



Primary Business Partnership: SkillsBlox Impact Report

2022 to 2023 Pilot

Delivered by



Funded by



The SkillsBlox programme was developed by the Centre for Leadership Performance (CforLP) and delivered by the Primary Business Partnership (PBP) thanks to Sellafield Ltd SIX – Social Impact Multiplied programme funding to deliver a long-term programme into schools.

There is clear evidence that career related learning in primary schools raises aspirations, motivation and confidence, as well as broadening horizons. Research has also shown that children as young as seven form stereotypical views of the world and are already discounting certain careers based on gender bias. Evidence has also shown that positive impacts from career-related learning are greater when:

- a consistent whole-school strategy is in place
- activities are planned, delivered and adapted depending on the age group

Whilst teachers understand the need to offer career-related opportunities within their schools, they lack the time and know-how to develop links to businesses and employers.

The SkillsBlox programme is a bespoke toolkit consisting of age-appropriate workshops to help primary pupils across Cumbria to identify and build the skills that will enable our young people to flourish in the future, whichever pathways they choose. The toolkit has been built around Tony Wagner’s 7 Skills for the Future, which were outlined in his book ‘The Global Achievement Gap’. The seven skills are outlined below with their equivalent descriptions for a primary audience in italics:

1. Curiosity and Imagination – *being curious and imaginative*
2. Accessing and Analysing Information – *being good at using information*
3. Agility and Adaptability – *being adaptable to change*
4. Creativity and Entrepreneurship – *having great and exciting ideas*
5. Collaboration and Leading by Influence – *good leader or team player*
6. Good Oral and Written Communication – *being a great communicator*
7. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving – *being a problem solver*



Understanding of Need:

The Centre for Leadership Performance (CforLP) are the proud delivery partner for the Primary Business Partnership. As a not-for-profit organisation, CforLP’s mission is to develop and build leadership capability across Cumbria. Over the last 12 years, CforLP has built lasting and meaningful connections with educators, businesses and young people, and therefore understands the skills and leadership challenges facing the county. We know that Cumbria has:

- An ageing population, with many leaving the labour market.
- Many young people who are leaving the county unaware of the opportunities available to them on their doorstep within Cumbria or who are limited by their own sense of self, social circumstances, and mobility.
- A skills shortage across all sectors, with a 6.8% average unemployment rate in West Cumbria (formerly Copeland and Allerdale) for 16–25-year-olds (CLEP, 2023).

The Centre realises that starting early and engaging young people at a primary age offers a sustainable solution, potentially reducing NEET numbers and nurturing local talent.

In addition, our continued work with schools through PBP and other programmes including Bright Stars and SkillsBlox, over 200 local businesses, stakeholders (WELL, Cumbria LEP, Local Skills Improvement Plan, Sellafield Ltd Social Impact Strategy, Local Alliance of System Leaders, Cumbria Primary Heads Association), young people, parents and local communities have informed our understanding of needs.



"We learnt (from Erika) that to be a Project Manager you need to be good at: teamwork (teamwork means dreamwork), computer skills, excellent communication skills and asking for help." Year 6 pupil, Victoria Juniors

The following points highlight the importance of fostering positive role models, breaking down stereotypes, and enhancing career development opportunities for young people in Cumbria. The SkillsBlox programme aims to raise aspirations, provide valuable skills, and bridge the gap between schools and businesses, ultimately addressing employment challenges and ensuring a brighter future for the region's youth.

The SkillsBlox programme has been developed to:

- **Raise aspirations:** PBP have first-hand experience of the difference positive role models from local organisations can have to inspire aspirations, create awareness of local career opportunities, and develop skills for future employment. Raising aspirations and broadening horizons is essential, as many young people rely on parents, teachers or their own social circumstances, resulting in limited aspirations, self-belief and understanding of local careers and jobs. The need to provide equal access to the opportunities is essential. Linking learning to real work examples can help stimulate greater aspirations and motivation and nurture a 'can do' attitude.
- **Break down gender bias:** Research indicates that children as young as seven exhibit gender bias and career stereotypes; the SkillsBlox programme seeks to break down these biases and expose pupils to positive career models early on.
- **Remove barriers to engagement:** Removing barriers between businesses and schools is crucial, facilitating meaningful dialogue and age-appropriate activities that connect with careers and the curriculum. Schools tell us that they lack the time to explore available opportunities from businesses. The SkillsBlox programme provides an easy toolkit to support career-related learning opportunities and acts as an enabler to make this happen.
- **Develop key skills:** Introducing primary-aged children to key employability skills builds confidence, potentially reducing the risk of NEET status, and enhances future success. The SkillsBlox programme focuses on sustainable skills development, including resilience, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration, promoting inclusivity. Schools have told us that pupils taking part in the SkillsBlox programme have increased in confidence, motivation, aspirations and felt braver about their futures as a result of these career-related learning opportunities.

