dissemination of research and best practice through our community.

This guide draws on the best practice we see in our community. We want to highlight excellent practice and provide a framework for effective delivery so that we can all continue to improve careers and enterprise learning for young people. The content is based on analysis of the programmes currently being delivered through the Careers and Enterprise Company's investment funds; consultation feedback from the Company's investment team, Lead Assessors and Regional Leads; the extensive experience of the Guide's authors; and feedback gathered from a grant recipient workshop.

Thomas Graham, Chief Investment and Strategy Officer

Chapter 2: How to use this guide

The past two years have given us the opportunity to work with some great organisations delivering high quality careers programmes to young people. We have been able to support delivery in areas that need it most and attract additional investment into the sector. Our focus on supporting the scaling up of effective interventions sits alongside the importance we place on contributing to the evidence base – both through original research and learning from delivery.

The experience of running a number of investment rounds and then contract managing delivery has given us an insight into how effective programmes operate. Our partnerships at a local and regional level also feed into this growing knowledge bank. We are keen to share what we have learned so far.

This guide provides a framework not a blueprint. We want to encourage diversity and innovation in delivery, underpinned by an understanding of what works and use of the existing evidence base. There are many aspects to effective programmes – and certainly those that are working well often differ substantially from each other. However, all have a clear vision and confidence in their approach.

This is designed to be useful to new, small organisations as well as those who are more established. It is the sister paper to the Good Bidding Guide, and they are designed so that they can be used together.

This guide does not provide a tick list of features programmes should include – although we provide links to the research into what works in careers and enterprise. Instead the aim is to challenge you to think about what parts of your programme could be improved and how. We have established a forum for sharing best practice, and this framework may help you identify areas of your delivery where others could benefit from your expertise.

The guide is structured around four key areas for effective delivery:

Chapter 3: Programme Design

Chapter 4: Implementation

Chapter 5: Delivery

Chapter 6: Evaluation

A number of examples are used in the text for illustrative purposes. They have been anonymised but they are all real.

Chapter 3: Programme Design

Evidenced-based design

Core to the Careers & Enterprise Company is the value placed on contributing to the evidence base. We do this in four ways:

- Commissioning original research and supporting the dissemination of research through publications, events and seminars
- Supporting delivery organisations to evaluate and learn from their own programmes
- Developing a community of practice amongst providers to ensure peer to peer sharing and learning
- Working with research partners like the Education Endowment Fund to improve the existing evidence base

Beyond understanding the evidence base, it is important that organisations are able to identify and distil the aspects that will enhance programmes, and embed them within their design and delivery. This requires more than a reference in a bid or an interview answer. The best programmes we see use published research to improve their delivery at a very practical level. Robust research should provide a challenge, and perhaps an alternative perspective. This can then be considered in tandem with the evaluation evidence (see Chapter 6) from your own programme to support continued improvement.

It is important to understand the quality of any research you use – this may depend on how strong the evidence is. Figure 1 is a summary of what works, based on the quality of the research currently available.

Figure 1: What works in careers and enterprise¹

STRONG EVIDENCE	SOME EVIDENCE	LIMITED EVIDENCE
High quality evaluations showing positive impact	Lower quality evaluations showing positive impact	Insufficient evaluation evidence at present
Employer mentoring	1-2 week work experiences	Careers fairs
Enterprise competitions	Career learning co-delivered by teachers and employers	E-mentoring
Work related learning provided in cooperation with employers	Careers talks	Job shadowing
	Careers websites	Part-time working

¹ Hooley, T [What Works in Careers and Enterprise](#) The Careers and Enterprise Company (2016)

	Curriculum learning co-delivered by teachers and employers	Teacher CPD delivered by employers
	CV workshops	Volunteering
	Employer delivered employability skills workshops	
	Enterprise activities	
	Mock interviews	
	Workplace visits	

Young people, surveyed by YouGov, identified a number of features they thought were characteristics of effective programmes. These include²:

- Practical support – for example CV writing and mock interviews
- Multiple interactions
- The quality of the interaction, specifically the authenticity of delivery and understanding of local labour markets, and the level to which interactions reflected the breadth of the labour market
- Integration between activity and professional careers advice
- Tailored support – awareness of the needs of different year groups and their proximity to the labour market.

