



Schools and Charity Partnerships:

Challenges and solutions

Kate Bowen-Viner, Alix Robertson and Loic Menzies







Kate Bowen-Viner is a Senior Associate at the Centre for Education and Youth. Kate leads research projects and impact evaluations for charities who work with young people. She has also co-authored reports about broader issues in the education sector, including: leadership in Multi-Academy Trusts and young homeless people's experiences of education. Kate blogs regularly and also writes for the national press. She has been working in the education sector since she left university. Kate has been a Teaching Assistant, a secondary school teacher in Bristol and a Civil Servant (Department for Education). This experience has given her a broad understanding of

the education system.

Kate has a Distinction in Policy Research (MSc) from Bristol University. Her dissertation research project explored girls' experiences of menstruation in school. She is a member of the Fabian's Women's Network, having completed the mentoring programme in 2019.

Alix Robertson brings both journalism and teaching experience to the Centre for Education and Youth. At CFEY, she has developed short films about special educational needs and disabilities for the Department for Education and Whole Schools SEND. She has also explored the barriers that Latin American young people face in accessing UK higher education for King College London and worked on evaluations for Action Tutoring and The Mercers' Company.

She started out as an English teacher at a secondary school, where she ran a student magazine and mentored vulnerable pupils. A desire to interrogate challenges in the education system led her to take an MA in journalism. She went on to work for sister papers FE Week and Schools Week, winning awards for her investigations. She reported on subjects including college finances, multi-academy trusts, and the experiences of women and LGBT people in education. Alix volunteers with the charity Keen London, helping to organise and run activities for young people with disabilities.



Loic Menzies is Chief Executive of The Centre for Education and Youth. He has worked in education research, evaluation and policy for the last ten years and is interested in how different aspects of education, youth services and wider society shape young people's transitions to adulthood. He has authored numerous high profile reports on issues ranging from youth homelessness to teacher recruitment, all based on detailed qualitative and quantitative research. He works closely with practitioners and policy makers to communicate research's implications, for example presenting to the Education Select Committee on White Working Class

Underachievement or working with civil servants to tackle the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. He is currently editing CfEY's first book, for Routledge entitled Young People on the Margins.

Loic was previously a teacher, youth worker and tutor for Canterbury Christ Church University Faculty of Education and has been a trustee of a number of youth and social entrepreneurship charities such as UnLtd and The Kite Trust, as well as a school governor.





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School and Charity Partnerships

Summary report

1 Introduction

Educational charities' impact on young people often hinges on the quality of their relationship with their school partners and how they work together day-to-day.

Guidance on how schools and charities can build effective partnerships is scarce and Action Tutoring recognises this as a problem for the sector.

In January 2020, Action Tutoring, in collaboration with the Centre for Education and Youth, held an event bringing together 18 charity and school leaders, across the primary and secondary sectors, to discuss partnerships and share best practice. This report presents key learning from the roundtable and covers four key themes:

- 1. Building a reputation: a charity's reputation is extremely important for building connections with schools.
- **2. Building strong relationships:** effective communication plays a crucial role in helping charities and schools build relationships.
- 3. Working together: schools and charities should plan how they will work together at the start of their partnership and should clarify any non-negotiables.
- **4. Evaluating impact:** schools and charities should work together to collect meaningful data and measure impact.





2 Executive summary

Building a reputation:

- Word of mouth plays a greater role in helping schools understand what charities have to offer compared to formal advertising and unsolicited contact.
- Social media has a variable impact on charities' reputation and their ability to share information with schools. On one hand, charities' social media accounts can be a useful means of sharing up to date information and raising schools' awareness of charity programmes but on the other, charities should not overly rely on social media to build their reputations because some schools do not use social media.
- Whilst charities may be uncomfortable about promoting their competitors, telling schools about another charity's services can help build other charities' reputations and support young people. Charities should therefore develop reciprocal networks of mutual recommendation.

Building strong relationships:

- Charities and schools that are looking to build new partnerships should use brokerage services such as Founders 4 Schools' 'Workfinder' programme which introduces schools to employers to build initial relationships with one another.
- To build positive relationships, charities and the schools they work with need to have shared goals but they need to balance this with maintaining their autonomy. This involves identifying and communicating non-negotiables.
- Charity staff who set up relationships with schools should avoid overpromising what the charity can deliver.

Working together:

- When they decide to partner, schools and charities should discuss and set clear expectations.
- Communication between charities and schools should not be burdensome for teachers and school leaders.
- Schools and charity partners should review responsibilities and key contacts when there are changes in school or charity staff.
- Charity staff who set up relationships with schools should be realistic about what the charity can deliver.

