Submission from Young Enterprise Scotland

Scale of third/private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities;

Young Enterprise Scotland endeavour to offer the opportunity in schools for young people to participate in active, collaborative and practical learning; available to all young people and such that takes account of interdisciplinary learning. However, without clear, open and ‘real’ partnership working and effective relationships with education authorities, we can only provide good quality enterprise and entrepreneurial learning to a few schools where we have genuine partnerships. We would like to be able to provide pan-Scotland opportunities, available to all young people, complimenting other learning activity but only with buy-in and partnership. The chance to engage all young people and not just those who present as amber on the matrix means that we could contribute to prevention rather than being seen as a stop-gap or quick fix. Feedback from YES interventions is powerful, positive and alludes to a need and a want for this type of partnership learning opportunity. However, it is not enough to say it needs to happen, it needs to be funded and promoted to happen.

Whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, whether their methods could be further embedded in the curriculum;

Genuine Collaboration – where we are able to forge genuine partnerships we have had great success in delivering programmes and working with the schools to fine tune and adapt programmes to suit their circumstances. Collaboration develops enhanced outcomes as well as giving teachers a level of support in specific subjects they might otherwise not have. In some schools where we have had a presence for several years we become valued and opportunities for us to improve our delivery and to expand our work with the schools are improved.

Honesty – School/education authorities need to be honest with external partners. It is impossible for us to make progress with young people if we do not have a realistic starting position. This has ranged from unrealistic expectations for groups through to failing to disclose additional support needs and behavioural issues. It is not a question of not working with particular groups or young people, it is about being prepared and being able to prepare accordingly. Genuine partnerships cannot exist without honesty. In at least one case we encountered a school that had several different vendors all delivering similar programmes to a group of young people on different days. The school actively sought to keep this a secret in case one or more vendors pulled out and they were left with time to fill. The effect on the young people was demotivating and a waste of resources.

Commitment – Without commitment from both parties progress cannot be made. We can deliver training regularly but if there is no follow up and no consistency in how the programmes are integrated with the rest of the young person’s learning it will quickly be forgotten. The schools that are most effective in their work with us look at inter-disciplinary approaches to learning and the links that they can generate between our programmes and their curriculum.

Again with strong, reliable partnerships and omitting any ‘petty bureaucracy’ of unreasonable, unrealistic targets there is potential to have real impact and add value to school education. We
are talking about people not numbers. However, without the buy-in and recognition at strategic level any 3rd/private sector input is mostly meaningless. A stressful baby-sitting service for the most at risk is a case of too little, too late.

Whether the full potential of the third/private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is being realised;

We have worked with a secondary school in Glasgow that from S1 works to build links with local businesses and provide a range of different enrichment activities. They are an exemplar of what can be achieved through actively seeking out partnerships and working in good faith and with real commitment.

A significant number of the schools we encounter are operating piecemeal trying to put together whatever they can get. Often this is driven by the letter of law in terms of what they should be doing rather than the spirit. Thus, we have encountered numerous schools with an agenda to ‘tick boxes’. Teachers we meet have the best interests of their students at heart and are doing the very best they can in the midst of cuts and ever decreasing resources. They need and deserve encouragement and support.

Our experience has been that forming genuine partnerships with schools is very difficult. There is often an unwillingness to commit to working with us in any real way, and many schools see external bodies as a way of reducing their workload rather than a positive partnership. Short term-ism and cynicism can taint some of our dealings with schools.

Funding: In 2014 we were able to get part funding for a 40 hr programme around enterprise and employability. The funder agreed to pay the bulk of the cost with a nominal contribution from the schools. Few schools we talked to were willing to contribute that money. Several were shocked that they were being asked to pay anything, and seemed to genuinely believe that we would be willing to give them something for nothing if they just held out. While we understand that education faces monetary challenges, private and third sector companies cannot operate on goodwill alone.

How successful schools have been in reporting in pupils wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the 3rd sector helps to deliver. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers’ as much as formal qualifications;

There can often be a clear division on what schools and parents see as valuable and what employers see as valuable. Academic achievement is seen as the most important factor by schools and F.E. institutions whereas our experiences with employers have shown repeatedly that social skills, life skills and attitude are key to employers. A balance needs to be reached, with the understanding that schools may be unlikely to have neither the infrastructure nor time to deliver the non-academic skills that are being sought.

We do not require academic excellence to take part in our programmes. Either consciously or unconsciously many schools see our programmes as a second class form of learning, only for those who cannot achieve academically. This has an effect on the makeup of our groups, barring young people who might be both academic and interested in enterprise as well as creating stigma for those who attend.
Are such achievements valued by parents, employers and learning providers? How is non-academic development learning measured? What means something to one person is meaningless to another. Wider access learning has to be recognised but saying it is not enough, a huge sea-change is required, with real commitment, to get that message across. That enterprise learning is a great-leveller is an opportunity. That a similar 3rd/private sector opportunities may be perceived as second class by schools because there is no real recognition of the value, or funding at a strategic level.

Given the strong policy focus on the early years, whether the 3rd and private sectors have been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages;

Given the backing, enterprise is suitable for all ages, styles and abilities. It should be embedded in the curriculum; we can support the recognition of enterprise learning and support the development via champion teachers. Given real support and not lip service at strategic level.

There are huge challenges in terms of working effectively with pupils across all years.

We have found that at S2 and beyond it is very difficult to find space in the already crowded curriculum and to find teachers willing to support consistent intervention.

Support and funding is required to enable partnerships to positively flourish for the benefit of the young people we care so deeply about. All young people have the potential to thrive through the creativity and imagination that is experiential enterprise learning. They should also have the opportunity. YES have the products, the knowledge and drive.