The Company has invested in publishing a number of papers that serve to develop a shared understanding of what works. These are available on our website. They include:

- Understanding the careers coldspots 2016
- What works in careers and enterprise
- Mapping disengagement
- Effective employer mentoring
- Moments of choice
- Prioritisation indicators 2015 (cold spots)

A process for using research to inform delivery:

- Identify the research you want to use (is it robust? Of high quality? Relevant?)
- Summarise the key messages that are particularly relevant to your programme.
- Determine how these research messages translate into practical interventions – what would they look like? A good example of this is the #iwill campaign, which is focused on encouraging 10-20 year old’s to participate in social action.
- Review the risk implications identified in the research. For example, if a certain quality threshold is required to ensure positive impacts, how will you ensure that is met?

² Mann, A [It’s who you meet: why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults](#) Education and Employers Taskforce (2012)

- Design an evaluation plan so that you understand the impact of any changes, and so that you can share your experience and grow the evidence base. Evaluation is covered in more detail in Chapter 6.
- Use the research to help you articulate why you are making choices and decisions about programme delivery.

Theory of change

The Theory of Change methodology can be a useful way to think about the impact research evidence might have on long, medium and short term outcomes, and what interventions need to be in place to facilitate that. This process can help capture why there is a need for your programme, what gap it will fill and help articulate how it provides a solution.

Working with employers

There is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate that employer engagement with schools produces positive outcomes for both young people and employers. Employers play very different roles within careers programmes – and rightly so, there is no one ‘right’ role, although the strength of the evidence for different interventions does vary (see Figure 1). It is important for both the theory of change and the programme design to be clear about the role that employers hold and to be able to articulate why that choice has been made.

Careers & Enterprise Company Regional Leads describe models that work well as having “a very clear role for employers.” Examining the research base can help with designing employer interactions with maximum impact for students. It can help determine whether, for example, employer type or size will be important considerations.

Research into the local labour market is available through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), along with the LEP priorities. This can provide a framework for understanding who local employers are, as well as local need. However, this needs to be contextualised by access to broader information as young people may choose to move to other areas of the country for study or work once they leave school.

Being able to bring in new employers who are not currently engaging in careers programmes in schools is a key attribute. In some locations there may be considerable demands on employers’ time. Understanding what other programmes are operating in your area, and their implications in terms of employer capacity is crucial. Some LEPs have multiple offers of support in the same small area, or specific sector, but have cold spots in other parts of their district. Your programme is more likely to be successful if it understands these very local demands.

There is no single ‘best’ way for employers to work with students. Effective programmes have employers engaged in meaningful delivery in a number of different ways. However, what they have in common is a framework for employers – what they are doing and what they should expect. Examples we have seen include:

- Employers delivering transition skills support to small groups of students over a term, trained and supported by the local organisation. This programme also offers feedback to employees who facilitate the student-teams and this is tied into their continuing professional development (CPD) at their firm.
- Comprehensive support for employers hosting work experience placements, including advance visits, completion of a specially designed booklet to help them think through issues that might arise, and additional training and mentoring as required.
- Progressive levels of engagement that see employers start with attending a careers fair, move to hosting half day workplace visits, and build up to delivering work experience and even summer internship programmes.

Working with volunteers

Effective programmes have a clear approach to support for employee volunteers. This may include:

- Structured information and recruitment sessions
- An induction programme, which includes safeguarding training
- Access to a named person in the delivery organization to contact if they have questions or need help.

One organization has an on-call system for their employee mentors so that there will always be someone available by phone should issues arise during a session

- Access to additional training.