Evaluating impact:

- Schools find both quantitative and qualitative data useful for understanding a charity's impact.
- Charities' impact evaluations should be designed to involve schools and should be written in engaging ways. Schools who have partnered with charities can then understand what went well and what could be improved upon.





3 Building a reputation

School leaders emphasised that decisions to engage with a charity were often based on that charity's reputation. Charities can use various techniques and approaches to build a strong reputation.

3.1 Peer to peer recommendations

Schools and charities feel that word of mouth is more important than formal advertising (e.g. print adverts in education publications) in helping schools understand what charities have to offer. Recommendations from other schools, teachers, multi-academy trusts, local authorities and governors are particularly helpful for building a charity's reputation because school leaders trust other education professionals.

"You often get so much contact from different organisations and it's very difficult to understand which are the ones that are going to be useful and quality. We're far more likely to look at someone who has engaged in that type of conversation if it comes through a recommendation from someone else that we know."

School leader

Charities can enhance their reputations by:

- Introducing schools that they want to work with to schools they have previously worked with.
- Asking schools that they have previously worked with to provide testimonials.
- Building relationships with local authorities, governance organisations and MATs. These organisations share information about charities with schools and play a key role in introducing potential partners.

3.2 Social media

Social media has a variable impact on charities' reputation and their ability to disseminate information to large numbers of schools. Charities' social media accounts can be a useful means of sharing up-to-date information and raising schools' awareness of charity programmes and when school leaders first hear about charity, they sometimes check charities' social media profiles to learn more about the organisation.

"If a new contact comes onto our radar, we may well look at social media to get more of an understanding of them and what kind of things they are working on. Social media platforms are really important because it's a way that schools might understand more about you."

School leader

However, both schools and charities warned against charities over relying on social media to build their reputation because:

- Some schools do not engage with social media.
- Using multiple forms of communication, including face-to-face meetings, are better for engaging with large numbers of schools and the wider education sector. This is because, depending on their context, schools and education stakeholders respond to communications in different ways. For instance, small schools in rural areas with poor internet access may not tap into social media as frequently as large Multi-Academy Trusts in major cities.

Attendees therefore cautioned against over-relying on social media to raise awareness as part of communication and marketing strategies. Instead, charities should use multiple strategies (including face-to-face meetings with local authorities, governance organisations and MATs) to move beyond awareness raising.

Communication and marketing plans should also lead school audiences to engage with charities and commission them. As this charity leader summarised:



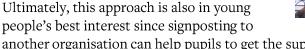


"In the marketing ecosystem, social media is really important to maintain your brand. What's important is to look at how much resource you dedicating to different aspects of your strategy. You don't want to be allocated tonnes and tonnes of money to 'awareness raising' if it's not going to generate word of mouth. You do want to be dedicating resources to things that will generate word of mouth. Charities need to understand how to move their audience through a journey, from awareness, to engagement to action as well."

Charity leader

Supporting other charities 3.3

Charities can support one another to grow their reputations. Telling schools about the services that another charity offers can help build other charities' reputations. Whilst charities may be uncomfortable about promoting their competitors, there are clear benefits to this approach since charities who sign-post to others can grow their own reputation and credibility by showing that they are supportive organisations who are passionate about improving pupils' experiences. Furthermore, if two charities agree to mutually refer schools then this can benefit both in the long run.



another organisation can help pupils to get the support they need.



"Although we do academics, we are not a tutoring organisation. If we meet a school who say actually what we really need is tutoring for our Year 6s, what we're going to say is 'go to Action Tutoring'. We know the sector a little bit. We signpost to organisations who we think could give a school the support they need." Charity leader

Building strong relationships

Schools highlighted that the decision to partner with a charity is often based on getting the relationship off to a good start. It is therefore crucial to build strong, positive relationships early on.

4.1 Timing

Charities should hold initial meetings with schools when they are less busy. Both school leaders and charities argued that busy periods like Christmas and exam season (May-June for secondary schools and colleges, and May for primary schools) as well as school holidays should be avoided. On the other hand, periods following exams can be quieter and a good time to build a relationship. Some secondary schools also find that they are less busy once Year 11s have left school for study leave in the summer term (June-July).

