This paper brings together a number of case studies on how cities from the UK and beyond have improved their education system.

**Improving education outcomes in a city can have a positive impact on its economic growth.**

People continuing into higher education are more likely to have better employment prospects and earn high wages. Education can also be a powerful tool to improve social mobility and open up opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Cities can ensure their education offer is relevant to the needs of both its students and employers by promoting education initiatives and programmes, providing financial help to students and working closely with providers and employers.

The case studies demonstrating how cities improve education and what they are trying to achieve are split into five groups:

- **Improving young people’s employment outcomes and work preparation**
  
  Strong local leadership is a pre-condition for city-wide collaboration. Partnerships can make individual organisations and initiatives more financially sustainable over the long term by allowing organisations to leverage multiple sources of funding.

- **Delivering better education outcomes**
  
  The establishment of clearly defined goals gives partnerships momentum and greater leverage within the wider community.

- **Promoting education for low income, low skilled adults and youth**
  
  Funding streams can act as a barrier to effective partnership working and create fragmentation within organisations.
• **Preventing youth unemployment**

Early intervention is crucial to the prevention of youth unemployment and disengagement over the longer term.

• **Helping young people develop the skills employers want**

Partnerships between educational providers and employers can help young people to develop the skills employers want and promote career planning and aspirations among young people.

### Improving young people’s employment outcomes and work preparation

Strong local leadership is a pre-condition for city-wide collaboration. Partnerships can make individual organisations and initiatives more financially sustainable over the long term by allowing organisations to leverage multiple sources of funding.

### Providing college scholarships and ensuring students are college-ready

**Lead organisation: Kalamazoo Promise**

**Location:** Kalamazoo, Michigan, US

**Year:** 2005 – to present

**Keywords:** Youth employment; Education; Employment prospects; International

**Read the full report here:** [Youth Opportunity: Lessons from the US](#)

In 2005, at a time when Kalamazoo was still being affected by deindustrialisation and suburbanisation, a group of local anonymous donors pledged to provide full college scholarships to every graduate of the Kalamazoo Public Schools.¹² While other US cities have similar programmes, Kalamazoo is unique in the size (funding is set up to continue in perpetuity) and the unrestricted nature of the Promise.

However, there are lessons to be learnt in terms of how partners collaborate to maximise the potential impact of the initiative. Many describe it as an economic development programme rather than simply a scholarship programme, with the Promise acting as a strong incentive for families and businesses to locate in the city. Yet the scholarship alone was deemed insufficient to achieve the economic, social and cultural transformation envisaged by local partners: “we expected it to positively affect dropout rates but the Promise does not make a great deal of difference if you’re going to dropout. You need to support young people to overcome wider barriers. Money is only half the answer; you need alignment with other actors”.³

In response, a group of organisations started working collaboratively to ensure that every student is ‘college-ready’, engage the private sector, communicate the wider regional impact and strengthen community alignment.

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² The scholarship is universally accessible and the allocation of funds is based on location (enrolled and resided within the KPS district for at least four years) rather than needs or merit. The scholarship will cover between 65 and 100 per cent of tuition fees based on how long a graduate has been a pupil within the district. The scholarships can be used to attend any of the 38 community colleges or universities in Michigan, and can be accessed at any times within ten years of graduating.

³ Interview.
The Kalamazoo Promise project team builds community relationships and works with several organisations in the city to ensure young people are ready for ‘school, college, work and careers’. The team are currently working with partners to identify key education transition points and predictors of school dropout.

The Learning Network for Greater Kalamazoo aims to build connections in the community and make collective efforts to improve educational attainment more effective and efficient. The Network tracks the performance of different interventions, helps replicate best practice from elsewhere, sponsors the events that bring people together and engages regularly with partners. Since 2011, the Network has helped bring together more than 100 organisations to support successful educational outcomes.

