

# Commerce in the Classroom (Phase 2)

## Impact Report 2020 - 2021

Future First specialises in connecting today's pupils with former students and other relatable role models so they develop the knowledge, confidence and inspiration to succeed when they leave school. We want every young person, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to believe "people like me" can succeed. Alumni and relatable role models empower young people and show them a world beyond their own and give them the knowledge and connections they need to get there.

In 2020/2021 Future First launched the second round of the Commerce in the Classroom initiative, thanks to generous funding from The Commercial Education Trust. The project aimed to connect individuals working in international trade and commerce to young people in secondary schools and colleges across the North East and East of England.

560 students in five schools, stretching from Kent to Sunderland, attended workshops supported by former students and other volunteers working in international trade and commerce. The workshops provided students with an insight into various careers in the sector and opportunities to develop transferable skills. This report outlines the key evaluation findings and impact of the project.

### The Need

Britain has a deep social mobility problem. YouGov polling (2019) told us that disadvantaged young people are less likely to think they will be successful in life, less likely to know anyone in a job they might want to do in future, and are more worried about their future employment, compared to their more affluent peers. A lack of access to relatable role models, and awareness of potential employment opportunities is a significant barrier.

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

By bringing commerce into the classroom, this project worked to address some of these issues, connecting schools and students with employees working in international trade and providing learning opportunities which schools often do not have the time or resources to undertake.

### Project Overview

The aims of the project were:

- To improve students' understanding of international trade and commerce, the range of career opportunities available within the sector and the key employability skills required to achieve success
- To support schools to develop links with regional and national employers so that they can continue to inspire interest in careers in international trade and commerce amongst their students for years to come.

As part of the project, 560 Year 10 and Year 12 students participated in employability workshops co-facilitated by former students and volunteers who have experience of working in commerce and international trade industries. Through the activities in these workshops and drawing upon the expert knowledge of the volunteers,

students were provided with opportunities to explore a range of career opportunities available within the sector, raising their aspirations and boosting their confidence in their own ability to succeed.

After learning more about the world of international trade and commerce, students listened to the professional experiences and career journeys of the volunteers. During a Q&A activity, students asked the volunteers questions to develop their knowledge and understanding of what it is like to work in the sector and the qualifications, skills and experiences that would help them to access these opportunities in the future.

Within job matching activities, students were challenged to develop their knowledge on job roles they had not heard of before, including operational, sales, and financial trader roles, as well as jobs within translation, marketing and trade compliance. After taking part, one student commented "I have opened up my options and will consider doing this as a career in the future".



Students then participated in a range of interactive problem-solving activities relevant to the challenges connected to the jobs in the sector and designed to develop and enhance employability skills needed for trading skills such as negotiation, communication, problem solving and teamwork skills. In reflecting on the skills they used, one student told us "I enjoyed being able to evaluate my employability skills. It allowed a lot of us to reflect on the skills we have achieved and the skills we want to develop."



### Project video

As part of the project workshops, students were also shown the project video showcasing Future First alumni working in international trade and commerce and their pathways from school. You can watch the Commerce in the Classroom project video [here](#).

## Creating links between schools and career role models in trade and commerce

Despite having to adapt to virtual facilitation for some of the workshops due to Covid-related restrictions, hosting the workshops virtually meant that students were able to learn from and be motivated by volunteers' advice, experience and guidance, without the barriers of access, distance or travel.

Over 280 individuals from across the UK, with a background in international trade and commerce, signed up to our sector specific network. A further 261 individuals on our National Alumni Network have specialist knowledge in these industries. Former students and career experts who took part in the workshops included representatives from the Department for International Trade, leaders working within international shipping organisations - such as



the Union Maritime Alliance - professionals with experience working in operations and supply chain management for global corporations such as Royal Dutch Shell, as well as career experts in the field of business development for international financial consultancy firms, such as Mazars.

As demonstrated by students' feedback, outlined later in this report, hearing from former students and volunteers working in international trade and commerce helped to improve students' awareness of the career pathways available, dispelling misconceptions about who can succeed and supporting them to develop employability skills for the future.

## Student feedback

In order to measure the impact of the workshops, students completed baseline and exit surveys at the beginning and end of the project. These were centred on measuring students' understanding of international trade and commerce, their awareness of the career opportunities available within the sector and their perception of their own ability to access jobs related to international trade and commerce.

