



**Skills Builder**  
PARTNERSHIP



# IMPACT REPORT

# 2021





One day, everyone will build the essential skills to succeed.

This year, 725 partners took us 1,468,611 opportunities closer to that goal.



## Welcome



**Tom Ravenscroft**  
Founder & CEO  
Skills Builder Partnership

**It has been a breakthrough year for the Skills Builder Partnership, and I'm excited to be able to share our 2021 Impact Report.**

### Our sense of urgency

The year has not been short of challenges on many fronts and for many of our 725 partners. We have all been affected by the pandemic and lockdowns.

At the same time, the work we do supporting everyone to build their essential skills has never been more important. These skills matter for children who have spent months isolated from their peers. They can support young people struggling to manage examinations and completing school or college under huge uncertainty. They are a vital for individuals navigating huge change in their workplaces or wider lives.

Our research publications this year have highlighted that all too often essential skills are correlated with demographics and opportunities to build them are not fairly distributed. At the same time, boosting essential skills is correlated with better school performance, higher self-efficacy and career ambitions, and with a substantial wage premium.

In the Partnership, we are all keenly aware of the urgency of what we are doing.

### A leap forward in reach

So I am encouraged that despite the circumstances, the Partnership has made huge strides towards our mission, across all of the different strands of our work.

As a result, the Partnership has delivered 1,468,611 opportunities for individuals to boost their essential skills this year. This combines the 187,783 individuals who built their essential skills through programmes that were run in schools and colleges by our central team. It includes a further 65,504 who benefited as individuals from our products. However, it also includes the wider impact of 1,215,324 opportunities for individuals to build their essential skills through approved programmes of partners.

This is a significant step forwards for our collective reach – a total more than four times that of the previous year.

We are also seeing meaningful progress on our national reach: through the Partnership, more than 75% of UK secondary schools and colleges now have some use of the Skills Builder approach.

### Looking forwards

We are ambitious for the coming years. We are piloting our work in seven countries in the coming year, as well as expanding to the other home nations of the UK.

Our work with employers is growing quickly, with 25 employers now embedding the Skills Builder approach into how they hire and grow their staff, helping to level the playing field and ease transitions into work.

We have a long way to go, but I'd like to congratulate all of our partners on an incredible year and an important step towards our shared mission.

**Tom Ravenscroft**  
September 2021





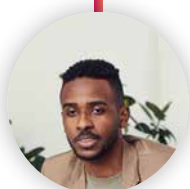
The challenge in education

In the classroom, teachers and parents have long been advocates for building essential skills – 97% of teachers and 88% of young people say that essential skills are at least as important as academic achievement for future success (Sutton Trust, 2017). Indeed, more than half of teachers surveyed (53%) felt that these skills were *more* important than academic achievements in future success.

Not only that, but essential skills like listening, problem solving, and staying positive all support classroom learning. This year, our research showed that essential skills at school are positively correlated with academic achievement, wellbeing, and career aspirations (Skills Builder Partnership, 2020).



However, developing essential skills is widely undervalued in the education system: in the Sutton Trust report, 72% of teachers felt their schools needed to do more to build those skills. As a result, essential skill levels are closely correlated with socio-economic background with children and young people having significantly lower levels of essential skills if they had lower parental engagement, were taught in an inclusion setting, or had a lower level of family income (Skills Builder Partnership, 2021).



And moving into employment

Employers are at least as enthusiastic about the critical importance of essential skills. Research from the CBI in 2018 indicated that employers ranked essential skills like leadership and teamwork as being more important than qualifications for success in a role.

In spring 2021, we published new research demonstrating a wage premium for under 24-year-olds of £3,200 for those essential skills, and up to £10,200 for those who were in roles that gave them the scope to fully deploy those skills (Skills Builder Partnership, 2021).



However, the Sutton Trust found that 68% of employers said that 18-year-old school leavers lack the skills to thrive in the workplace (2017). This is reflected by the CBI’s 2018 survey where 38% of employers were dissatisfied with the essential skills that young people demonstrated. The challenge is that employers often just expect these skills of new recruits, and half of young employees report having few opportunities to build those skills further (Skills Builder Partnership, 2021).



You can read all of our research and insight reports, including those highlighted here, at

[skillsbuilder.org/insights](https://skillsbuilder.org/insights)



Being clear on the skills that matter

The Skills Builder approach has been honed over a decade. The essential skills we focus on are defined as ‘those skills which are needed for almost any job and which support the application of technical skills and knowledge’.

These skills have been tested not just in the UK context, but through our work in South Africa, India, Oman, and the Czech Republic. They have been honed with the input of hundreds of employers, impact organisations, academics, and educators.

Providing a route map to build them across a lifetime

Launched in May 2020, the Skills Builder Universal authoritative guide to how to break down and build essential skills. It was developed over five years with input from leading organisations across education and employment, including the CBI, CIPD, Gatsby Foundation, the Careers & Enterprise Company and Business in the Community.