One large organization allows employee volunteers to attend the training they run for their own staff. This may be relevant and support the employee/student relationship, but may also be used by the employee volunteers to support their own personal development

- A clear exit strategy. This is often a celebration event of some sort if the employee has been engaged with either one or a group of students for a period of time. However, it is also important to capture the learning from volunteers who are involved for short periods of time.

Working with schools

Our experience has shown that there are a number of approaches to working with schools – hands on, hands off, building school partnerships. However, key to successful design is clarity about the schools you are planning to work with. Effective programmes:

- Know their schools
- Know how they will target the schools to bring them on board
- Know how they will target the children within those schools (without creating stigma)

It is essential to know which schools you will work with, and why, and to have a clear plan to approach and engage them. If those links do not exist then it is important that the strategy to build and maintain them is clear. Effective programmes are able to articulate a compelling rationale as to why schools would want to work with them.

Strategic links

Underpinning an effective design is the embedding of the programme in its locality. Understanding and utilising strategic links are important, as well as ensuring that the investment and resource already in place are complemented rather than duplicated. Additionality is key.

A work experience programme applied for money to deliver 'book-ending' support. Work experience was already being delivered in the area. Instead of designing a competing programme, the organisation had designed interventions that built on and enhanced the provision that was already in place. The provider delivers support pre- and post- placement to ensure that the match quality is high and learning from the work experience is maximised.

This also involves working closely with the strategic organisations representing or engaging with employers and schools in the area. These include the LEP and the Enterprise Advisors. Understanding the work they are already doing – and the gaps they have identified helps to ensure that your programme design will be more likely to be valued and supported.

Collaboration has resource implications, both in terms of the time to create and maintain partnerships, and the funding that may be required to support them. It is important to understand the benefits, and how to design a delivery model that maximises the strengths of all constituent parts. Equally, if this is not an approach for you, then the rationale needs to be clear and well articulated.

Chapter 4: Implementation

Timeframes

The Careers and Enterprise Company management interview process often reveals a wide variation in the level of attention played to planning. Implementation plans are key to demonstrating capacity to deliver – reflecting who will do what and when, and providing reassurance to funders and other stakeholders that it can be done.

Implementation plans give a good indication of the organisational awareness of how long things *actually* take. Effective plans demonstrate an understanding of the time required to recruit volunteers, engage employers and schools, and embed delivery. This needs to be based on experience, research, and early examples of reaching out to others. It will also be contingent on whether the provider has been delivering in an area for some time, or whether they are scaling to a new area. This all needs to be underpinned by contingency plans, which take account of where any delays will impact on other parts of the implementation.

Phased roll-outs can be an effective way of scaling. This phasing can occur across locations – for example building up in one LEP area first before starting in a second (or multiple other) location(s); or within locations – starting with a hub and then moving out to other areas within the same LEP. A phased roll-out may also occur within different parts of the programme, with some interventions available sooner than others.

One programme started with school-based activities that were delivered by programme staff, with employer-led activities coming later in the programme. This enabled the programme to get off to a quick start, and provided a longer window to engage employers.

One of the pitfalls of phased roll-outs that needs to be mitigated is lopsided delivery across multiple areas. Concerns have been raised from LEPs where the start of delivery in their area was delayed and the perception is that this is because the programme and provider continued to focus on their prime delivery location at the expense of other areas.

Avoiding this danger requires understanding the type of scaling that makes most sense for each programme: are you better able to scale within your same locality but to more schools, or a different type of pupil in schools in which you already operate (eg younger years) or take the programme you have to another location?

There are a number of key drivers of this decision:

- How will programme need to change?
- What do you need to consider?
- How will you get this information?

If you are currently running a transition skills programme to Y9 and 10 pupils but want to scale it by extending access to Y7 and 8, what difference will that make to the content? If a

key part of the programme is developing CV and interview skills, is that still relevant, does it need to be adapted or replaced?

