



# Evaluation of the Edge Grant Programme

26 February 2025



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Commissioned by



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# Acknowledgements

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We would like to acknowledge the support of all the project leads for the evaluation, including the time spent providing contacts and documentations for the research. We would also like to acknowledge all the project partners, employers, students and teachers that participated in the research.

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# 1 Introduction

This paper provides a summary of an evaluation undertaken by ICF to evaluate the Edge Grant activities running before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify effective practice and learning from the projects that could inform wider debates on key policy issues related to the delivery of education and skills.

## 1.1 The Edge Grant Programme

The Edge Grant Programme aimed to support organisations to develop innovative solutions that support the Foundation's strategic priorities of improving young people's experience of learning. The projects were expected to address some of the following key themes:

- Improve the design and delivery of effective careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG);
- Support the development of project-based learning (PBL) and associated profound employer engagement;
- Support the development of a 14—19 curriculum which integrates both academic and technical/professional subjects;
- Support the development of innovative approaches to higher technical education at levels 4, 5 and 6;
- Develop innovative ways to measure the performance of technical education.

In 2018—19, eleven organisations received grant funding ranging from nearly £40,000 to just under £100,000. The funding for these projects was expected to be spent within a 24-months period, while projects could be completed in shorter or longer periods. Of these eleven projects, six agreed to participate in the evaluation.

In 2020, the Edge Foundation issued funding to four additional projects through the Post Covid Grant Fund. These projects started in October 2020 and were expected to finish at various points from June 2021 to September 2022. Four of these projects agreed to participate in the evaluation.

The projects funded under the programme are presented in Table 1.1. Further details on the projects are available at: [Funded Projects | Edge Foundation](#)

Table 1.1 Edge Grant Programme and Post Covid Grant Fund Projects

<b>Delivery organisation</b>	<b>Project aim</b>
<b>Edge Grant programme</b>	
Barbican Centre Trust	To work with local schools to develop a Creative Careers Challenge. This would give 90 students the opportunity to undertake creative projects designed by teachers, employers and industry practitioners through in-school lessons and activities in the Barbican Centre.
Derby College	To work with Loughborough College, Leeds City College, Twycross Zoo and local engineering employers to develop a new curriculum for L1-3 land-based and engineering programmes, where learning is put in the context of 'real world' experiences.
Eden Project Learning	To develop a Horticulture Advocates Programme (HAP) with teaching resources and practical activities that will train secondary school students to become horticulture advocates.
Middlesex University (with Sheffield Hallam and Staffordshire Universities and UVAC)	To undertake research and then develop a network of higher education institutions (HEIs) for developing sustainable degree apprenticeships.
XP School in Doncaster	To develop a new diploma that combines qualifications, personal development and careers advice through learning expeditions.
Yeovil College	To develop a Healthcare Simulation Suite that provides young people with a hands-on insight into healthcare careers using project-based learning.
<b>Post Covid Grant Fund</b>	
Baysgarth School	To further develop the School's new curriculum model. This will ensure alignment to the North Lincolnshire Skills Framework and develop students into independent learners. This would include an employability focused curriculum in Year 9 complemented by 'inspire time' for delivering enrichment activities on Wednesday afternoons.
Skills Builder	To provide high quality interactive online training to 2,000 teachers. This would aim to embed essential skills development in their teaching, using a free national training platform based on the established Skills Builder Hub.
Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership (EBP)	To create a platform for schools, students and business volunteers to access a Virtual Work Experience programme. This would sit alongside current face to face work experience offered to over 2,000 young people.
Warwickshire College Group	To develop a hub providing online and blended learning. Together with lecturer support, it would deliver employability skills to all young people in the institution.

### 1.2 Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation examined the implementation and impact of the ten projects and how they have been sustained. It explored:

- How projects have performed against their original plans and expectations (activities/ outputs/outcomes).
- The '*distance travelled*' by projects from their baseline position.
- The extent to which the activities have been sustained after completion in the short-term (three-six months) and expected to continue in the longer-term.
- How learning from the projects has informed the other work of the provider and others if more widely disseminated.
- The effectiveness of project delivery, including what worked well and lessons learnt from activities that worked less well.
- What project activities could be considered examples of good practice and in what context are they most effective.

The results aim to provide Edge with an evidence base on effective new practice in the delivery of high quality technical and vocational education (TVET) and the challenges faced in achieving this.

### 1.3 Research conducted

The evaluation drew on a case study approach. The evaluation team conducted in-depth research within the ten participating projects, which was triangulated with documentary evidence. The research activities for these case studies were:

- Interviews with 4-8 individuals within the project. This included the project lead, partner organisations, delivery staff and a selection of beneficiaries.
- Day visits to the programme in order to view the activities being delivered.
- A review of programme documentation, including any outcomes and their self-assessment reports.

The evaluation research took place alongside the programme's delivery between 2018 and 2022.

## 1.4 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** explores the design and delivery of the projects. It considers evidence of need that informed the interventions, how they were delivered and lessons learnt.
- **Chapter 3** presents the outcomes of the six projects and their plans for sustainability moving forward.
- **Chapter 4** presents the conclusions of the evaluation research.

## 2 Design and delivery of the projects

Chapter 2 explores the design and delivery of the projects. It considers evidence of the need and value of the projects, how they were delivered and lessons learnt.