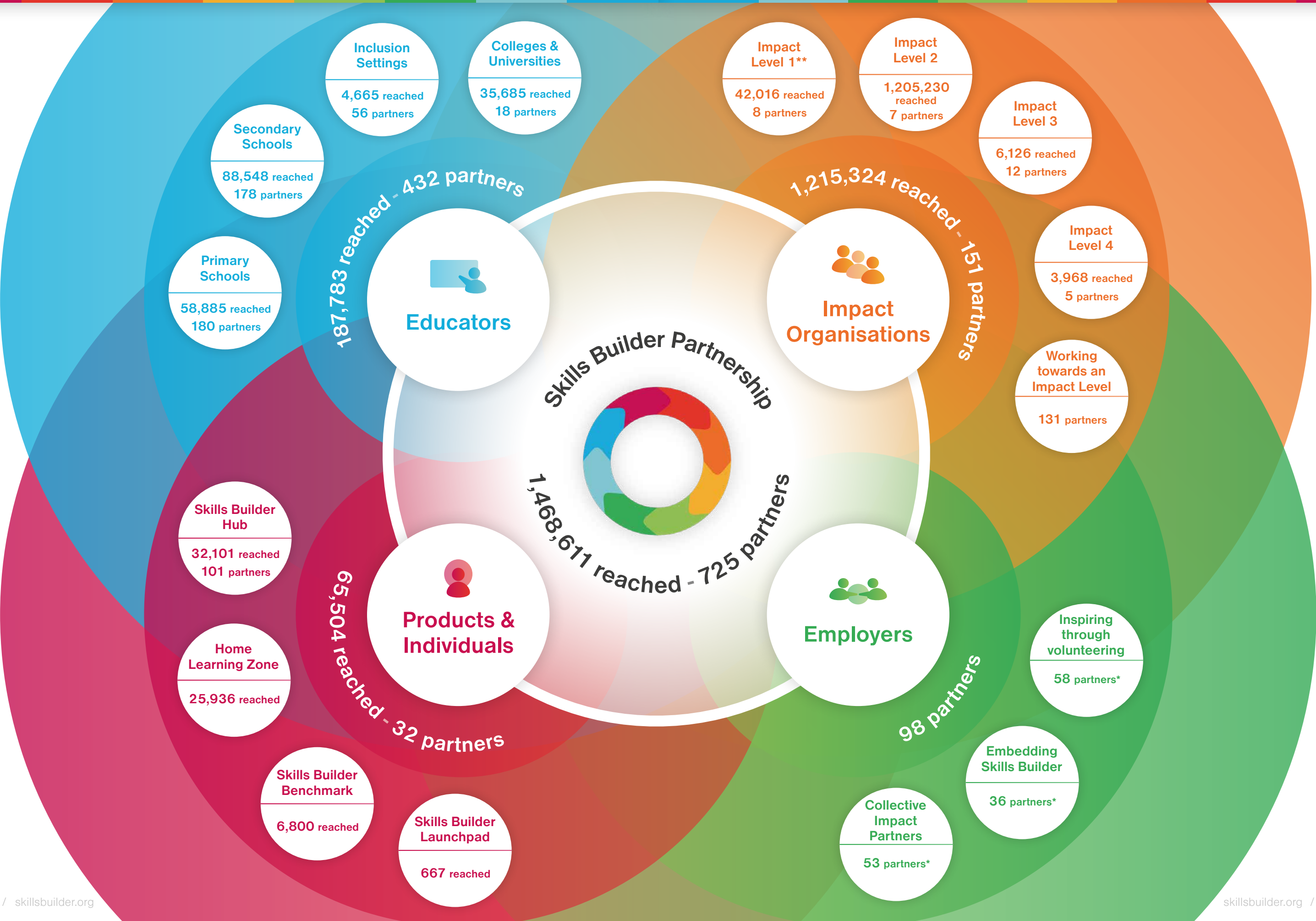


It provides the central common language and shared objectives for building essential skills. Its steps provide a shared route map that is used by all partners to align their efforts to build the essential skills of the individuals they work with. It can also be used as an assessment tool, helping to identify existing skills, and next steps for development.

The Universal Framework has also been widely adopted outside the formal Partnership – for example, as a recommended model for developing new apprenticeship standards and as a tool for T-Level students in England.

England’s latest statutory careers guidance for secondary schools and colleges stated that:

**“In schools, each subject should support students to identify the essential skills they develop and to identify the pathways to future careers... The Skills Builder Universal Framework shows how to build essential skills into the school or college curriculum.”**



\* Some employer partners are represented in more than one category  
\*\* Not included in total reached figure





432  
schools and colleges in Partnership

11,018  
teachers trained

187,783  
students

75%  
UK secondary schools & colleges  
reached by Partnership



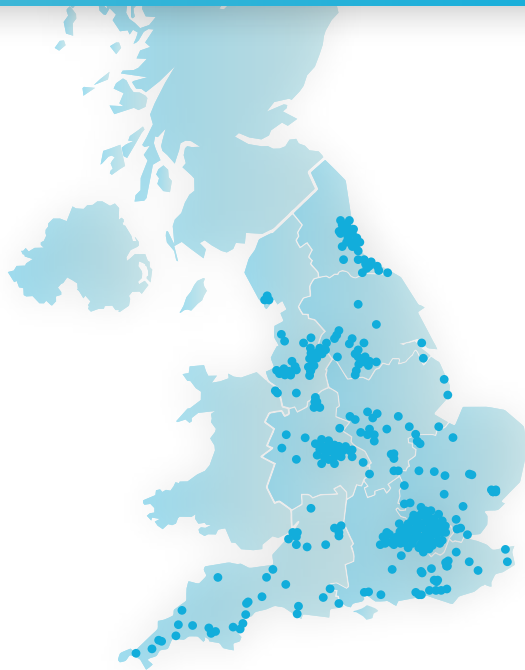
# Educators



## Educators: our approach

The Skills Builder Partnership was originally set up by teachers to ensure that every student had the opportunity to build the essential skills to succeed. We work with educators in a full range of settings: primary and secondary schools, special schools, alternative provision settings, colleges and universities – the full range of institutions.

Our flagship Accelerator programme is an intensive year-long programme to build the capacity of schools and colleges to take a best-practice approach to develop essential skills as a central part of the education they provide. We also support schools and colleges through Digital Membership, giving them access to the tools and curriculum they need to support their learners.



## How we work with educators

Over a decade's work, we have honed six key principles, which are best practice for building essential skills in education settings. As we work with our school and college partners, our focus is always on how to create sustainable change in the educational experience that students are getting. We do this by supporting a Skills Leader in the institution, providing training for all the teaching staff, and working as strategic partners with senior leaders to adapt policies and curriculum goals accordingly.

Our six principles are to:

### 1. Keep it simple

A consistent focus on the essential skills helps ensure everyone's shared understanding and makes building them as tangible as possible.



### 2. Start early, keep going

Starting as young as 3 years old and committing to keeping it up allows time for mastery, and ensures the skills help unlock other learning.



### 3. Measure it

Quantifying skills ensures a balanced understanding of strengths and weaknesses, highlights progress and demonstrates next steps.



### 4. Focus tightly

Building skills should build upon students' previous learning, and focus on achieving mastery by giving the skills the time and focus they need.



### 5. Keep practising

To accelerate progress in the essential skills, they should be applied and reinforced elsewhere in the curriculum and outside it.



### 6. Bring it to life

Keep it relevant by taking children and young people out of the classroom and by bringing real-life problems and challenges into it.



Schools and colleges who demonstrated best practice in embedding these principles achieved a **Skills Builder Award** this year. In this inaugural year, we are pleased that **302 schools and colleges** achieved an Award.





## Our approach to measuring impact



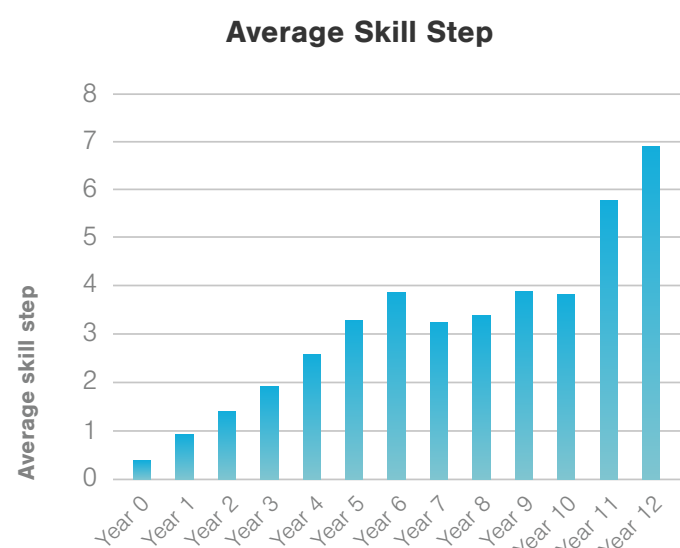
We use the Skills Builder Framework as the model for assessing essential skills. For this analysis, we are using the assessment tool which is built into the Skills Builder Hub, which asks teachers to assess the proportion of their class who are able to demonstrate the different skill steps.

These proportions are then used to create an aggregate skill score of between 0 and 15 for the skill.

Teachers are then encouraged to revisit this assessment subsequently in the year to track any changes.

This year, we tracked a cohort of 1,360 groups representing approximately 40,000 individual students. We excluded the results of groups who were demonstrating progress more than one standard deviation greater than the average to avoid outliers.

## The starting point: a challenge



At the start of the programme, teachers complete an assessment of their classes.

These assessments give us a view of how essential skills are generally built over a child or young person's time in school before a Skills Builder programme.

