

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

A qualitative assessment of the impact of Enterprise in Education & the Determined to Succeed strategy on businesses

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TNS System Three was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to carry out qualitative research to explore businesses' participation in DtS and the initial impact of DtS on them. This research focused on a discrete sample from the business community and should be regarded as providing a valuable progress report into the impact of the DtS strategy from a business perspective.

Main Findings

- All businesses were currently engaged in a wide variety of enterprising opportunities with schools.
- In general, perceptions around DtS were positive. Businesses were aware of DtS and agreed with its underlying philosophy, but did not have specific knowledge of the 20 recommendations underpinning the strategy.
- Some businesses perceived DtS to be a coordinated strategy that involved a variety of agencies including: Young Enterprise Scotland, Careers Scotland, the Local Authority and the Scottish Executive. For these businesses, this perceived multi-agency approach gave DtS a coordinated feel.
- Some businesses perceived there to be a lack of communication around the progress of DtS since its launch. Businesses expressed a desire to be kept up to date on the progress of DtS both on a national and local level.
- Local Authorities were actively involved in implementing their individualised approach to DtS. They had engaged businesses through a variety of means, including business breakfasts and partnership agreement signing sessions. All Local Authorities were confident of achieving the national target of 5 partnership agreements per cluster by 2006.
- The formal partnership agreement format was used to best effect for businesses that were either previously lightly involved in enterprising opportunities or relatively new to engaging with schools. There was some evidence to suggest that partnership agreements were not appropriate for businesses who had been engaged with schools for some time, or preferred ad-hoc, informal relationships with schools.

Background

TNS System Three was commissioned to conduct research with businesses engaged in Enterprise in Education (EinE) to explore participation in and the impact of the Determined to Succeed (DtS) strategy.

This research was designed to explore the relationship businesses have with schools, investigating experiences and knowledge of being involved in EinE and DtS and whether the strategies are having an impact. This research also involved gathering the views of members of Local Authority DtS teams. The overall aim of this research is to inform policy delivery and future commitments to the DtS strategy.

Method and sample

The research was carried out as follows:

- 24 one to one in-depth interviews, approximately one hour in duration, with businesses currently engaged in enterprising opportunities with schools. The 24 were further segmented by:
- 10 interviews with DtS only group (businesses that were thought to have been involved in enterprise opportunities with schools since DtS launch and not before)
- 14 interviews with DtS and before group (businesses that were believe to have been involved in enterprise opportunities with schools since before the launch of DtS)
- 10 interviews with Local Authority DtS contacts were also carried out. Each interview lasted 10-25 minutes in duration.

The Scottish Executive identified and supplied TNS System Three with the sample for participants.

Research Findings

Observations from business sample

Commonalities were found across the business sample.

Businesses were aware of DtS and its underlying philosophy but were largely unaware of the specific recommendations underpinning the strategy.

Businesses believed there were mutual benefits for schools, pupils and businesses in engaging in enterprise opportunities. For businesses these included: giving something back to the community, public relations benefits and internal staff development. For pupils and schools businesses perceived benefits to include: exposure to the business world, active learning and potentially sparking an interest in a new subject area for pupils.

Businesses believed that these mutual benefits would ultimately yield economic and societal benefits.

Businesses were engaged in a wide range of activities with schools. These activities ranged from work experience placements to innovative arrangements with schools such as co-coaching agreements.

Businesses had a clear idea of what enterprise should be – a combination of attitudinal and practical elements. Both elements were considered vital to furnish young people with the necessary skills to succeed in their working life.

The expected difference in the sample (DtS and before vs DtS only) was not realised in the research findings. Whilst the DtS and before group had indeed been engaged in EinE opportunities for a number of years, this was also found to be true for many of the DtS only group.

Business perceptions of DtS

Perceptions of DtS's underlying philosophy are positive. For some the existence of DtS as a tangible, national strategy meant that they could compare their own organisation's EinE plan to that of the national strategy.

Some businesses perceived DtS to be a coordinated strategy that involved a variety of agencies including: Young Enterprise Scotland, Careers Scotland, the Local Authority and the Scottish Executive. For these businesses, this perceived multi-agency approach gave DtS a coordinated 'feel'.

Some businesses were aware of high-level Scottish Executive involvement associated with DtS at the time of its launch. This articulated the importance of the strategy to businesses.

Business engagement with DtS enterprise opportunities

Businesses had been engaged in enterprise opportunities with schools for varying periods of time.

The main difference in the sample groups (DtS and before vs DtS only) was found to be method of first engagement with DtS:

- DtS and before were likely to be first engaged with DtS via a variety of ways including: at the strategy consultation phase by the DtS national team (at the Scottish Executive), through other agencies (such as Careers Scotland) and through Local Authorities
- The DtS only group were more likely to have been first engaged in DtS via Local Authority efforts. This group benefited in terms of Local Authorities acting as enterprise idea generators, mentors and communication bridges between them and local schools.

Local Authorities and DtS

All Local Authorities were currently engaged in the implementation of their DtS plans.

Local Authorities were executing an individualised approach to the implementation of DtS strategy as each had their own unique set of circumstances.

Each Local Authority claimed to be confident in achieving the target of 5 partnership agreements per school cluster – a specific DtS target to be achieved by each Local Authority by 2006.

Local Authorities had adopted a variety of ways in which to engage businesses including: business breakfasts, partnership agreement sign up sessions and face to face meetings with individual businesses.

In general, Local Authorities felt that the Scottish Executive's role was that of a supportive DtS mentor. Some Local Authority DtS post holders had contacted the Scottish Executive's DtS team for ideas and guidance around businesses engagement.

DtS challenges

For some, the formal partnership agreement format was welcome as they defined the parameters of the enterprising relationship between business and school, they also articulated the expectations placed on each party.

- Partnership agreements were found to be best used with businesses who had been lightly or sporadically engaged in EinE opportunities with schools
- Partnership agreements were perceived to be of less value to those businesses who had considerable experience of engagement in enterprise opportunities with schools, or who preferred informal, word of mouth arrangements. Indeed, some Local Authorities claimed that some businesses felt that the partnership agreements were unnecessary
- Some businesses regarded partnership agreements negatively, suggesting it as an approach from the Scottish executive around DtS where the emphasis was on signing up sufficient numbers of businesses to meet targets.

Businesses perceived communications to be more appropriate for businesses not currently engaged with DtS.

Businesses expressed a desire for local and national DtS progress updates as they were largely unaware of any progress being made on this scale.

Businesses agreed that the DtS strategy must be delivered locally

In terms of measuring the success or otherwise of engagement in enterprising opportunities, businesses cited differing behaviours. Larger businesses were more likely to have better structured means of measurement. One example was a business recording the number of people in the area applying for certain related subjects when leaving school for HE/FE.

Conclusions / recommendations

- In general, businesses hold positive attitudes towards DtS. Businesses are on the whole positive about the philosophy underpinning the DtS strategy and believe that enterprise should play a significant role in the lives of young people
- Through increased, continued or more formalised engagement with schools and through the existence of a national strategy such as DtS, businesses held the perception that enterprise was moving up the educational agenda in Scotland. Indeed the fact that DtS existed as a national strategy created the impression, for some businesses, of a cohesive approach to EinE from the Scottish Executive
- Through their involvement in enterprising opportunities, businesses believe that DtS is working to some extent. In general, the experiences businesses have had when engaging with schools have been positive
- Businesses were open to further suggestions as to increase or develop their engagement with schools and were generally positive about their future relationships with schools. Generally, the businesses were very receptive to new and different enterprise opportunities they could get involved in
- Through the efforts of Local Authorities facilitating partnership agreements between businesses and schools, there is evidence to suggest that the number of enterprise opportunities is increasing. Local Authorities have been involved in encouraging businesses and schools to enter into partnership agreements and this had been achieved through activities such as business breakfasts and partnership signing ceremonies
- There is evidence to suggest that partnership agreements are best suited to businesses who have been lightly involved with schools in the past or who are relatively or completely new to EinE. For businesses with a relatively long history of EinE opportunity engagement with schools, some found partnership agreements a rather unnecessary appendage to their informal relationship with schools. Local Authorities should therefore carefully decide upon which businesses to target for partnership agreement signing, or should consider how they introduce these agreements to businesses so they are not met with unnecessary hostility

- Local Authorities should be striving to generate and promote a sustainable model for enterprise opportunity engagement between schools and businesses. Eventually, this model should not require input from Local Authorities as the necessary communications and information networks will have been put in place. There is evidence from the Local Authorities to suggest that this model is beginning to take shape
- There is a strong role for communications to articulate what is happening in terms of DtS on both a national and local level. Businesses are currently unsure as to how DtS is progressing. Businesses also do not know what other businesses are doing in terms of enterprise opportunity engagement. Businesses also wish to know that their involvement is making a difference to young people.
- Communication should be a priority for the DtS team. This communication should specifically target those businesses already engaged in DtS as well as trying to attract new businesses to DtS
- Communication to currently engaged businesses may be best achieved through face to face meetings, such as business networking events at a local and / or national level. Whilst businesses appreciate that DtS is still in relative infancy, we believe that the Scottish Executive should consider how to raise the profile of the DtS strategy to the business community.

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