



# MAKE THE GRADE: SUSTAINING THE INSPIRATION

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# FOREWORD

We are delighted to share with you our independent evaluation report of Make the Grade. This report highlights the collective work of our team and our many dedicated education and corporate partners to better prepare young people for their futures specifically through the period of our Big Lottery Funding up to December 2016.

The challenges and choices facing our young people, as standards of living stagnate, global economic competition increases and technology is changing the face of the labour market at an ever-rapid rate, are profound. Yet too many young people still face difficulty getting access to good careers advice and careers information will struggle to keep pace with change.

Make the Grade provides students from an early age with direct access to employers to discuss opportunities and career paths, learn about roles and sectors, and understand and develop the key employability traits that employers will expect of them. This is done through the exciting medium of employer-led activities, such as challenges and competitions, visits, industry and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) days, mentoring and workshops, all delivered by real working people drawn from their own community, working alongside their own teachers.

This is proving to be a winning model – and the results of this



independent evaluation clearly show the impact of Make the Grade in the schools, colleges and businesses we work with.

For us, this evaluation was more than a request from our funding providers, it was a real opportunity to examine what makes our model work and how we can ensure its continued growth and success for existing and future partners. We remain incredibly grateful to Big Lottery Fund for backing Make the Grade as one of just a handful of "Great Ideas" that they have supported nationally.

The Board and team at Ahead Partnership extend our thanks to

everyone who took part in the evaluation whether you are a teacher, employer or young person, to York Consulting for their thorough and diligent production of this evaluation, and finally to all our partners and funders for your support and commitment. You all share in the success of this programme.

**Stephanie Burras CBE**  
Chief Executive



# INTRODUCTION

**Ahead Partnership is a social enterprise that seeks to connect and integrate businesses more thoroughly with their local communities, and Make the Grade is our flagship education programme.**

Launched in 2011, Make the Grade's aims are the same nationwide:

- ✔ To better inform young people about career opportunities;
- ✔ To build effective practical connections between young people and local employers;
- ✔ To improve the employability skills of young people;
- ✔ To encourage improved attainment and attendance at school;

- ✔ To level the 'opportunity playing field' for those subject to particular disadvantage;
- ✔ To reduce the likelihood of young people becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET);
- ✔ To improve the transition of young people into further training or work;
- ✔ To improve the supply of skills to the labour market through better alignment of subject and course choices to local skills gaps.

The need for high standard Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance is well publicised. The Careers & Enterprise Company's latest research paper, *Moments of Choice*, suggests that young people

want and need a combination of up-to-date information and tangible experiences to help them understand their options and inspire them with ideas about their future.

Further studies have found that multiple contacts with employers whilst in school improve the confidence that young people have in the choices they make and can improve their future earning potential by up to 16%.\*

Make the Grade is a unique programme which brings businesses and educators together to give every young person inspiration and ideas, regardless of their background. Educators and employers use our programme to create bespoke activities that are uniquely tailored for their students or their sectors and workplaces.

## WHY HAVE WE UNDERTAKEN AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF MAKE THE GRADE?

In August 2016, we commissioned an independent evaluation of our Make the Grade programme. This evaluation was conducted by York Consulting ([www.yorkconsulting.co.uk](http://www.yorkconsulting.co.uk)).

The evaluation was tasked with assessing the performance, effectiveness and impact of Make the Grade across the three-year period (2013-16) during which it received funding from Big Lottery Fund. This is a summary of the final report from the evaluation.

The grant was made through Big Lottery Fund's "Supporting Great Ideas" programme and the investment was intended to develop and prove the Make the Grade model initially within the Leeds City Region.

The model was extended to Birmingham in March 2015 and is currently launching in Sheffield City Region. In recent years we have also grown to service large employers on a national geography, with plans to grow Make the Grade's national presence further in 2018.

The key lines of enquiry for the evaluation were:

- ✔ Performance against key targets set by Big Lottery Fund;
- ✔ The delivery, impact and value for money of the broader Make the Grade programme from the perspectives of employers, volunteers, school staff and young people;
- ✔ Critical success factors and lessons learnt in the delivery of Make the Grade;

- ✔ The sustainability and scalability of the Make the Grade model, particularly as it has expanded its geographical reach.

## WHAT METHODS WERE USED?

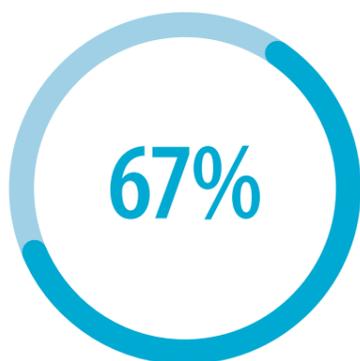
The evaluation was based on two key elements. The first was primary research delivered through a combination of semi-structured consultations (one-to-one and group sessions) and online surveys.

