

Commerce in the Classroom

Evaluation Report 2019-2020

Introduction

Future First works across the UK to help build, engage and activate thriving state school alumni networks, to ensure that all young people have access to relatable role models, trusted mentors and meaningful social capital.

In 2019/20 Future First partnered with The Commercial Education Trust to deliver a pilot project connecting individuals working in international trade and commerce to young people in secondary schools and colleges across the South East and East of England.

207 students based in ten schools in regions of low social mobility in Norfolk, Sussex and East Cambridgeshire attended a set of two workshops supported by volunteers working in international trade and commerce. The workshops provided students with an insight into various careers in the sector and opportunities to develop transferable skills. All students were asked to complete baseline and exit surveys to measure their progress over the duration of the programme. This report summarises the key evaluation findings incorporating feedback from volunteers and teachers.

The Need

The UK has a social mobility problem, which has worsened over recent years. Our [recent research](#) with YouGov showed that over a third of young people from the poorest backgrounds do not know someone in a job they would like to do and 40% are worried about the job they will get in future. In addition, almost half (43%) do not know, or are unsure, if “people like me” will be successful in life. A significant barrier to young people’s social mobility is a lack of access to relatable role models, and awareness of potential employment opportunities.

We know that the labour market is becoming increasingly complex and difficult to access and that it is important for young people to be aware of this. The Department for Education recognises the importance of commercial education in supporting this, but more needs to be done to ensure students are aware of the changing labour market and to ensure that schools are able to develop productive links with employers.

Commerce and international trade is a growth industry, however, the full impact that the UK leaving the European Union will have on international trade is not yet known, and there are already challenges to developing an effective and efficient pipeline of viable and diverse employees. By bringing commerce into the classroom, this innovative pilot worked towards addressing some of these issues, connecting schools and students with employees working in international trade.

Project Overview

Developing the network

Integral to the success of the project was the development of a network of individuals working in international trade and commerce. To build the network we contacted Chambers of Commerce across the UK to circulate information regarding the volunteering offer and undertook extensive targeted regional outreach on LinkedIn. We contacted our existing alumni networks and approached international businesses located in Norfolk, East Cambridgeshire and Sussex as well as other towns and cities across the South East and East of England.

We presented at the Civil Service Social Mobility School Outreach Team event at the Department for International Trade and delivered a round table event bringing together representatives from the Commercial Education Trust, the Department for International Trade, SEMTA, techUK, DC Pro and the East Midlands International Trade Association. At the roundtable we explored the best ways we could bring meaningful employer encounters to young people in the classroom, while also raising the profile of international trade and commerce as a viable and accessible career pathway.

Over 200 individuals from across the UK with a background in international trade and/or commerce signed up to our network. They work in a range of different fields, including government policy, international trade research, agricultural markets, technology, financial trading and consultancy as well as international trade and commercial law. Of those, representatives from 20 organisations volunteered their time to participate in the pilot.

Delivery

We designed and delivered 20 two hour workshops in ten schools, providing 207 students with an insight into the skills and careers opportunities within commerce and international trade.

The workshops were designed to provide students with a greater understanding of what international trade means and involves and to expose them to a range of employment and career opportunities available within international trade.

In the first workshop, students participated in an interactive trading game involving goods trading to illustrate what a complex market place looks like, and students were provided with the opportunity to reflect on the skills they used and the importance of communication, team work and negotiation skills. They also learnt about exports and imports and which countries trade the most. They participated in a Q&A to find out more about their volunteer/s' job and the skills they use





on a daily basis. The workshop ended with final advice from the volunteer/s as well as a job matching activity where students got into teams and matched jobs with their corresponding job descriptions.

In the second workshop, students were introduced to new volunteers and participated in a Q&A. Students learnt about supply chains for products and looked into the ways in which markets are affected by events such as natural disasters and political upheaval.

Evaluation Methodology

207 students and 20 volunteers participated in the programme. Students completed baseline and exit surveys at the beginning and end of the project, designed to measure their understanding of international trade and commerce, their awareness of career opportunities available within the sector and perception of who can succeed, as well as their confidence in their own ability.

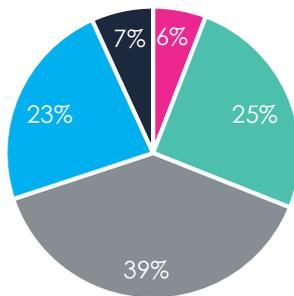
Alongside surveys, we asked students to record their learnings in their workbooks at the end of each workshop and collected feedback from school staff and volunteers.



Findings

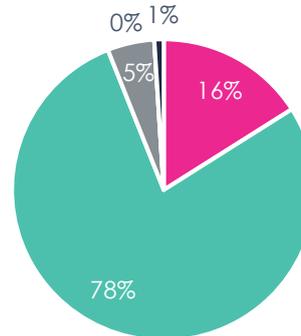
An improved understanding of what international trade means and involves

Baseline
I understand what international trade is



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Exit
I understand what international trade is



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

At the start of the project 31% of students told us that they understood what international trade was, by the end of workshop two this had increased by 63% to 94%.

Students were asked to reflect on what they had learnt:

"The importance of trade around the world"

"I learnt a lot about supply chains"

"An overview of the international trading market"

"That England's highest export is machinery"

"Many things used by us daily are internationally traded"

"That international trade affects everything. Most companies and most products + food + services"

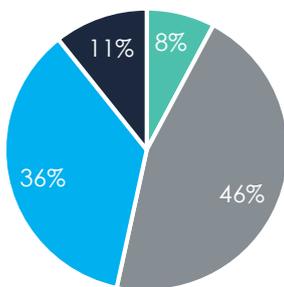
We asked volunteers to tell us the impact they felt the workshops had on the students they were engaged with.

70% of volunteers said that they believed the workshops increased students' understanding of what international trade is.

Increased awareness of employment and career opportunities available within international trade

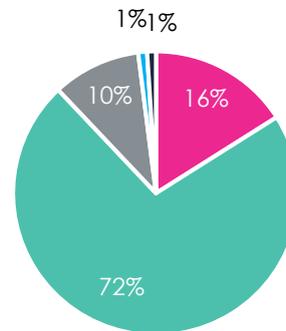
Before the workshops, 8% of students told us they knew about different jobs available in international trade. By the end this had increased to 88%.

Baseline
I know about the different jobs available in international trade



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Exit
I know about the different jobs available in international trade



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Students were introduced to employees working in a variety of different fields. They ranged from Financial Advisors to Operation Managers, Civil Servants to Business Development Managers.

Representatives from local businesses such as Aspen Pumps based in East Sussex and HGV Alliance based in Cambridgeshire participated in the project, as well as large scale, national organisations such as Fujitsu, the Federation of Small Businesses, Nielsen and the Department for International Trade.

Students reflected on what they learnt:

"I know jobs within international trade"

"What international finance advisors do and what their jobs involve"

"What an international marketing consultant does"

"What logistics are"

"The accessibility for people with varied qualifications to get a job in international trade"

We asked volunteers to tell us the impact they felt the workshops had on the students they were engaged with.

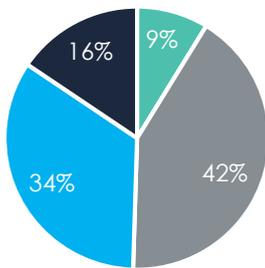
70% of volunteers said that the workshops provided students with an overview of the different jobs available in international trade.

Develop transferable employability skills

As part of the pilot, students participated in a range of activities designed to develop and enhance employability skills such as negotiation, communication, problem solving and team work skills. One student told us they had learnt “how to negotiate within trading”, another said they had learned that “communication and problem solving (skills) are vital in finance.”

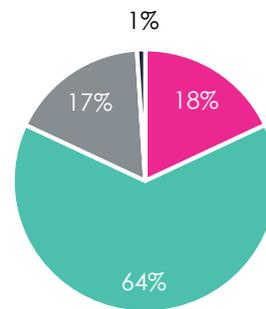
At the start of the project 9% of students said they knew the skills needed to get a job in international trade. By the end this had increased 82%.

Baseline
I know what skills I need to get a job working in international trade



- Strongly Agree
- Not sure
- Strongly disagree
- Agree
- Disagree

Exit
I know what skills I need to get a job working in international trade



- Strongly Agree
- Not sure
- Strongly disagree
- Agree
- Disagree

Students told us they had learnt that:

“Experience is just as valuable as qualifications”

“What skills are vital in the business environment”

“I’ve learned what are the important skills needed for certain jobs”

90% of the volunteers said they felt the workshops had improved students' knowledge of the types of skills needed to get a job in international trade.

One volunteer told us that they particularly enjoyed:

“Watching the students apply some logic and business thought to the tasks”

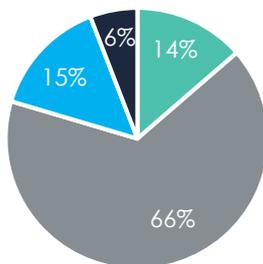
Dispel misconceptions

To assess students' perceptions of careers in international trade and commerce we asked them if they would consider a job in this sector. At the start of the project 8% of students told us they would consider a career in international trade, by the end this had increased to 42%.

One student told us they had learnt that *“International trade is growing and is something great to get into”* another said *“I would feel more comfortable going for a job in international trade”* and another said *“I feel confident that I'm capable.”*

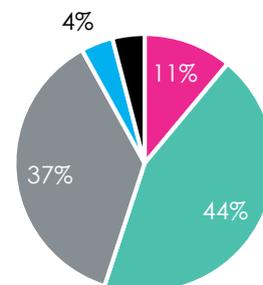
At the start of the project 66% of students said they were not sure if they were capable of getting a job in international trade, by the end this had reduced to 37%.

Baseline
I am capable of getting a job in international trade



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Exit
I am capable of getting a job in international trade



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

In addition, we asked students to respond to the statement, “I am confident I will be successful in the future.” At the start of the workshops 52% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. By the end this had increased to 72% .

90% of volunteers said they believed the workshops increased students' confidence in their ability to get a job in international trade and commerce.



Creating links between schools and employers

Commerce in the Classroom has supported schools to develop productive links with employers. Following the workshops 20% of our volunteers have since provided additional support to students at the schools they initially volunteered for.

For example:

- A Communications Manager at local business, Aspen Pumps, returned to Hailsham Community College to speak at a Business Breakfast.
- An Associate Lawyer who works in Russian and CIS disputes attended a business lunch and French lessons to talk to students about her career.
- A Membership Advisor at the Federation of Small Businesses wrote a case study about his pathway after school to share with students at Ely College.
- A Hotel Consultant is returning to City Norwich College to speak at a “World of Work” day in March.

The examples above highlight the impact the pilot has had in developing links between schools and employees working in international trade and commerce, something that schools often do not have the time or resources to do. By brokering these relationships, we have enabled schools to provide additional careers support to many more students outside the remit of this pilot.

Workshop feedback

85% of students rated the workshops as excellent or good

90% of volunteers said the workshops were excellent or good

We asked teachers to provide us with feedback on the workshops:

“Lovely session, students very engaged” Business Teacher, Sir Harry Smith Community College



“An informative session that will support their future studies” Careers Leader, Felpham Community College

“I would like to arrange future events for GCSE business students” Teacher, Ely College

Paul's story

Paul, Vice President of Connected Automotive and Mobility at Fujitsu, tells us why he wanted to 'pay it forward' and volunteer with international business students.

I always say that I 'grew up' at school; I entered as a boy and left as a young man not only through formal education but with new social skills and an awareness of how to get things in life. Once I left school I joined a youth training scheme which was a government scheme for 16 year olds which was part educational and part work experience. One of my first jobs after training was testing circuit boards at a company which agreed to sponsor me through college.

After college I got a job with Fujitsu as a junior engineer which involved repairing PC's. This was my entry point into the company and the opening to life changing opportunities. I worked my way up to support engineer, line manager of a team of engineers to the area manager for Central London until I moved over to retail clients such as Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer. I then took over the running of application development which meant learning about a new area of the company, spanning 9 countries across Europe and being responsible for 1000 people. I eventually returned to the business side where I took on the role of Operations Director for manufacturing across Europe which lead me to connect with Ford Motor Company where I became the global client executive and then went on to head up the Automotive business in the Americas and lead on global strategy.



Towards the end of my time at school I still had dreams of being a footballer which were unrealistic. It was thanks to the advice of my careers advisor that I went on the youth training scheme, leveraging my attributes in maths and computer studies. It was great careers advice and without it I may have been lost; it was the intervention that I needed. I'm a big believer in paying it forward, I sit on an advisory board for Michigan Council of Women in Technology which is a charity that helps women within Detroit Michigan get into STEM education and jobs. When the opportunity came up to volunteer with Future First I thought it would be a great way of paying it forward in my home City. I could pass on the careers advice that I was so lucky to have received. It's important for young people to talk to those with experience outside the classroom to help them make decisions using real world guidance and advice. I always say that the only bad decision is no decision!

I went back to school as a volunteer at a workshop for business students who were looking at international business. I shared my experience with them along with some aspects of the industry that may not be so obvious such as taking into account cultural diversity when trading in different countries and other things that may not necessarily be in their textbooks. I found the students to be very engaged and engaging; I learned as much from them as they hopefully learned from me, it was very rewarding!

The advice that I'd give to students is to find a sense of purpose. When you're young in your career you chase money and promotions but they're short term motivators; neither of them will sustain you over time. The one thing that will help you get out of bed in the morning is a sense of purpose.

The other piece of advice I'd give is to develop self-awareness early. Sometimes you may find it difficult to list what you're good at because your talents or skills may seem easy for you to do. It's difficult to value skills you find easy and you put more value on skills you don't possess. It is important to recognise that you may have skills that others don't and the route to success is to become great at what you are good at.

Rebecca's story

Rebecca, a Year 12 student from Sir Harry Smith Community College, tells us what she gained from participating in Commerce in the Classroom.

I enjoy studying at Sir Harry Smith; the step up from GCSE to A Level is challenging but a nice relief from having to take over 10 subjects to now studying 3 that I really enjoy. Reading around and understanding a subject in depth that I'm interested in makes my time in and out of lessons more enjoyable.

Before taking part in the Commerce in the Classroom workshop I had an interest in business since taking it at GCSE and potentially thinking about taking a course at university; this meant that I've been looking into the career areas that business could lead to. However, I had never considered international trade as an option purely because I didn't have much of an idea about what this would entail.

Before completing the workshop, I had little to no knowledge of what job opportunities there were and what they'd entail but the workshops did show me that there are multiple different job opportunities available in international trade.

The task that I enjoyed the most during the workshop involved guessing the salaries of certain jobs in the sector and comparing these to other jobs; the activity showed me the wide variety of jobs that are available and how these have a range of salaries too.

My plans for after completing my A Levels are to go to University and study a course such as Law with Business. The Commerce in the Classroom programme did influence me in considering jobs related to international trade which I otherwise wouldn't have considered.

Sustainability and legacy of the project

Using the knowledge we have gained during this pilot, we have developed guidance materials for teachers in all of our 400+ member schools on how to run these sessions in their own classrooms. Our next step is to share these resources, providing us with the potential to reach 400,000+ students across our member schools.

- All of our schools have access to our Digital Toolkit, which contains a resource library. We will make the session materials available for download, as well as guides and templates to help schools recruit and prepare volunteers.
- All school staff signed up to our service receive our monthly update email, in which we will promote the new materials.
- We will offer "Commerce in the Classroom" as a package which schools can pay for us to deliver in their schools.



Additionally, we will encourage and support schools to maintain relationships with the organisations and individuals we have brokered through regular communications and the use of Future First's online portal. This will mean that they can continue to engage in a range of ways in the future, and support young people as they progress along their employment pathways. As noted above, this has already happened with a number of the volunteers.

Conclusion

Commerce in the Classroom connected individuals working in international trade and commerce to young people in secondary schools and colleges across the South East and East of England. 207 students based in 10 schools in regions of low social mobility in Norfolk, Sussex and East Cambridgeshire participated in a set of two workshops supported by volunteers working in international trade and commerce.

Our findings show that by the end of the project students who took part in the pilot were more able to identify what international trade was and had an increased awareness of the variety of different roles available in the sector. They were able to identify skills needed for specific jobs and had opportunities to practice negotiation, team work and problem solving skills through a variety of activities. At the start of the project only 8% of students told us they would consider a career in international trade, by the end this had increased to 42%, showing the importance the pilot has had in broadening students' horizons.

85% of students and 90% of volunteers rated the workshops as excellent or good, and since the project ended a number of volunteers have returned to the classroom to provide advice and guidance to other students, highlighting the success of the pilot in terms of forging links between schools and employers.

We know that in an ever changing labour market it is increasingly important that students are aware of different pathways available to them and for schools to be empowered to provide that information and guidance through links with employers. This pilot highlights the impact brokering these connections can have. There is significant potential to expand upon this programme and pilot it in other areas.