### 2.1 Perceptions of the need of the projects

Across all the projects there was generally strong support for the need for the initiative. Projects by Derby College, the Baysgarth School, the XP School in Doncaster, the Barbican Centre Trust and Eden Project Learning were supported by students and teachers, who valued the need for more practical and contextualised learning. These initiatives were seen as a '*break from the norm*' which stimulated students' interest and enabled them to better understand how their skills could be applied to work.

Perhaps the most valued project was that undertaken by Yeovil College to create a clinical healthcare suite. The project aimed to recreate a hospital ward which could be used for training students undertaking healthcare programmes. Representatives from health services recognised the need to better ensure that young people are 'work ready' when they enter the profession. Young people would need to be familiar with using modern equipment and have experience of working in a similar environment. This need became even more acute as the project was delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Projects that aimed to boost employability were also viewed to be valuable, including online training and integration of employability in the curriculum. As with the Yeovil College project, there was strong support from employers for initiatives to make students more work ready. Skills Builder's programme of online training for teachers was felt to be particularly innovative for employing a '*train the teacher*' model for improving employability and valuable as it provided support to teachers that generally did not have a great deal of knowledge in the area and where there was a perceived lack of existing support.

There were more mixed views on the value of online programmes, such as the Warwickshire College Group's online training hub and the Tower Hamlets EBP virtual work placements. While they were valued as '*add ons*' to existing services, most students in particular did not find online content as engaging as face-to-face provision. Online provision was also felt to have less value for individuals that were interested in more vocational careers as they felt it was less '*hands-on*'.



The Middlesex University project was significantly different from the other projects as it was not delivery-orientated but instead centred on developing a network of HEIs delivering degree apprenticeships. This was also valued as being needed by the sector; stakeholders recognised that a forum is needed in relation to new initiatives, such as degree apprenticeships, which allows delivery organisations to share best practice and areas of opportunity.

### 2.2 Design of the projects

Overall, most projects demonstrated a structured approach to design which ensured that they were consistent with original expectations. Across the projects, the following factors were felt to have had a positive effect:

- **Building on existing initiatives and plans.** Most projects were able to demonstrate some preparatory work that they had already done which supported implementation. The Skills Builder project for example expanded on an existing tool, while the XP School model was based on existing academic research with the academic partners involved in its steering group. The work undertaken by the Barbican Centre was also based on previous activities. Having this preparatory work in place meant that there was a '*proof of concept*' for the projects and existing infrastructure that could support their delivery, which allowed some projects to be more ambitious. Indeed, when activities have had to be developed wholly new, it has led to some delays.
- **Importance of building partnerships.** Nearly all the projects could not have been delivered in isolation and therefore utilising existing partners was essential in making them feasible. This is illustrated by the strong partnership between Yeovil College and its local NHS trust, which facilitated the sharing of equipment for the clinical suite. Likewise, the support provided by Twycross Zoo was valuable for delivering the Derby College projects. Even projects that were not delivered by educational providers, such as the Eden Project and Barbican Centre, benefitted from having existing partnerships with local schools. Indeed, where there were challenges in projects, a key issue was difficulty in mobilising stakeholders.
- **Co-design of initiatives.** Most of the projects that were able to mobilise stakeholders effectively had already engaged partners in the design of the programme and activities. This ensured buy in from the start. For the Barbican project, engagement with schools at the start allowed issues around how the initiative could be embedded within the curriculum to be resolved early, and likewise it supported the Eden Project to design the activity in a way that made it more accessible to schools through having short bite-sized modules.
- **Eliciting early senior leadership buy-in.** The more transformative projects delivered through the grants were generally driven by having senior leader buy-in. In part, this was driven by a need to '*do things differently*'. The XP School project, for example, was developed alongside efforts to revolutionise the study plan for Year 9, and fit within the wider focus

## 2 Design and delivery of the projects

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on innovation in the school, which is reflected in their school not employing a catchment or selective model for selecting students and focus on work related learning. Similarly, the Barbican Centre and Eden Project Learning initiatives built on leadership buy-in to provide wider activities that supported their local communities.

- Having a plurality of staff members working on the projects. All the projects that were successful had dedicated staffing resources that could lead on implementation. This typically included a project lead and coordinator, alongside other staff. Project delivery plans that were too reliant on one person experienced more difficulties due to the person being away or from staff changes. A more distributed leadership model was generally more effective in managing risk and in ensuring partnerships were not dependent on individual relationships and therefore were more likely to continue after the project.

All the projects were designed in a way that has high fidelity to the original vision. However, some also had to be adapted following the social distancing restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Most notably the Eden Project initiative was re-designed to be self-learning resources that could be sent to school (named Horticulture Advocates Programme boxes). Other projects such as the XP Schools project were delayed due to emerging priorities caused by the pandemic.

### 2.3 Delivery of activities

#### 2.3.1 Supporting the development of the 14-19 curriculum

The Derby College, XP School, Baysgarth School and Yeovil College projects aimed to change their curriculum to support more contextual and project-based learning. These changes were:

- **Derby College:** Through working with employers to provide students with practical 'real-world' problems that they work through in class.
- **The XP School:** Learning centred around enrichment activities and a key theme (for example ancient Rome) which informed its curricula for maths, science, humanities and the arts.
- **Baysgarth School:** Developing a more employment focused curriculum in Year 9 of study. This involved more project-based work alongside enrichment activities
- **Yeovil College:** Developing a clinical health suite which re-creates healthcare settings such as wards within the college

Students in all institutions generally reported that curriculum changes worked well. They felt the tutors were supportive in helping them undertaking project-based work, while also given them the freedom to work autonomously in their groups, which they generally welcomed. Most welcomed that the role of the tutor changed significantly during PBL lessons to facilitators where they answered questions when asked rather than providing teaching.