The Upjohn Institute is an independent research institute, which acts as a fiscal agent, intermediary and think tank for Kalamazoo. The Institute leads the Learning Network’s data team developing and maintaining a community scorecard, implementing a data platform that collects and eventually integrates community-based out-of-school-time data with school-based and adult learning data, and providing ongoing research support.

Kalamazoo Communities in Schools works with Kalamazoo Public Schools System to determine school and student needs, and establishes relationships with local agencies and businesses, parent and volunteer organisations to meet these needs. The support has led to improved attendance and behaviour in schools, and improvements in reading and maths.

The Promise has acted as a catalyst and changed the incentives for a broad range of actors. Partners have worked together to maximise the impact of the investment to improve educational and economic outcomes in the city. As a result, there has been a sharp increase in mentoring and tutoring, better coordination among youth-serving organisations and new programmes established to support students post-secondary. The Promise has since seen the reversal of long-term enrolment decline, particularly among more disadvantaged groups.

Promoting city-wide collaboration using mayoral influence

**Lead organisation:** Boston PIC  
**Location:** Boston, Massachusetts, US  
**Year:** 1980 – to present  
**Keywords:** Education; Youth (16-24) employment programmes; Employment prospects; International

**Read the full report here:** Youth Opportunity: Lessons from the US

The Boston PIC is the convener of the Boston Compact, the city’s historic collaborative school improvement agreement between the Mayor, the leaders of Boston’s business and higher education communities, the Boston Public Schools, and the Boston Teachers Union. The Compact bought together the resources of public schools, universities, trade unions and the Mayor’s Office to improve student academic achievement and work preparation. The long-running success of the Compact has required strong leadership to attract significant corporate investment and sustained engagement.

The Boston Compact was established in 1982 as a partnership between the business community and the
public schools, and run out of the Mayor’s Office. The essence of the Compact was an agreement whereby
the school system would work to improve education and learning outcomes, and in return, businesses,
colleges, and labour organisations would provide jobs and postsecondary educational opportunities
for graduates. The Boston PIC has run a summer job programmes as well as job-counselling services
at several high schools for the last 25 years. It acts as an independent umbrella for the development of
business-school programmes and is a ‘safe and reliable avenue for businesses to engage’. Businesses
were also attracted by the clear improvements in educational and employment outcomes that resulted
from the Compact.

The Compact’s goals are designed to be durable, resilient and measurable. Periodically, however, the Mayor
and the Superintendent of Schools call for a new Boston Compact when circumstances change, new
leadership is in place and it is viewed an appropriate time for a renewed collaboration focused on shared
goals. The most recent Compact was signed in 2000 and incorporated new state accountability measures
(goals), SATs, and other indicators of academic achievement, alongside data on success in college.

**Delivering better education outcomes**

The establishment of clearly defined goals gives partnerships momentum and greater leverage within the
wider community.

**Using a collective impact model to establish shared goals**

**Lead organisation: Thrive Chicago**

**Location: Chicago, Illinois, US**

**Year: 2013 – to present**

**Keywords: Education; International**

Read the full report here: [Youth Opportunity: Lessons from the US](#)

Thrive Chicago, modelled on Strive Cincinnati, aims to increase the diversity of quality enrichment
programmes, increase high school graduation rates, and provide additional support for young people to
pursue and persist in post-secondary options through a city-wide collective impact strategy.

The idea behind the collective-impact model is to create a ‘cradle-to-career’ continuum of services for
young people in Chicago. The initiative evolved out of a growing recognition that the institutions serving
young people in the city – from the school system and government agencies to non-profit and faith based
institutions – had different missions. Thrive Chicago aims to establish a roadmap to strategically connect
institutions under a unified vision for education and young people. Much of the organisation’s first year was
spent identifying key outcomes and analysing relevant data, developing necessary infrastructure and building
widespread support for the partnership. The Mayor’s Deputy for Education convened 30 key leaders across
the city representing community-based organisations, business, philanthropy, and city agencies to serve as
thought partners to agree on a common set of goals. These leaders helped to widen engagement to a further
120 organisations in the city that collaborated to build a ‘cradle-to-career’ impact framework for Chicago –
including a shared vision and mission, accountability structure and key outcomes to guide the work.
There has been strong momentum across the city around adopting the framework. Thrive Chicago is currently leading the development of a city-wide data warehouse, which will have the ability to connect data from all partner organisations, and a web-based dashboard, which will provide partners with reports on key data points critical to their implementation of Thrive Chicago priorities.