Secondly, we supplied relevant management information datasets, including those containing pupil feedback on Make the Grade activities which we collate for all events throughout each academic year.

Multiple contacts with employers while still in school can boost a young person's future earnings by



Young people who told YouGov they would like more experience and advice from employers



Number of students whose grades improved after taking part in business mentoring



\*Source: What is to be gained through partnership? Exploring the value of education-employer relationships – Education & Employers Taskforce, October 2010

Participant group	No. Interviews	Survey responses
Staff in schools that engage with Make the Grade	11 staff across 9 schools	19
Young people that have taken part in Make the Grade activities	42 young people across 5 schools	N/A
Employers	15	69
Volunteers	5	36
Stakeholders (e.g. Ahead Partnership board members and local authorities)	11	N/A



# HOW DID MAKE THE GRADE PERFORM AGAINST ITS TARGETS?

Big Lottery Fund set some principal objectives. Taking each one in turn the performance against each of these objectives has been very strong.

**PO1: More schools and local businesses will have active, long-term partnerships. Partnerships will be supported by a cross-section of employers, large and small.**

The performance of Make the Grade against Big Lottery Fund's targets and projections for the number of partnerships, employers participating, pupils engaged and income generated brings the success of the programme into focus.

Two of the targets (number of employers engaged and the number of partnerships forged) have been exceeded by considerable margins. Pupil engagement is less easy to measure, but data collected throughout the last three years shows that the targets were greatly exceeded with over 17,000 individual young people benefiting from Make the Grade multiple times through over 45,000 separate encounters with employers.

	Target (2013-2016)	Actual result
Number of new school partnerships made	28	39
Number of employers engaged	250	500
Other income generated for sustaining programme	£1.022 million	£1.251 million
Number of young people engaged	14,800	17,000

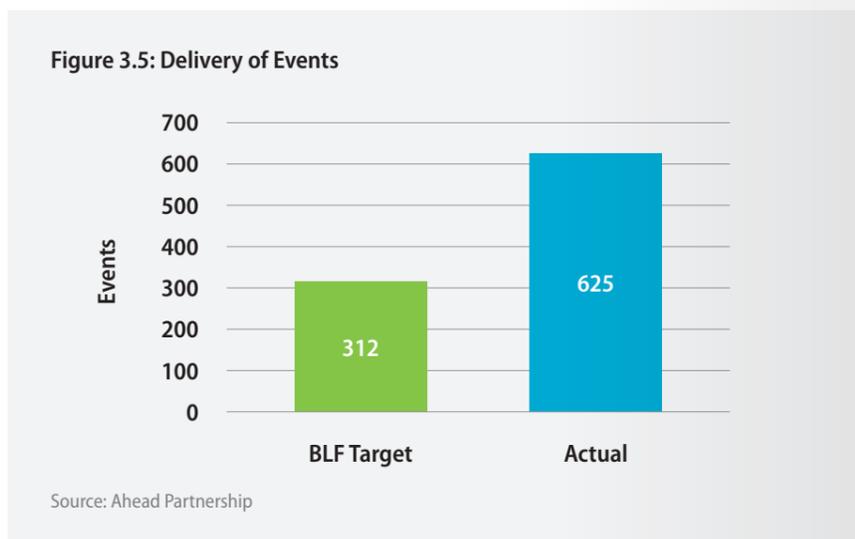


# HOW DID MAKE THE GRADE PERFORM AGAINST ITS TARGETS?

**PO2: Business engagement will be incorporated far deeper into the school curriculum in order to develop young people's understanding of business, increase their employability and show the relevance of, and links between, learning at school and a successful working life.**

There are three crucial ways that this objective was measured: the number and type of employability and work-related activities undertaken, schools reporting greater integration in subject areas and employability provision, and businesses reporting that they have the opportunity to bring the world of work into the curriculum.

Make the Grade delivered more than double its target number of events. The qualitative and survey feedback suggests that schools now find it easier to integrate employment, enterprise and careers activities into the curriculum.



This is supported with management information that 76% of employers agree ('a lot') that Make the Grade has made volunteering in schools more accessible and 92% of the employers that took part in this evaluation either strongly agree or agree that Make the Grade has helped them to build more positive relationships with schools.

**92%**  
**OF EMPLOYERS SAID MAKE THE GRADE HELPED THEM BUILD MORE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS**

**MAKE THE GRADE HAS DELIVERED 200% ITS TARGET AMOUNT OF EVENTS SINCE 2013**



**PO3: Young people will be more aware of career and future training options, where they might lead and how to get there. They will be more self-aware and confident and make better choices for their own futures.**

At the end of each Make the Grade activity, students are asked various questions about the impact the activity had on them. This information shows that between 2013 and 2016, 92% of students said that the activities had helped them think

Target	Actual result from student feedback
At least 60% of young people feel the employability activities with employers have developed their awareness of career choices and options	92%
At least 60% of young people feel the employability activities with employers have helped them be better prepared for work	93%
At least 60% of young people that have taken part in mentoring activities feel they have contributed towards an increase in confidence and motivation	88%

about the sorts of jobs they could do in the future and made them feel more confident about future career choices, far exceeding the 60% target set by Big Lottery Fund.

# OTHER CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The overriding message from the evaluation is that Make the Grade has been, and continues to be, a very successful programme. In addition to a fit-for-purpose delivery model, six main factors underpin this success.

You will find more information on each of these further on in the report where you can see a breakdown of what school, employers and young people said specifically about Make the Grade, but they are summarised here.

## VALUE FOR MONEY

The schools contributing to this evaluation agree, without exception, that it would be difficult and potentially very costly for them to try and emulate Make the Grade themselves. Finding the staff time, fostering employer relations and developing suitable materials would all be challenging. Schools' views on the value for money of Make the Grade are therefore very positive.

The same is also true of employers, many of whom have tried to engage with schools in the past with relatively little sustained success.

## ALIGNMENT

The majority of the employers and schools that have contributed to the evaluation have taken part in Make the Grade with the same or broadly similar objectives: to raise the aspirations of young people, to better equip young people for the world of work and to provide young people with experiences that enable them to make more informed decisions.



The results of this evaluation show that employers view Make the Grade as an effective and high impact way of addressing organisational objectives around education, unemployment and/or local communities.

Schools also recognised that Make the Grade helps them to fulfil statutory responsibilities around high quality careers education and information, and supports the integration of

employment/enterprise into the curriculum. It also helps them support pupils (including, in some cases, the most able) living in disadvantaged areas to realise their potential.

## LOCALISATION

We deliver Make the Grade via close working with schools and employers. This ensures that activities are tailored to local circumstances, both social and

**“THE CHILDREN ARE INSPIRED - THEY RISE TO THE CHALLENGE AND HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN WINNING ENTERPRISE CHALLENGES. THE CHILDREN SHONE WITH AWE WITH THE WORLD OF WORK DAYS... THIS LEADS TO A LOVE OF SCHOOL AND CONTRIBUTED TO OUR SCHOOL - THE MOST DEPRIVED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN LEEDS - ENDING UP IN THE TOP 1% OF SCHOOLS ACADEMICALLY IN THE COUNTRY.”**

HEAD TEACHER, PRIMARY SCHOOL

economic, and promotes a strong sense of local relevance. It also dispels any suggestion that Make the Grade operates as an 'off-the-shelf' package.

Supporting this, the schools that contributed to the evaluation agreed almost unanimously that the programme is tailored to their own priorities/needs. Employers were similarly positive about the tailoring of the offer to their own priorities, the priorities of their sector, and the needs of the participating young people.

## WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN PARTNERSHIP

This evaluation has also proven that at the centre of Make the Grade's success is effective partnership working. During the evaluation, employers and schools compared their experiences of Make the Grade with other education-business activities, both formal and informal. Consistently, they reported that Make the Grade had been

professional, organised and based on a strong two-way dialogue.

## TEAM AND ETHOS

The evaluation confirmed that our team is highly regarded, well-liked and respected across our customer base. Our staff are considered to be ambitious, innovative, helpful and committed to continual improvement. Our team and its ethos are integral to our brand and the success of Make the Grade's delivery and effectiveness, because we are all committed to its success.

## CO-ORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Probably the greatest appeal of Make the Grade to schools and employers is that it significantly reduces the administrative and operational difficulties often faced when setting up and maintaining education-business partnerships. On this topic, the evaluation has uncovered many examples of



employers and school staff wanting to praise the project management, administration and co-ordination skills of the Ahead Partnership team.

The general view is that we communicate very well with schools and employers and that the team is mindful of different participants' preferred methods and styles of communication.

# WHAT THE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED SAID ABOUT MAKE THE GRADE

Five focus groups were undertaken with students from a range of partner schools for this evaluation. They were asked specifically about Make the Grade.

A thermo-evaluator activity and intrinsic value attribute scaling (scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is no impact and 10 is high impact) were used to elicit views from young people during the focus groups. The attributes/statements covered by the tools were:

- ✔ I feel more confident;
- ✔ I am more resilient;
- ✔ I am more motivated;
- ✔ I have improved my speaking and listening skills;
- ✔ I work well as part of a team;

- ✔ I am better prepared for the world of work;
- ✔ I have a better idea of what I might want to do for a career;
- ✔ I know more about my choices after Year 11.

The average scores from the value attribute scaling are presented below. This shows that all eight attributes score highly, with the averages ranging from 6.5 for 'I am better prepared for the world of work' through to 8.1 for 'I work well as part of a team'.

It is of note that in the schools in more deprived areas, the 'I have a better idea of what I might want to do for a career' ratings were

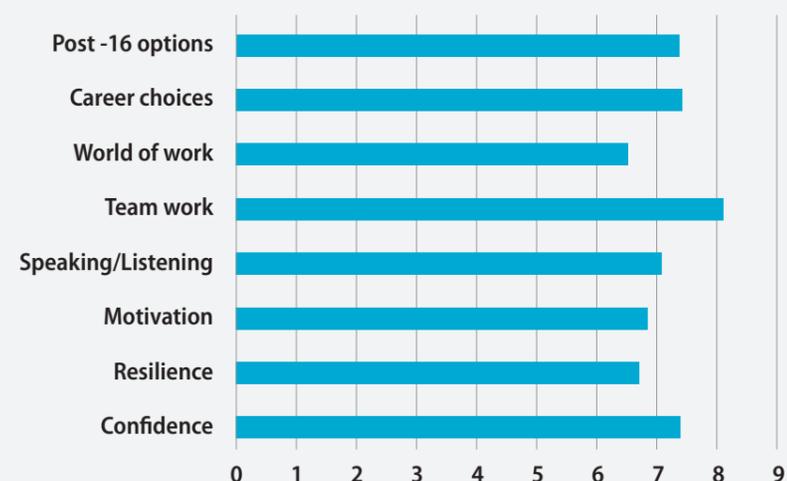
typically very high, more so than in less deprived areas.

The focus groups also suggest that pupils rate activities more highly when they can make a link to their own circumstances or (forthcoming) decisions. For example, employability skills activities were rated highly when they took place prior to work experience. Mock interviews are most valued prior to Post-16 choices and one-to-one interview practice is perceived to be the most useful activity prior to university interviews in Year 13.

**"I ENJOYED THE CHALLENGE ACTIVITIES BUT I FOUND THE CAREERS FAIR THE MOST USEFUL; THERE ARE COMPANIES AND JOBS I DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED."**

YEAR 11 PUPIL

Value assessment as reported by young people

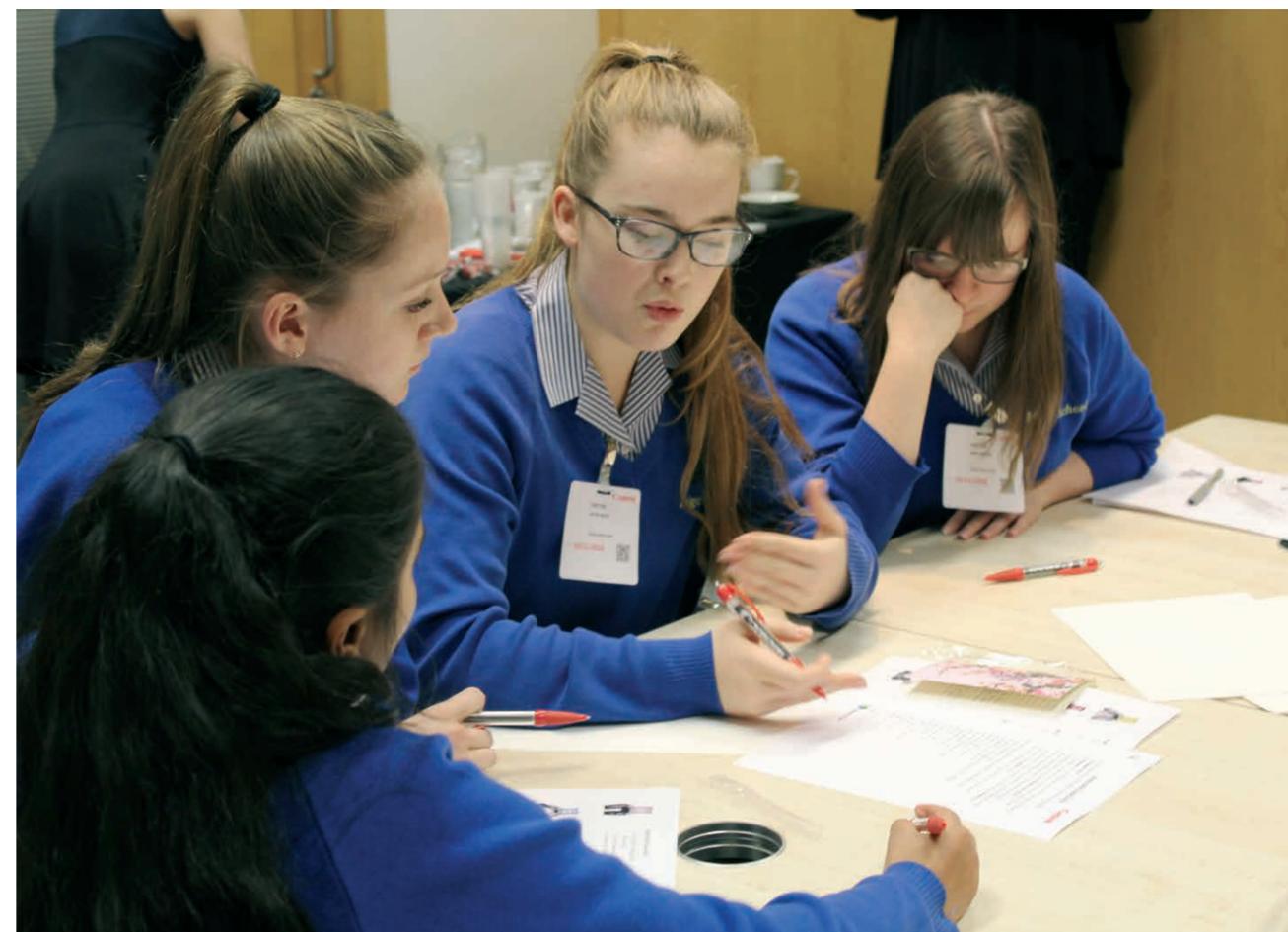


Source: School survey

**"OUT OF ALL THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE ACTIVITIES, I FOUND THE INTERVIEW PRACTICE THE MOST HELPFUL AS I WILL BE INTERVIEWED FOR A UNI COURSE NEXT YEAR."**

YEAR 12 PUPIL

**93%**  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL MAKE THE GRADE HAS HELPED THEM BE BETTER PREPARED FOR THE WORLD OF WORK



# WHAT SCHOOLS SAID ABOUT MAKE THE GRADE

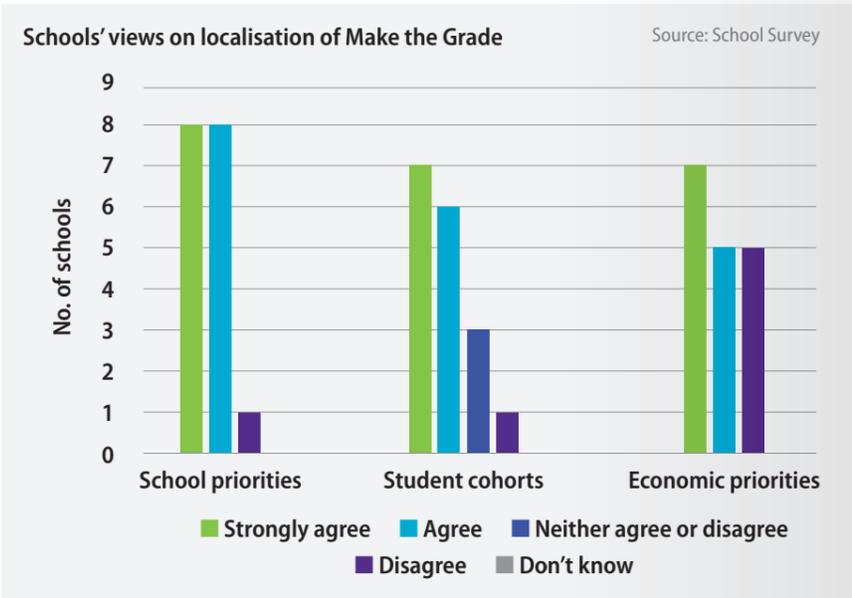
## VALUE FOR MONEY

The schools contributing to this evaluation agreed, without exception, that it would be difficult and potentially very costly for them to try and emulate Make the Grade themselves. Challenges that they would face in doing so include:

- ✔ **Staff resources:** one school estimated that they would need to assign a full-time equivalent member of non-teaching staff to successfully replicate Make the Grade.
- ✔ **Employer connections:** the majority of schools in the evaluation find engaging with employers, and specifically the task of engaging the right people within the right employers, both difficult and time consuming. As such, they recognise and value the significant savings that Make the Grade offers them.
- ✔ **Developing activities and resources:** schools are adept at developing activities and resources in their own contexts, but were very open during the evaluation that they would struggle to match the quality and employer-relevance of those developed for Make the Grade.

## EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

The schools responding to the online survey were unanimously positive about the impact on pupils and their school.



For example, in one school, the programme has been very helpful in promoting higher education as a route into professional careers and encouraging their 'most able' pupils to be the first-generation university entrants from their families.

## SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The majority of the schools in the survey also reported that Make the Grade had:

- ✔ Enabled them to engage with more employers;
- ✔ Integrate employers within the wider school community;
- ✔ Deliver more careers and work readiness activities.

Our own management information collected from school staff directly after events over the three year period supports the assertion that pupils have developed skills/aptitudes. For example:

- ✔ 92% of schools report a positive impact on the confidence and self-esteem of the pupils that had participated in Make the Grade;
- ✔ 92% of schools identified a positive impact on young people's communication skills;
- ✔ 87% identified a positive impact on pupil's team working skills;
- ✔ 84% identified a positive impact on young people's planning and organisation skills.

**"ALL MY CLASS HAVE CLEARER ASPIRATIONS AFTER TODAY. THEY KNOW WHERE THEY WANT TO GET TO AND HOW THEY MIGHT GET THERE."**

SUBJECT TEACHER

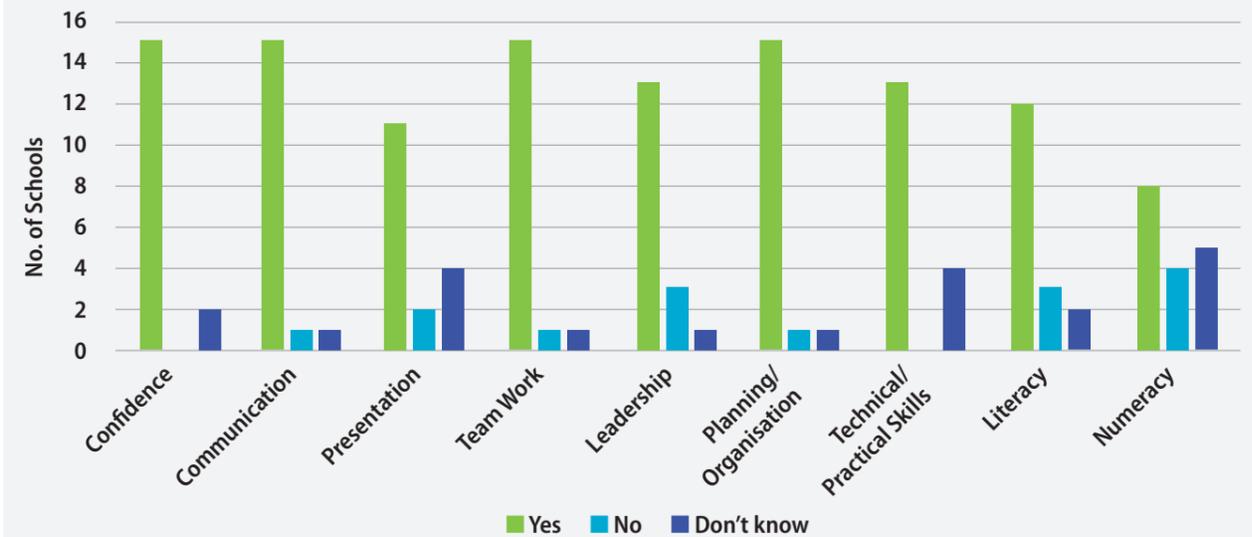


# WHAT SCHOOLS SAID ABOUT MAKE THE GRADE



Schools' perceptions of the skills developed by young people

Source: School Survey



## IMPACT OF MAKE THE GRADE ON NEET AND PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

Each young person's career and life pathways are influenced by a host of (unique) factors. From a research perspective it is extremely challenging – without large Randomised Control Trial exercises – to distil the specific impact or influence of one particular strand of support or intervention.

That said, a large majority of school staff responding to the survey, and all of those who provided qualitative input to the evaluation, identified Make the Grade as a contributory or primary factor when it comes to reducing their levels of NEET young people..

Schools' views are mixed on pupil attainment. However there is broad agreement that Make the Grade

**90%**  
OF STUDENTS SAID THAT MAKE THE GRADE LED THEM TO WORK HARDER AT SCHOOL

**“THE MENTORING PROGRAMME HAD AN IMPACT ON A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS. IT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THEM SUCCESSFULLY MOVING TO ALTERNATIVE PROVISION.”**

MEMBER OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM, PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

has improved the resilience and motivation of the young people that have taken part.

90% of students themselves identified that Make the Grade motivated them to work harder at school with a more consolidated and focused view to the future.

# WHAT EMPLOYERS SAID ABOUT MAKE THE GRADE

## VALUE FOR MONEY

Many employers have wanted and tried to engage with schools in the past with generally little sustained success. Employers are not familiar with how schools work in terms of timetabling and lead times for activities. This has led to considerable issues when trying to set up and establish a programme of activity and engagement.

Employers were very positive about the value for money Make the Grade offers, particularly when it comes to drawing on our vast network and experience. All reported that the outcomes for their volunteer staff and for the participating young people were well worth the investment.

## EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

At the centre of how Ahead Partnership works, and how Make the Grade is delivered, is effective

partnership working. During the evaluation, employers and schools compared their experiences of Make the Grade with their experiences of other education-business activities, both formal and informal. Consistently, they reported that Make the Grade had been:

- ✔ Professional and organised (with commitments and promises routinely honoured);
- ✔ Delivered with appreciation of their business and their sector;
- ✔ Approached as a partnership, where suggestions, recommendations and constructive criticism are welcome.

Additional feedback gathered during this evaluation suggests that schools and employers often become frustrated with education-business activities because they require a lot of

## “AHEAD PARTNERSHIP UNDERSTANDS WE ARE A BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE OPERATE.”

EMPLOYER

planning and preparation in order to be successful. They also felt that often they are not well attuned to the needs of one or both parties and/or they are time consuming to maintain on anything other than a one-off basis.

Therefore the greatest appeal of Make the Grade to schools and employers is that the programme significantly reduces these burdens. Not only that, it does so in a way that adds considerable value to the end

product, i.e. the activities and events, and therefore to the participating young people. Employers are very positive about the tailoring of the offer to their own priorities, the priorities of their sector, wider economic priorities and the needs of the participating young people.

Feedback from employers throughout the evaluation shows that we place a clear focus on high quality delivery, time management and efficient ways of working. This not only contributes to the strong performance of Make the Grade against key metrics, but also impresses employers. Regularly during the evaluation, employers commented that we “understand how business works”.

## SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the evaluation employers regularly remarked how they had seen young people



develop over time and how they had been impressed by improvements in their confidence, motivation and independence.

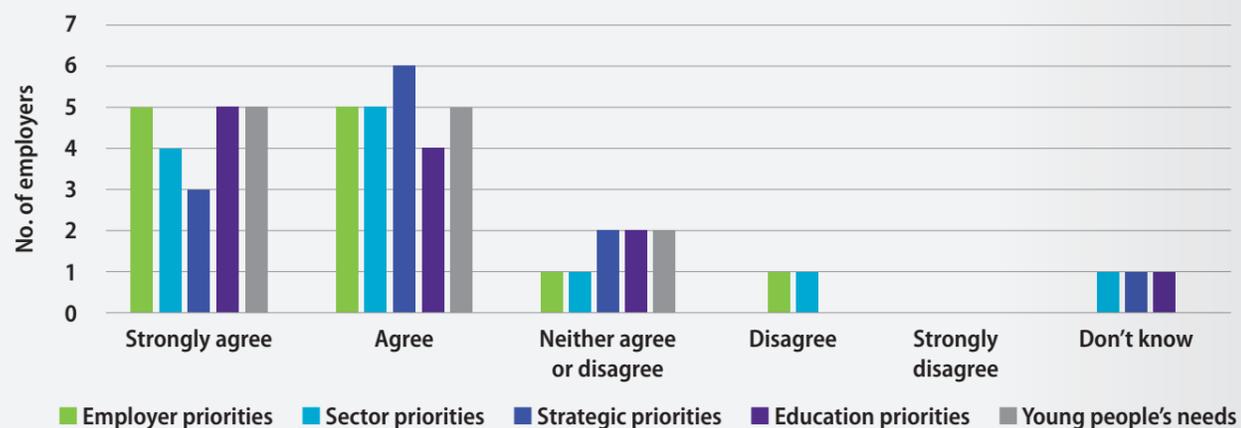
Employers and their volunteer employees also regularly remarked that working with young people through Make the Grade has been a learning experience, and in some cases a steep learning curve.