What we see is that through primary school, students are making progress of 0.55 steps per year. While this consistent progress is encouraging, unfortunately the rate of progress is inadequate for children to reach the target of Step 6 by Year 6.

More concerning is at secondary school, where progress stalls and, on average, young people are making negligible progress for several years.



## Our programmes accelerate progress

The good news is that tracked across the year, we are able to demonstrate meaningful additional progress for groups where our resources are being used, and further progress for programmes that are using the Accelerator programme, particularly for those in their second year:

**+0.55**  
steps' progress  
per year

**Schools without  
a Skills Builder  
programme**

**+0.93**  
steps' progress  
per year

**Schools using our  
digital resources  
including the Hub**

**+1.15**  
steps' progress  
per year

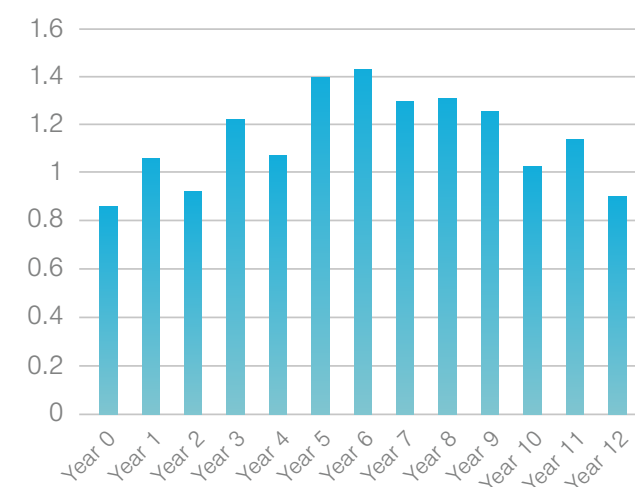
**Schools using  
the Accelerator  
programme**

**+1.21**  
steps' progress  
per year

**Schools on second  
/ subsequent years  
of Accelerator**

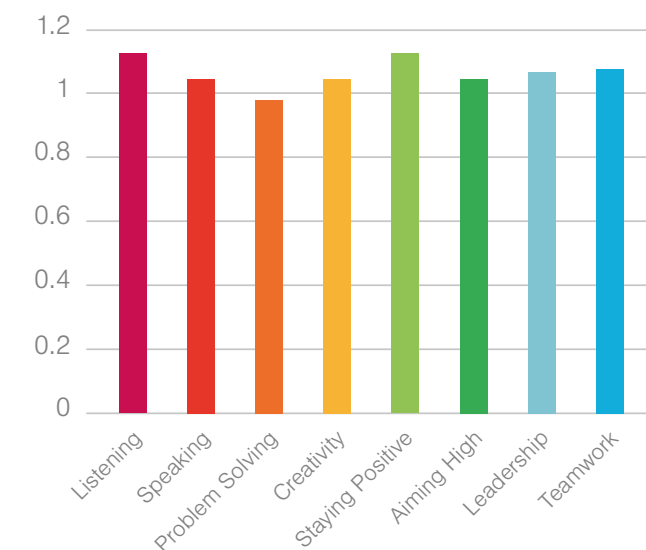
## Progress in all skills and at all ages

Progress by year group for Accelerator schools



This year we secured progress for learners of all ages – showing that it is possible to close the gap at secondary school and college.

Progress by skill for Accelerator schools



We were also able to demonstrate progress across all eight of the skills. This is important, because all skills are important to students' future success.



## Educators: Case studies



### PRIMARY SCHOOL Mablethorpe Primary Academy

*This content was written by Mablethorpe Primary Academy*



**Skills Builder**  
*Gold Award*

We wanted to embed the essential skills in our curriculum in order to help our children raise their aspirations and expand their knowledge of the working world. We felt that Skills Builder was the best programme to use to fulfil this aim and help teach our children the skills they will need in life and in the world of work.



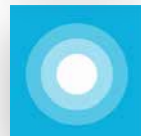
**Keep it simple:** We have displayed the essential skills icons in every classroom from Reception to Year 6, so the children use them every day. Every week we teach cross-curricular lessons focusing on a particular skill, using our own curriculum overview and resources from the Skills Builder Hub.



**Start early, keep going:** Our curriculum overview shows how we can link our lessons every week to a different essential skill. This gives the children time to focus on the particular skill they are working on. During the time when children were learning from home, we encouraged our families to use the Skills Builder Home Learning Zone.



**Measure it:** We regularly assess our pupils using the data assessment tool on the Skills Builder Hub which is fantastic for tracking their progress. Our children also assess themselves and use a sticker system to show where they are with their development and application of a particular skill.



**Focus tightly:** Students in our school take part in weekly Skills Builder lessons which may be stand alone or cross-curricular. The short stories and videos on the Skills Builder Hub can be used as introductions to a particular skill. We make teaching the skills a priority so that the children can use them regularly and see their own progress.



**Keep practising:** Teachers can use the curriculum overview which is linked to each essential skill, so pupils can practice these skills in everyday lessons. Throughout whole school projects (Careers Weeks, Enterprise Week), we have brought Skills Builder to life in the classroom! The pupils use the key Skills Builder language when they work together and know what it means.



**Bring it to life:** In our academy we have held Virtual Careers Weeks and an Enterprising Week in which the pupils are provided with new opportunities to learn about the world of work. We plan opportunities for our children to work on class projects in order to develop their essential skills, through real-life projects.

The Accelerator programme helped us to plan explicit and cross-curricular lessons teaching the essential skills which pupils will use in their everyday learning and in the world of work. The children enjoyed working on new projects and learning how to develop new skills in every area of the curriculum.

We are continuing as part of the Partnership as we have found the resources to be invaluable and are looking forward to using some of the new projects next year to enrich our learning of the essential skills.



## Educators: Case studies



### SPECIAL SCHOOL Woodlands School

*This content was written by Woodlands School*



**Skills Builder**  
*Silver Award*

Woodlands School is a broad spectrum special needs school in Coleshill, North Warwickshire. We originally became involved in the programme because we loved the ethos, language and resources. We have a positive and aspirational goal to get as many people with learning disabilities into paid employment as possible.



**Keep it simple:** Firstly, we got our teachers to see the value of starting exploration of the skills from an early age. Next, we passed the enthusiasm to the students through lessons, games and consistent use of the visuals and language to prompt consolidation in context. Lastly, we have shown our parents what Skills Builder is all about.



**Start early, keep going:** Staff understand that the essential skills are things that their pupils explore and encounter each day in natural play or social interactions. All staff in all classes, right from nursery age, now vocally highlight skills to learners, giving praise where it's due, raising enthusiasm.



**Measure it:** All teachers have use of the Skills Builder Hub. We are tracking how often the students get to explore the essential skills through the curriculum by adding specific Employability lessons to the long term plans. Then, within medium term plans, the language is highlighted so teachers can see at a glance what to promote in which context.



**Focus tightly:** Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) targets are tightly linked to the Expanded Framework meaning differentiated and individual interventions can be planned and summative assessed using our EHCP tracker. Woodlands has a focus skill of the month so we work together to promote the same language at the same time.



**Keep practising:** Teachers understand that the essential skills are used in all that we do as adults but also all that the students do as children. Because of this we now highlight the language with more passion and adaptability. Our students not only hear the language, they understand what that skill means and how to apply it.



