

# DEVELOPING THE TALENTS OF CORNWALL'S NEXT GENERATION

A PFA RESEARCH STUDY – JULY 2015



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## FOREWORD

One of the key eye openers from Cornwall Chamber's 'A Business Plan for Cornwall' consultation was that concerns about business support, tax, business rates and physical infrastructure were completely overshadowed by the need to develop the talents of the next generation; preparing young people for the world of work, investing in the skills of those already at work and nurturing our business leaders of tomorrow.



To coincide with Business Cornwall magazine's July/August edition on education and training, PFA Research decided to delve into this in more detail; to assist the Chamber in its call for long-term practical links to be forged between business and education in Cornwall, by discovering what action is needed to deliver positive results for our future prosperity.

In June 2015, PFA carried out qualitative, in depth interviews with key representatives from academia and a range of local employers, to better understand how effective links can be formed that develop the talents of our next generation and deliver the skills that businesses need. Here's what we found...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PFA' followed by a stylized flourish.

## WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING?

Encouragingly, there's a whole raft of activity already happening between business and education.

Innovative schemes are being set up to develop local talent and fulfil the high level skills needs of the business sector, such as bespoke apprenticeship schemes developed specifically to meet the needs of industry, collaborations between major employers in given sectors and internships for A-level students.

All the traditional activities such as school visits, work experience placements, the Young Enterprise entrepreneurship programme and sector schemes, like 'Chefs adopt a school' through the Academy of Culinary Arts and STEM Ambassadors (Science Technology Engineering and Maths), provide opportunities for young people to be exposed to business.

Industrial placements as part of university education, graduate employment schemes, and work to educate parents, teachers and careers advisors as to future job opportunities are taking place as well.

And the impacts are being felt.

### *The views of business...*

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*"Everyone has been amazed – there has been work done by students that has jaw dropped our senior managers."*

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### *The views of education...*

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*"In software development and coding we're seeing a definite change in the creation of code clubs and organisations like Software Cornwall – it's really nice to see."*

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## HOW OPEN IS EDUCATION TO BUSINESS?

Schools and colleges are generally open to interacting with business, but a single point of contact to organise and coordinate things would help.

A lack of commercial structure and culture clash over sense of urgency can make it difficult for working relationships to develop. But the respective doors of both businesses and education providers are ajar and waiting to be pushed open.

### *The views of business...*

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*"If you go and knock on the door they will jump at the chance – everyone's keen, there's no issue about school and colleges not wanting things to happen... they welcome contact."*

*"It's a real variety pack and depends on some of the individual staff within the school – with some you get a real sense they are really going above and beyond the remit of their role to make things happen; others find obstacles to put in the way."*

*"In the majority of schools there is no single point of contact, and often no official acknowledgement of the time and travel expense taken out from the business to attend. The first contact into schools is usually to reception and if there is no one allotted to manage the relationship, businesses get passed from pillar to post. Response times can be very slow, taking months for things to happen, if at all; then businesses lose the desire to engage."*

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*"Once a relationship is established, they're really open to trying new things – they want to use the business community as an additional resource."*

*"Sometimes the timing doesn't fit in with academic curriculum they have planned... Schools need time to arrange transportation, get agreement from parents, the children need someone to accompany them."*

*"Teachers have a heavy responsibility to fulfil the curriculum and don't necessarily have a business background so it's unfair to ask them."*

*"We could have a designated business governor on each Governing Body. Someone who's held responsible, with an item on the agenda that asks 'right, what have we been doing with business?'"*

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### *The views of education...*

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*"Our links with business are a mix of historical links through contacts and also we have a directory of local businesses we know who will support us. Sometimes we get businesses being proactive. Whenever we ask, we find businesses are VERY receptive."*

*"We invite employers in to talk to students about opportunities and generally find they are very willing to do that. The scale of business makes a difference in how much time they have available for us."*

*"Teachers are under pressure to get children through exams... we do need to make sure children are literate and numerate when they enter the workplace."*

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## THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

Businesses can play a greater role in ensuring young people are ready for the workplace and there is agreement about what needs to happen.

If business expects education to prepare young people for the workplace, it needs to set out clearly what it will require from education in advance, finding ways to get involved early and before students become school or college leavers.

Raising aspirations is recognised as an important job for both businesses and education, helping young people to see the opportunities outside of their own experiences and influences to date.