**Using neighbourhood-based collaboration to establish shared goals**

**Lead organisation:** Bronx Opportunity Network  
**Location:** Bronx, New York, US  
**Year:** 2008 – to present  
**Keywords:** Youth employment; Education; International  
**Read the full report here:** [Youth Opportunity: Lessons from the US](#)

The Bronx Opportunity Network (BON) is a collaborative effort among a group of seven CBOs serving young adults in the South Bronx – one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the US with high levels of disconnected youth.

The initiative developed out of a shared goal to increase college access – and to support postsecondary retention – among disconnected young adults in partnership with Bronx and Hostos Community Colleges. In the first year of the initiative, 100 young adults participated, and 76 young adults successfully completed their first year of college.

Partners worked together to assess the existing evidence and develop a framework for action. Continuous communication has been an integral part of ensuring that partners align and coordinate activity within this framework: “you need to have timing and space for meetings – communication is one of the most critical components to partnership working”. Partnership has had multiple benefits: learning from others involved in the partnership, a collective voice giving them more power and influence in the wider system; a focus on demand-driven strategies; allowing partners to share best practice; brainstorming solutions to particular issues and working together to recruit. It also means partners can provide on-site support, for example at college campuses rather than just at community centres.

**Promoting education for low income, low skilled adults and youth**

Funding streams can act as a barrier to effective partnership working and create fragmentation within organisations.

**Providing federal support for evaluation**

**Lead organisation:** Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education  
**Location:** 9 cities across the US, US  
**Year:** 2007 – to present  
**Keywords:** Education; International  
**Read the full report here:** [Youth Opportunity: Lessons from the US](#)

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4 Interview.
Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE), formerly known as Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS), is a large-scale, rigorous evaluation of nine innovative career pathways programs across the country. The evaluation is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families (ACF).\(^5\)

The evaluation uses randomised assignment evaluation. Year Up is participating in the programme, along with a number of colleges, workforce partnerships and not-for-profit organisations across the United States. The programmes vary in nature but all promote access to and completion of post-secondary education, and target low-income, low-skilled adults and youth. All programmes also place emphasis on building successful partnerships. A total of eight Year Up sites are involved and there are some site-specific variations to the Year Up programme. For example, Year Up New York is working to align its project management curriculum with the requirements for certification, and Boston and New York sites have implemented or are piloting a business math class as part of their professional skills curricula. Young people eligible for the programme were assigned via lottery to either a treatment group that can participate in the programme or a control group that cannot participate but can access other services in the community. Any differences detected between the two groups in the follow up period will be attributed to Year Up.

PACE attempts to tackle two major challenges to successful evaluation: how to determine more effective programme components and how to determine intermediate outcomes on vital casual paths so that future evaluation findings can be obtained more quickly. The programme is currently underway and there should be results available in two to three years.

**Preventing youth unemployment**

Early intervention is crucial to the prevention of youth unemployment and disengagement over the longer term.

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**Breaking the poverty cycle through education**

**Lead organisation: Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ)**

**Location:** New York, US

**Year:** 1970’s-present

**Keywords:** Education; Youth unemployment; International

**Read the full report here:** [Delivering change: Cities and the Youth Unemployment Challenge](http://hcz.org/)

The Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) aims to break the poverty cycle in Harlem by getting children through education.\(^6\) The aim is to create a mass of people involved in the programme so that “children are surrounded by an enriching environment of college-oriented peers and supportive adults”. Introduced in the 1970s, the programme has now expanded and serves over 10,000 children and 13,000 adults.