**Bring it to life:** At Woodlands we bring the essential skills to life in literally everything. This year students have just started exploring the use of the interactive passports to track skill development. Next year, the use of the passports will be spread through the whole of the Sixth Form Curriculum.

We are building a community of like minded teachers at Woodlands, and we love the fact that the Skills Builder staff also welcome us into the essential skills community. This helps to support our delivery of the programme, become skilled practitioners and link with other schools.

We wish to continue working with others in the Skills Builder Partnership to make our provision even more accessible, to share ideas and assist in feeding back to assist with adapting or adding to the programme. We have also built the Framework into the curriculums and long term plans for the whole school and are excited to see how it develops.





## Educators: Case studies



## Educators: Case studies



### SECONDARY SCHOOL Kingsbury Green Academy

*This content was written by Kingsbury Green Academy*



We are a rapidly-improving secondary academy in rural North Wiltshire. Our careers vision is for pupils to develop employability skills, courage and confidence, being able to articulate positively about themselves. We want all teachers to advocate employability skills in lessons, for pupils to link learning and the working world.



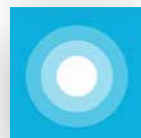
**Keep it simple:** All classrooms have the Skills Builder skill icons on the walls, and they're built into class lesson resources too, so all staff are actively involved in building essential skills. We have a Skill of the Term focus in our regular newsletters that go out to parents and our employer links.



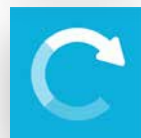
**Start early, keep going:** Essential skills are introduced, referred to and developed in PSHE careers lessons from Years 7-13. Students set targets, highlighting which skills they would like to work on and develop. Students build skills in other careers activities, such as Takeover Day in Years 8/9, work experience in Years 10/12 and through mentoring programmes.



**Measure it:** Students reflect on their essential skills during PSHE careers lessons and create action plans to improve them which are shared with Careers Advisers and parents too. During work experience, employers assess students at the end, certifying their progress.



**Focus tightly:** Year 7-9s use the skills steps to focus their development and teachers track when they have successfully demonstrated a step. We make use of the Skills Builder short lessons to directly teach steps of the skills, as well as working with work experience partners too.



**Keep practising:** Through curriculum lessons, the tutor programme and the careers activities, our students have the chance to recognise the skills and practice them. This continues into our Sixth Form where Skills Builder development modules and reflection are being integrated into the curriculum. A Challenge Day in Year 8 also helps students to practice the essential skills.



**Bring it to life:** The employers we work with integrate Skills Builder and essential skills language into their communications – for example, in video content for students, in assemblies and in planning outcomes from work experience. Employers also help our students to build essential skills into their CVs.

I feel that Skills Builder has brought about a common language that has connected the Careers Department with the Curriculum Departments, helping us strengthen our work as a whole school. Skills Builder has given us a central framework where we can share experiences and outcomes and share success stories that can be then implemented in different subject areas. It has given us a way to communicate with parents to celebrate students' successes with a clear focus and familiar language.

The credibility and evidence behind the essential skills has given us a confident focus that we can use to communicate with employers, who can then understand how we are trying to support the students and make them work ready. We feel like we're all in this together.



### COLLEGE Newcastle College

*This content was written by Newcastle College*



**Skills Builder  
Gold Award**

The Skills Builder Award has proved an invaluable external framework in planning, developing and implementing essential skills in our curriculum since 2019. We aim to signpost the essential skills at every opportunity for students to see the relevance of activities and experience meaningful engagements with stakeholders.



**Keep it simple:** As part of their tutorial engagement, every student receives a reflective log book promoting the eight essential skills for success. The booklet is then used by the student to review and evaluate progress, and support consistent development - in consultation with their personal tutor.



**Start early, keep going:** Planning of skills development resources is aligned to engage all students, irrespective of their academic level. The promotion and active application of essential skills takes place at every stage of the careers guidance journey, from joining all the way to leaving.



**Measure it:** It's important to keep a track of progress when developing essential skills, so at Newcastle College, we assess learners' progress through regular student discussion. This includes one-to-one interactions where action plans for further practice and development are agreed.



**Focus tightly:** Every one of our students receives a weekly timetable based on developing the eight essential skills for success as they progress through their course. Both students and staff record their initial targets for each essential skill based on their current abilities and qualifications.



**Keep practising:** Students are proactively encouraged to demonstrate and apply their understanding of essential skills through a broad range of contextualised vocational projects, work experience and engagement with employers. This also includes internal skills competitions, progressing to external national recognition in World Skills competitions.



**Bring it to life:** Employer engagement and exposure to the world of work is used so students know what is required in their chosen vocation. Virtual work experiences allow students to engage with employers online, providing opportunities to communicate directly, and groups from different curriculum areas work together to resolve business challenges.

Using the Accelerator Programme and embedding the eight essential skills has allowed the college to self-assess itself on what it delivers and identify where improvements still needs to be made. With many students being taught remotely over the last year, being able to use essential skills has been particularly important.

It has helped to ensure that our students are fully aware of the importance of developing new skills, personal characteristics and behaviour traits associated with their intended career destinations.

151  
impact organisations

32  
approved programmes

1,215,324  
opportunities delivered



Impact  
Organisations

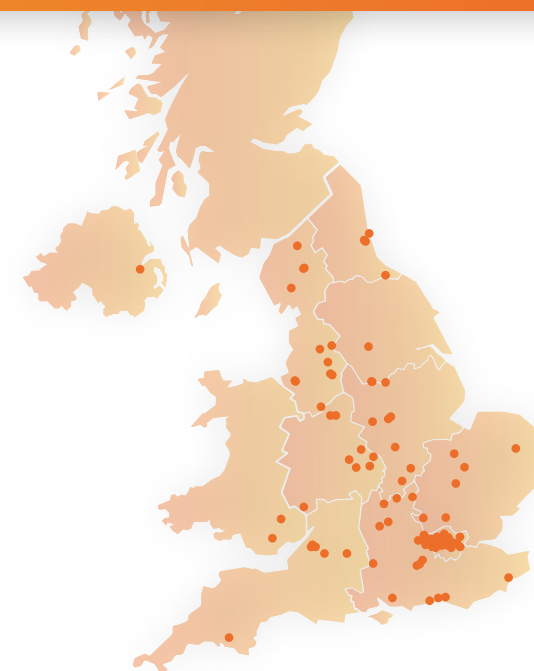


### Impact organisations: our focus

The power of the Skills Builder Partnership comes from the committed alignment of all of our partners, but close collaboration with other impact organisations plays a critical role.

Our partners are a diverse group covering areas including employability, sports, the arts, volunteering, university access, parental engagement, inclusion, and retraining. Each brings expertise and a great track record from their focus area.

By aligning together, it means that the individuals we support can better learn and practice their essential skills in a diverse range of settings. This multiplies our individual efforts, and also means that we can learn from each other.



### How we work with organisations

We work with impact organisations to build their capacity to fully adopt and embed the Skills Builder approach in their work in three main areas:



#### Programme design

We support partners to embed best practice in building essential skills using the Skills Builder approach. Programmes can then achieve an approved Impact Level.



#### Impact measurement

Partners benefit from using skills measurement tools and best practice we have seen. They can also benchmark impact against peer organisations to learn more.