The most effective examples of scaling in this way introduced progressive programmes, where the exposure to employers, information and activities built with each school year. Some providers reduce access as intensity of activity grows; others retain a mainstream programme but change activities. What is common across both approaches is a clear vision of how expanding access to younger pupils will enhance the experience at all stages of the process.

Working with employers

Identifying employers and engaging both businesses and employees within them is likely to take time and considerable investment. It is important that new employer activity sits in addition to what is already in place in an area, and will not either irritate employers by over-burdening them with requests, or sever strategic links by taking employers that have value for other organisations.

Employers and their employees may have training needs. These should have been identified as part of the design process and working with employers and employees to meet these should sit as part of the programme design. However the time to deliver any upfront training, including induction or recruitment activities needs to sit in the implementation plan.

The time spent training employees to be volunteers varies significantly between programme providers. Some offer a significant induction, others a short induction period with access to additional support or training once the programme is underway.

Working with schools

The investment required to identify and engage schools needs to be reflected in the implementation plan. Effective programmes know which schools they will work with, and why.

One provider of work experience for pupils with higher levels of need had identified schools that were already invested in delivering careers support but had students who were not engaging with the mainstream placements on offer. Their programme was designed as a parallel intervention, offering additional support to both employer and student pre, during and post placement.

At implementation it is also important to identify the degree to which capacity building is required. Some programmes work with teachers at the school to support smoother transitions in and out of interventions, and to enable cross-curriculum integration.

One model delivers transition skills support through a network of school partnerships. The implementation stage for this requires considerable work to bring the schools together under the umbrella of a lead school. This model is designed to support sustainability as each school in the partnership will have the option to lead their own network once the project has run for two years. It also streamlines communication with employers as contacts are shared between the schools in a partnership.

Strategic links

Strategic partners – whether LEPs, schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) or employer umbrella groups - are important to set up and maintain during implementation. Communication is key. It helps to be clear about what roles and expectations are on each side.

Keeping partners up to date with what you are up to and what stage you are at is appreciated. This can be done through a regular phone call or email, or more formally through an organisational newsletter.

One programme was designed as a result of the provider working with a LEP to deliver placements. The strategic relationship that resulted helped identify a gap for a work experience week that had a different twist – with young people moving between multiple employers within the same sector. The support from the LEP in identifying the need, and helping to sense-check the proposed solution made implementation considerably easier.

There have been issues in the past with provider organisations assuming that LEPs or Enterprise Advisors and Co-ordinators will be able to set up and provide all links with employers in the area. Unless this has been explicitly negotiated pre-tender, the assumption should be that strategic organisations may be able to support delivery with information and advice but responsibility for partnerships should not be devolved to them in this way.

Chapter 5: Delivery

Engagement

Engagement – be it with pupils, schools, employers or strategic partners is key to effective delivery. The best programmes build sustainability by continuing to work to engage stakeholders as the programme rolls out. The most successful programmes understand the local landscape. They work with the LEP and other partners from an early stage, and may convene a steering group to support programme development.

Partnerships

The role of place can have a significant impact on the programme being delivered. Some programmes are delivered in school to minimise time out of lessons, and reduce the risk of students getting 'lost' on the way. Some are delivered in employer's workplaces or other premises. This may be to provide a neutral place for students who don't like school, or may be to inspire students who are unaware of nearby opportunities.

One programme worked with local employers who were little known in the community. Based on a small industrial estate, school pupils were unaware of their existence. Through working with the employers to design a work experience programme that culminated in a fun design/production competition, the organisation was able to raise awareness about local opportunities, and employers were able to talk to students about apprenticeships they delivered.

It is really important to understand the role that funding has – and what other funding is available in the area. The Good Bidding Guide has information on identifying and using match funding. Some of this may come from funding for your specific interventions – from schools or employers. However, some organisations have used other funding streams to develop additional but complementary aspects to their programme.