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Students generally welcomed the opportunity to undertake more 'hands on' learning as part of their course, and to receive feedback from employers. They felt this was useful in helping to ensure they developed the skills needed by industry.

For XP School, the use of excursions to frame learning for a particular term was particularly valued. Students felt this stimulated their interest in the topic, which then carried through to all their subjects *"it makes it a lot more interesting. It means that for subjects like maths you can actually see how it relates to the real world."*

The only issues that students reported was occasional mismatches between the projects and the requirements of their learning course. For PBL, some learners felt that the problem covered topics that were not part of their course, largely as they were centred around an employers' specialisms. Some students also had a sense that it was difficult to fit some topics in the national curriculum around a theme.

This was not however an issue with Baysgarth School as the activities took place in Year 9. They noted that the exam boards they work with start the GCSE curriculum at Year 10. They stated that the school has historically struggled to decide what to cover in Year 9. They believed this approach was valuable as it provided employability and project working skills alongside providing an introduction to their options.

For the Derby College project, a few students reported challenges in self-regulating the groups for group working. Students were able to select who they worked with, but some contributed more than others and had differing views on the solution, which created tensions. These had to be resolved, often without the teacher acting as a mediator. One participant thought that the quality of the learning experience is dependent to some extent in the group of people you end up in: *"It has been hard to keep the group together at stressful times. E.g. "how can I get everyone to listen, how can I keep everyone focused"*. However, the tutors argued that this was an important skill they wanted the students to develop.

The Yeovil College project was well-received by employers. They felt that having the equipment used in the workplace in the college for students to practice on helped ensure that they were better prepared for the workplace.

Students in Yeovil College also greatly valued the clinical suite. They felt it gave them a better sense of what work would be like in an actual ward, and what equipment they would be using. For some it felt *"more like an apprenticeship"* than a college course because they were able to gain the practical experience. *"I was more confident, and what we needed to do felt natural, so if a nurse asked us to go and do something, we could do it. I felt like I was more confident more quickly on our shadow shifts. I asked if I could help a nurse out and she was surprised about it she thought I would be more nervous"*.

### 2.3.2 Providing PBL enrichment activities

Both Barbican and Eden Project delivered projects that provided PBL enrichment activities to their local schools. The Barbican Centre invited students from local schools to visit their premises, provided resources for teachers to deliver creative workshops in school and ran a competition where students would develop proposals for a new product which they would then pitch to a panel of experts. The Eden Project aimed to promote a career in horticulture through providing students with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) focused challenges.

The consensus from interviewees was that bringing students to the Barbican Centre at the beginning of the project provided clear additional value. Many of the participating students had not visited the Barbican Centre or a similar arts organisation before, and several described being inspired by the building and atmosphere during focus groups. The exhibition itself was clearly a novel experience for students too, with students in focus groups variously describing it as interesting, enjoyable and thought provoking.

Perspectives of the workshops designed by the Barbican Centre were very positive. During focus groups, students from all three schools noted that the styles of teaching they experienced during the workshops were highly engaging and different to how they normally learn during lessons, with the content also being clearly different. Nearly all students (96%, or 49 out of 51) responding to a Barbican survey towards the end of the project in February 2020 strongly agreed or agreed that they had enjoyed participating (see the figure below). The only issue with the workshop was that it was designed for Year 10 and 11 students, but because these students were busy with exams, it was mostly attended by Year 9 students.

All of the students interviewed that participated in the Eden Project initiative similarly felt the sessions were delivered well and were engaging. They particularly liked the hands-on experience and being able to access a functioning laboratory. As one student stated: *“They definitely kept you interested throughout the day—and it didn’t feel as much like classwork”*. One student stated that it had substantially exceeded their expectations, stating they originally thought it would *“just be something like a worksheet and going out and doing things”*. As a result, all stated that they would take part in the sessions again and would recommend them to their peers.

Students also valued the project-based learning approach. All students interviewed stated they enjoyed the opportunity to think about a problem and develop their own solutions. They also valued the ability to work on problems that were related to industry which they felt was different to the learning that they do in school.

The only limitation of the Eden Project workshops was that it required a lot of commitment from families to ensure the students could attend the Eden project on a Saturday morning.

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This meant that project staff could not be sure how many young people would turn up to the sessions and their starting point. There could also be fluctuations in the number of students attending the workshops because of the weather, holidays and other commitments.

### 2.3.3 Improving the design and delivery of employability skills and careers education, information, advice and guidance

Three projects focused on providing employability skills development support and work experience. The Skills Builder project provided online training to teachers to support them to teach essential employability skills. The Warwickshire College Group project delivered an online employability programme. The Tower Hamlets EBP used an online platform to providing virtual work experience, to replace face-to-face work experience which was not possible during the pandemic.

For the Tower Hamlets EBP project, employers and school staff were generally positive about the work experience sessions. One employer reported receiving positive feedback from the volunteers who provided information to students and felt it was an important way to show Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) during the pandemic. School staff also stated that the sessions were well organised and that delivery was quite hands off for teachers in school. As one elaborated: *“the tasks that they had the student do were good and they were engaging, and they were challenging tasks, and they were in line with what the industry requires”*.