#### Staff training

Finally, we train the teams and volunteers of partners to most effectively use the Skills Builder approach, as well as the learning tools and resources we have built.

### The impact for organisations

91%

of organisations

were very satisfied with their experience as part of the Partnership

98%

of organisations

were very satisfied with the training and support received

75%

of organisations

of impact organisations see being a member as being important to achieving their mission





## Impact Organisations: Our network

### Our partners

Over 2020-21 we were pleased to support 151 impact organisation partners. We also worked with a further 17 employers on their impact programmes. Partners commit to aligning their work that focuses on building essential skills with the Skills Builder Framework. Doing so makes it easier for the individuals who we all support to better connect the different opportunities that they have to build essential skills. Partners join one of twelve clusters, giving them greater opportunities to connect and collaborate.



## Impact Organisations: Our network

### Impact Levels

This year we have introduced Impact Levels, to help to assess the impact of partners' programmes and to recognise programmes that are aligned to the Skills Builder approach. To achieve an Impact Level, programmes go through a careful review process. Successful programmes are included in the Impact Directory, and their reach is include in the overall reach of the Partnership.

The Skills Builder Impact Levels can be achieved at four levels:



**Skills Builder**  
Raising awareness  
of essential skills

#### Impact Level 1: Raising awareness of essential skills

Programmes that are successful at this level make individuals more aware of the eight essential skills and their importance for success.



**Skills Builder**  
Reflecting on  
essential skills

#### Impact Level 2: Reflecting on essential skills

Programmes that are successful at this level give individuals the opportunity to become more self-aware of their skill levels and next steps by reflecting on their essential skills.



**Skills Builder**  
Practising  
essential skills

#### Impact Level 3: Practising essential skills

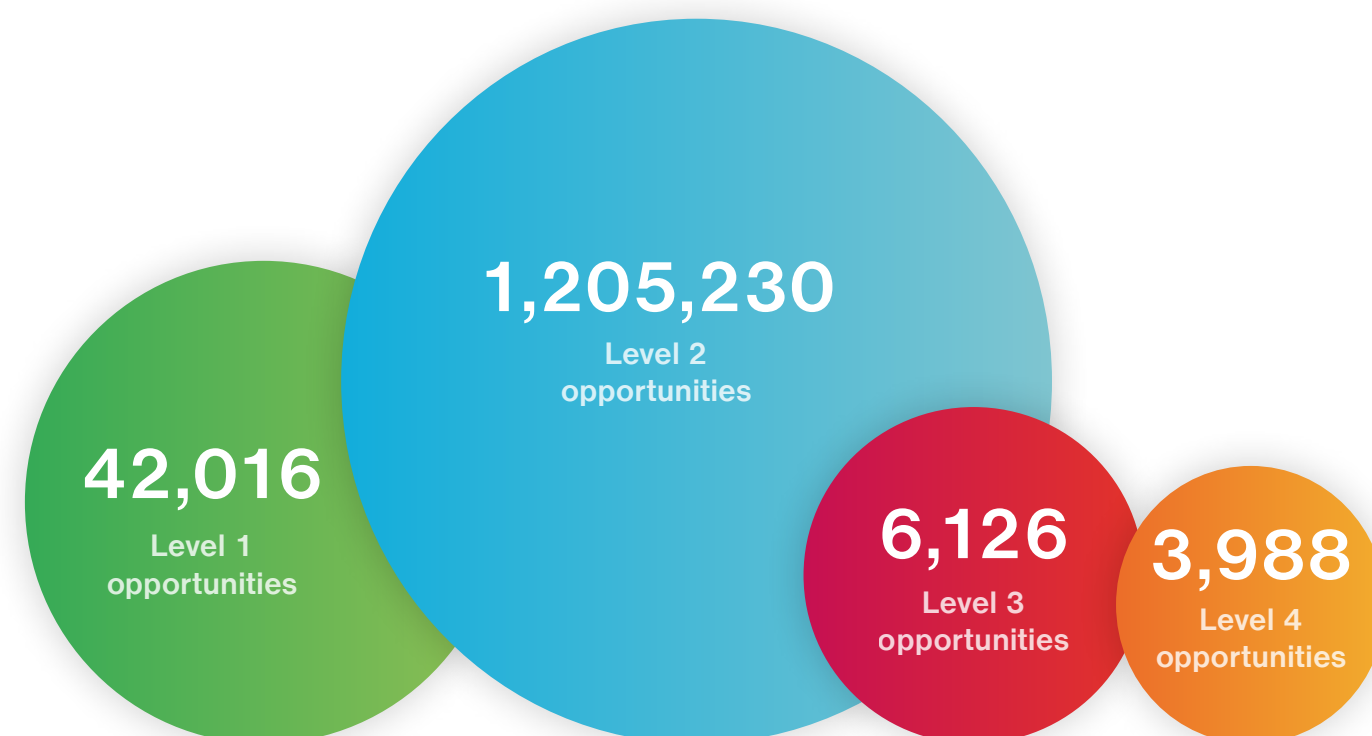
Programmes that are successful at this level give individuals the opportunity to apply and practise their essential skills and the steps.



**Skills Builder**  
Progressing in  
essential skills

#### Impact Level 4: Progressing in essential skills

Programmes that are successful here combine the chance for individuals to reflect on their essential skills before and after applying them, with programme content that is specifically targeted on making steps of progress.





## Impact Organisations: Case studies



## Impact Organisations: Case studies



Careers & Employability

Sports

Youth Provision

### Sports and Employability Programme



#### Skills Builder

Progressing in essential skills

Street League is the UK's leading sport for employment charity. We support young people who live in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the UK to learn the skills they need to overcome their practical and personal barriers and become economically active. Sport is at the heart of what we do and what makes us successful. We support young people holistically, recognising the inextricable links between wellbeing, health and employment.

We use the power of sport to help young people, aged 14 to 30, who face personal barriers to employment to improve their wellbeing, secure employment and have a brighter future. We work in schools, communities, and with employers to equip young people with the confidence, motivation, essential skills and qualifications needed to succeed in the world of work.

Our sports and employability academies for unemployed young people, is an exciting step in our journey to preventing – as well as 'treating' – youth unemployment and in-work poverty. Our programmes develop the essential skills, self-worth and sense of belonging young people need to thrive and move into high quality employment, education or training.



Arts & Culture

Careers & Employability

Outdoors & Adventure

Parents & Community

Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths

Sports

Volunteering & Social Action

### Children's University Online



#### Skills Builder

Reflecting on essential skills

Children's University, encourages, tracks, and celebrates children's participation in learning beyond the classroom. We do this because they know it makes a difference; participation in this kind of learning is good for mental health and well-being, supports social mobility, and gives children and young people the opportunity to develop skills in new and innovative ways that aren't always prioritised by the curriculum.

As a member of the Skills Builder Partnership, we make use of the Skills Builder Framework when validating the learning activities that we promote to children. All activities that are entered on our digital platform, Children's University Online, are tagged with up to three essential skills from the Framework.

The impact of this is proven to be positive and the new digital platform provides actionable data to understand the type of learning and categorisation of learning opportunities and skills developed. This approach also helps children to be able to celebrate the skills that they are using and developing along the way



Arts & Culture

Careers & Employability

Curriculum Support

Youth Provision

### Essential Skills through Hobbies



#### Skills Builder

Practising essential skills

PencilBricks is a social enterprise based in India that believes in making essential skills easy, fun and accessible to every individual. *Essential Skills Through Hobbies* is a student internship programme where students (age 13- 18 years) join us to learn skills, practise and apply them. We integrate essential skills in hobbies so that learners have opportunities to develop them through their passions.

