



APPLIED LEARNING

What is applied learning
and how can it help prepare
young people for the future?



About Young Enterprise

Young Enterprise is a national enterprise and financial education charity that works directly with young people and their educators to develop the vital skills and mindsets needed to maximise future opportunities and make a positive contribution to communities and wider society.

We believe that all young people should be given the opportunity to apply learning in real and relevant contexts in order to develop the transferable skills and enterprising mindsets that will enable them to navigate future pathways to success.

Young Enterprise provides over 500,000 such learning opportunities to young people every year with a focus on working with those that experience the greatest barriers to social mobility.



“Young Enterprise has over 60 years of experience of helping young people apply their learning through opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems. We have seen firsthand the power of applied learning: creating meaningful, practical learning experiences that help young people acquire and apply knowledge and skills – so they know more, remember more and do more – often showcasing potential career pathways they may not have previously considered.”

Sharon Davies, Chief Executive, Young Enterprise.



Visit our website to find out more about our programmes, and how you can get involved

What is applied learning?

Applied learning is an active process in which learners use existing knowledge and understanding to address practical, real-world challenges.

The key to applied learning is the provision of relevant and relatable support to help young people reflect upon, connect and articulate the relevancy of skills gained with their academic education and help transfer these skills to their future plans.

Why is it needed?

THE PROBLEM:

A

Despite successive updates to the curriculum, young people do not feel equipped for the changing world of work (The Prince's Trust, 2017). Research shows that the top three reasons why employers are not hiring young people are lack of skills (42%), experience (36%) and confidence (34%) (Institute for Employment Studies, 2023).

B

Furthermore, when young people don't understand how the things they learn in school are applicable to the future, and the 'real world', they disengage from education (Demos, 2009) which can lead to absenteeism.

C

Whilst the current curriculum has an emphasis on knowledge, opportunities to apply this knowledge in real and relevant situations are highly inconsistent across schools, meaning young people often do not have the skills to apply their knowledge in real-world settings.

D

For young people to feel more prepared for their future careers, skills and the application of those skills need to be more closely aligned with the curriculum.

E

Overhauling the curriculum is a costly process in both time and resources. Schools are stretched across a wide-ranging curriculum, and teachers' time to deliver beyond curriculum content is minimal.

F

THE SOLUTION:

Deliver the same curriculum content but enable more opportunities to apply learning in practical ways. Applied learning is a low-cost, time-efficient approach that schools can easily adopt to teach the same curriculum content that also helps develop transferable skills and experience of applying their knowledge to real-world situations, increasing work-readiness.

The benefits of applied learning



Improves engagement and motivation

The critical reflections of applied learning have been shown to increase motivation in young people by a study performed in 44 schools (Ofsted, 2010). It also increases engagement in young people considered 'at-risk' of disengagement from education (Blake, 2006) because when young people don't understand how what they learn in school is relevant to their future careers and lives, they can feel disengaged from education. This can lead to misbehaviour, absence and, in extreme cases, exclusion, which costs the state £2.1bn per year (The Centre for Social Justice, 2021).



Creates a more productive workforce

Exposing young people to potential career paths and opportunities to develop and apply their skills before leaving school makes them more employable and work-ready (Garnett et al., 2016; Society for Experiential Education, 2022). According to the Times Education Commission (2022), almost three-quarters of businesses believe their profitability and productivity would rise by at least 25% if new recruits from school, college or university were better prepared with these workplace skills.



Builds transferable skills

Applied learning enables young people to engage directly in a real-world problem or situation and apply their knowledge, which has been proven to improve their problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, creative thinking and confidence (Balleisen et al., 2023), linking to Gatsby Benchmark 2: 'Learning from career and labour market information'. These transferable skills are then enriching across the curriculum and beyond into the world of work.



Supports social mobility

Young people growing up in more disadvantaged communities are at greater risk of losing access to education (Who's Losing Learning? Coalition, 2023; Centre for Social Justice, 2023). Applied learning can help prevent this through improved engagement and sustaining opportunities for all. It also facilitates more encounters with local relatable role models and helps to build social capital (Social Mobility Commission, 2023). Research by the Sutton Trust (2017) finds that broadening the diversity of candidates suitably prepared to enter the workforce would boost UK productivity by as much as £38bn.



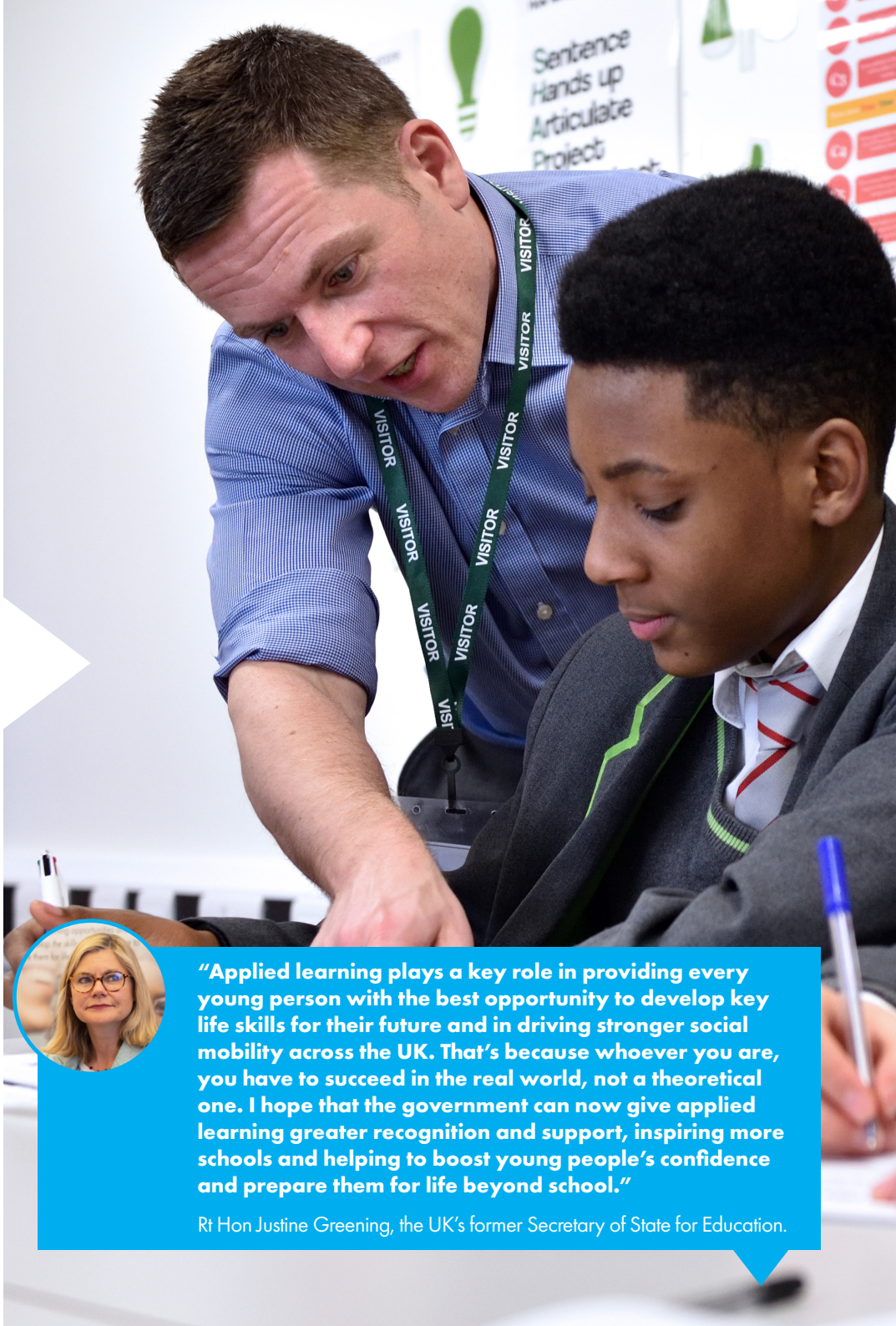
Improves academic outcomes

When implemented consistently, applied learning approaches have been shown to improve academic outcomes as they enable young people to understand why they are learning certain content, increasing their motivation, lateral thinking and retention of knowledge through applying that learning to something that feels relevant to their futures (Bradberry & De Maio, 2018). This also links to Gatsby Benchmark 4: 'Linking curriculum learning to careers'.



Cost-effective to deliver

Applied learning is an approach that can be adapted and used across the curriculum. It does not require additional resources or investment from schools or the government. It can be integrated into existing lesson plans to teach the same content in a new, more effective and engaging way that exposes young people to new opportunities, engages them with the real world and develops their skills for the future.



“Applied learning plays a key role in providing every young person with the best opportunity to develop key life skills for their future and in driving stronger social mobility across the UK. That’s because whoever you are, you have to succeed in the real world, not a theoretical one. I hope that the government can now give applied learning greater recognition and support, inspiring more schools and helping to boost young people’s confidence and prepare them for life beyond school.”

Rt Hon Justine Greening, the UK’s former Secretary of State for Education.

What applied learning looks like in practice

Applied learning is a tool that enables teachers to bring real-world contexts and ideas to young people’s education, integrated across subject teaching to enrich their understanding, ability to apply their knowledge and to help them build transferable skills for the future.

Example 1 – Business

First, students gain knowledge from classroom teaching and textbooks about company management roles and responsibilities, setting them up with the foundational understanding of how these processes work in theory. By complementing this with applied learning – e.g. taking part in work experience – students are able to reflect on what they took away from the classroom, understanding more about how these processes work in practice, and confronting real world challenges to overcome and learn from, improving their employability.

Example 2 – English and Drama

Students study a play to gain knowledge about literary technique, playwrighting and examples of character development. Applied learning can complement this, for example, by asking students to take responsibility for producing sections of the school play. This gives students the agency and opportunity to get together with peers and teachers to discuss storyboarding and direction, while compromising and resolving creative differences, just as would happen in a real world setting. This experience builds a better understanding of how what they learn in the classroom helps in practice.

Example 3 – Primary Maths

Pupils are guided through knowledge-based exercises to develop their comprehension of decimals and fractions, including using monetary terms (pounds and pence) in the exercises as a means of making this accessible to them. Applied learning could take this even further by setting up an in-class ‘shop’ using play money or currency counters to help the children become familiar with divisibility of whole numbers, and also introducing the basics of budgeting and shopping lists using money in decimal values. This gives the students an opportunity to develop important life skills at this early age.

These are just three examples of how applied learning can be used in a wide range of settings and subjects to motivate young people and build their connections between the knowledge they are learning and how they might use these skills in the future.

What applied learning looks like in practice



“Young Enterprise’s brilliant work linking learning to life beyond the school gates is truly inspiring for young people. It shows why it’s so important we continue to bring careers from the margins to the mainstream of education, so students see how and what they learn is relevant to how its applied in the jobs they are interested in.

There are great examples all around: film studio Pinewood showing how maths is used in set design, KPMG running problem solving sessions with students using real world client challenges and a Birmingham NHS trust training social care students to be community researchers for real projects on maternity care – feeding back findings to clinical teams.

The work Young Enterprise champions brings innovation and inspiration to the classroom, helps young people connect lessons to the workplace - boosting enthusiasm and motivation - and encourages them to explore pathways into the world of work and find their best next step.”

Oli de Botton, CEO, The Careers & Enterprise Company.

CASE STUDY: Fyske, Young Enterprise Alumna and Journey Award winner 2022

“When I first heard about Young Enterprise I thought this sounds like something I can do, because it’s like real-life... Before I started YE, I wasn’t the best in school, I was refusing to show up, I wasn’t passing any of my exams or anything like that... but as soon as I started doing YE I was like ‘Oh it’s Thursday, I have to go in so I can go do this today!’ So it did help with other things at school, because I wanted to do this.”





What Applied Learning Really Looks Like report

Published in January 2023, the What Applied Learning Really Looks Like report highlights several successful case studies to show teachers and policymakers what applied learning actually looks like in practice – particularly in cases where time and resources are limited.



Read the full report by scanning
the QR code, or by visiting:

[young-enterprise.org.uk](https://www.young-enterprise.org.uk)

References & Further Reading

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