Student satisfaction with the sessions was also high. Most valued the opportunity to learn about different sectors and to undertake employer-related assignments. They enjoyed that they were sector specific. While not regarded as a direct replacement for work experience (which lasts longer and involves more practical work), the day-long virtual work experience was felt to be valuable in understanding sector jobs and what the work entails.

Some improvements to the amount of time spent with the employer, and the type of employee engaged with were suggested by school staff. However, discussions with Tower Hamlets EBP indicated that they were working to address this.

The Skills Builder project was also seen as valuable for targeting teachers. School staff and teachers particularly valued the ‘on demand’ training, which meant that teachers could undertake the training when they had free time. This was felt to reduce the difficulty in timetabling teaching training during a school day, which is a significant barrier.

The Warwickshire College Group project on online employability skills for students was generally regarded by educators as a good way of building employability provision within the curriculum. They felt having an online portal was a good way of ensuring that all students receive the same quality of provision, without compromising lesson time.

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Students had more mixed views on the employability skills programme. Some valued learning about the topic and felt it helped them prepare for work. However, others regarded it as a 'tick-box' exercise. This is reflective of some students reporting the online learning was less engaging and focused on subjects such as health and safety which they did not find interesting.

### 2.3.4 Supporting the development of innovative approaches to higher technical education at levels 4, 5, and 6

The only project that aimed to support innovate approaches to higher technical education was the Sustainable Degree Apprenticeships Research project delivered by Middlesex University, in partnership with Staffordshire University, Sheffield Hallam University and the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC). This project developed an evidence base on the practices that result in degree apprenticeships being sustainable as university provision and delivered to a high standard. This in turn will be used as a tool to bring together HEIs in a Centre for Degree Apprenticeships, which will ensure effective practice is disseminated and to provide a 'sector voice' to inform HE sector discussions with policy makers and funders.

The project was generally felt to have been delivered well. The research led to the production of a [report](#) which participants generally felt was useful, mainly because it was on a relatively new policy area where there was little existing research. Some felt it also reflected their experiences of delivering degree apprenticeships. As one participant stated, "*it helped codify the challenges with delivering degree apprenticeships*". The research was also reported to have been comprehensive.

The dissemination event was also valuable in bringing HEIs together to discuss degree apprenticeships. The event highlighted potential high demand degree apprenticeships, which helped to show how degree apprenticeship programmes could be sustainable. Interest was primarily among those that were already delivering degree apprenticeships. However, project staff felt that this was in line with expectation, as they wanted to start with an active 'community' and then expand it out in the medium-term.

## 2.4 Reflections on success factors

The following examples of good practice were proposed for the delivery of the projects:

- Utilising employer commitments to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an effective means of engaging employers and their staff to participate in work-related learning activities with schools and colleges. Many employers value supporting their local community and an effective CSR can help them to attract staff. Similarly, many employees value the opportunity to 'get back' and therefore are willing to participate in school initiatives. Developing programmes that are flexible and able to build on this (e.g. from asking employers to provide project briefs or participate in panels) is a good way of engaging employers.

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- The use of online on-demand training for teachers is an effective way of making training more accessible in order to elicit higher take-up. The training events for teachers delivered through Skills Builder was well-received for being able to *'fit around'* teachers' existing workload. This online learning could therefore be used to provide teacher training on areas that are not covered through existing schools' Continuous Professional Development (CPD). In the Edge Grant projects it applied employability skills, but it could also include training on providing careers information and other support to students

Consideration does however need to be given to how online learning can be used more effectively. Where it has been used as a replacement for face-to-face activities it works less well, as many students prefer more engaging interaction. However, when used as additional support (such as through the virtual work placements) it can add substantial value.

- The use of existing sector bodies as *'honest brokers'* can be valuable in setting up networks. For the Middlesex University project, the role of UVAC in creating a shared online space for HEIs to collaborate was seen as valuable in the project achieving its objectives. It was noted that an initiative led by one HEI would unlikely have gained the same traction, given that they may not be representing the sector as a whole.
- Partnerships between employers and providers which aim to provide more accurate *'real world'* facilities and equipment have been shown to be worthwhile. Employers, students and institutions all benefit from this collaboration, which improves the quality of TVET. The Yeovil College project worked effectively with the local NHS trust; such partnerships can be replicated in others. There is also scope to roll this out for other sectors—particularly those that have a range of large employers, such as construction.
- The experience of Baysgarth School suggests that Year 9 may be an opportune time to implement more project-based work and employability skills provision. As they note, it can be more straightforward to timetable innovate activities during this year as some GCSE programmes are yet to start.

# 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

Chapter 3 presents the student and organisational outcomes from the Edge Grant programmes, as well as how the activities will be continued at the end of the grant funding period.

## 3.1 Student outcomes

The projects that supported the development of PBL explicitly (the Barbican Centre and Eden Project Learning projects) led to a wide range of positive outcomes for students.

For the **Barbican Centre project**, most participating students reported improvements in their understanding of the types of jobs available and entry routes in the creative industries as a result of participating in the project. A post-course survey of participating students administered by the Barbican Centre received 51 responses. Overall, it found that:

- 80% agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of the types of jobs available in the creative industry in which the employer that co-designed their workshops and/or hosted a visit was operating in.
- 78% agreed or strongly agreed that they had a stronger understanding of progression routes and possible future career pathways available.

Similar findings were identified in qualitative research. In focus groups many students described new job roles they had heard of via workshops or the employer visit which they had not been aware of previously. Awareness of new job roles was particularly clear among students from Sidney Russell School. For example, two students described how they had developed a new interest in careers as graphic designers as a result of their experiences developing design boards during the school workshops they participated in.

