

Written evidence submitted by the Thomas Dudley Group

I am CEO of Thomas Dudley Group Limited. We are a group of manufacturing businesses including foundries and plastic injection moulding based in Dudley in the West Midlands. We employ almost 500 people and parts that we have produced that you might easily recognise would be manhole covers, surface boxes and cats eyes in the road, the zinc diecast pieces for Monopoly and plastic toilet cisterns and fittings.

As an ex apprentice myself I know the benefits of the links between education and business. My involvement has included:

- Chair of the Black Country Skills Board
- Governor of Dudley College of Technology
- Trustee of Dudley Multi Academy Trust
- Director of Black Country and the Marches IOT

I also sit on a number of committees/steering groups including:

- Black Country LEP Employment Skills Board
- Metals Council Employment, Skills and Training group
- Dudley MBC Employment Skills Board.

Thomas Dudley work with a number of different parts of the education system.

- We provide a careers experience for year 6 learners from a local primary school so they can learn about careers and see manufacturing in a foundry and plastic injection moulding factory
- We provide a careers experience for all year 7 learners from the local academy trust so they can learn about careers and see manufacturing in a foundry and plastic injection moulding factory. This involves 1000 learners per year in lots of 30 on Wednesday mornings throughout the year.
- We provide work experience on an ad hoc basis throughout the year. This has included T Levels.
- We currently have 5 full time apprentices and another 25 learners on apprentice schemes in the business
- We are currently hosting teachers on the Black Country Careers Hub Staff Dream Big Teacher Encounter Scheme
- We are a Cornerstone Employer with the Careers and Enterprise Company.

One of the biggest issues that we have is actively engaging with schools. I liken it to the old sixth form dance where the girls sit on one side of the room and the boys sit on the other, both sides have every best intention of dancing but when the music actually starts no-one gets up. No one has the time as businesses have customers to please and schools are bound by a framework that gives no credit for employer engagement.

For Thomas Dudley this has changed in the last five years with engagement with the Black Country Skills Hub and Careers and Enterprise Company and a more enlightened local academy trust. The common language that is being encouraged by the Gatsby Benchmarks allows a level of monitoring and direct comparison so schools know where to concentrate their effort, and businesses can target their engagement accordingly. This is very different from before when businesses did not know who to engage with (Connexions, Prospects, Employment Business Partnerships etc) and most engagements ended up with disappointing results. I do not believe that a business attending a careers event that involves standing at a table in a sports hall with a number of other businesses for

3 hours while learners queue to collect whatever "goodies" you have constitutes a career engagement.

The system needs to find a way to allow learners to make an informed decision before year 9 about what career they might be interested in, and just as importantly what careers they do not want. I class it as success if a student attends TDL and feeds back that they do not want to be an engineer. Interestingly in a class of year 6 approximately half said they wanted to be engineers (including girls) but by year 7 they have moved into sports, hair and beauty and care. It will be another 2 years before they do their options and possibly 5 before they apply for a job but I believe some of the learners that visit Thomas Dudley will now consider an exciting career in manufacturing, even if it is in the support services of human resources, marketing or sales.

We will continue to take students of all ages around our business, but to reinforce this we need to engage the teachers. If they fully understand the needs of our business and also how their subject relates to what we do, they can make their lessons more interesting and relevant to the local labour market. We are working with the Black Country Skills Hub and the Dudley Academy Trust on a scheme that gets teachers into business. It was piloted last year but Covid restricted numbers to 50%, but this year every teacher and member of support staff will spend one day in a local business. This upskills the teacher and creates great relationships into the local community. The aim is for each teacher to include the experience into their lesson plans to make their subject interesting and relevant.

To close this circle I believe that the OFSTED framework should recognise engagements like this, move focus and funding away from qualifications and attainment to outcomes, and give marks in exams for students who can make relevant references to their career experiences.

I hope this submission is useful and I would be happy to host any member of the committee and show them what we do.

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