4.2 Brokering partnerships

A number of brokerage services, such as Founders 4 Schools' Workfinder, introduce schools to organisations and individuals who can support them and their pupils. Charities and schools who are looking to build new partnerships can use brokerage services to build initial relationships with one another. This involves schools





informing a brokerage service about the challenges they are facing, their needs and their context (e.g. location, pupil demographics). Charities also inform the service about their programme and the brokerage service then 'matches' schools to charities who can provide relevant support.

Charities and schools who are looking to build new partnerships through a brokerage service should sign up to brokerage services that are relevant to their needs and goals. For instance, if a charity offers schools support with careers education, they would do well to contact and build a relationship with the Careers and Enterprise Company or Founders4Schools, whilst charities working in the university access space may want to build a relationship with the Outreach Hubs. Outreach Hubs are part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme and act as a point of contact between schools and universities. They facilitate access to existing provision for widening participation to university.

One of the benefits of working with a brokerage service is that the process of signing up can help schools examine their challenges and clarify what they want from a charity partnership. This in turn ensures that discussions with a charity are clear, honest and focussed.

"The whole process began with a really detailed needs analysis which was led by a school and the school being really honest about what their challenges were and what they wanted to achieve across a really broad range of areas. We just found we needed to give people the tools to think what it was they wanted to get out of the relationship to make sure that they got it and the support of that brokering to make sure that things actually came off."

Charity leader

4.3 Shared goals

In order to build positive relationships, charities and the schools they work with need to have shared goals, whilst balancing this with their autonomy. Shared goals are important for initial relationship building with schools because school leaders are more likely to engage with a charity who shares their aims and priorities. Charities should therefore ask schools about their objectives and highlight overlap.

"I think alignment is really important. Is it going to be something that we have to rejig what we do? If the answer to that is yes, is it definitely going be worth it? I think a lot of things come in where it sounds great, but it just doesn't fit."

School leader

At the same time, charities should set out their non-negotiables with schools, for example the length of a programme or the resources that will be used. Rather than simply measuring or testing their impact, charities should therefore conduct evaluations that explore processes and what leads to impact in order to identify their non-negotiables. This will help them to recognise key elements of their programmes that must be delivered in order to positively impact on young people and achieve the charity's goals.

Charities must avoid compromising on the key elements of their programmes to suit a school's wishes because this can:

- Lessen impact on pupils: if charities adapt or remove key elements of their programme, this can undermine fidelity to a tried and tested model, potentially reducing the programme's positive effects.
- Lead to inefficiency: if charities adapt their programmes for every school that they work with this can reduce economies of scale and prove costly and inefficient.





Realistic messages

Charity staff who set up relationships with schools should be realistic about what the charity can deliver. This can be challenging when staff are keen to impress schools and build new partnerships, but charities must avoid overpromising and underdelivering because this can damage the charity's relationship with a school.

"One really simple thing for charities to consider is whether or not the people responsible for establishing school partnerships are the same people responsible for delivering them because if you set that up correctly, you really limit the risk of overpromising and underdelivering." Charity leader

To overcome these issues charities can use the following strategies:

Rather than separate sales staff, use staff who set up relationships with schools to deliver the programme: using the same staff mitigates the risk that staff who set up relationships with schools will set unrealistic expectations because these staff will have personal experience of programme delivery.

Where this is not possible, charities should:

- 2. Make sure that at least one member of the delivery team attends initial relationship building meetings with schools: this will mean that delivery staff can contribute to setting realistic expectations during initial meetings in schools
- Train relationship building staff and delivery staff on the non-negotiable elements of the charity's programme: this will help to ensure that messages from staff who set up school relationships aligns with delivery staff's messages.

Working together

School and charity leaders stressed that effective working relationships are the foundation of effective delivery.

Setting clear expectations 5.1

When they decide to partner, schools and charities should establish clear expectations. Doing this early helps to build a positive and balanced relationship where both parties are clear about what the other needs. Early discussions also help avoid problems or misunderstandings arising later in the partnership. For example, one

charity leader explained the importance of setting expectations

around safeguarding and communication:

"For me, it's part of the expectation setting. We say we have to have a minimum of safeguarding capacity; we have to have a point teacher or member of staff and we have to have a senior member of staff contact as well. That is a minimum expectation. Because you set that expectation at the beginning, it generally works ok."

Charity leader.

Charities and schools should also clarify the outcomes and outputs they expect from the partnership because this helps both parties to understand what they are working towards.





"Most of what we're talking about is essentially the delivery of a service. Which isn't that different in its fundamentals to the private delivery of a service. You need really clear expectations on both sides. What are you going to get and what are you going to have to do in order to get that? Making sure you're really clear and upfront is important so you don't get any nasty surprises later on."