Most students on the Barbican Centre's project also thought they had developed some 'fusion' skills that employers increasingly need as a result of participating in the project. Overall, 84% of students (43 out of 51) completing a Barbican Centre post-project questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that they had learnt new skills by taking part in the project. In the qualitative interviews, many students said that working together collaboratively was a key area where they felt they had developed during the project, particularly for the two groups of students with a background in drama whose workshops were more focused on this discipline.



### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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For the **Eden Project Learning project**, the most substantial impact of the project has similarly been on increasing student knowledge of new careers. All the students interviewed felt they had learnt about new horticulture jobs that they were not aware of previously. The project particularly raised awareness of plant science roles. Most of the students were not aware that these roles existed before they participated in the project.

*“It wasn’t really like note taking like it is in other classes, it was more telling us about horticulture – and it was more about horticulture” [project participant].*

*“I found it interesting to learn about the types of things involved in Horticulture – I didn’t know it was things like looking at the juice from different types of plants, and bits of science we don’t really know about” [project participant].*

In the student interviews there was a sense that most were more likely to work in horticulture as a result of the project. The activities that related to industry tasks were generally valued by the students, with particular praise given to:

- The laboratory-based session which produced an output on agar jelly that students could take home to propagate. All the students valued this task, with one stating they enjoyed it because *“we could work in an actual lab, which is something I have never done before”*.
- Learning about technology and soil and how freezing spinach affects the freshness. Most of the students we spoke to valued this test because they found it interesting.
- Calculating food miles. This was felt to be interesting because it related to student interest in sustainability.

It should be noted that most students attending Eden Project Learning project sessions already had an interest in science. Therefore, most students felt that science-based horticulture roles were not a significant departure from their previous interest and goals.

#### 3.1.2 Supporting the development of a 14-19 curriculum

The four projects that employed PBL or work-related and practice-based approaches to support their 14-19 curriculum. These were:

- **Derby College:** Provide students with practical ‘real-world’ problems that they work through in class through working with employers.
- **The XP School:** Learning centred around enrichment activities and a key theme which informed its curricula for maths, science, humanities and the arts.
- **Baysgarth School:** Developing a more employment focused curriculum in Year 9 of study. This involved more project-based work alongside enrichment activities.
- **Yeovil College:** Developing a clinical health suite which re-creates healthcare settings such as wards within the college.

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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For the **Derby College** project, all the students that participated in the focus group felt the work they undertook through the work-related learning projects was relevant to their career aspirations and goals. Indeed, one student felt that it was one of the most valuable elements of their course: *"It better relates to what I want to do compared to what I'm doing now. What I actually want to go into."*

The most common benefit of the PBL approach reported by students was the opportunity to work directly with employers. As one student stated: *"They know what they are talking about, so it's more beneficial."* Students also valued the opportunity to visit employer premises, as few had any direct experience of working with employers.

All participants also thought they had developed some employability skills as a result of the project. Particular skills they reported developing were in trouble shooting and independent research to solve problems where they may otherwise have just asked their lecturer. Some also reported learning more about specific technical aspects of their course. For example. Students studying the enter the animal care industry reported that they learnt how to develop a budget for renovating a kennel, and elements of animal welfare law regulating how kennels can be designed and operated. As one stated: *"[we found] there's a lot more to the job than just looking after animals."*

For the **Yeovil College** project, students reported that the main benefit was that it improved how they worked with patients and undertook practical procedures. This meant they were more prepared for progressing to a higher-level healthcare course and in undertaking industry placements.

The Clinical Skills Suite also provided opportunities to provide learners with the most up to date methods and procedures and protocols in healthcare settings. For example, in response the Covid-19 pandemic current learners completed an infection, prevention and control unit, using the correct PPE equipment and handwashing area – this was completed in one lesson.

Some students noted a positive difference among students on placements that had used the clinical skills suite and those that had not. They explained:

*"There were a few [other students] on our ward who were just doing health and social care and they were more nervous. There were lots of things we could already do like observations like blood pressure, temperature, oxygen saturation, testing blood sugar, bed making, thickening fluids, nasal cannulas, cleaning catheters and manual handling"*.

During the interviews with students, they discussed feeling more confident going into their T Level exams as they have had an opportunity to both learn theory and practically undertake and complete procedures regularly.

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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For **XP School**, students were overwhelmingly positive about the experiential learning approach employed in the project. For many, the tangible outcome was improved interest in academic subjects, which rather than being considered as abstract concepts could be aligned to practical real-world examples. Some also noted the positive impact of the programme on learning about different cultures and civilisations.

Teachers in the school similarly reported more engagement and interest from students in the subject. Most reported that there were more questions and more students willing to answer questions during discussions. They also noted that students spent extra time on their project work, which exceeded what they would typically do for homework.

Similar findings were reported for students from **Baysgarth School**. Most welcomed the opportunity to conduct a wide range of activities, which complemented their core subjects. Many also reported positive examples of what they learnt on activities such as robot club which helped them in wider subjects, including both technical skills (e.g. coding, design) and soft skills (e.g. teamworking and communication).

Teachers similarly reported higher engagement of students in lessons. Many felt that the initiatives the school delivered in Year 9 helped build students' *'social capital'*, by giving them experiences that many would not experience outside school. Some also noted the *'lifechanging'* nature of some activities, such as participating in national finals and undertaking international trips.