- **Raise attainment:** Career-related learning activities not only raise aspirations and broaden horizons, but can have positive impacts on academic and educational attainment. Research shows children in West Cumbria are underachieving, with pupils in the Copeland and Workington Constituencies below expected standards compared to national levels in many areas. We also know Cumbria has low participation in higher education in a fifth of its communities.
- **Broaden horizons:** Schools have told us the importance of showcasing careers beyond Sellafield. Local employment landscapes can polarise young people's views, potentially impacting the area's long-term sustainability.



The graphic features the SkillsBlox logo and website at the top. Below it, seven cards are displayed, each with an icon and a skill description:

- Being adaptable to change** (Icon: Two circular arrows): This is about being able to respond when things change. Sometimes change can be planned and we can get ready for it, sometimes it happens suddenly and we have to react fast.
- Being a good leader or team player** (Icon: Three people): A good leader makes sure everyone is willing to work alongside them and that they listen to ideas from the whole team. Good teamwork means that everyone works together to complete a task.
- Being curious and imaginative** (Icon: Question mark): Curiosity is really important because it's our brain saying 'I wonder why...?' and 'how does that work?' It's an essential skill in creating new ideas, overcoming challenging obstacles and making things better.
- Being a great communicator** (Icon: Speech bubble): Communicating is essential and includes speaking, listening, seeing, body language and posture and happens between people. Different situations, people and technologies mean we need different ways to communicate.
- Being good at using information** (Icon: Book with magnifying glass): We need to know where to get information from when we need it. Once we have that information – news, facts, words, data, measurements, timings, dates and names – then we need to know how to use it in the best way.
- Being a problem solver** (Icon: Puzzle piece): When something is going wrong or has already gone wrong we need to find ways to put them right. Someone who corrects mistakes or makes things better is a problem-solver.
- Having great and exciting ideas** (Icon: Lightbulb): One skill in coming up with ideas is not being afraid to think up new things and another is being brave and telling people about them. When we ask 'what if...?' brilliant ideas can come to life.

Who took part and how we measured impact

The pilot SkillsBlox programme explored how to develop whole-school age-appropriate career-related learning activities that could be used by schools with the support of the PBP and a SkillsBlox Advisor.

- The aims of the pilot study were to :
- 1. Develop a suitable and manageable framework/toolkit to develop children's confidence and awareness of skills.
 - 2. Develop age-appropriate workshops that were enjoyable for all who took part.
 - 3. Make schools more aware of the career-related support that local businesses can offer.
 - 4. Develop a series of activities to increase pupils' awareness of key skills required to be successful in the future.
 - 5. Develop a series of activities to help pupils to feel more confident, braver and aspirational about their futures.

Who Took Part

19 schools took part in the pilot programme, supported by 14 SkillsBlox Advisors from different local organisations.

Ellenborough Academy, Maryport	St Patrick's RC Primary, Workington
St Begh's Catholic Jun. Whitehaven	Beckermest CofE Primary
Derwent vale Primary, Workington	Mayfield School, Whitehaven
Valley Primary, Whitehaven	Broughton Moor Primary
Flimby Primary	Victoria Junior School, Workington
Victoria Infants School, Workington	St Matthew's CofE School, Westnewton
Fellview Primary School, Caldbeck	Bassenthwaite School
Waberthwaite CofE Primary	Orgill Primary, Egremont
St Bridget's, Parton	Montreal CofE Primary, Cleator Moor
Bransty Primary, Whitehaven	