Businesses can not only help children see at first hand the practical relevance of what they learn in school. Perhaps more importantly, business leaders present authority to show there is life beyond school and the world is also about small enterprising companies exploiting bright ideas right here in Cornwall.

### *The views of business...*

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*"We are the custodians of talent and standards – businesses that bemoan skills shortage need to define what that criteria is."*

*"There are some great jobs in Cornwall and industry has a responsibility to work with young people to help them understand what those jobs are... otherwise how will people know? We can't sit and complain without doing something about it."*

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*"Better the understanding of the world of work; give young people a clearer understanding of pathways... widening aspirations away from stereotypical jobs."*

*"Start taking on young people before they leave school or college – don't use Health and Safety legislation as an excuse – it's difficult but not impossible."*

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### *The views of education...*

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*"Offer teaching staff work experience to upskill and learn more about their area of expertise... it's so important for cutting edge companies to engage and teach about the opportunities coming through."*

*"Schemes where business people act as mentors to students in schools could be of great benefit, especially in providing an opportunity to develop vital networking skills."*

*"It would help if there was a database of employers who were willing to come and talk to or take one of our students."*

*"It's all about young people having a better understanding about what a sector can offer – if you take construction – it's not just about building, there's site management, design, office jobs, accounts, admin - all the services to support the sector."*

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## WHAT'S IN IT FOR BUSINESS?

Businesses can realise significant benefit by engaging with education.

For some businesses, especially larger employers, it is a direct investment in the future to attract talent.

Whether it's giving talks in schools or offering work experience to groups of students, it all helps to raise the company profile and demonstrate values. For others, engaging with education provides opportunity for self-development, such as developing presentation skills.

*The views of business...*

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*"As a family business, we're firm believers that we have a social responsibility to reinvest in the communities in which we operate."*

*"We owe it to the next generation to do so. When I was young growing up, you used to be able to walk into any business and see what was going on. Society has put barriers up and we need to break down those barriers."*

*"For any business that needs to employ a quantity of people, this is a great opportunity to raise awareness. A sales and marketing approach is what you have to apply to recruitment. Raising your brand within schools and colleges is laying foundations for the future."*

*"Mums and Dads will say: 'They're a good bunch – go and see what they've got available'. It raises our profile as a responsible employer. It's a chance to demonstrate who you are as a company."*

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*"Bringing people into businesses can be expensive so the more you can bring in the pipeline will save money in recruitment agencies. There are benefits also for employees - it supports opportunities for self-development, for example developing presentation skills through talks to groups of children."*

*"It works especially well with younger members of staff as children relate to them more easily; it doesn't have to be the senior people."*

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*The views of education...*

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*"Schools these days are being asked to operate like businesses; we can learn from business ourselves."*

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## A SKILLS SHORTAGE?

In the Cornwall Chamber 'A Business Plan for Cornwall' consultation, almost 60% of business respondents said they have difficulties in finding suitable staff. Hard to fill vacancies were in technical positions (particularly engineering and IT), sales and managerial jobs.

There are mixed views on the issue of skills shortages, but where they exist, the business sector must help to close the gap.

Schools are under pressure to get young people through exams and achieve the best results, allowing students to access their next stages in life, whether in further or higher education or the world of work.

To enable the design of a curriculum that develops relevant skills, businesses must deliver a clear message that education hears and can understand.

However, while business works out what it needs, some in education say roles need to be better promoted to a wealth of ambitious young people, whose ambition often is to leave the county.

## The views of business...

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*"For core areas around engineering and technology, there are consistent skills gaps across our industry. It's how we feed that into local colleges and make them aware of that."*

*"There is a skills shortage, but it's to do with the way further education colleges are funded. There's no mechanism to be forward looking, for example, identifying that perhaps there's going to be a need for lots of aerospace engineers in 5 years' time."*

*"It does start by looking at a future plan - we need to look at what's happening in the next three, five, ten years to ensure young people are being developed to take on those sorts of roles."*

*"Most 13-14 year olds get limited or no guidance on careers. They need some real inspiration and that needs to be sorted by the business community."*

*"It's been difficult to get the message about apprenticeships through – some schools are just focussed on University."*

*"I definitely agree there is a shortage of suitably qualified individuals in Cornwall, but actually I am hearing from businesses that it's because of salaries, not training. Recruitment problems are mainly around the cost of living versus salary rather than the lack of skills."*

*"It's a bit misleading to say it's just skills - it's skills and behaviours to be able to challenge, implement change, think creatively and lead large numbers of people."*

*"It's not typically the senior or managerial roles that are a challenge for us in the hospitality industry – the attraction and development of additional junior chefs and waiters will be a priority as our business grows."*

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## The views of education...