Partnerships assume a very particular role when consortia are involved. A good consortium adds strength to a programme when each member brings something distinct (we have seen employer bodies, membership organisations, geographical knowledge and content developers among others) but the reason for the partnership is clear. Each member of the consortia needs to have a clear reason for involvement with the programme and the sum needs to be greater than the parts.

Transport

Using off-site premises requires transport, which has a logistical and, often, a monetary cost. Public transport may work in a city location where there is regular and cheap/free transport for young people. Minibuses may work better in more rural locations – or where the distance from school to employer is further.

It is important to think about transport if you are considering scaling from one area to another. A system which has served you well in one place may not work so well elsewhere. Effective programmes tend to be masters of maximising their track records. It is said that no experience is a lost experience. Understanding what lessons come from previous delivery – both good and bad play into creating any new programme. However, this needs to be contextualised by what is different – and what changes this requires.

One provider had an employer-based activity delivered using public transport. They were seeking to replicate their model in other places where the infrastructure was not as well developed, and where the programme would have required young people travelling between towns up to 20 miles apart. They had not taken into account the cost or time implications, and how these differed from the original model.

Type of support

We see considerable differences between size, scope and length of programmes. There is often a correlation between the numbers a programme reaches and the intensity of support provided. In general, programmes that are aimed at whole year groups offer more group work. Those that offer small group support or 1-1 help, tend to be restricted to a smaller group. In the case of the latter the selection process is important. Decisions need to be made as to whether it is the school or the programme that target or identify pupils. It is important that the selection process does not make it harder for those with higher levels of need to partake in the exercises. This may happen if the application is voluntary and requires an application form for example. There is no one correct method of selection, but it is important that organisations are aware of unintended consequences that may arise from the choices that are made.

Our experience shows that progressive approaches that balance intensity and scale are effective. These may see a build up over time, with more resource dedicated as pupils move up through the school, or more intensity as the programme becomes more career specific.

The use of cross-curriculum integration can also be very beneficial. There is increasing interest in the use of transition skills and labour market information in core lessons. For example, writing covering letters in persuasive writing, or analysing local labour market data. Some organisations are focusing on CPD for teachers to enable the delivery of such interventions.

We are increasingly seeing an emphasis on contextualising interventions. One way this is done is through 'bookending'. This may see activity before and after the main intervention/event in order to help young people make decisions and identify how to get the most from a careers fair/work visit/work experience week or it may be a case of action planning post activity to embed learning and identify next steps.

Some programmes include significant involvement from other actors - including teachers or family members. If this involvement is part of the programme it needs to be designed and factored in.

Digital

In a number of sectors technological advances are changing the way services are delivered. While we have seen some good programmes that focus on preparation for and access to careers in the tech and digital industries, we are yet to see a programme that effectively utilises tech to deliver something different, rather than similar services differently. There is a significant difference between doing the same thing more efficiently using technology – for example through the use of Skype interviews with employers or video conferencing for employer visits – and using tech to challenge the current approaches. It will be interesting and exciting to see the first programmes that do the latter.

Technology also offers providers an ability to scale and to develop and deliver in new areas more quickly.

Sustainability

One of the key questions we look to see answered in management interviews is how the programme will be sustained beyond the current funding round. Sustainability is indicated by broad organisational support and investment – from trustees, supporters and advisors. Common factors of sustainable programmes are:

- Understanding of value, not just cost
- Considered length/durability of the programme – for example, if heavily reliant on employee volunteers, how will they be recruited/retained?
- Ability to evidence and mitigate for risk
- Development of an exit strategy

Programmes with good sustainability markers tend to have identified diverse future funding opportunities. These may include:

- The use of multiple funding streams to grow the programme
- Using alumni to add capacity
- School partnership model, where schools within a hub can go one to become lead schools, developing hubs of their own
- Monetising interventions/products (for example charging schools). This is done in a number of ways including a scaled payment plan, where the programme is provided free to schools in the first year and costs are introduced as the programme demonstrates its effectiveness; or a 'freemium' model where the basic programme is free and additional support is charged for
- Use of philanthropic funding
- Charging employers through delivering CPD alongside volunteering opportunities, or as a requirement as part of a network
- Funding for specific parts of the programme – for example asking school PTAs to invest in tools

Chapter 6: Evaluation

Evidencing impact

Understanding and sharing best practice are core values for the Careers and Enterprise Company. We want to track the impact of our own work, but beyond that we want to ensure that we are adding to the evidence base of what works, and of where the gaps are. This is strategically important for us and you, and a community approach. We would like to support commonality around measurement to improve the robustness of data in the sector.

Developing an evaluation framework for your programme, that sits outwith the specific requirements of funders, is critical for effective delivery. It enables you to quantify your performance, against predicted outcomes, and feeds into a Theory of Change. Measuring and understanding the inputs, outcomes and impacts of interventions is key. As its most basic level, this can be programme monitoring – do people (pupils, employers, teachers, parents, strategic partners) think the programme made a difference – and can that be evidenced? For small organisations with limited capacity this can be done immediately through the use of packages such as Survey Monkey, which allow you to group and analyse the data you collect.

Once data is collected, it needs to be analysed and used to support the development of your existing programme and planning for future programmes.

Some considerations for designing programme evaluations

- Are there sample frameworks you can use to develop qualitative questionnaires?
- What evidence exists from other programmes that outcomes improved?
- What are you trying to establish? Can you evidence the need for the programme?
- What will tell you if your interventions work?
- Do you have your targeting right? How will you know if the groups you are intending will benefit from your programme are engaging and gaining from the intervention?
- Can you link activities to pupil progression? Is there other available data (eg from schools or the National Schools Database) that you can use to do this?
- How will you match quantitative and qualitative data?
- Recognise your limitations, and factor this into your analysis – for example, do you only have a small sample to work from?
- What will be the process to responding to good and poor feedback?
- Can you benchmark against other organisations, for example on attrition rates or satisfaction levels?
- When are the best times to measure?
- Will a snapshot or a cohort survey best help you understand what the impact is?

There is more detailed information on designing evaluation available. If you are interested, the [Programme Insight](#) guides funded by Big Lottery, and produced by the Realising Ambition consortium are a good place to start.

Sharing best practice

The Careers & Enterprise Company are establishing a community for sharing best practice. This community consists of grant recipients, and includes alumni from every funding round. We support expert research and peer-to-peer learning. We have three broad objectives:

- Coordination
- Learning and support
- Sustainability.

This is a work in progress and we very much value your input.

Coordination

While scaling up activity, it is crucial to coordinate activity within each LEP area. The Enterprise Adviser Network (EAN) and the support structure of Enterprise Coordinators provide a local base to ensure regular dialogue around the reach of programmes to young people and schools in each local area. This will be complemented by a framework of engagement at a local, regional and national level.

Learning and Support

The Community will provide a space in which to share best practice and to facilitate peer-to-peer support. This is primarily events-based, and includes:

- Three annual national [events](#) for grant recipients of all funding rounds, focusing on networking, peer-to-peer support and expert sessions
- Quarterly meetings linked to Regional leads meetings, with an emphasis on meeting, networking and providing an update to Enterprise Coordinators
- LEPs are encouraged to host regular 'keep in touch' meeting for grant recipients funded to deliver in specific LEP areas.
- Annual conference – this offers the opportunity to build a wider community beyond those funded by us

We are also in the process of developing a digital space that will be a hub for sharing reports on best practice.

Sustainability

We will work with partners in the same field to ensure a sustainable approach to funding activity, and an increase in evidence.

To find our more information and to be added to our distribution list, please contact investment@careersandenterprise.co.uk

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