Charity leader

It is also important for schools and charities to discuss logistical and administrative expectations. One charity leader explained that knowing a school's behaviour policies, uniform expectations for staff and pupils, and daily timetable helped charity staff operate consistently with these:

"Over communication in terms of logistics I think is a really important and I think sometimes we sometimes underestimate how important that is to our partners. Things like making sure that the tutor who comes to the school has a copy of the dress policy."

Charity leader

Charities and schools can use the following questions to facilitate discussions about expectations:

- 1. What do we expect to achieve by partnering together?
- 2. What outputs do we expect and when?
- 3. Are there any elements of the programme that can be adapted?
- 4. Are there any elements of the programme that cannot be adapted?
- 5. How will the programme be delivered?
- 6. Who will be involved in delivery? Who from the charity and who from the school?
- 7. What are the safeguarding procedures we need to follow?
- 8. How is the school day timetabled? When do break and lunch times occur?
- 9. What behaviour policies does the school have?
- 10. What is the dress code for pupils and staff?

5.2 Communication strategies

Communication between charities and schools should not be burdensome for teachers and school leaders. Charities should avoid using head teachers or MAT leaders as their main point of contact because they are generally too busy. School leaders explained that whilst it is useful for headteachers and MAT leaders to hear about the charity's progress, they are unlikely to have time to get involved in logistics. Charities should therefore use another member of staff as their link teacher and catch up with Headteachers or MAT leaders through meetings at key strategic points in the year.

Charities should also avoid relying on lengthy email chains to communicate with schools as one charity leader explained:

"Sending large amounts of information over email simply does not work. It's not a way in which teachers are used to communicating."

Charity leader

Charity and school leaders agreed that communicating lots of information over email is ineffective for two main reasons:

- It adds to teacher workload: Large email chains take a long time to read and respond to. Doing this adds to teachers' busy timetables.
- It does not help schools to engage and take action: As teachers and leaders are often busy, they are not used to communicating through lengthy emails and are therefore unlikely to engage with this type of communication. This can lead to schools missing instructions from charities and not taking action. Schools find it easier to engage with short messages that outline key information and action points.





Charities should...

- Avoid sending long emails to teachers/leaders
- Catch-up with Headteachers/MAT Leaders at a few strategic points in the year
- Have regular contact with a link teacher who is not a busy Headteacher or MAT Leader.
- Hold a meeting with schools when communication strategies are not working and explain how communication could be improved

Schools should...

- Tell charity partners if communication strategies are not working. Explain how communication could be improved
- Designate a staff member to lead day-to-day contact with the charity partner
- Share the school's expectations and rules to help charity staff act consistently whilst on site.

5.3 Dealing with changes in staff

School and charity leaders find it challenging to maintain contact when a key member of staff leaves. Schools and charity partners should therefore review responsibilities and key contacts whenever staff move on, particularly because expectations can change when a new member of staff arrives.

"It can be quite tricky where a project has the full support of a head or a CEO, but then there is a change in leadership."

Charity leader.

To overcome these issues, charities and schools should hold a review meeting when a staff leave. New staff should attend and contribute to the meeting. Schools and charities should answer the following questions as part of their partnership review:

- 1. What were our aims when we first started working together? Have these changed?
- 2. Who will lead communications from the charity team?
- 3. Who will lead communications from the school team?
- 4. What were the expectations for communication when we first started working together? Have these changed?
- 5. What were the expectations for our partnership when we first started working together? Have these changed?

5.4 Reflection

Charities and schools should reflect on their partnerships at key points in the year. For example, through face-to-face meetings every term or at the end of an academic year. This process helps both parties to improve the way they work together, whilst avoiding blame. Charity and school leaders explained that a collaborative approach to 'reflective discussions,' where partners are open about things that did and did not work well, helps make genuine improvements to the partnership. As one charity leader explained:

"We have a discussion about our 'partnership' so it's not 'you did that' and 'you did this' and framing it that way is really helpful for making is a genuinely collaborative problem-solving exercise. It's a positive way for people to engage. We have those sessions termly."

Charity leader

As part of their reflective discussions, schools and charities should discuss what is, and is not, working well in the following areas:





- **Meeting goals:** how well is the partnership helping schools and charities to achieve their aims?
- Managing expectations: is the school meeting the charity's expectations? Is the charity meeting the school's expectations?
- Communication: how useful has communication been? How burdensome has communication been?
- Logistics: should logistical arrangements (e.g. timetabling/room booking) change to help the charity work with the school or its pupils?