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*“Currently schools are under pressure to get students through exams. Results really matter, and when we’re focussing hard on getting the best results, we have to design the curriculum to make sure we’re reaching students with all those relevant skills. That’s why businesses telling us what they need is really important so we hear that voice and can understand that need.”*

*“There is definitely a skills shortage – if you look at IT, it changes daily, it’s very fast moving - I don’t personally think as a provider my staff would be able to stay fully up to date, so it’s about how businesses support colleges, by becoming associate lecturers for example.”*

*“I don’t necessarily agree there is a skills shortage – employers could do a better job of promoting the roles available – students are very ambitious, and their view of ambition in life is to leave the county. One of the things I’m very interested in is, in some industries, employers sponsor young people – so if employers want them to come back, then pay for them to do it. That would be a really positive relationship employers would have too with our young people.”*

*“There is something about the image of the core industries in Cornwall – such as food for example - that means despite paying and training well they are not seen as attractive careers by young people. Ironically, they often give access to a range of exciting development opportunities not available elsewhere.”*

*“The Chamber are doing a lot to get the conversation going and the more we get business articulating what they want the more responsive we can be. The notion of the Chamber extending their reach to have conversations is very welcome.”*

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## DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS

Businesses often cite a lack of commercial awareness and 'soft skills' among school leavers. Education recognises and is addressing this, but business needs to play its part too.

It was evident from the recent research for 'A Business Plan for Cornwall' that for many businesses recruiting staff, academic qualifications have little currency unless supported by a portfolio of soft skills in communication and general presentation.

Education is becoming increasingly aware of the part it can play in developing emotional intelligence. Businesses can support by offering work opportunities to young people, providing early experiences of life in the real world.

### *The views of business...*

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*"Businesses want young people to have well developed life skills, not just for the workplace but also when they're representing the business and engaging with the wider community."*

*"Basically it all stems back to the fact you need to have education and industry working much closer together, so young people are doing activities that are much more like business activities."*

*"A key element is teachers and helping them understand the opportunities and the need for softer skills; helping them understand the context."*

*"It's a real shame that work experience is not a compulsory element in schools. In a week you can change some challenging behaviour."*

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### *The views of education...*

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*"The real thing I think is missing is to get to show students in a transferrable setting – they need to understand why it's relevant. Getting them out and learning in a real setting; you can't beat it. Confidence is also a major thing – the more exposure we give them to unfamiliar work place environments, the more they become equipped to handle these situations and develop that confidence."*

*"If the students are late for work, there are serious consequences – we seek to replicate this but there's nothing like experiencing this for real in the workplace."*

*"Schools are starting to wake up to the part they have to play, teaching emotional intelligence, but this has only started to be recognised in recent years. It was once thought that these skills were innate and couldn't be taught, but there's a change in opinion now."*

*"A lot of that comes through their work experience. Even if they just have a part time job in Sainsbury's, they are developing in customer service, confidence and the ability to work with lots of people. For many however, it's difficult to find a student job or appropriate placement."*

*"More exposure to work earlier on in their educational career. The increasing use of tech gadgets and social media also loses the human element – so a declining trend overall. It's giving people the opportunity to learn what's acceptable and not."*

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## YOUNG ENTERPRISE

There is unilateral support for entrepreneurship programmes such as Young Enterprise but most would like it broadened to reach more young people.

Both business and education think programmes such as Young Enterprise are a great help to foster entrepreneurial thinking. The only criticisms relate to perceptions that often it's only the brightest and best students who get to take part and that programmes could go farther in replicating real business experience.

### *The views of business...*

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*"It is great and something which is really useful... but it's only the keen ones; the minority of children get to do it."*

*"They do a good job but tend not to reach out to those who are troubled. So it's taken up by those who are already bothered to get involved... those already motivated in other walks of life."*

*"There are schemes out there like the Year in Industry initiative... there are something like 600+ businesses registered, to give young people a real experience while they're working out what they want to do. It's getting rave reviews apparently but it seems not many places know about it."*

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### *The views of education...*

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*"I'm a complete fan; it's top quality stuff that instils tenacity and resilience – we're thinking about ways to extend it across older and younger age groups."*

*"It's a good first step, but very safe and closely managed. I liked the programmes where young people were given money to set up real businesses – that's a braver step. Young people do need acceptance that things can fail – that's good learning."*

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## STRENGTHENING LINKS

There are many ideas on how long term practical links can be forged between business and education.

Designated points of contact, more information on ways to engage and raised understanding would all help to strengthen links.

### *The views of business...*

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*“With colleges and unis, there is no formalised structure – you just bump into someone, say: “wouldn’t it be good if we did this” and then it goes round in circles. It only works if somebody is organising and coordinating it, but it tends to be kind of sporadic – it’s no one’s job to do this.”*

*“One thing to be really careful of is where relationships are owned by one or two people – for example one teacher or business representative, there should be more.”*

*“...centralised coordination – a single point of access from business into education – it needs to be simple, one point of contact, for the right people to make links and know the process is safe to go through.”*

*“Employers probably don’t know what routes and opportunities are available. A list of all the opportunities to engage with schools and colleges in one document would be a great help.”*

*“Employers should speak more to other employers, to say ‘come and join our activity and see how easy it is to engage’”.*

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### *The views of education...*

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*“I don’t know if there are any schemes where business people are mentors to students in schools. They could teach young people networking and so on – it could work.”*

*“Having an understanding of educational constraints to meet the business need. Constraints that the awarding bodies put in, and we have to deal with.”*

*“I genuinely believe that Cornwall has a unique environment in which it could foster collaboration between business and education as many informal links do exist. What it’s not managed to do yet is turn these into formal links that actually practically solve some of these issues.”*

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## INVESTING IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Education doesn't stop at school. The need to invest in the skills of those already in work and nurturing the business leaders of tomorrow is seen to be equally imperative.

Respondents spoke unanimously on the need to grow talent and invest in people in order to grow business. There was concern, however, that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is not part of culture for many businesses.

While the results of the research highlight the need for business to speak clearly to education, and for education to hear and respond, it was widely recognised that people development is one area where business can learn from schools.

### *The views of business...*

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*"Development is key, as you don't grow your business if you don't grow your people."*

*"Growing your own talent has to be a priority. It should be on the agenda for every business."*

*"There's a perception that when you finish school, you don't have to learn any more – we need to make people aware of the need to be constantly learning and doing - we need people who are passionate about learning."*

*"Make sure [new joiners] get an exceptional welcome to the business. Start as you mean to go on – regular support and guidance; technical and service development and then aspiring to manager level."*

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*"Little and often is our mantra – more regular, informal conversations in terms of development goals and activity."*

*"We've developed our own mentoring programme to share knowledge and experience across other areas of the group."*

*"Employers don't value ongoing training unless they see immediate financial benefit. Tech companies keep employers up to speed on technical aspects and will invest in industry training or peer to peer learning, but for less obvious skills, they resort to development only in competency or capability situations."*

*"CPD is not embedded into workplaces. Someone has to have a real interest in something to keep up to date and research latest developments. Appraisals if done at all are done badly."*

*"We're fortunate being part of a big group so there are opportunities to do CPD. We have management programmes and courses each year so there is a constant flow – it's all about behavioural side of leadership and management and part of our succession planning strategy. For a single business at one site it's a bit trickier to find open courses that are right and relevant. Could SMEs collaborate and share those developments?"*

*"At present, evening classes are not vocational – this all goes down to coordinating the needs of business. One of the key things that needs to happen is for us to advise education where the actual need is."*

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## The views of education...

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*“We have CPD programmes for teachers and future leaders – maybe we could get business and education running joint sessions, certainly on soft skills... we could act as a foundation.”*

*“There is flexibility for us to work with employers to develop the right type of training to develop the workforce.”*

*“In some instances there can be some reticence in having to pay for skills development, but if training is of a quality that businesses think will have a positive impact on turnover it’s no problem. We’ve increasingly seen employers and individuals prepared to pay to develop their business and progress their careers.”*

*“There is a role for the Chamber of Commerce or FSB to model training for smaller businesses. The SMEs that train and develop their workforce compete better and are better at tendering for business; but the fear is, if you train someone they will leave. In actual fact people recognise the investment and give back their loyalty in return.”*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PFA Research and Business Cornwall magazine would like to thank the people listed opposite for giving up their time to contribute their valued opinions to this research.

We hope these insights will help to further strengthen the ties between education and business in Cornwall & Scilly for the prosperity of our future generations.

There are many more people we would have liked to have talked to and in doing so, we would no doubt have gained more ideas. Join the conversation on the Business Cornwall group page on LinkedIn, or contact us at PFA Research.

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