This programme exposes students to hobbies like photography, doodle art, videography and blogging. Children and young people create, experiment, question, conduct research and self evaluate their work. The programme's curriculum is problem-centred: the problem statements for each week have a progression and are aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Along with the problem, students are introduced to one step of the essential skill each week. They work on building a solution to the problem using the steps of the skill learnt each week and their hobby. As there is a progression in the steps, each week students apply the previous week's step learnt too. Once the student submits their artefact (solutions), they self evaluate to reflect upon their approaches and improvise. Detailed feedback by the team is also shared, accelerating students' progress.



Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths

### Neon



#### Skills Builder

Raising awareness of essential skills

Engineering UK is a not-for-profit organisation, which works in partnership with the engineering community to inspire tomorrow's engineers and increase the number and diversity of young people choosing academic and vocational pathways into engineering. They aim to grow the collective impact of work across the sector to help young people understand what engineering is, how to get into it, and be motivated and able to access the educational and training opportunities on the way.

Their platform NEON, brings together the UK's best engineering experiences and inspiring careers resources to help teachers bring STEM to life, with real-world examples of engineering. Finding engaging activities to show where engineering is used in the real world can take time; NEON create brilliant experiences and are linked to up-to-date careers information, as well as highlighting authentic applications of engineering.

The platform also helps teachers to find activities and exercise that develop the essential skills most relevant to their students, allowing them to make links and frame discussion around the industry. This is vital for raising awareness of essential skills and how they transfer to different settings.



98  
employer partners

36  
working towards Excellence Standards

57  
providing volunteers

53  
supporting Collective Impact



# Employers



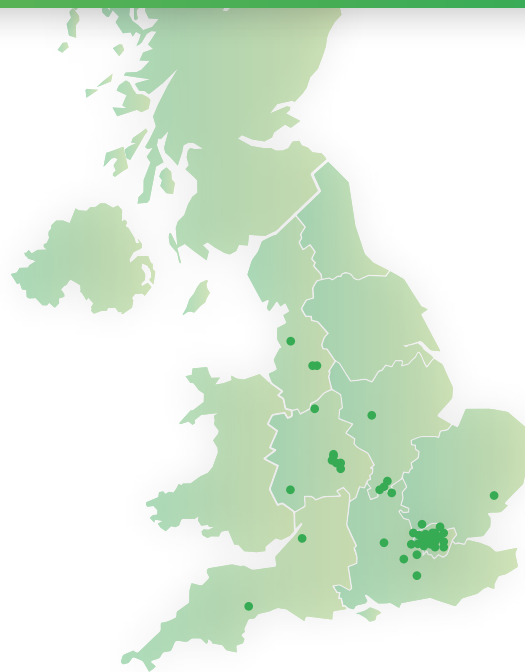
## Employers: Our approach

### Employers: our focus

Employers have always been a vital part of the Skills Builder Partnership, but over the last two years it has been exciting to see a shift in how we work together. Increasingly, employers are using the Skills Builder Universal Framework inside their own businesses, joining up the journey of building essential skills from education into the workplace.

We are seeing a growing number of employers putting the approach into practice in:

- Supporting building essential skills in education and for individuals who are outside training, education or employment.
- Ensuring objectivity and transparency in recruitment, supporting diversity, inclusion and social mobility.
- Engaging all staff to boost their essential skills across their careers



### How we work with employers

Our approach with employers is focused on collaborating to build capacity by embedding the Skills Builder approach across three broad areas:



#### Inspire

Employer partners might run workshops in schools and colleges, host learners in their workplace, or sponsor schools or colleges to take part in Skills Builder programmes.



#### Hire

Employer partners use the Universal Framework to design specific, objective exercises to uncover essential skills. They also share their approach, to build transparency.



#### Grow

The approach can also support the training of apprentices or individuals much further into their careers. Skills assessment tools and learning materials are often used here.

### The impact for employers

4.7/5

overall satisfaction  
of employee volunteers

4.5/5

overall satisfaction  
of employee volunteers that  
volunteering had boosted their  
understanding essential skills

100%

of employees  
on our training saw  
essential skills as important  
for their future



## Employers: Our network

### Our partners

Over the last year, we were pleased to work with 77 employer partners across the different strands of our employer programme.

57 employers supported the Inspire strand of our work. This included running workshops with students in Skills Builder schools and colleges, or providing online learning content for the Skills Builder Hub or Home Learning Zone.

36 employers were working towards achieving the Excellence Standards. This is explored more on the opposite page, but crucially meant putting the Skills Builder approach to work in their organisations to achieve best practice in how they Hire or Grow their staff, as well as creating their own Inspire programmes.

Finally, many of these employers were also part of the group of 53, alongside foundations and other donors, who financially supported the delivery of our work with schools, colleges, and impact organisations. We thank these supporters as Collective Impact Partners on the final pages of this Impact Report.



## Employers: Our network

### Excellence Standards

This year we have introduced Impact Levels, to help to assess the impact of partners' programmes and to recognise programmes that are aligned to the Skills Builder approach. To achieve an Impact Level, programmes go through a careful review process. Successful programmes are included in the Impact Directory, and their reach is include in the overall reach of the Partnership.



### Excellence Standards



#### Inspire: Outreach

Supports children and young people to build essential skills

Provides opportunities for individuals out of the labour market to boost their essential skills

Builds the capacity of the education and wider system to develop essential skills across society



#### Hire: Recruitment

Uses the Skills Builder Framework as an objective method of assessing an applicant's essential skills

Provides applicants with a fair chance to show their essential skills through the recruitment process

Provides applicants with information about the essential skills which are required and developed through the role



#### Grow: Staff Development

Encourages every employee to improve their essential skills throughout their career

Supports employees to reflect and receive feedback on their essential skills

Provides opportunities to support employees at all career stages to build their essential skills

Recognises and celebrates improvements in essential skills





## Employers: Case studies



Argent



Inspire

Argent strives to maximise the positive social and economic impact of major urban regeneration projects such as Kings Cross and through Argent Related's developments at Brent Cross Town and Tottenham Hale. Enabling local young people to learn about careers in the built environment and develop the essential skills needed for success through school engagement and work placements is a key part of this vision.

Together with Skills Builder, Argent is developing a modular work placement programme supporting participants to understand, demonstrate and articulate their essential skills in the context of the built environment sector. A 'golden thread' of essential skills development runs throughout the workshops and communications delivered in partnership with local schools, the application process and the work placement itself. The modular structure enables teams working across multiple developments to deliver a consistent experience that is also tailored to the local area.



Network Rail



Grow

When designing a programme of support for a six-month work placement, Network Rail were keen to ensure that each participant left the programme equipped with the skills to succeed in any role they went on to. The participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds with a diverse range of previous experience so providing wrap-around support, that could be tailored to meet the needs of each individual, was a key priority for the team. To support these goals, Network Rail worked with Skills Builder to provide the Essential Skills Academy, our flagship skills development course for individuals. Delivered online, the interactive ten-session course provided training and guidance to enable participants to identify, practise and articulate their essential skills.

