

## **The Curriculum Story Project**

# **6. The Benefit of Partnerships for Learning Design**

This pack provides examples of how settings and schools have developed sustainable partnerships that enrich projects with real-life skills, knowledge and expertise.

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# Sustainable partnerships enrich Interdisciplinary Projects projects with real life skills, knowledge and expertise

**Almost every curriculum story about Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) features a person or organisation beyond the early learning and childcare setting or school walls. It takes persistence to build sustainable partnerships. Partnerships are beneficial to both the company and charity and can be formed from various sources.**

The curriculum design for IDL needs educators and schools to design the core knowledge and skills central to experiences. Educators cannot be experts in all the potential areas that an IDL experience might include. Partnerships play a vital role in contributing knowledge about real-life skills and learning pathways. Partners can also use their expertise and experience to coach and mentor learners.

## Collaborative planning with partners

A network of partnerships enriches the range of IDL contexts that schools and educators can provide for their learners. Educators and partners must recognise the importance of collaborative planning and co-design and invest in the time essential to make this happen to maximise the potential benefits. Planning learning with partners takes time and needs careful timetabling as part of the curriculum design cycle. However, the impact of dynamic, creative and engaging IDL experiences on both learners and educators outweighs the challenges of planning them.

**Schools and settings can consider dedicating time for collaborative planning time by integrating it into the working time arrangements of staff. In addition, schools and settings might consider how IDL practice intersects with learner pathway choices. When well structured and co-designed with learners and partners, work-placed learning will often end up a rich IDL experience.**

## Calderglen High School, East Kilbride

Community partnerships offer new opportunities and authentic learning goals for learners.

Calderglen High School has made community partnerships that seek to offer learners real-life connections, goals, and ambitions. Partnerships provide relevant opportunities and real-world experiences. They impact students who struggle to succeed within the traditional examination pathway. The partnerships allow for new learner pathways, choices, and networks.

At Calderglen High, partners are viewed as more than visitors to the school. The partners actively shape the learning. For example, the assignment for Design and Manufacture is typically achieved over six to eight weeks in class. However, a new partnership with the Construction Scotland Innovation Centre (CSIC) allowed young people in Calderglen High School to work in a professional engineering environment and complete the assignment in one day.



### Adjust traditional course structures to be more effective

Usually, it is a struggle to maintain the momentum over several weeks using the typical period by period structure - the slow pace is a challenge. The better option was to take learners out to CSIC, exposing them to new techniques and meeting people in the industry. This ensured they could achieve half of their portfolio far more meaningfully. The young people were persistent and motivated with their learning efforts, even when energy could be low in January and February. There was a huge mutual benefit for CSIC. They learned a new way of working with schools. CSIC usually visit schools or runs careers fairs as the primary form of engaging with schools. CSIC was also thrilled with the impact and results on the learners due to the more intensive workshop environment.

***“The impact of knowing people, and understanding where construction is going, meant that the students could make better choices. For example, coding is forming an increasing part of the built environment construction in the future. Construction isn’t low skill/low pay - they’re able to see how to do better for themselves. It changed their mindset.”***

Jill Dodds, former DHT, Calderglen High School



Calderglen High’s partnership with CSIC is also an excellent example of how partnerships evolve. Initially, Calderglen High had just wanted to use the space they offered as the school has an ongoing challenge to find venues that provide the flexibility they need to run some of their courses. In addition, schools always struggle to deliver the design spaces you see in real industry environments.

However, CSIC offered to do more than simply let out their space, and the partnership took off.

The impact was evident in terms of the quality of the learning experience. It also profoundly influenced some of the young people’s learning attributes.

***“Cameron, in 6th year, was one pupil who did really well in the interaction with the external experts. He asked lots of questions, where normally he might not have been expected to. He’s now back doing his Higher and pursuing job and training options outside the traditional construction industry. He’s even on a mentoring scheme with our Career Ready programme. He was assigned an industry mentor who he met regularly to help him work towards his aspirations.”***

Jill Dodds, former DHT, Calderglen High School

## **A design thinking approach to finding and solving problems**

A design thinking approach to curriculum design has encouraged Calderglen High to be solution-focused, concentrating on the opportunities for partnership presented by their community context and the specific needs of their learners. The design thinking approach, thinking big around a problem, has effectively helped the school target equity funding.

For example, part of Calderglen High School’s Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) paid for the an office staff member to be pivot her role to a new focus, as a Family Liaison Worker (FLW). During the pandemic, the FLW supported family partnerships with technology, using data on attendance and performance to target which learners to work with, making connections between their qualifications, performance, and prospective learning pathway. This example of focused intervention and close partnership with families helped prevent learners who might have fallen between the cracks from underachieving.

***“We were able to get all of those students who were struggling with learning into the campus a couple of times a week to re-engage, upping their motivation and achievement. Vulnerable learners can mean vulnerable, as in ‘not learning’. Bringing them in during lockdown meant that they benefited from individualised attention to get them where they want to be.”***

Jill Dodds, former DHT, Calderglen High School

## **Inspiring mentors: the Dream Team**

Calderglen High School has also formed unique and inspiring mentoring partnerships with former students and ex-staff members. They have been labelled the ‘Dream Team’. The Dream Team mentored 25 pupils who required additional support. These students were looked after, nurtured, and had consistent 1:1 conversations to support their learning. Also, the mentoring partnerships do not place an extra burden on staff or leadership.

As a result, Deputes have more time to focus on the wider cohort, and teachers have little cynicism about the mentoring focus on relatively small numbers of students. The Dream Team has allowed Calderglen High to create partnerships designed specifically for inclusive learning and help raise the attainment of all students.

## Key features of using a curriculum design cycle at Calderglen High School

- Partnerships offer real-life resources and expertise that the school cannot provide.
- The success of partnerships is of mutual benefit to both the school and the partner.
- Successful partnerships evolve and improve through close collaboration and communication between the school and the partner.
- Partnerships have evidenced a clear impact on the quality of learning experiences and influenced young people's positive learning attributes.
- A design thinking approach encouraged the school to 'think big' around the partnership between school and parents.
- The 'Dream Team' mentorship scheme has offered inclusive support for learners without adding extra workload to teachers and Deputies.

### Resources:

Career Ready Mentoring Scheme: <https://careerready.org.uk>



## Inclusion and Support Service, West Lothian

Partners engage with the needs of learners through collaborative planning and pupil passports.

**A collaborative partnership planning approach between educators and partners meets individual learners' needs. The introduction of anonymous pupil passports allows partners to discuss and plan potential experiences best suited to the learner's unique needs.**

The Inclusion and Support Service (ISS) is a joint Education Services and Social Policy team in West Lothian. It exists to support children, young people and families with additional support needs. The service includes an education team that provides educational support from their Early Intervention and Secondary Teams for children and young people aged 0-18. The ISS also has social policy teams from the Children and Young People's Team, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Parenting Groupwork and Attendance Improvement Management Service.

**The ISS has developed, introduced and embedded the use of pupil passports for the learners they support, both in the two specialist schools at Burnhouse School (Skills Centre) and Connolly School Campus and also across mainstream schools supported by the ISS Early Intervention Team. The pupil passport has significantly impacted learner pathways and partnership working and is a central part of the ISS service improvement planning.**

The idea for pupil passports arose from the need to amplify young people's voices and involve learners directly in curriculum design. It was developed from the persona tools in the government service design toolkit. The ISS did not want to build plans around fictitious learners, so the planning process began with partners looking at anonymised personas of learners. As a result, partnership planning events have evolved from 40 people in a dining hall to international audiences online.



### Learner profiles as planning tools

The learner personas are presented as pupil passports at planning events. For example, the passport of a young P6 boy struggling with his autism showed how he likes to learn, what he's interested in, and what he and his friends enjoy. A range of community and industry-based partners looked at this passport. The partners collaborated to set up work information experience days for this learner and his classmates. With its automation and conveyor belt, a visit to the Paterson Arran biscuit factory in Livingston led to thinking about divergent learner pathways for the learner.



The real-life experience opened his eyes to career paths and other opportunities. It reengaged him with his learning, and he progressed from a specialist setting to attending his local school. Notably, the learning experience planned by the partners also benefited other children in the class. Communication skills were strengthened by meeting the adults in the workplace, interacting with them, seeing positive role models who sustain jobs, and wearing work uniforms.

As a result of the partnership planning and experiences, other learners talked about where else they might want to visit. For example, the class visited the University of Edinburgh microbiology labs, inspired by another young person's request.

***“This is a model we’ve been testing. One child at a time, benefitting all children. A Universal Design for Inclusion.”***

Andrew Millar, Additional Support Needs Manager.

The ISS has successfully used this approach to partnership working with schools across West Lothian over the past four to five years. The approach has supported the successful implementation of ‘Skills Stations’ across all West Lothian secondary schools. In addition, the ISS has established a support network across all secondary schools using service design approaches to support curriculum design and individual learner pathways for young people accessing the Skills Stations.

***“By focusing on what the learners are telling us, in their voice, what their challenges are and what their aspirations are, we are constantly creating new innovative learner pathways which then, in turn, benefit many other learners.”***

Andrew Millar, Additional Support Needs Manager

The ISS has found that the most straightforward tools educators should consider when compiling passports are whole school activities based on Health and Wellbeing. Health and Wellbeing already have embedded priority status in schools and settings. Therefore, the process and opportunity of talking to learners, capturing what they think and feel are already there. However, using the data effectively and creatively to achieve impact is vital.

The ISS has had great success with its partnership working and pupil passports because a lot of time and effort is spent carefully choosing prospective partners and briefing them beforehand about the purpose of the collaboration. As a result, there is a critical mass in ensuring that enough partners are present to provide in-depth choices.

***“Partners get involved because it’s emotive. They can see how challenging life is for young people and want to make a difference.”***

Katie Gardinier, Acting Head Teacher, Inclusion and Support Service.



## **Key features of using an enquiry design cycle at the Inclusion and Support Service:**

- Partners are invited to planning events that involve them directly in the planning process.
- Pupil passports are an innovative way to share anonymised information about learners.
- Although partnership learning experiences are designed through the lens of one pupil's passport, the impact is beneficial and inclusive for all learners.
- The ISS is beginning to offer the same approach to secondary schools via a new network of practitioners.
- Partners are carefully selected and briefed before planning events about the purpose and impact they can have.
- The delivery of partnership planning events focuses directly on the emotional benefits that partners will have from participating and making a difference in young people's lives.

# Discussion Prompts

You may wish to use these discussion prompts with your team or create an interdisciplinary learning session with colleagues from across your setting. Set aside three sessions to tackle each question in turn - use the time between sessions to research, experiment and probe further.

## Session 1: What new opportunities can you envisage for partnerships in your community?

For example, what local businesses or charities has your school/setting not worked with recently or perhaps never?

## Session 2: How could you apply or adapt the example of pupil passports to present information about learners' needs to partners?

For example, what essential information about attributes, skills, or passions might you include on a passport?

## Session 3: How do you overcome challenges in building more community partnerships?

For example, how could you use former students or local residents to provide partnership experiences? How could you use technology to pursue partnerships beyond the community, even making links internationally?

# Next Steps

## Tell us how it went:

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