 PRIMARY
BUSINESS
PARTNERSHIP

 SKILLS
BLOX

Thank you to our current SkillsBlox Advisors

 ALTRAD

 BABCOCK

 COMS

 KAEFER

 Balfour Beatty

 Sellafield Ltd

 Lakes College

 MORGAN SINDALL

 NORTH LAKES HOTEL & SPA

 Sellafield Ltd

 ArmstrongWatson
Accountants, Business & Financial Advisers

 KBR

 Jacobs

 MORGAN SINDALL

 ALTRAD

 cavendish nuclear

And to all those businesses and organisations that have supported SkillsBlox

 WHYP

 West Cumbria Rivers Trust

 WOODALL

 Cumberland Council

 RRU

 Diff-Ability CIC

 PPM Ltd

 BECBC

 NHS

 MOTT MACDONALD

 CARLOS REINA

 THE LAKE DISTRICT WILDLIFE PARK

 MILLCROFT VETERINARY GROUP

 THE OUTDOOR PARTNERSHIP

 EH

 JONFELLCHEF

 Jacobs

 Moorforge Viking Settlement

 Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service

 Copeland

 mitie

 oneAIM

 Sellafield Ltd

 NUCLEAR GRADUATES

 CLASS OF ONE

 BENDALLS ENGINEERING

 NATIONAL NUCLEAR LABORATORY

"The sessions and the volunteers have supported in raising aspirations for our children, helped them to understand what careers are available in our local area and identify the skills needed to reach their dreams. The sessions were fun and interactive and we would like to thank all those involved for the opportunities you have given our pupils" Laura Freestone, Co-acting Head, Montreal Primary



Building skills and taking young people on a developmental journey: SkillsBlox – the building blocks to success

The age-appropriate workshops designed and delivered as part of the SkillsBlox programme are:
(All year groups, EYFS, KS1, KS2)

Dress up Day

Encourage the children think about what they want to do when they grow up.

Drawing My Dreams

Children are asked to draw themselves in their Dream Job and also jobs with a gender bias. The children then get to meet positive role models that break down these gender stereotypes.

My Crest

Allows the children to explore who they are, what they like and what they are good at. Start conversations about strengths, abilities, skills and self-awareness and how this relates to the world of work.

Animal ME

Encourages children to think about different types of skills and personalities. Learn to recognise strengths and qualities in themselves and others and relate these to potential future career paths.

Who Uses This?

An opportunity to meet local employers through this fun and interactive session. Pupils are shown an item / tool / building / vehicle and asked to think about the types of people / jobs that would commonly use them.

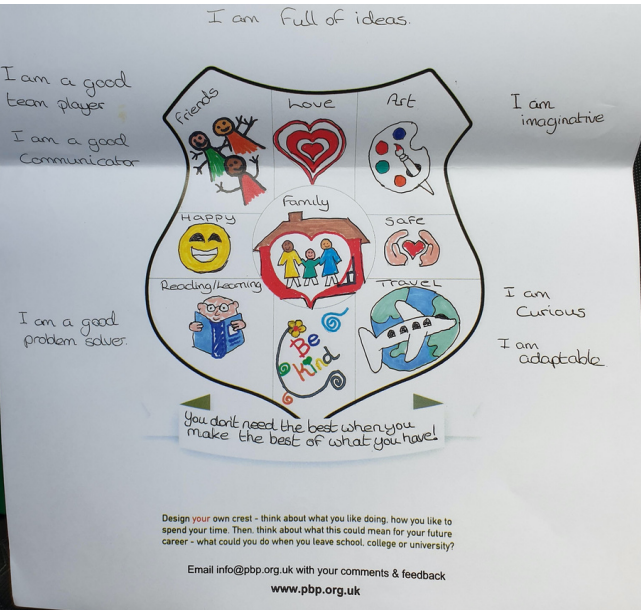
Dream BIG! Dream JOB

An opportunity to hear all about different types of jobs within Cumbria and wider afield. Aims to raise aspirations and inspire the children to Dream BIG by meeting people from the world of work.

Ideal ME

Encourages children to see themselves in the future, to think of what their futures might look like and the skills they might need to be successful in whatever career they choose.

“Great to have interaction over sustained period within a school – much better than one-off inputs that are ad hoc”
Cath Howard, Balfour Beatty



“Taking part and getting to know the children over a longer period of time has been great as it has felt like a really meaningful relationship, especially being able to bring in my other colleges to expose them to as many positive role models as possible. It has also allowed me to gain confidence!” Issy Shannon, Bechtel Cavendish Nuclear

The impact of the pilot SkillsBlox programme

Impact has been collated via pre and post programme surveys completed by the teachers and pupils who took part. A series of primary Benchmarks developed by the North East LEP have been used to measure impact.

In Summary:

19 West Cumbrian Schools took part **18** SkillsBlox Advisors
Over **640** volunteering hours

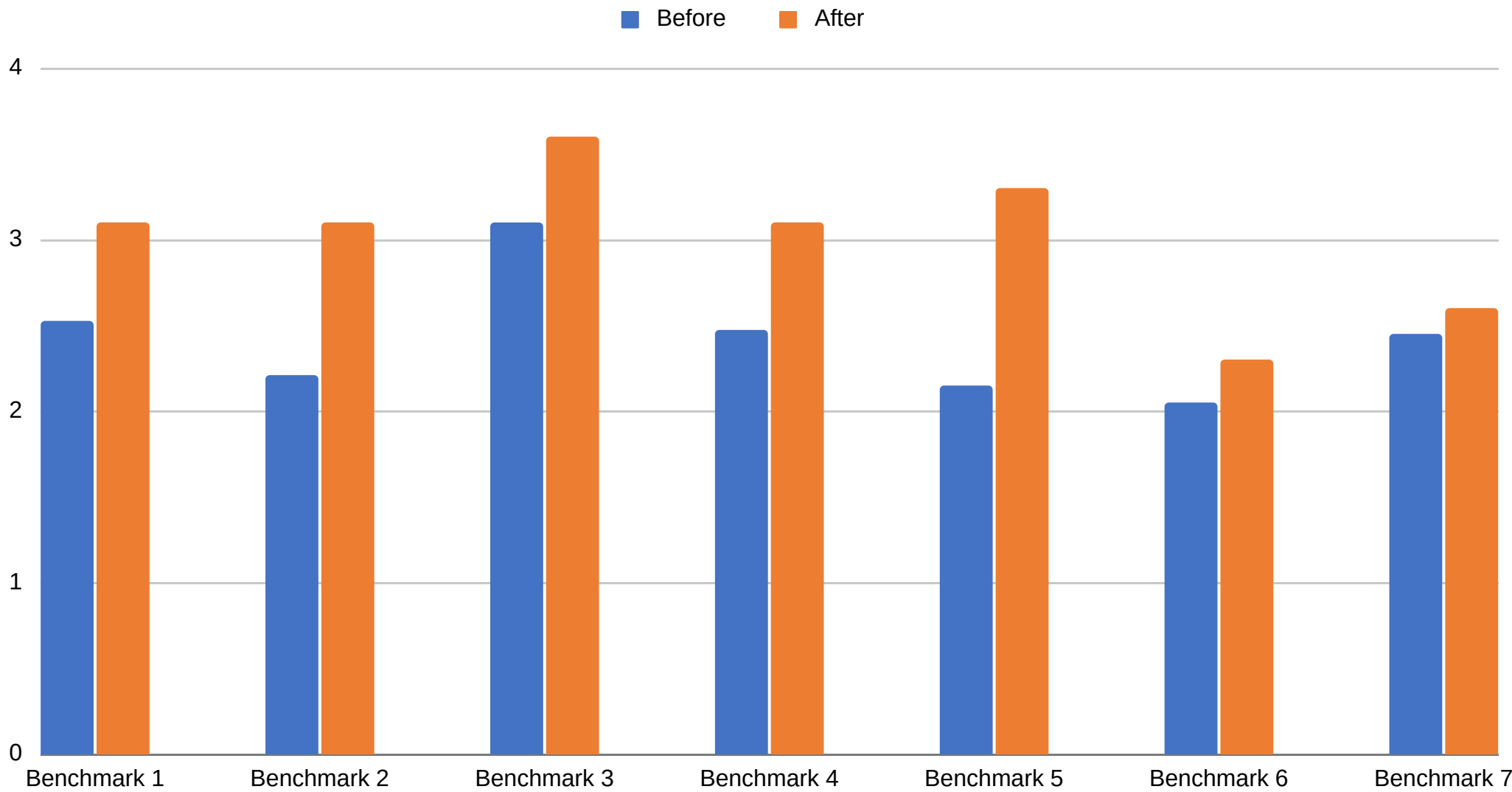
A total of **2528** pupils in all the schools experiencing the programme

Over **6000** engagement opportunities

Over **100** volunteers dedicating their time to helping children explore the world of work and build the skills they'll need for their futures, delivering over **640** volunteer hours



The chart shows the average rating given by teachers (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 4) for all survey respondents: respondents and numbers differ between the Before and After surveys, so the figures provide an indication only.



The Benchmarks:

- 1.A stable and consistent approach to career related learning
- 2.Learning from career and labour market info/ understanding the job options available to them
- 3.Addressing the needs of each pupil; everybody is good at something
- 4.Linking curriculum to careers
- 5.Encounters with employers and employees
- 6.Experience of workplaces
- 7.Encounters with secondary, further and higher education experience

Key findings for schools

The skills, confidence and aspiration of the pupils all improved after taking part in the programme:

100%	of SkillsBlox school leads enjoyed taking part in the programme
100%	of SkillsBlox school leads felt that the programme had had a strong positive impact on their pupils
100%	of SkillsBlox school leads were made more aware of local businesses and the support they can offer (compared to 30% at the start of the programme)
100%	of SkillsBlox school leads felt they had a stable and consistent approach to career related learning (compared to 47% at the start of the programme)
100%	of SkillsBlox school leads were now linking their curriculum to careers (compared to 47% at the start of the programme)
100%	of SkillsBlox school leads were now having encounters with employers and employees (compared to 20% at the start of the programme)

"We have really enjoyed our SkillsBlox week. The children have gained so much from it and have such high aspirations now for their futures." Sara Royle, Headteacher, Bassenthwaite Primary

"I liked learning about different jobs and it's given me some ideas about what I want to do in the future."
Alisha – Y6 pupil, Victoria Juniors

"I liked guessing the jobs everyone did" pupil from Mayfield School

88%	of the pupils enjoyed taking part in the SkillsBlox programme
91%	of pupils who took part in SkillsBlox said they did lots of things well (compared to 82% at the start of the programme)
86%	of pupils who took part in SkillsBlox said they felt brave about their futures (compared to 82% at the start of the programme)
80%	of pupils who took part in SkillsBlox said they understood what to do to achieve their dreams (compared to 75% at the start of the programme)
86%	of pupils who took part in SkillsBlox said they understood how the things they learn in school will help them in the future (compared to 85% at the start of the programme)
100%	of pupils who took part in SkillsBlox said they knew that sometimes things go wrong but that's OK (compared to 91% at the start of the programme)

Conclusions

Four of the five aims of the pilot programme were fully achieved:

- Age-appropriate workshops were created that were enjoyable for all who took part.
- Schools that took part in the programme had several volunteers from local businesses talking to the children about skills and careers, thereby making them more aware of the support that local businesses can offer.
- Pupils that took part have mainly enjoyed the workshops and developed new skills by taking part in the programme. Key skills developed have been recorded in their passports after a period of self-reflection after the activities.
- Taking part in the activities has shown to help pupils to feel more confident, braver and aspirational about their futures.

And one has been partly achieved:

- The programme has provided a suitable and manageable framework to develop children's confidence and awareness of skills. However, recommendations have shown that updates need to be made to redefine the programme to align to year groups rather than key stages and certain resources updated to provide a better activity as part of the programme.

Recommendations

Following the success of the pilot and feedback from the SkillsBlox Advisors and schools that took part, we recommend to:

	Continue the pilot if funding can be secured and promote as a five year programme to enable impact on pupils to be measured
	Continue to support the schools and SkillsBlox Advisors to achieve the aims of the programme
	Update the SkillsBlox resources to streamline activities
	Continue to create new resources to be used as part of the programme
	Sign-up companies to support the programme and provide SkillsBlox Advisors
	Develop a contract of engagement for advisors and schools – to include commitment and expectations
	Continue to gather feedback but simplify the process to get more returns

“We have taken part in the SkillsBlox programme for 2 years now. The children thoroughly enjoy learning about different occupations and breaking down the stereotypes that are associated with those occupations.” Flimby Primary School

The future

If future funding can be secured, we are fully committed to continuing to support the 19 schools wishing to take part next academic year (18 from the 2022/23 pilot plus Moor Row who took part in 2021/22). All of the schools have enjoyed participating and have increased their links with local businesses through the programme.

In addition, we will update resources as per the recommendations and include a workplace visit in the 2023 to 2024 programme.

If funding is secured, we plan to start the programme in January 2024.





SKILLS BLOX

Please contact us if you can support the next SkillsBlox programme

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