#### 3.1.3 Improving the design and delivery of CEIAG and employability skills

The three projects that had a specific focus on providing employability support and work experience (Skills Builder, Warwickshire College Group and Tower Hamlets EBP projects) were also all found to have some impact on students.

Students on the **Tower Hamlets EBP** project generally reported improvements in their employability skills. This included understanding *"What employers are looking for"*, as well as soft skills on working independently, problem-solving, meeting deadlines and communicating via emails.

Teachers also reported that the programme benefited students' transferable skills. As one school staff member explained:

*"We had some great stories of students thinking outside the box for some projects, and like the idea for the project – it's great. Like I really do think it's good the way they make them come together and do this project". Students are also given the opportunity to work with other people they don't know or haven't worked with before, which required different communication skills: "so [the students have to] find a way to communicate with people, not only you do know them, but might have best relationship with them. So that is why I'm proud to see that some of our students [took part]"*.

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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The work produced by students generally received positive feedback by employers and school staff that were interviewed. Employer volunteers stated during interviews that students gained a good insight into their organisation.

Schools that participated in the project were keen to participate again for several reasons, firstly because it reduced the risk of face-to-face work experience being cancelled at a time when they weren't sure what the '*new normal*' would look like post covid, and due to ongoing difficulties with arranging work experience placements (continued concerns about Covid-19, employees continued working from home, companies taking fewer students).

For the **Warwickshire College Group** project, the main benefits of the programme was of students understanding basic skills around health and safety and work practices that they need for entering the labour market. Most students felt they had a better understanding of these topics since completing the training, and most felt that it was not covered in other parts of their course.

The **Skills Builder** project was delivered to teachers rather than students. Because the research took place relatively soon after the teachers had undertaken the module, it was not possible to examine how they applied what they learnt and consequently the benefits that students gained from the programme.

## 3.2 Organisation outcomes

### 3.2.1 Supporting the development of PBL

All the employers delivering PBL reported positive benefits to their organisation. For the **Eden Project**, the Edge Grant helped support them to move forward in their strategic priority to provide more support to their local community. This in turn supported their mission of connecting young people to the natural world, which in turn will lead them to better respect and protect nature.

The Edge Grant also gave the Eden Project the opportunity to test different models for maximising the support they can provide local schools. This included being able to reflect on the learning from the laboratory-based sessions as well as the Horticulture Advocates Programme boxes. The lessons were reported be particularly valuable as the Eden Project aims to build its local footprint in its new site in Morecambe.

Schools that participated in the Eden Project initiative also reported organisational outcomes. More widely, most of the students and teachers interviewed mentioned that discussion about horticulture had increased within their science classes, and the activities had sparked conversation about the issues covered outside of the workshop sessions.

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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For *HAP in a Box*, the skills and knowledge gained during the workshops and challenges was also used and reflected on within the school-based science. Teachers reported that during Plant Science modules taught in the classroom, students were able to draw on the experience and learning gained from the project and bring this to the class.

For the **Barbican Centre** project, the organisation felt it had enabled them to test a model of linking up artists, employers and schools to co-develop workshop curricula with limited risk and without the pressure of producing a final output such as a performance or product. The Barbican Centre has trialled partnership working between artists and schools previously. However, these previous projects have been largely output driven (for example preparing for a performance). In addition, previous partnership-led processes have not had a focus on careers and the backgrounds of artist facilitators.

The Barbican Centre also reported that the programme has a positive impact on their staff. They reported that many valued the opportunity to work with *'young, inquisitive minds'* and valued that they were able to *'give back'* to their local community. Some also reported that they were impressed with some of the innovative solutions that the young people suggested.

All the three teachers in schools that took part in co-devising the series of workshops agreed or strongly agreed that the project was *'inspiring'* and *'will inform and innovate methods of classroom learning'* when surveyed after the project. Three out of four teachers also agreed or strongly agreed that *'students were able to explore new creative models of learning within this project'*. For example, one teacher interviewed described how they planned to embed brief references to real employers and job roles as a result of the workshops, which would be relevant to areas covered in their ongoing teaching of the Design Technology curriculum and would make more explicit in some lesson plans how the topics covered related to certain *'fusion'* skills employers typically want.

At least one participating school expects to maintain a longer-term relationship with a creative industry employer because of the project. The employer Mixcloud has committed to maintaining a collaborative relationship with Sydney Russell School beyond the confines and funding of the project, which helps sustain the project for future year groups. Both employers involved in hosting student visits so far described having positive experiences working with the schools. Two of the employers who completed a post-project survey agreed that the project was enjoyable, well-resourced and inspiring.

The Barbican Centre are actively seeking to encourage such ongoing informal relationships between participating schools, creative practitioners and employers, which could take the form of advice to inform curriculum activities, buying-in school workshops from arts facilitators or hosting work experience placements. This would allow some elements of the project to continue without the intervention of the Barbican Centre.

#### 3.2.2 Supporting the development of a 14-19 curriculum

There were a wide range of organisation benefits reported by the four projects that supported the development of a 14-19 curriculum.

For **Derby College**, a major benefit of the programme was that it supported their tutors to gain a good understanding of PBL and how to apply it to practice. Additionally, some tutors also reported that it provided them with more opportunity and motivation to trial new assessment approaches which enabled more project based learning. As one tutor stated: *“It’s given us opportunities to do things off curriculum. To let students’ learn more independently without having the pressure of assessment for a qualification.”*

All four tutors in the focus group said they had applied elements from the CPD sessions into their teaching for problem-based learning sessions. For example, one tutor described how during these sessions they typically spend most of their time walking around the class listening to group conversations and observing what they are doing, asking prompting questions where needed. *“It’s a very different way of teaching.”* However, a couple of teachers reported a challenge was balancing the need providing enough control to make sure students were keeping on task during problem-based learning sessions while not intervening too much and letting them learn for themselves independently and autonomously.