6 Evaluating impact

Charity leaders highlighted that a school's input into evaluation design and data collection plays an important role in impact evaluation.

6.1 Designing impact evaluations

Charities' evaluations should be designed to involve schools and be written in engaging ways that appeal to schools. Those who have partnered with charities can then understand what went well and what could be improved upon. Charities can also use their evaluations to share findings with other, new potential partners.

School leaders emphasised that they wanted to contribute to evaluation design so that they could demonstrate progress to governors and trustees. As one school leader explained:

"We've got a board of trustees that would be desperate to find out about the impact that anything we are doing in school have."

School leader

To ascertain how to engage schools through impact evaluations and to encourage them to participate in research, charities should ask their school partners the following questions:

- 1. What would you like to find out about our impact? Asking this question can help charities ascertain whether schools want to find out about the charity's impact regionally and nationally, as well as in their own school. This information will help charities to plan the way they present their findings. For example, they may decide to share data with a school about impact in that particular school compared to impact across the entire country.
- 2. How would you like findings to be displayed in an evaluation report? Knowing this will help charities to disseminate findings in a way that is engaging for current school partners as well as potential new partners.

6.2 Using academic data

It can be tempting to include academic data in an impact report because the education system, and sometimes funders, prioritise academic progress data. However, academic data should only be used to measure impact if it has a clear link to a charity's activities and goals.

School leaders warned that using academic data to measure progress towards unrelated goals undermines the validity of evaluation findings and it is rarely possible to do so in a reliable way or to confidently determine causality and attribution.

"If you're looking at wellbeing, you could look at whether the teacher feels the pupils are happier. Or we use a system where you measure things like listening skills, aiming high, being positive. When we do wellbeing projects,





that's what we would use to measure rather than looking at their SATs results because it could literally be anything that's impacted on their SATs results. Keep it specific to what you're actually trying to do."

School leader

Some charities do require academic data to measure their impact, but it can be challenging to get this information from schools in a timely and systematic format. This is partly due to circumstances outside of a charity or school's control. School data teams often have heavy workloads and timetables for receiving and uploading academic data. Furthermore, data is not necessarily collected in consistent and compatible formats across different schools. The table below sets out some approaches that can help to overcome this important challenge.

Charities should...

- Set out plans for data collection with schools, at the start of a partnership. Plans should include deadlines and the format data is presented in
- Explain why giving charity partners access to relevant academic data is beneficial for the school and agree a means of doing this that is compatible with data regulations.
- Explore options to analyse data in a way that is useful for individual schools (e.g. analysing pupil premium pupils' progress)

Schools should...

- Use academic data at the start of a partnership to show charities challenges the school is facing in terms of pupil progress/attainment [if applicable to charities' services/programmes]
- Discuss plans for using academic data to measure impact and flag any analysis that the school would find useful (e.g. analysing pupil premium pupils' progress)

6.3 Mixed methods

Schools find both quantitative and qualitative data useful as means of understanding a charity's impact. Quantitative data gives schools a broad understanding of how effective a charity's work is whereas qualitative data gives schools a deeper understanding about why something is effective. As some charities emphasised, qualitative data (e.g. quotes or drawings from young people) can be extremely powerful for conveying a young person's story to schools and other stakeholders, such as parents and trustees:

"Some of the most powerful things are before and after quotes from the children who have done our programme. We obviously got parent permission. We've videoed children. We've also got parent focus groups and teacher surveys. We have an impact report that is short and teachers can show to their trustees or add to their newsletter if they want."

Charity leader

Charities should therefore plan to collect both quantitative and qualitative data as part of their impact evaluations. Examples of methods for collecting quantitative and qualitative data are set out in the table below.

Quantitative	Qualitative	
Collecting academic data	Narrative inquiry	
Surveys (e.g. baseline, midpoint and	 Focus groups 	
endpoint surveys)	• Interviews	
• RCTs	 Photography 	
Quasi-experimental studies	 Videoing 	
	 Drawing 	
	• Collage	





Charities and schools should collect and use data from pupils in a safe way. Procedures for collecting and sharing data should comply with the <u>Data Protection Act 2018</u>.

7 Conclusion

It is not always easy for charities to partner with schools. Key challenges include building a good reputation; developing a strong and positive relationship with a school early on; establishing effective ways of working with a partner and school involvement in designing and conducting evaluations. However, our roundtable attendees had overcome many of these challenges, and by focusing on things like: communication, managing expectations and reflection, they strengthened their partnerships to provide young people with the support they need.





