

# Employer engagement

*Leadership Focus* takes a look at the success of the NAHT-led Primary Futures initiative and how it helps children make connections between their learning and their futures.



“

A few months ago, we had a volunteer come into the school and ask the children to guess what job she did. She was wearing a hard hat and carrying a 3ft-long steel spanner. She was an engineer in the merchant navy and told them how she spends three months a year away at sea.

“You should have seen the faces of the children – most of them had no idea a job like that even existed. It was especially inspiring to the girls, and she was able to emphasise the importance of maths, science and English to her job; so it lent powerful relevance to what all the children were studying and learning.”

So recalls Andy Mellor, head of St Nicholas Church of England Primary School in Blackpool, secretary of the Blackpool branch and the incoming NAHT vice president, about one of his many experiences of Primary Futures.

Primary Futures is the initiative set up two-and-a-half years ago by NAHT and the charity Education and Employers with the aim to “widen the horizons and aspirations of primary school children by helping them make the connections between their learning and their futures”.

It has a simple remit: to connect schools, through a free database, with volunteer employers, individuals and organisations within their area.

These volunteers then come into the school to talk about what they do, how they got to where they are today, how

learning and education helped them in this and to (hopefully) inspire the children about their own future goals and aspirations. The fact it is now working with more than 3,000 schools in England (see panel) is testament to its success and popularity.

As Andy explains: “The reason why we do it is simple: it is to build the level of aspiration in our children, Blackpool is often treated as something of a basket-case nationally. But there is, in fact, a lot going on here.





**Above:** Primary Futures helps children build levels of aspiration.



**Left:** Andy Mellor introduces volunteers to the pupils at his Blackpool school.

## WHAT IS PRIMARY FUTURES?

Primary Futures was launched in October 2014 as a joint project between NAHT and the charity Education and Employers, which runs the Inspiring the Future scheme focussing more on secondary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Its aim is simple: to widen the horizons and aspirations of primary school children by bringing employer volunteers into school to talk to them about what they do, to inspire them, open their eyes to future career and life opportunities they may not have thought of, and to make the connections between their school learning and their post-school futures.

It currently has a growing network of more than 35,000 volunteers going into more than 3,000 primary schools in England.

Primary Futures is free to use, and schools connect with volunteers through an online Primary Futures database, at [www.inspiringthefuture.org](http://www.inspiringthefuture.org)

Teachers can view the profiles of different volunteers in their area and contact any they would like to come into their school. There are also resources such as an FAQs section and guide on the website.

In Wales, schools can connect with volunteers in the same way, currently through Inspiring the Future although the aim is for the Primary Futures brand to roll out there in the next few months.

In Wales, there is currently a network of 54 teachers from 43 schools and colleges, working with more than 324 volunteers.

The charity has said it is keen to expand into Northern Ireland, and is looking to build up its database of schools, colleges, employers, professional bodies and individuals there. Anyone interested can contact it through

[enquiries@inspiringthefuture.org](mailto:enquiries@inspiringthefuture.org)

**CASE STUDY**

Jo Powell is deputy head teacher of Tredegarville Church in Wales Primary School in Cardiff, which has 254 children on its roll and has been running employer/volunteer engagement programmes through Inspiring the Future since October 2014.

“For our Inspiring the Future Week, we get volunteers through the database and also from community partners. It is all about raising awareness in our children; encouraging them to understand why education is important to their future and for broadening their horizons.”

“This year our volunteers included Emma Williams (Welsh Government), Tryfon Kalyvides Architects, Dilwyn Young Jones of the Welsh Assembly, The Cardiff Devils ice hockey players, The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff University School of Medicine, the author Dai Hankey, a cheerleader, a vet, our school governors, past pupils and many more.

“We’ve also tried to link our week of activities to our School Values. For example, a member of Cardiff Food Bank joined us this year.

“The week creates a real buzz. The volunteers often discuss challenges they have had to overcome or things they’ve achieved in their role as well as offering an insight into the jobs they do. It also shows the children why you have to work hard at school if you want to achieve in later life - it inspires them and shows the importance of succeeding at school.

“Our Inspiring the Future Week has also resulted in developing positive partnerships. We now take classes to Cardiff Medical School, where the children’s learning is enriched and enhanced. The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama students now join us



**Above:** Inspiring the Future Week introduces children to the world of work.

for our weekly ‘Do Something New’ sessions where our children have the opportunity to learn new skills.

“The Primary Futures website is easy to use. There are a variety of volunteers who you can contact to visit your school. In addition to the positive outcomes for our children, our partnership working was recognised as excellent during a recent Estyn inspection. With exciting times ahead, and with the development of the new curriculum, we will no doubt find Primary Futures a very useful resource to support our teaching and learning.”

**Left:** Cardiff medical students help out as part of Science Week.



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"Historically, the two biggest employers here have been traditional industries and tourism. So, as a town, it is important that we diversify and, even more important, that we keep our most able people here. Moreover, because we do not have a university in Blackpool, people who have wanted to go to university have had to travel, at the very least, to Preston, and then perhaps never come back.

"It is about trying to create a link between schools and businesses, trying to develop young people who are resilient enough to enter the world of work; it is also about developing and raising their aspirations about what 'work' entails and the variety of jobs that may be out there; and it is about breaking down gender stereotypes on what sorts of jobs are available.

"For example, we have a local nautical college near us - Fleetwood. We recently had a female marine biologist come into the school who really inspired the children and showed them what you can achieve if you work

hard at science. The volunteers we have had have been amazing. They come into the school and the children get to see the link between the curricular subjects they are learning in the classroom and the world of work outside," Andy adds.

Next month will also see Primary Futures events and activities happening across the borough during Aspirations Week from 22-26 May.

Blackpool is, of course, one of the government's 12 'opportunity areas', along with Derby, Norwich, Oldham, Scarborough, West Somerset, Bradford, Doncaster, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich and Stoke-on-Trent.

These are areas where the Department for Education is proactively working to target and establish programmes to support access to work and vocational opportunities and remove obstacles to social mobility.

The NAHT's Primary Futures work clearly aligns with this aspiration. But there is also a



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### THE EMPLOYER'S VIEW

Rachael Boaler is senior business manager at recruitment firm Randstad Education in Blackpool, and Effie Sharp is a primary education consultant. The firm is a Primary Futures volunteer and has worked with Andy Mellor at St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, among others.

"We feel very strongly that it is important for us to give something back to the community. We have done talks with schools and workshops across Lancashire; there are a lot of schools we are working with," says Rachael.

"Everyone loves it; it allows the children to see someone other than their teacher. And, as an organisation, we get a lot back too. It creates a real buzz and it is great for increasing the profile of the team.

"As a head, it is really very simple to do. You just go on the website and email the volunteer directly."

"Rather than talking at the children, I like to get them involved, to ask them questions," says Effie. "I ask them to guess what I do, guess what skills I need to do my job, that sort of thing. The children really relate to it.

"For instance, I travel quite a lot for work, and so I was able to talk to them about how a job like mine, even though I'm based in Blackpool, can give me the opportunity to go to lots of different places and meet different people. It helps them to see the bigger picture, such as you don't necessarily need to move away to be successful.

"I try to avoid coming out with stereotypical advice - 'you need to listen to your teachers', that sort of thing - and make it more about stories, and then link it back to education. So I might explain that a lot of my job is about talking to people and helping them with things like CVs, so English and communication skills have been very important to me."

richer pedagogical element to the programme - making the connection between the value of education and learning with aspiration and social mobility - that sets it apart from, say, a standard secondary careers' event, as NAHT Primary Futures manager Steve Iredale explains.

"The key thing is that this is not about careers' talks, although schools may also do that. This is more about why primary school learning is, and will be, important in later life; that education is a route through which to achieve your dream," he says.

"What I would be encouraging schools to be doing is looking

at the curriculum and thinking about where local volunteers and employers might be able to come in to support and inspire the kids. For example, someone from your local museum if you're doing a history-based topic. If you can't find the volunteer on the database that's often where NAHT can help.

"Volunteers can enhance the children's learning and bring things to the classroom that the teacher often can't; they just bring a different perspective and can give the children a dose of reality. The captivated look on their faces sometimes has to be seen to be believed," Steve adds.

**Below:** Children enjoy finding out more about the world of work.

"Employer engagement is often seen as something quite secondary-specific, and it is often more about careers education, information, advice and guidance," agrees NAHT policy adviser Siôn Humphreys.

"The trick at primary level is to make it part of the educational process, not just 'an event'. It is more about introducing children to the world of work; giving children the opportunity to realise that education is not just good in itself, but something that serves the economy, the country, and which can serve them in terms of aspiration and social mobility," he adds.

And, finally, there is an important role for these sort of programmes within special schools, argues Kim Johnson, NAHT president and principal of Bradfields Specialist SEN Academy in Chatham, Kent.

"It is quite clear that we want to raise children's aspirations, to awaken them to the possibilities that are open to them. Getting people to come into the school and talk about what they do is a great way of doing that.

"From the perspective of a special school, it is also about encouraging the children to think about their abilities not their disabilities," he points out.



#### FIND OUT MORE...

If you would like to register with Primary Futures and contact volunteers waiting to inspire your children, please visit the website [www.inspiringthefuture.org/primary-futures/](http://www.inspiringthefuture.org/primary-futures/)



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