Alongside the live workshops, participants assessed their areas for development and measured their progress at key milestones using our reflection tool, Skills Builder Benchmark. They also took part in self-directed learning, completing short courses on skill steps they would like to develop using Skills Builder Launchpad.

Network Rail also wanted to ensure consistency between the course content and the support provided by line managers and mentors to help participants recognise how they were using their skills in-role. We worked together with their training partner, National Skills Academy for Rail, to provide guidance and training for line managers in how to nurture essential skills in participants and provide tangible feedback.

As a result of the course and support provided by line managers, we have really been able to see participants grow into their roles and thrive in the workplace. One candidate noted; "In my previous jobs I have always kept to myself. After participating in the workshops, I have been speaking to more people in my workplace which is helping me grow in my role and giving me the opportunity to learn from more experience and specialist people." The Network Rail team are now exploring building essential skills into their wider recruitment and development processes.



## Employers: Case studies



Thames Water



Hire

Thames Water are passionate about developing the essential skills of employees at all levels of their business. Alongside using the Skills Builder Framework to support their skills strategy, they have also begun embedding essential skills within their recruitment practices to support their goals of transparency and inclusivity. So far, Thames Water has focused on using the Framework to support their outreach, apprenticeship and Kickstart recruitment. They worked with us to map their vacancies and apprenticeship standards to the Skills Builder Framework, using the clear and consistent language of the Framework to break down complex concepts and minimise barriers to entry.

To level the playing field for their candidates, they provided them with information on the eight essential skills before their interview so they could fully understand how to best showcase their skills at the assessment centre. When designing the interview structure, the Thames Water team worked to ensure that each activity provided candidates with clear opportunities to showcase specific essential skills and skill steps that would be needed for the role. The interview scripts, questions and assessment criteria were all aligned to the Skills Builder Framework to ensure a consistent approach across the team. Finally, both successful and unsuccessful candidates were provided with feedback on their essential skills after the interview to enable them to use the experience to support the next steps in their career journey.



Accenture



Lead

Accenture is committed to being a responsible company and citizen and as such champions the development of skills needed to thrive in the digital economy, aligning with the eight essential skills covered in the Skills Builder Framework. Together with Skills Builder, Accenture has enabled 55 schools across England to improve essential skills education for 8-14 year olds through our year-long capacity building programme, the Skills Builder Accelerator.

As a result, over 621 teachers completed Skills Builder training with 84% reporting increased confidence in teaching essential skills. In turn, over 19,000 students were supported to make accelerated progress in essential skills as a core part of their education. 50 schools went on to achieve the Bronze, Silver or Gold Skills Builder Award - a new kitemark helping schools to evidence and communicate their commitment to essential skills education to parents and the wider community.

Simon Wareham, Skills Leader at Sandhill View Academy in Sunderland who were able to complete the programme thanks to Accenture's support explains: "We strongly believe in the development of skills in supporting our students to be prepared for their future life outside of school, just as important, if not more important, than academic qualifications. Being part of the Accelerator programme has really helped us to drive forward the development of these skills and to change the culture of the school."

4

Skills Builder products in 2021-21

65,504

active learners in 2020-21

62

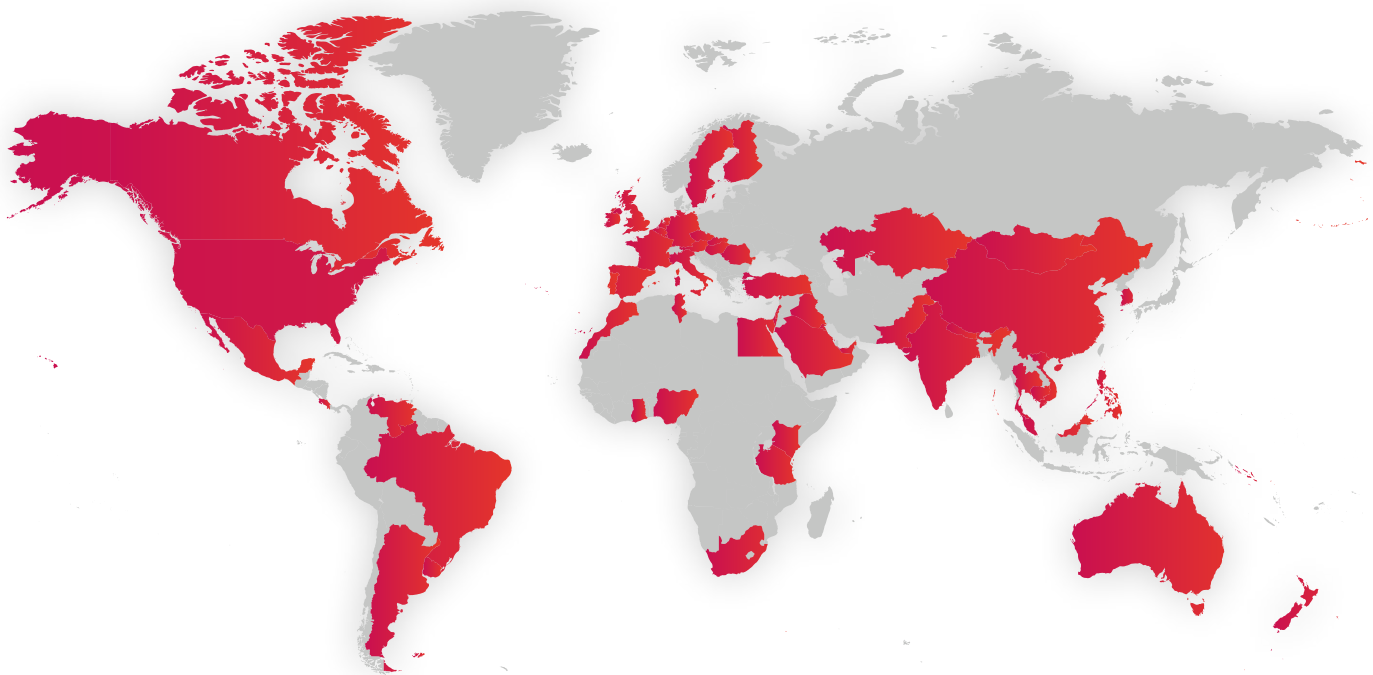
countries reached in 2020-21



# Products & Individuals



## Products & Individuals: Our focus



Our mission is to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to succeed. While our work with educators, employers and impact organisations is critical for making that impact, we also want to ensure that any individual who wants to build their essential skills has access to top quality resources and materials to be able to do so.

Over this year, we have developed two new products which are designed to cater to individuals who are taking ownership of their own essential skills development – Benchmark and Launchpad. Both of these products have already shown their worth, and are being adopted and promoted by colleges, employers and impact organisations working with adults.

They complement our two existing products: Skills Builder Hub, which is designed to be used by teachers in the classroom at primary and secondary level, and the Home Learning Zone which is designed for parents and carers of primary-age children to use outside of their classroom learning.

We're pleased to see active usage of these tools not just in the UK but in 62 further countries, making essential skills development accessible to all.

### The impact







## For Educators, Parents & Carers

We have continued to grow our two core products for parents and carers over the past year – Skills Builder Hub and our Home Learning Zone.