## “WE HAVE A MINIMUM OF THREE REQUESTS PER WEEK SO WE CHOOSE OUR PARTNERSHIPS CAREFULLY.”

EMPLOYER

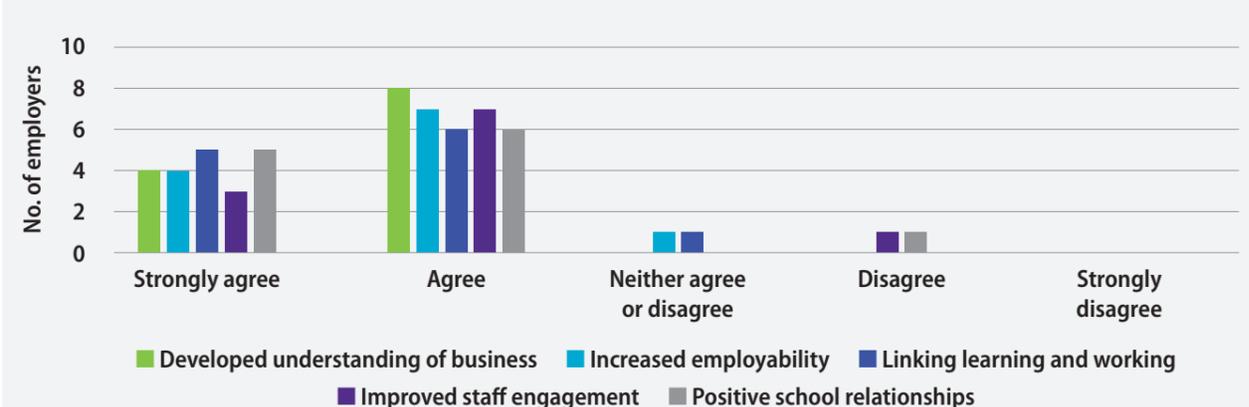
Localisation – employer view

Source: Lead Employer Survey



Employers' perception on impact

Source: Lead Employer Survey



# WHAT'S NEXT?

The evaluation helped us to discover some key recommendations with areas to explore to develop Make the Grade for the future.

In summer 2017 we reached out to our education and business communities to socialise the findings and build and improve on these areas for the benefit of everyone involved in Make the Grade.

Here's what our partners told us, and the actions we will focus on to develop and improve Make the Grade to 2020.

1

**You said: We need experiences for teachers too.**

**We will** be using our strong network of teaching partners to investigate more flexible activities and resources for schools that will help them more successfully navigate future careers either for their subject area or for the region in which they teach. A number of our education partners have highlighted that Teacher CPD offerings are becoming increasingly difficult to fit into Inset Days where there are a number of competing priorities for content, so we'll look at how we can tackle that so teachers don't miss out on the opportunity to learn about careers and the labour market through Make the Grade.

2

**You said: Parents are vital influencers in young people's decisions about careers.**

**We will** investigate parents/carers' greater involvement in the design and delivery of some of our activities in 2017/18 to assess their impact and find out how we can affect change throughout the community.

3

**You said: Careers education needs to start earlier.**

**We will** fully assess our programmes in 2018/19 to develop the variety and breadth of activity available at primary level. Although we do offer a successful range of primary activities, we think we can develop this further with the help of our partners.

4

**You said: We should consult with young people more.**

**We will** continue to take part in initiatives such as Children's Takeover Day and young people's working groups so we can put young people in the lead and get direct views from students that take part in Make the Grade. By 2020 young people will inform all of the work we do with opportunities to learn from students extended to all our partners.

5

**You said: Making Make the Grade complementary to the curriculum helps students apply their learning more clearly and helps schools see its value.**

**We will** use the feedback obtained from curriculum-linked activities piloted in 2016/17 to strengthen this aspect of our offer, so that by 2020 our activities complement the curriculum wherever possible.

6

**You said: We need more diversity in the resources we use such as digital platforms.**

**We will** be carrying out a detailed assessment of how we can better use digital platforms and technology to make our resources more accessible and more exciting for all our partners. This will help us make the most of what's already out there and by 2020 we will have integrated more diverse and accessible resources that keep up with the way young people and our partners live their lives.

7

**You said: Businesses and their volunteers want to understand longer term impact to understand the value of their commitment.**

**We will** be looking at how we can work with our education partners to provide longer term impact reporting to our business and education partners from 2017/18 onwards. We've already launched improved evaluation forms with our students, teaching partners and business volunteers to enable us to capture more in-depth feedback.

8

**You said: More volunteers would take part if Make the Grade was linked to more formal recognition and appraisals.**

**We will** pilot more formal recognition for both students and volunteers with our mentoring programmes this year and will collect feedback from this to decide how we can help our partners drive volunteer engagement to extend growth and appeal to 2020.



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