Most tutors also reported improved confidence to facilitate a more student-led approach to learning. They felt that understanding the theory helped them justify and explain their approach during lesson observations by other staff, and also to make effective choices on when to use it in lessons.

For the **Yeovil College** project, the clinical suite was felt to have had a positive impact on the number of applications to study healthcare courses at the college. In 2022, the college have doubled the numbers enrolled on T Levels compared to last year. Interviews with students and the final evaluation report from Yeovil College suggest that the clinical skills suite was a factor in their choice of Yeovil College.<sup>1</sup>

The skills suite had enabled the college to become a more desirable place to work and learn, with both teaching staff and learners stating that they especially liked the suite, and the additional access to resources, and practical skills that could be both taught and gained. The tutors interviewed felt they benefitted substantially from participating in the project and having access to the clinical skills suite to support both their teaching, and their own CPD.

As a result of the use of the Skills Suite, Yeovil College was used as an example of Best Practice by the DfE for industrial placements within the healthcare sector. The final Evaluation report by the college stated this was due to the practice that students gain in the suite.

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<sup>1</sup> In July 2021, 60 more students applied to Yeovil College

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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For **Baysgarth School**, the project enabled them to complement the wider changes that they were making to their provision. Its main perceived value was that it gave them more *'room to experiment'* in terms of what they delivered. This included supporting the development of new programmes and timetabling changes.

The wider shift in approach to an employability focused curriculum at Year 9 was also felt to have been valuable to the school. They felt that otherwise Year 9 could be regarded as a *'wasted year'*. While this may in future present challenges with Ofsted, they felt the approach benefited students' by improving attendance, enabling quieter students to *'come out of their shell'* and enhanced learning and personal development, which in turn would result in better exam results.

The school did note a substantial upfront time cost for setting up the inspire time activities that took place on the Wednesday afternoon. This was from teachers having to develop the new programmes and the cost of specialist equipment. However, once developed the costs of maintaining the offer is low and teachers in the main reported that they supported the changes that were made.

For **XP School**, the shift to experiential learning has led to benefits to the institution in terms of students being more engaged in lessons and in creating a better learning environment. While the changes would likely have taken place without the programme, the Edge grant has enabled a more rapid review of evidence to inform their approach, which expedited implementation.

The school believes their approach has resulted in high demand from students in their local area. They note that they are substantially over-subscribed for places, which they believe is partly attributable to parents and children valuing the experiential learning approach.

They feel the experiential learning approach also supports social mobility, as it is particularly valued by students that are less academically minded. To further enhance this, the school has adopted an approach of providing places to students across Doncaster and not just those within a local catchment area, to ensure places are available for students in the most deprived areas of Doncaster.

#### 3.2.3 Improve the design and delivery of CEIAG and employability skills

Receiving the Edge Grant was felt to have enabled the **Skills Builder** Partnership to now have a comprehensive set of modules that complement the programmes that are delivered face to face and enables distance. This allows them to engage with more geographically spread of schools. It also keeps the costs of provision lower for schools.

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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The online provision was also felt to have enabled more teachers within schools to access the online learning and training. This has resulted in a more consistent message and use of the tools and learning within schools. As one interviewee stated:

*"I think what's crucial, what the added value of having the online training area is, is that it's not always possible to reach everybody via a delivered session. The practicalities of working in a school means that that's not always feasible. It means that people can access the information before, during, after a session, or if they're unable to attend that delivered training".*

Schools have also benefited from having teachers that are better able to teach employability skills. This was reported by all the teachers that were interviewed and reflected in a survey of [participating teachers in 2021/2022, which found:

- 94% teachers rated themselves as more confident teaching essential skills as a result of the programme (268 respondents)
- 95% of teachers saw an impact as a result of using the online teacher training modules (140 respondents)

More schools are also accessing the support. There has also been an increase in engagement with the Skills Builder Hub, since the platform has been integrated with the hub. This provision is free to access.

For the **Tower Hamlets EBP**, there has been a substantial reported benefit on the volunteers in businesses that have provided the virtual work experience. This is because they valued *'giving something back'* as well as building on their own previous volunteering experience. This even included one employer participating that was based outside the UK.

For employers, the project was seen as valuable as it enabled them to *'test the water'*, before deciding if they had the resources or interest to provide on-site work experience.

Schools benefited from the programme by being able to provide more employer related provision for students than they would do otherwise. They found that more employers are willing to provide virtual work experience than physical work. They felt that students benefit from having direct contact with employers and being able to undertake *'real world'* activities.

For **Warwickshire College Group**, the benefit of the programme has been that they have been able to develop content and also test the appetite and application of online programmes as a complementary part of their learning offer for students. As a result of the study they have learnt what students want from online programmes (interactive content, compatibility with mobile phones, single sign-in) as well as approaches to make the sessions more accessible (e.g, contrasting colours, recognisable icons) and effective pedagogical approaches. This can then inform their future development of online programmes.



### 3.2.4 Developing innovative approaches to higher technical education

The Middlesex University project has helped some HEIs identify potential actions that can improve the delivery of degree apprenticeships. One participant in the dissemination workshop stated that they planned to use lessons from the event to help them develop and roll out a public services apprenticeship, and another felt they would employ some of the practice highlighted in the event to inform how they engage employers in the design of degree apprenticeships and *'how to make the workplace learning count'*.

However, it was recognised by delivery partners that the full impact of the research project on influencing HEI behaviour has not yet been realised. This is likely to take place over the next five years as the findings from the research inform on-going HEI discussions and sharing of best practice through the Centre for Degree Apprenticeships. It will however be dependent on HEIs engaging with the centre and continuing the momentum generated through the project.

Delivery partners were confident that this would take place. UVAC highlighted that they had good interest in a conference they had arranged in the Autumn on degree apprenticeships and pointed out that they currently have over 100 active members that they can engage in the centre through targeted communication.

Delivery partners also reported that the current financial climate in HE was also likely to further encourage HEIs to engage in degree apprenticeships. For many it will be an effective route for mitigating some of the financial losses incurred from fewer international students studying in their organisation. It also helps diversify HEIs education offer to ensure they are better prepared for future economic *'shocks'* to the system.

However, it was also recognised that many HEIs were currently *'fire-fighting'* as a result of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 lockdown. This includes having to relocate apprentices that have been unable to complete their workplace learning and also implementing online learning solutions to allow students to learn remotely. It was recognised that this would likely mean it would take time before HEIs will be able to implement strategic changes to their degree apprenticeships provision.

## 3.3 Sustainability of the projects

All the projects were expected to continue in some form at the end of the programme. The Baysgarth School, Skills Builder, XP School and Warwickshire College Group projects were expected to continue beyond the programme. The activities undertaken by Baysgarth School and XP School comprised changes to the curriculum which would be continued through mainstream funds. The Warwickshire College Group and Skills Builder projects developed online programmes the organisations would continue to deliver after the end of the Edge Grant period.

### 3 Project outcomes and sustainability

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The Yeovil College project was extended after the end of the programme. After the development of the Clinical Suite, the college obtained additional funding to deliver T Levels and consequently has moved to a new building where they have increased the size of the clinical suite and included new equipment

The Tower Hamlets EBP (now The Switch) will continue the project but at a lesser scale. The current plan is to offer a hybrid work experience split across two days attendance in the workplace and two days of virtual work experience. Additionally, the network developed through the Middlesex University project would also continue and be hosted by UVAC.

Projects such as Derby College, Eden Project and the Barbican projects will not continue in their current format. All were designed to be short-term projects. The Barbican project was an initial pilot and both the Derby College and Eden Project initiatives built the capacity of teachers so they could continue the lessons of the project after the project ceased, and most teachers stated they intended to continue them, although not in as much depth as the programme.

However, the learning for all these projects are being used to design other initiatives. For Derby, discussions were taking place to embed PBL within their engineering and land-based curriculum, including exploring with Awarding Organisations where it can be used for course assessments, and where it is not possible. The Eden project was also exploring rolling out the Horticulture Advocates Programme boxes at their site in Morecombe. Barbican were exploring the feasibility of re-packaging the materials developed through the programme so it could be a more general resource for teachers.

# 4 Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation found there was substantial promise for most of the projects that were funded through the Edge Grant programme. In particular, it found:

- There is substantial value in delivering more work-related learning, both through changes to the curriculum as well as using employers to provide project-based tasks. Where this has happened the feedback has been positive from students, as they feel it enables them to learn new skills that they do not receive in the classroom and also provides learning in a more enjoyable format.
- There was particular promise in curriculum developments from the projects delivered by XP school and Baysgarth School. These changes were generally universally supported by students and teachers felt they improved student engagement and better prepared students for doing well in their exams and for entering work.
- The Yeovil College model of accessing work equipment from their local NHS trust to create a more authentic learning environment for their students was also a model that could be replicated in other colleges. This benefits students and employers by ensuring students are better prepared for entering the workplace. It is particularly feasible for sectors dominated by large employers (e.g. Healthcare) as well as construction, where Section 106 agreements that large developers make with local authorities could be used to encourage them to support infrastructure development in local schools and colleges.
- The focus of some projects on employability provision was also largely valued by both teachers and students. It is regarded as an important skill that is not covered systematically in the curriculum.
- The use of online provision, such as training or work experience, can provide substantial value, but only when used to complement existing provision rather than replace it. On-demand online learning was particularly valuable for teacher training, as it enabled them to fit the training around their schedules

The Grant programme has been most valuable for providing seed funding for providers to trial new approaches or develop new infrastructure that can inform providers' future plans. This can be as an adjunct to existing reforms being implemented by providers (e.g. the Baysgarth School or XP school projects) or in developing networking and enhancing the evidence base of 'what works' (as was the case for the Eden Project, Barbican Project and Middlesex University project).

## 4 Conclusions

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The projects have also demonstrated the value of partnership working between schools/colleges and between schools/colleges and employers and stakeholders. While projects have experienced challenges in partners dropping out, where it has worked it has demonstrated a sharing of expertise that has led to the success delivery of projects. It has worked best when partners have had an ethos to 'test and learn' from new initiatives.

The pandemic restrictions did not cause undue impact on the projects, other than delaying some timescales. Indeed, in some examples such as for the Eden Project it has led to new innovations, such as the HAP in a box product. Some projects proved to be particularly valuable during the pandemic, such as the Yeovil College Clinical Suite and the Tower Hamlets EBP virtual work placements.