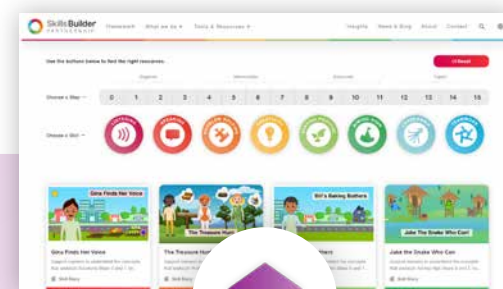
### Skills Builder Hub

The Skills Builder Hub opens up the opportunity for schools and colleges to build their essential skills wherever in the world they are. The Hub includes:

- Tools for teachers to assess the essential skills of their class
- More than 300 short lessons to directly teach skill steps
- 20 extended projects and 15 challenge days that give the opportunity to apply and practice skills
- Training materials to boost teachers' confidence

The Skills Builder Hub is widely used by schools and colleges on the Accelerator programme. Excluding them, in 2020-21, the Skills Builder Hub had more than 3,600 active users from 62 different countries. These uses supported 32,101 learners to build their essential skills.

[skillsbuilder.org/hub](https://skillsbuilder.org/hub)



### Home Learning Zone

The Home Learning Zone was originally created in April 2020 as a response to the Covid crisis. It provides activities that children can complete with their parents and carers.

The Home Learning Zone includes:

- Stories that introduce the skills for children
- Regular challenges that the whole family can get involved with
- Ideas for projects and activities that parents and children can take part in
- Guidance for parents about how they can talk about essential skills with their children, and support their classroom learning

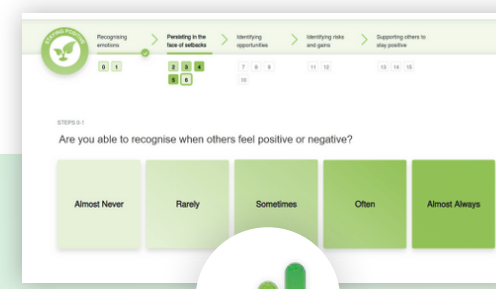
In 2020-21, the Home Learning Zone had nearly 26,000 individual users. For our calculations of reach, we make the conservative estimate that each individual user was supporting one child to build their essential skills.

[skillsbuilder.org/homelearning](https://skillsbuilder.org/homelearning)



## Products & Individuals: Our focus

Over this year, we have launched two new products in line with our mission that everyone should have the opportunity to build their essential skills:



### Skills Builder Benchmark

Skills Builder Benchmark was launched in 2020 as a tool to support individual self-reflection on their essential skills.

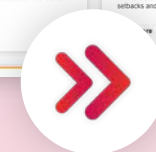
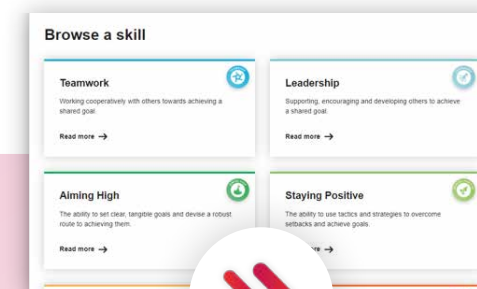
The tool has been designed for individuals throughout their lives, and it is widely used by employers and impact organisations, as well as by secondary schools, colleges and universities.

Skills Builder Benchmark includes:

- Structured self-reflection questions covering the entire Skills Builder Framework
- Feedback reports on areas of strength and suggested focuses for development

Since its launch earlier this year, more than 42,642 self-reflections have been completed by 6,800 individual users.

[skillsbuilder.org/benchmark](https://skillsbuilder.org/benchmark)



### Skills Builder Launchpad

Skills Builder Launchpad has been piloted this year for the first time. It acts as a powerful complement to Benchmark by supporting individuals to build their own essential skills.

The Launchpad tool includes:

- Short learning modules featuring video, audio and written explanations for how to build each skill step in turn
- Activities and ideas for how those skills steps can be applied and practiced in the real world
- Space to record reflections and evidence of achieving a particular skill step

Launchpad has been piloted since February 2021 with 667 users and is set to scale substantially over the coming year.

[skillsbuilder.org/launchpad](https://skillsbuilder.org/launchpad)

Our funders

As a not-for-profit organisation with an ambitious mission, none of the achievements of the last year would have been possible without the generous support of our Collective Impact Partners.

These partners are critical for supporting our programmes: They fund the first year of the Accelerator programme for eligible schools and colleges. They also help to support our work scaling with Impact Organisations, supporting them to embed and make the most of the Skills Builder approach in their work.

Much of our innovation is also underpinned by the support of these partners. For example, in the last year they have supported the development of Skills Builder Benchmark and Launchpad as two potentially transformational products. They have also supported us to expand into new geographical areas.

Finally, our Collective Impact Partners are often powerful advocates for the wider systemic change that we need. They encourage businesses, educators, and impact organisations to work together and to better align our efforts.

We're grateful for all of their support.



**Skills Builder is a partnership on a mission. We are committed to the goal that one day, everyone will build the essential skills they need to succeed.**

The last year has been a transformational one for our central team and the wider Partnership. The more than four-fold increase in our reach reflects the growing momentum of our work, and the enthusiasm for a shared, effective approach to building essential skills.

This both presents a huge opportunity and a substantial responsibility. If we can continue to build engagement with the Skills Builder approach as the de facto model for essential skills development, we could reach a tipping point where investing in these skills becomes the norm.

Realising the opportunity in education

To realise this opportunity, we are committed to continuing to grow our ability to build the capacity of educators and impact organisations to take on the Skills Builder approach. We have made real progress on this in secondary and college education where 75% of secondary schools and colleges in England now have a touchpoint with the Partnership.

There is more to be done though to extend our work in the other home nations, and we are running the Accelerator in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for the first time in the coming year.

We also want to look at how we can extend our work in primary settings. We have long worked in primary schools, but the greater number of primary schools in the country means that we should continue to innovate around the models that make our approach more accessible to those schools.

Finally, we want to do more to realise the international potential of our work. We have partnered with the British Council for the last two years to provide teacher training aligned with the Skills Builder

approach in countries across Africa and Asia, as well as running some of our own small-scale pilots. In the coming year, we will run our first Global Accelerator for schools overseas in partnership together, and look forward to learning a lot more along the way.

Working with impact organisations

Our work with impact organisations and the collective impact that we can create has powered the growth in reach this year.

We have a strong pipeline of organisations joining the Partnership, as well as a great range of new programmes that will be joining the Impact Directory and increasing opportunities for individuals to build their essential skills over the coming year.

The clusters of Impact Organisations – whether focused on employability, sport, arts, volunteering or any of the eight other clusters – are increasingly working together to make the shared Skills Builder approach the norm in their sectors.

Creating change with businesses

Over the coming year, we also want to work hard to start realising the potential of our work with employers. There are strong early signs of the impact that the Skills Builder approach can have for how employers inspire those outside the workforce, how they hire in an objective and equitable way, and how they grow their teams to achieve their full potential.

We expect to see a growing number of employers starting to achieve the Excellence Standards in the coming year. This is a critical part of the impact puzzle if we are going to fully achieve our mission.

This last year has proved what is possible – we hope you will join us as we strive to achieve the potential of the Skills Builder Partnership.

**Tom Ravenscroft**  
September 2021



