

Creating meaningful change through employability intervention



Foreword: Kirstie Mackey

The world of work is changing dramatically. Economic, societal and technological forces are leading to increased global collaboration, agile working and automation. This will have a significant impact on our workforce, as people of all ages and career stages need to adapt to rapid changes and different ways of working.

But many young people face an even greater challenge, particularly those who need extra support to reach their full potential or are not currently performing at the level the school would expect. It can be so much more difficult for them to build the foundation of skills and motivation they need to succeed, both at school and work.

Through our experience of running an employability programme in schools for six years, with over 7.7 million participants, we wanted to develop a model of employability skills intervention for young people who need it the most. With our extensive knowledge of measuring impact and a strong understanding of what works, we had an ambition to help embed the right blend of aspirations, mindset and 21st century employability skills. The pilot project described in this paper focused on white working-class boys as they are the least likely of any social group in England to go to university, have the lowest GCSE exam results and are least likely to find jobs after leaving school.

The results demonstrate how the right intervention can successfully inspire and engage students who need help to realise their full potential, encouraging them to set realistic goals and work towards a career path they may not previously have considered.

Insights from the pilot show that the role of aspirations should not be under-estimated, and a focus on aspiration and ambition should be central to any employability intervention. Whatever a student's starting point, their aspirations can either hinder or drive not only their skills development but also their motivation and mindset.

Mentors from the world of work also play a key role in the success of any programme, as they can both inspire young people and help to build critical skills.

This is just the starting point for this intervention, which links employability skills to learning and motivation at school. We hope that the insights and the model described in this paper will encourage other employers, educators and the UK government to work together to address the employability skills gap for those students who need it most.



Kirstie Mackey

Director of Citizenship and Consumer Affairs,
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Summary

Amid the rapidly changing demands and expectations of the world of work, schools can find it challenging to equip young people with all the skills and attitudes they need. LifeSkills, created with Barclays recognises the importance of businesses and educators working together to develop employability skills and build aspirations, particularly in young people from more challenging backgrounds.

Research shows that white working-class boys are the most under-represented group in higher education, have the lowest GCSE results, and are more likely than most other social groups to end up in low paid and insecure jobs after leaving education. In an attempt to find a way to narrow this gap, LifeSkills implemented a pilot programme of intensive employability skills training and support for 50 white working-class boys in Year 10.

The pilot wanted to drive the following four areas:

1. Improve aspirations
2. Support in acquiring employability/practical skills
3. Show how a blended approach to supporting young people delivers the greatest impact
4. Quantify the link between improving aspirations and increased motivation for them to work harder at school to achieve the results

The pilot delivered on the first three points with further analysis taking place on quantifying the link around increased motivation on GCSE results.

The pilot programme consisted of six out-of-school sessions held at inspirational venues. These were based on a training framework linked to the local labour market and particular skills shortages. The sessions were supported by Barclays mentors, who provided various inputs including group work and one-to-one support.

An independent evaluation found that 90 per cent of the participants showed improvements in their employability skills and aspirations by the end of the programme.

By helping the boys to understand the world of work, to identify their own strengths and to develop clear goals, the programme offered a strong foundation for the development of employability skills. Support was also provided to help transfer successes of the programme into other areas, such as learning at school and beyond.

Key lessons from the pilot include the need to focus on aspirations; the key role played by mentors; the importance of working closely with schools; and the need to identify and adapt to students' differing needs.

This paper outlines the impact of the pilot, the lessons learned, and provides suggestions for a sustainable, successful model of employability skills development, which could be implemented by businesses and schools across the country.

About LifeSkills, created with Barclays

The LifeSkills programme inspires and supports 11- to 24-year-olds by providing them with key employability skills to help them succeed in the world of work. The programme brings together educators, businesses, young people and parents.

When we set out in 2013, our goal was to equip one million young people with the skills they need for work by 2015. To date, more than 7.7 million young people have participated in the programme, and 84 per cent of all UK secondary schools are registered.

LifeSkills gives educators access to more than 65 hours of curriculum-linked content and also supports them to meet the standards set out in the Gatsby benchmarks for effective careers practice in schools. The website provides ready-made lessons with interactive tools, covering a range of employability issues – from CV writing and interview technique to networking, enterprise and online reputation. Young people and parents can also access a wide range of interactive resources to work through independently.

The programme is designed to help young people develop the transferable skills needed for the 21st century workplace. These include resilience, communication, creativity, problem solving, leadership and proactivity. As a major employer, we continue to monitor changes in the workplace so we can be at the forefront of helping young people develop the skills that employers need.

Over the last year, the LifeSkills programme has piloted an intensive programme of employability skills development, working with groups of students who need additional support to reach their full potential.

The issue: low social mobility of white working-class boys

There has been much focus in recent years on the low educational attainment and social mobility of white working-class children, particularly boys. The gap between this group and others emerges in early years, continues through primary and intensifies in secondary school.

White working-class pupils achieve the lowest grades at GCSE of any main ethnic group¹. And young people from white British backgrounds, especially white working-class boys, are the most under-represented group in higher education², which in turn makes it more likely that they will end up in lower-paid, insecure jobs³.

Evidence suggests that issues of low social mobility can be addressed with better career and employability programmes.

The Social Mobility Commission, for example, found that poor careers advice and work experience meant that, even with the same GCSE results, one-third more children from poorer backgrounds drop out of post-16 education than their better-off classmates⁴.

Research Barclays commissioned in partnership with the Education and Employers Charity highlights the difference that a good employability programme can make. It found that multiple, high-quality engagements with employers are linked with better economic outcomes for young people later in life⁵.

¹ Class differences: ethnicity and disadvantage, Sutton Trust (2016) [suttontrust.com/research-paper/class-differences-ethnicity-and-disadvantage](https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/class-differences-ethnicity-and-disadvantage)

² Ethnicity, Gender and Social Mobility, Social Mobility Commission (2016) [gov.uk/government/publications/ethnicity-gender-and-social-mobility](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethnicity-gender-and-social-mobility)

³ Is Britain Fairer? Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) [equalityhumanrights.com/en/britain-fairer](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/britain-fairer)

⁴ State of the Nation 2016: Social Mobility in Great Britain, Social Mobility Commission (2016) [gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2016](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2016)

⁵ Contemporary transitions: Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college, Education and Employers (2017) [educationandemployers.org/research/contemporary-transitions-young-britons-reflect-on-life-after-secondary-school-and-college](https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/contemporary-transitions-young-britons-reflect-on-life-after-secondary-school-and-college)



Addressing the issue: the pilot project

In September 2017, Barclays, in partnership with the Transformation Trust, began a pilot project with a group of white working-class boys. The project was designed to provide high-quality employability education to help young people develop their skills, raise their aspirations, better understand the world of work and meet their full potential.

We looked at the Government's 12 social mobility and opportunity areas⁶. From these, we chose the three areas with the greatest number of Barclays colleagues who were able to dedicate time to act as mentors: Ipswich; Oldham and Bradford.

⁶gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

We worked in partnership with 11 schools to identify 50 white, working-class boys who could benefit from the programme. We identified Year 10 as a key point in the educational cycle where a young person's journey can still be influenced. Targeting this age group also meant we would soon have access to destination data for the participants.

A blended format approach to deliver the programme

6

The programme consisted of six out-of-school sessions, held in professional venues. The sessions focused on the core transferable skills which are vital to succeed in the future world of work as well as helping students recognise their skills and start to link these to aspirations. See the Training Framework to the right.



A motivational youth facilitator delivered the sessions. A team of Barclays volunteers from a diverse range of roles and backgrounds were trained to act as mentors to support the boys, based on the organisation's 'colleague mentoring framework'.



Local employers spoke at sessions about their industry and career pathways.



Students also had the chance to engage with other young people, just a few years older than themselves, who were already successful in their careers.



Communication, self-confidence and self-belief were at the forefront of each session.



The participating students could continue conversations with mentors online.



Boys were offered a work experience placement.

Training framework which delivered tailored sessions, which have been refined and further developed as a result of the pilot.

Aspirations

1. Recognising skills – CV showcasing – employability plans – identifying gaps linked to current aspirations
2. Developing 21st century skills: resilience; problem solving; creativity
3. Inspiring an enterprising mindset for the working world and exploring how this can be applied in business
4. Financial capability
5. Final CV preparation linking to new aspirations
6. Mock interviews to support with career adaptability and transferable skills

The impact: improved employability skills and personal development

The project was rigorously evaluated by independent research agency Chrysalis Research, who captured students' outcomes and compared them against those of a control group. These were young people of the same demographic in the same schools, who did not participate in the programme.

According to the extensive evidence gathered during the evaluation, the programme provided students with greater self-belief and a better understanding of what is valued in the workplace. Participants developed important transferrable skills that are essential for success in the workplace. Their aspirations became clear and they began to realise the importance of working to achieve these career goals. Overall, around 90 per cent of the participating students showed noticeable improvements, in most or all of these areas.

We identified two key areas where positive changes to students' work-readiness and employability were particularly noticeable.

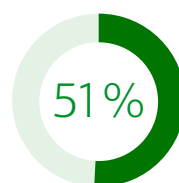
1. Improve aspirations

Clarity of young people's plans for the future improved dramatically, with many of the boys' aspirations becoming more ambitious, while also grounded in reality. Few of the boys had previously given much thought to the future, while some had unrealistic or unspecific plans.

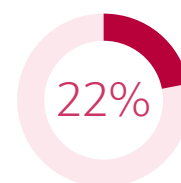
For around half the participants, their skills and aspirations began to translate into a new mindset and approach to learning. We saw evidence of improved motivation, with students wanting to achieve more in their studies.

Realising that they might have more than one job in their life, or work in more than one sector, was one of the most important outcomes for students. It helped them become more receptive to career and education pathways they had not considered before. They also began to see the importance of transferable skills, which increased their motivation to learn.

Percentage of young people who stated that their ambitions and aspiration improved a lot during the programme

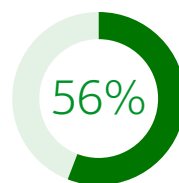


Deep impact participating

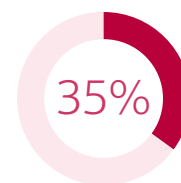


Deep impact control

Percentage of young people who said their motivation improved a lot during the programme



Deep impact participating



Deep impact control

“ The school is located in one of the poorest areas in the country. The boys had really low aspirations for themselves. They had no idea what they wanted to be, or what they were capable of achieving. So, I wanted to introduce the LifeSkills programme. They've already all made at least one grade of progress in all their core subjects, which is double the rate of expected progress. The boys have got a much clearer direction of where they want to be, which has had an impact in their lessons. They are putting their hands up and being more engaged. I just wanted to say a big thank you to Barclays for paying an interest in these boys. For them to realise that the world's their oyster and they can achieve whatever they want is absolutely massive.

Rachel Arthur, teacher, Oasis Academy, Oldham

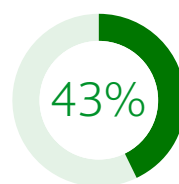


2. Acquiring employability and practical skills

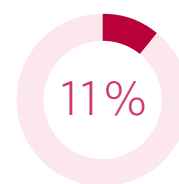
Three quarters of the participants improved their employability skills on the programme. Improvements were most noticeable in communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

A better understanding of what employers are looking for and of different workplaces was another area of development for participants. For many students, this increased understanding was linked with improvements in other areas, such as greater maturity, openness to careers they had not previously considered, willingness to make more effort at school, and being proactive about gaining work experience.

Percentage of young people who felt their knowledge of how to solve problems in the workplace/at school improved a lot during the programme

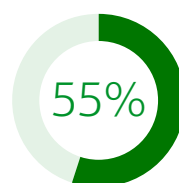


Deep impact participating

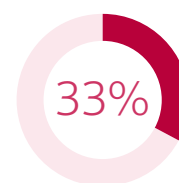


Deep impact control

Percentage of students who said they felt a lot more prepared to make future career decisions



Deep impact participating

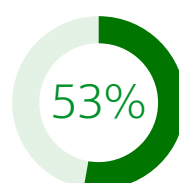


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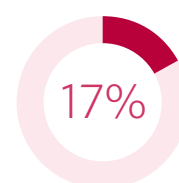
Students also had a better understanding of what they needed to focus on to achieve their ambitions. This was an area where virtually all participating students improved. The majority improved considerably, compared with minimal or no changes observed among the control group of students.

More than half of participants said their awareness of different education and training routes had improved a lot during the programme, compared with 17 per cent in the control group.

Percentage of students whose awareness of different education and training routes had improved a lot



Deep impact participating



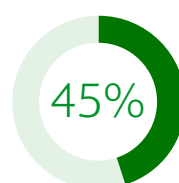
Deep impact control

Bigger than employability

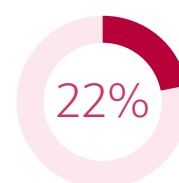
It became apparent early on in the pilot that, to fully achieve its aims, the programme needed to go much deeper than solely focus on employability skills. It was just as important to help young people to develop self-esteem and support them to understand and articulate their individual strengths.

Personal development (including confidence, maturity, self-awareness and reflection skills) was one of the areas of greatest progress, with the vast majority of participating students showing noticeable improvements.

Percentage of young people who noted that their understanding of own strengths and skills improved a lot during the programme



Deep impact participating



Deep impact control

Key lessons from the pilot

The pilot demonstrated just how much young people were able to achieve when offered the right level of support. The following three key lessons can be used to inform future employability interventions with groups of young people.

1. A focus on aspirations and ambitions

Helping students to identify their career ambitions is vital and should be at the heart of any employability skills model. Where students of school leaving age lack clarity about the future, they are more likely to become 'NEET'; not in employment, education or training when they leave school.

Aspirations are a starting point and a driver in developing students' employability

Another key focus should be building participants' self-belief and developing their understanding of themselves and their skills. This increased awareness can help the students to identify careers they had not previously considered.

It is also crucial to emphasise the importance of career adaptability and transferable skills. Without an awareness of these areas, students can be reluctant to work hard in subjects they feel are not relevant to their chosen career.

Involving representatives from local businesses can give young people an idea of the skills employers are looking for. Successful people who are close to the students' age or those with more experience can be valuable in providing real-life examples and inspiration about the importance of career goals, adaptability and transferable skills.



2. A blended approach to support students over time

The pilot programme was more than just the sum of its sessions. The role of people who worked with the students and the relationships they built with them was as important to the success of the programme as its focus and content demonstrating that a blended approach was a vital component of the model.

Consider the people and relationships that can support students' engagement and deepen their learning

... Facilitator

The programme facilitator delivered the programme content and created a positive and inspiring environment that helped engage students and supported their personal growth and self-expression.

... Mentors

The relationships between mentors and students were powerful in supporting positive outcomes for the boys. Mentors became trusted adults, who showed interest in the boys and treated them with respect. The boys viewed them as different from other adults in their lives and, as a result, were able to talk to them about the world of work.

Mentors successfully engaged the boys by prompting them to think and find their own answers. They engaged in the session activities alongside the boys, modelling a willingness to make an effort, learn and improve – which helped to foster a growth mindset among the boys.

In addition, the mentors often provided very personalised and specific support between sessions – for example, helping the boys to research their chosen careers and develop a clear idea of what experience and qualifications they would need to pursue.

It was important for the mentor relationship to be sustained over a period of time, and to be able to offer bespoke support to the student. In cases where students needed a lot of additional help, intensive support from mentors made a profound positive impact.

... Schools

The pilot also made it clear that schools have an important role to play in helping students to transfer their new skills and attitudes into the formal learning environment. In the best examples, school staff used the programme sessions to build rapport with students with whom they could not previously engage. They also put in place a comprehensive system of academic and pastoral support.

In many cases, students' improved attitudes to learning and motivation alone were not enough for them to do better in their studies. They often lacked study skills and had considerable gaps in their subject knowledge and literacy skills. To enable students to start performing in the classroom in line with their increased motivation, school staff involved in the programme had to work closely with colleagues across curriculum areas to help address emerging needs and make sure improvements were noticed and built upon.

Where such support was not provided, students found it difficult to transfer the learning from the programme to school, because teaching staff continued to perceive the boys as not trying hard enough. This led to frustrations for students and meant that their personal growth and changes in attitudes were not translating into better learning outcomes at school.

Whilst we know the value of parental involvement, we weren't able to include it as part of this pilot programme. We will look at how we can combine this element with the blended approach used as we expand this work to support other groups.

Complex and diverse needs require a bespoke, holistic programme that groups similar students together

3. Identifying the different needs and starting points of students

Early on in the pilot, the complexity and diversity of the participating students' needs became apparent. Many had low literacy skills; a large proportion had a difficult home life or lack of support at home; many had special educational needs; and very few had a clear idea of what they wanted to do in future.

Due to the wide range of issues within the group, the programme needed to offer the opportunity for holistic development, with a focus on personal growth, alongside the development of skills and understanding. It was also important for the programme to be personalised for each student, to accommodate the various starting points. Some students needed nurture and confidence-building, while others needed challenge and a 'wake-up call' to apply themselves. This identification of individual needs was ongoing and the programme was continually refined in response to emerging needs.

While the pilot set out to understand the impact that the programme could have on academic attainment, we found that making a direct collation was much more complex than anticipated due to the differing needs of the young people. However, early evidence suggests that in instances where the student has been supported to identify realistic goals, backed up with clear actions and a strong understanding of skills requirements, there will be increased motivation to study. Further analysis will be undertaken to assess long-term outcomes such as post-16 destinations and GCSE results.

Findings from the pilot show that employability interventions within a group setting work best when students are grouped according to their needs. For example, where students with low literacy levels are grouped together, rather than working in a group with more academically able peers, mentors are more able to provide the right level of support for all participants within a group.



“ We are so proud that for many of the boys, the programme transformed their sense of identity. They went from feeling they had nothing to offer to becoming young adults with a real sense of pride and self-worth.

One student started the programme with serious behaviour problems, a permanently passive attitude and a reluctance to engage in any learning activities. He had dismissed all attempts by school staff to build positive relationships with him. The school's main concern was to keep him from being excluded and prevent him from becoming NEET when leaving school.

During the programme, he began to engage in learning, work hard and occasionally even show enthusiasm at school. But perhaps even more important was the sense of pride in his eyes when he talked about the qualities he'd identified in himself, what he now wanted to do as a job, and the steps he was taking to get there.

Amy Leonard,
The Transformation Trust



Conclusions

The aim of the pilot was to understand beyond the scale of LifeSkills, what impact can be made in a relatively short period at a critical point in time with groups of students. Early indications evidence that the pilot was a success.

We set out to achieve four key aims around improving aspirations, acquiring employability skills through a blended approach to then quantifying how linking aspirations and motivation impacts a young person to work harder at school to achieve results.

We found that the short term outcomes around driving aspirations and teaching employability skills using a blended approach had the greatest benefit.

These should be central to employability intervention models, to help young people adapt their mindset to transition to work successfully as it helps to drive motivation and focus.

Further analysis will be undertaken to assess long-term outcomes such as post 16 destinations and GCSE results.

The results of the pilot have helped us to pinpoint the key elements to include in an employability skills intervention model. Our blueprint for this model is shown on page 12, together with a high-level overview of the necessary training framework. These illustrate how the model could work in a secondary school environment, delivered by educators and businesses working together.

We will continue to test the model with other year groups and will deliver it across different timescales to further identify solutions to the barriers and challenges young people face.

Research approach

In each of the participating schools, eligible students were identified using a range of criteria. Eligibility was checked by the independent evaluator, Chrysalis Research. Students were randomly allocated by the research team to take part in the programme or to act as control group.

Chrysalis Research collected a range of data at the beginning, mid-point and end of the programme. This included:

- Observations and video recordings of all⁷ students to accurately capture each student's development
- In-depth individual interviews with all students, school staff and most of the mentors
- Student survey carried out at the end of the programme
- Analysis of attainment, attendance and behaviour data from the participating schools

With the exception of mentor interviews and programme session observations, all evidence was captured and analysed in the same way for the participating and control group students.

At the analysis stage, the development of each individual student was assessed in each of the outcome areas – such as personal development, employability skills or aspirations – by considering all available evidence.

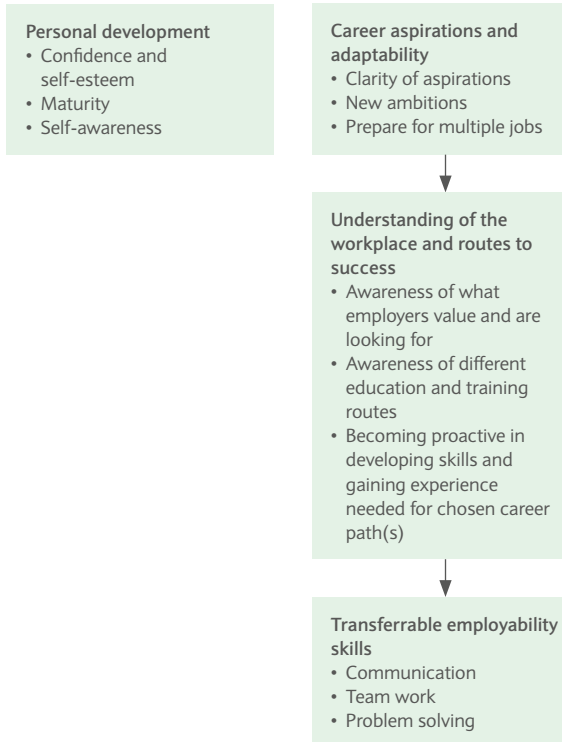
⁷ There was a small number of instances when it was not possible to record or interview a student, if they were absent from school at the time of data collection.

Deeper intervention to support young people in moving from education to work

Model: Input and structure



Short term outcomes



Longer term outcomes