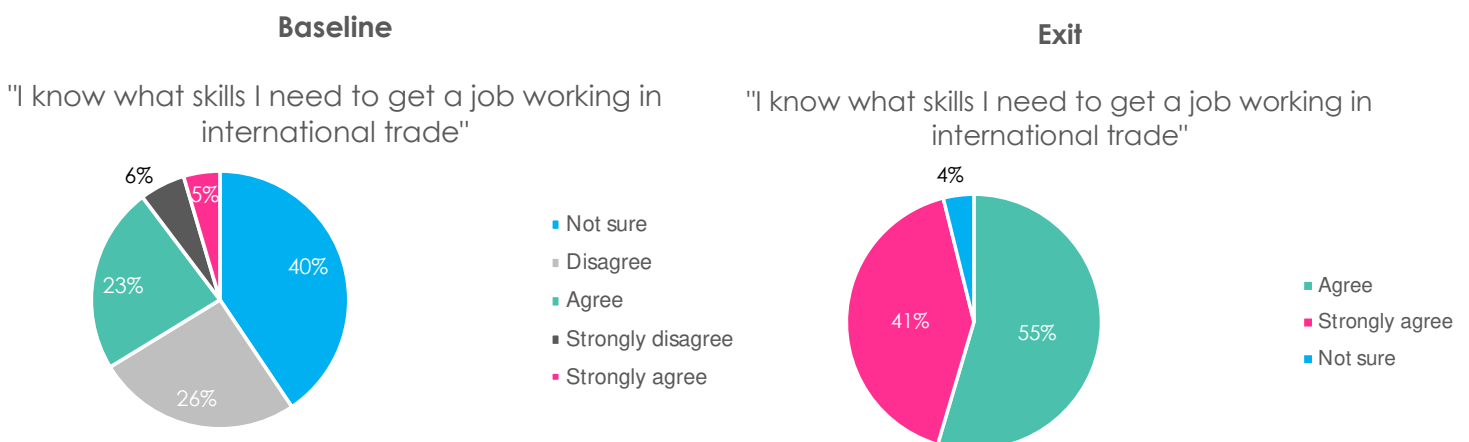
It is clear from the feedback data that students enjoyed participating in the project as a positive and informative experience, with **90% of students saying they would recommend the workshops to a friend.**

In the context that international trade and commerce has been identified as a growth sector, with an increasing demand for jobs in the field, it was positive to see that as a result of taking part in the project:

**98%** of students told us that they knew what international trade was, compared to 64% at the beginning of the project

**90%** of students told us that they knew about different jobs available in international trade, compared to 33% before the workshops

Many of the students also reported that the Commerce in the Classroom project helped them to develop essential employability skills that will enable them to access opportunities in the future:



The feedback also demonstrated that the project had a significant impact on students' confidence and motivation to strive for success:

**72%** of students told us that they thought they were capable of getting a job in international trade, compared to 42% before the workshops

As a result, **70% reported that they were more likely or much more likely to consider a job in this sector in the future.** This shows evidence of a significant impact, particularly in light of recent national research completed by The Princes Trust, entitled the Aspiration Gap, which illustrated the effects of the pandemic, eroding young people's confidence in their future and their belief that they will be successful in life (The Princes Trust, 2021).

We asked students for their feedback on taking part in the workshops:

**"I'm more knowledgeable on the jobs associated with international trade and it's made me more interested in the sector"**

**"Before I didn't understand what these sorts of jobs entailed but now I am aware I am interested by them and more likely to choose on than before"**

**"The talk with the volunteer made me realise that anyone can work in international trade...it gave me more information about different opportunities that I hadn't thought of before"**

**"I've had an idea of wanting to be an entrepreneur, so this made me feel more confident"**

### **Teacher and volunteer feedback**

It was wonderful to have volunteers from 15 organisations and employers relating to international trade and commerce speak to students during the workshops. As demonstrated by the students' feedback, it was clear that their contributions made a remarkable difference to students' knowledge of careers in this sector and their confidence and motivation to achieve.

We were pleased that the positive feedback from students was also reflected in how volunteers reported on the programme:

**100%** of volunteers rated the workshops as good or excellent

Peter Oliver, a Berlin-based journalist specialising in trade and a former pupil at one of the participating schools said:



**“I didn’t know what was available when I was a kid, now I do. I’d like others to know that it’s a big world with lots of opportunities...being able to allow the students to ask us questions, we don’t know what they might find most useful, but when they ask, that’s where some gold may be unearthed”.**

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

**100%** of teachers rated the workshops as good or excellent

**100%** of teachers rated the workshops as relevant or very relevant

**75%** of teachers said they would recommend this session to teachers in other schools

*“Great session, the students loved it”* Assistant Headteacher, Lampton Academy

*“I look forward to using these again in the future”* Business teacher, Marshland High School



## Meghan's story

**Meghan is the Executive Assistant to the Director General of Trading Systems at the Department for International Trade (DIT), she talked to students about why it's ok to take your time and try new things.**

My journey from school to where I am now has been a rollercoaster! I studied for a BA in German and Spanish at the University of Southampton and then spent a couple of months travelling through Central America and spent time working as a German speaking Recruitment Consultant.

I started as an Executive Assistant at DIT in 2020 - my focus and passion has always been languages and travel so I knew that whatever I ended up doing, it needed to have an international focus and the scope to interact with other countries and cultures. My experience learning foreign languages and travelling proved invaluable as it meant I could demonstrate my ability to work with a wide range of people from different cultures and backgrounds.

This area is an extremely new and exciting area of government policy as the UK navigates its position as an independent trading nation outside of the EU. My role as an EA is to provide administrative support to the Director General. This can include diary management, including contacting our foreign partners to arrange meetings, commissioning briefings and the collation of papers, organising events and building strong relationships with the Overseas Networks and facilitating communication between them and the DG.

I am aware that my experience since leaving school has not been smooth sailing - I did not have a particularly clear idea of which sector I wanted to go into and instead just followed an education path based on the subjects I like most (languages). I let students know that it is okay to not have things figured out straight away - I'm 25 and still finding my way! My advice to anyone interested in a career like mine is to be very organised and *enjoy* being organised. I really enjoyed sharing my insight with students along with answering questions and highlighting that there is nothing wrong with changing jobs while you try to find the right one for you.



## Hayley's story

### **Hayley, Careers Lead at Langley Park School for Girls, describes the success of running international trade and commerce workshops for students.**

We offered international trade and commerce workshops to our year 10 and 12 students who had an interest in trading or who were unsure of what career path to pursue in order to showcase the variety of careers available.

Each workshop was tailored to a year group – so the workshop for the Year 10s focused on their current studies and pathways post-16, whereas the workshop for the Year 12s focused on opportunities for graduates or apprentices within trading.

The workshops worked brilliantly, they were very interactive which encouraged students to contribute and Alex, our Alumni Programme Manager, made it fun and engaging. Our students learned a lot about careers they had never even thought of previously.

During both workshops we had alumni guest speakers who worked in the industry and students were able to ask them questions and get tips for the future - it gave our students a very valuable insight and I find that having the alumni speaking to them about their job is very impactful. I would certainly recommend these sessions to teachers in other schools, we had a number of students ask when the next session is – always a great indication!



## Conclusion

The Commerce in the Classroom project connected individuals working in international trade and commerce to young people in secondary schools and colleges across the North East and East of England. 560 students based in 5 schools in regions of low social mobility benefited from 2-hour workshops supported by career experts working in international trade and commerce.

Our findings show that by the end of the project, students were more able to identify what international trade was and had an increased awareness of the variety of different roles available in the sector. They were able to identify skills needed for specific jobs and had opportunities to practice negotiation, teamwork and problem-solving skills through a variety of activities. At the start of the project, 35% of students said they would consider a job in international trade and commerce, by the end of the project this had doubled to 70%. Since the project ended, a number of volunteers have made plans to return to the classroom to provide advice and guidance to other students.

The impact of this project highlights the importance of forging links between schools and employees working in international trade and commerce, and the difference this can make to the lives of young people. By brokering these relationships between schools and career role models in the sector, we



have equipped participating schools with the resources they need to provide additional careers support to many more students in the future.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank The Commercial Education Trust for their funding and support, without which this project would not have been possible. We are looking forward to our continued work together to inspire more young people to consider a world of opportunity and a future that could be theirs.