

Businesses Want The Education System to Better Prepare Young People

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Businesses want the education system to better prepare young people with the attitudes and attributes they need to succeed in the world of work. That's according to this year's CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey.

In the survey of 291 companies employing nearly 1.5 million people, over half (61%) are concerned about the resilience and self-management of school leavers and a third (33%) with their attitude to work. By contrast, nearly all firms (96%) are satisfied with young people's IT abilities when they enter the workplace.

Firms want primary schools to focus on developing literacy and numeracy (85%) with around one-third not satisfied with these skills among school leavers. Half (52%) are urging schools to develop a greater awareness of working life among 14-19 year olds with support from businesses. Companies are prepared to play their part with two-thirds (66%) willing to take on a larger role in the school careers system.

John Cridland, CBI Director-General, said:

"Businesses feel very strongly that the education system must better prepare young people for life outside the school gates, or risk wasting their talents.

"The journey from school towards the world of work can be daunting, so we must support schools and teachers to help develop the skills, character and attitudes students need to progress in life.

"We're hearing the right noises from politicians of all colours, but the need for genuine reform on the ground remains.

"We need young people who are rigorous, rounded and grounded, and business stands ready to play its part."

Rod Bristow, President of Pearson Core Markets, said:

"Everyone agrees that young people should be better supported as they prepare for the workplace – today business leaders echo the voices of teachers, Ministers and indeed young people themselves in calling for a more joined up approach to the transition from education to employment. The challenge now is to grasp the nettle so we bring employment and education opportunities together to meet the urgent social and economic need of creating a more highly-skilled workforce.

"Through our World Class Qualifications programme Pearson is working with employers and education experts from around the world to ensure that young people in the UK are equipped with the skills they will need to prosper in education or in the workplace."

Key findings include:

- Too many young people leave education not equipped with enough knowledge of their chosen job/career (school leavers 56%, graduates 30%) or relevant work experience (school leavers 55%, graduates 37%). This reflects concerns that careers advice is simply not good enough to help young people make informed choices (80%)
- Businesses recognise the need to support schools with 80% forging links of some type with at least one school or college
- The skills gap is getting worse - 58% of firms are not confident they will have sufficient highly skilled staff available for their needs in the future. A quarter (28%) of firms who need technicians qualified in science, technology, engineering or maths already report difficulty recruiting and a third (35%) anticipate problems in the next three years
- Nearly half of employers (44%) have organised training to tackle weaknesses in basic numeracy, literacy and IT for adult employees and more than a quarter (28%) for those who have joined directly from school or college.

The CBI is urging reform of Ofsted so that academic progress and the development of character are both prioritised in schools. It argues of the need to clearly set out what we want our schools to deliver and effectively hold them to account against this.

Such changes can help build support for a more tailored curriculum between 14 and 18, based around individual learning plans.

The UK's leading business organisation has challenged the automatic assumption that an academic path is the best route to success for young people, calling for the delivery of gold-standard vocational A levels as a viable and rewarding alternative. It also wants the requirement for work experience at Key Stage 4 restored and for more business engagement with schools.

On the growing skills gap and education reform, John Cridland added:

“There is a crisis in UK skills right now and our incapacity to meet growing demands for higher skills is putting the long-term prospects of the UK economy at risk. We need to create more apprenticeships, but also retrain current workers with in-demand skills in key sectors.

“We need a system that better reflects how well a school’s culture nurtures the behaviours and attitudes young people need. Success should be measured by where young people go once they have left school or college, not on exam results alone. A switch by Ofsted inspectors to the kind of broad-based quality assurance that has served British business so well over the past 20 years is critical to this.”