8 Recommendations

Key area	Charities should	Schools should
	Introduce schools you want to work with to schools you have	
	previously worked with.	
	Ask schools that you have previously worked with to provide	
	testimonials	
Building a	Build relationships with local authorities, governance organisations	
reputation	and MATs. These organisations share information about charities	
	with schools and play a key role in introducing potential partners.	
	Use multiple forms of communication. Including a mix of face-to-	
	face meetings and social media.	
	Build up networks of reciprocal recommendation with other	
	charities and signpost schools to others who can meet their pupils'	
	needs.	
	Hold initial meetings with schools during less busy periods of the	
	academic year.	
Building	Use brokerage services to build relationships with schools. Ensure	Use a brokerage service, that is relevant to the school's goals, to find
initial	that the brokerage service that is relevant to the charity's goals.	charities who can provide support.
relationships	Ask schools about their objectives and highlight any similarities	Share the schools' goals with potential charity partners.
	with their own goals.	
	Clarify their non-negotiables, such as the length of a programme or	
	the resources a charity uses, with schools.	
	Ensure that staff who build relationships with schools set realistic	
	expectations about what the charity will deliver, using the steps set	
	out in this report as a starting point.	
	Set clear expectations with school partners using the questions set	Set clear expectations with charity partners using the questions set out in
	out in this report as a starting point.	this report as a starting point.
	Ensure communication serves both parties' needs and preferences,	Ensure communication serves both parties' needs and preferences, for
	for example by:	example by:
	Avoiding long emails to teachers and leaders	





Working together	 Having regular contact with a link teacher who is not a busy Headteacher or MAT Leader Catching up with Headteachers/MAT Leaders at a few strategic points in the year Holding a meeting with schools when communication strategies are not working and explain how communication could be improved 	 Tell charity partners if communication strategies are not working. Explain how communication could be improved Designate a staff member to lead day-to-day contact with the charity partner
	When school or charity staff change, hold a review meeting. Any replacement staff should attend and contribute to the meeting. Discussion can be guided by the questions set out in this report. Work with schools to reflect on the partnership at key strategic points for example, through face-to-face meetings every term or at the end of an academic year. As part of their reflective discussions, schools and charities should discuss what is, and is not, working well in the key areas set out in this report.	When school or charity staff change, hold a review meeting. Any replacement staff should attend and contribute to the meeting. Discussion can be guided by the questions set out in this report. Work with schools to reflect on the partnership at key strategic points. For example, through face-to-face meetings every term or at the end of an academic year. As part of their reflective discussions, schools and charities should discuss what is, and is not, working well in the key areas set out in this report.
	To ascertain how best to engage schools through impact evaluations and in conducting evaluations, charities should ask their school partners: • What would you like to find out about our impact? • How would you like findings to be displayed in an evaluation report?	Tell charities what the school would find useful from an impact evaluation.
Evaluating impact	 Academic data should only be used to measure impact if it has a clear link to a charity's activities and goals. If academic data is needed for impact evaluation: Set out plans for data collection, at the start of a partnership. Plans should include deadlines and the format data is presented in Identify how data can be shared in ways that are compatible with data regulations. Explain why giving charity partners access to relevant academic data is beneficial for the school 	 If academic data is needed for impact evaluation: Use academic data at the start of a partnership to show charities what challenges the school is facing in terms of pupil progress/attainment. Discuss plans for using academic data to measure impact and flag any analysis that the school would find useful (e.g. analysing pupil premium pupils' progress)





Explore options to analyse data in a way that is useful for individual schools (e.g. analysing pupil premium pupils'	
progress)	
Plan to collect both quantitative and qualitative data as part of their	
impact evaluations.	
Collect and use data from pupils in a safe way. Procedures for	Collect and use data from pupils in a safe way. Procedures for collecting and
collecting and sharing data should comply with the <u>Data Protection</u>	sharing data should comply with the <u>Data Protection Act 2018</u> .
<u>Act 2018</u> .	



Action Tutoring supports young people facing socio-economic disadvantage to achieve a meaningful level of academic attainment, with a view to enabling them to progress in education, employment or training. We do this by partnering high-quality volunteer tutors with pupils to increase their subject knowledge, confidence and study skills. Our vision is a world in which no child's life chances are limited by their socio-economic background.



This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' The Centre for Education and Youth. The Centre for Education and Youth is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood