

Form the Future's Annual Conference 2020 Report

Introduction

On 1st December, Form the Future CIC hosted its Annual Conference with a twist – for the first time, the event was hosted virtually, marking a move to digital that the organisation has been building on throughout the year.

In a year that has seen young people disproportionately affected by Covid-19, with a stall in the labour market and the attainment widening between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, the economic legacy of COVID-19 is likely to result in more pupils experiencing poverty and the challenging family circumstances that create educational disadvantage

At our annual conference, we brought together business and school leaders from across the region for the largest, and perhaps the only, business and education conference – exploring how we can equip young people with the skills they need for the future of work; and how we can help local companies generate the talent they need.

The speakers

The conference kicked off with an introduction from Anne Bailey, who touched on Form the Future's unusual year and how the organisation has adapted to the challenges of supporting young people throughout the pandemic. Anne also unveiled Form the Future's 2019-2020 Impact Report – the first time the organisation has released a digital, interactive report. The report can be viewed [here](#).

Professor Anna Vignoles, Professor of Education and Fellow of Jesus College at the University of Cambridge, addressed attendees next, and discussed the impact of COVID-19 on young people. Professor Vignoles discussed the short, medium and long term challenges facing us as a result of the pandemic; the immediate challenge to keep infection rates low; the longer term economic impact of COVID-19; and the skills crisis, with millions of young people missing out on vital learning time. Professor Vignoles discussed the possibility of the impact on young people becoming a generational issue, unless we act now to mitigate that impact. Professor Vignoles argues that policy needs to be sensitive to the fact that there will be particular cohorts, in particular areas of the country, that will be most affected. You can view Professor Vignoles' full speech [here](#).

Oli de Botton, Executive Headteacher of School 21, spoke next – discussing the school's innovative 'head, heart and hand' approach to education, and the opportunity to rethink some of the central questions in education. Oli discussed the idea that schools have always had a social mission, and need to be externally focused, working with organisations to raise aspirations and inspire young people. Oli argued that during lockdown it became clear that knowledge was not enough. Skills such as resilience, emotional connection, and being able to sell into the labour market are essential skills. You can view Oli's full speech and find out more about School 21's philosophy [here](#).

Jane Paterson-Todd, CEO of Cambridge Ahead, spoke next – providing a summary of the [Rand report](#) on careers guidance in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The report summarises that while the majority of

schools surveyed have an embedded careers programme in place, schools prioritise academic over technical and vocational career routes. The report found that engagement with local employers is typically integrated into schools' career programmes – but that some of the surveyed schools encountered challenges building relationships with local businesses. The report made a number of recommendations, including a need for Ofsted to develop standard metrics to assess and monitor the quality of career guidance provision, and that dedicated funding is necessary to ensure schools have an embedded, impactful careers advice service. Form the Future are proud to be a trusted partner for many schools in the region – and welcome the findings of this report. You can view Jane's full summary of the report [here](#).

Councillor Neil Gough, representative for South Cambridgeshire District Council and Skills Lead for the Greater Cambridge Partnership, gave a view on the skills agenda from a local government perspective, and discussed how the GCP plans to address the current skills challenges. Cllr Gough explained how the economic climate has a huge influence on the skills agenda. Cllr Gough outlined three immediate concerns; firstly, businesses focus on survival and short term planning; secondly, concerns for young people overwhelmed by the short-term challenges of COVID-19; and thirdly, that these two issues combined will magnify the inequalities already embedded in our education system. Cllr Gough discussed how the GCP is increasing its level of support, including a four-year programme that will see the GCP's investment in skills doubled. You can view Cllr Gough's full speech [here](#).

Alex Hughes, Founder of Shifties and one of our conference sponsors, spoke about the need to promote entrepreneurship in school. Alex discussed his own experience at school, and the hunger the Shifties' community has to share their expertise as micro business owners and entrepreneurs with young people. Alex discussed how business owners can make a real difference when participating in school career activities – showcasing a range of skills that young people can aspire to. You can view Alex's full speech [here](#).

Naily Makangu, Director and Founder of Athena Leaders and one of our conference sponsors, spoke to attendees about work experience, and what we can do to provide young people with opportunities to build and develop their skills. Naily shared the story of a work experience placement she took on this year, who worked as a graphic designer, developing his natural creativity and gaining vital experience of working within a business. You can view Naily's full speech [here](#).

The workshops

After hearing from our panel of speakers, attendees split off into their chosen workshops. We've summarised a some of the key takeaways below:

Apprenticeships – a solution to our skills crisis?

- It was felt that schools favour A-Levels and the university route, and teachers focus more on the children going to university, but it was acknowledged that teacher are under a lot of pressure.
- It was suggested that there are more events parents can go to with their children to learn about the wide range of jobs available.
- Many well-established companies have an apprenticeship scheme, but it was felt smaller employers could do more. In some cases, this is due to lack of knowledge about apprenticeships and the support available.
- It was suggested that professional careers advisors should promote apprenticeships more.
- Some teachers do not understand the scheme and think it is for hairdressers, plumbers etc, and do not appreciate you can take a degree through an apprenticeship.

- It was recommended we make better use of apprenticeship awareness events by promoting them in schools.
- Life experiences are very useful and better than reading a textbook – apprenticeships can offer this.
- Form the Future can assist both students and employees to tell them about the scheme, help find the appropriate training provider, assist with the paperwork and on going support. Form the Future is also running short courses from February 2021 to help adults secure long-term employment.

Work experience – how to facilitate while working remotely

- Helen Clements, Morgan Sindall Construction’s community advisor in the Eastern region spoke about their virtual work experience programme, ran in the Summer in place of the traditional work experience programme.
- 30 students from different schools came together in mixed teams for a virtual work experience week, where they took part in a number of digital challenges and tasks, before presenting a final project to an expert panel, including Morgan Sindall Construction’s senior team.
- Helen spoke about how successful the week was and how Morgan Sindall intended to continue with virtual work experience in the future. Students participated fully and scored the experience very highly.

Do we need a ‘Cambridge curriculum’ for local schools?

- There was a strong sense that Cambridge is a special place and the variety of work you could do here is incredible. Whether it’s bioinformatics or the arts, or even a combination of the two.
- It’s so important we help children to see these opportunities while they’re still at school and thinking about their futures. [Ed.: there’s a chance to be filmed talking about your work for our Careers in the Curriculum series]
- The work that goes on in Cambridge can also contribute to teaching and learning – it’s a resource in its own right.
- While academic qualifications are good, what gets you a job are the soft skills and your wider understanding of the world. It’s important that students know this and have a chance to develop these skills.
- There isn’t always a direct correlation between what you study and what you end up doing for a career: we should ask people in business what they studied and what they do now!

Comments and social media –

Although we would have loved to be together in person it was fantastic to see attendees’ engagement via the chat. You can view the chat files [here](#), and we’ve highlighted some of the comments below:

- Hi Prof Anna, great session, thanks. I’m interested to know your thoughts on specific skills that students might have disproportionately gained during 2020. I’m pondering Zoom skills, e-learning, technology etc - things they may not have gained in a classroom. These are skills that employers need. It’s an opportunity to sell these skills to employers perhaps?
- Your mission is fab! Love Empowerment and making a difference. Great! – *on Oli de Botton’s speech.*
- If we are to bring about change we need to build on the existing national Careers Quality Award (few Cambridgeshire schools have this!), and the Gatsby Benchmarks. But we also need OFSTED to

take CEIAG seriously and for school governors to be aware of their statutory responsibilities for CEIAG.

- Absolutely agree with all said - schools should not be islands but able to draw on resources, businesses etc around them. Education and learning must draw on community.
- I think Alex Hughes used the key word - ambition. Identifying and nurturing ambition further in schools is so important and employers play a huge role in this. Role models are key!
- Thank you for a most informative webinar, thank you to Form the Future, I am looking forward to more of these. Thank you to the speakers.
- Thank you for today - great energy and insight into the fantastic work FtF is doing.



Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who joined Form the Future for our first virtual Annual Conference. It was fantastic to hear from so many attendees, and have such positive engagement with our speakers.

We'd like to thank our conference sponsors – Athena Leaders, Cambridge Independent, The Cambridge Building Society, Kameo Recruitment, Lexington Communications, Shifties and The University of Cambridge, a participant of Annual Food Agenda, funded by EIT Food – for their support in helping us to make our conference a reality.

We launched Form the Future's first digital Impact Report for 2019-2020 during the conference. You can view the full report [here](#). Thanks to KISS Communications for their support.

We've also recently launched our [new website](#). You'll find everything you'd expect to see from Form the Future – from information about our services and our latest news, to our volunteer portal and upcoming events. And for the first time, we've included a student area, with resources and tools to help young people make their next steps, which we're really excited to add to in the New Year.

We're always on the look out for professionals who can share their passion and experience with the next generation. We are particularly eager to recruit more people who are just starting out as our students feel a real connection to those who are in early career roles. Our work is needed now more than ever, and through our in-school and virtual events programme, our volunteers share their knowledge and experience with the workforce of the future. They help enhance skills and inform young people's career aspirations. You can find out more about volunteering with Form the Future [here](#).

Finally, we would like to continue the conversations and find ways of meeting up more than once a year. So next year we'll be running a series of virtual coffee-mornings and we hope you'll be able to drop in. Each will have a theme, an occasional speaker, and plenty of time to talk and share. The first one will continue discussions on how we can create more inclusive workplaces. Everyone is welcome! [Book here](#).