The programme’s services are structured to fit into a pipeline that provides continuous support and reinforcement from 0 to 22 years old. HCZ’s charter schools have high teacher to student ratios, longer school days and a broad range of extra-curricular activities, including programmes to discourage drug...
use and gang culture and counselling. Staff also works with students to develop personal plans for further and higher education. Alongside the educational investments, community programmes are also run. These include truancy prevention programmes; one-on-one counselling to families; foster care prevention programs; and an employment and technology centre that teaches job-related skills to teens and adults.

Researchers found that the programme had managed to completely close the racial educational attainment gap. Modest estimates suggest that attending a HCZ charter school is associated with a 4.8 to 7.5 percent increase in earnings, 1.65 to 2.25 percent decrease in the probability of committing a property or violent crime, and 7.5 to 11.25 decrease in the probability of having a health disability.

While the overall programme is viewed as effective, researcher has since questioned whether community investment has appreciable effects on student achievement in schools in the US. A 2010 study examined the differences between students attending the charter schools and those not, and then those with and without access to the community programmes. It concludes: “High quality schools are enough to significantly increase academic achievement among the poor. Community programs appear neither necessary nor sufficient”. As such, while community investments may have positive impact, for cities seeking to improve educational attainment, these findings suggest it is important they focus on school performance first and foremost.

**Increasing academic performance through early interventions**

**Lead organisations: Department for Education (DfE), London schools**

**Location:** London, UK

**Year:** 2003 - 2008

**Keywords:** Education; Youth employment

**Read the full report here:** [Delivering change: Cities and the Youth Unemployment Challenge](#)

The London Challenge ran from 2003-2008 and aimed to break the link between deprivation and low educational standards. It initially ran in secondary schools, aiming to increase aspirations, improve teacher morale and teaching standards to improve exam results. From 2006 it expanded to include some primary schools. Central and local government and schools worked together to achieve the aims.

The programme was experimental and a wide range of new approaches were tried, including the appointment of Challenge advisors. These advisors were employed directly by the DfE and worked with schools to identify their weaknesses and develop and implement plans for improvement. The emphasis was on offering support to inspire existing teachers and to attract new staff to overcome London’s teacher shortage, rather than naming and shaming “failing” schools. There was also a strong emphasis on the use of data and collaboration between high performing and low performing schools. Schools were encouraged to compare themselves to each other and identify possible reasons for variations. Other initiatives included improving/updating school equipment and the London Student Pledge, which aimed to ensure that all students experienced a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

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When the programme began, the performance of London schools was below the UK average. By 2006 Ofsted reported that attainment had risen faster in London than anywhere else and that a higher percentage of schools were judged “good” or “better” for overall effectiveness than in other regions. The London Challenge was also identified as a model that could be effective in other locations where school performance was a concern.

More recent research on London schools suggests that the improvements in London’s primary schools in the last 1990s and 2000s mostly explain the improvement in GCSE attainment in London. This may be related to the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies that were piloted in the capital, although more research is required to assess their importance. The research does find, however, that the London Challenge still has a positive effect after controlling for prior attainment and is likely to have helped sustain higher levels of achievement.

**Helping young people develop the skills employers want**

Partnerships between educational providers and employers can help young people to develop the skills employers want and promote career planning and aspirations among young people.

### Promoting career planning and aspirations

**Lead organisation:** Career Academies  
**Location:** Cities across the US, US  
**Year:** 1998 – to present  
**Keywords:** Education; Youth employment; International  
**Read the full report here:** Delivering change: Cities and the Youth Unemployment Challenge

Career Academies in the US aim to prepare young people to make successful transitions into post-secondary education or employment. The Academies have three core components: small learning communities, academic and technical curricula combined around a career theme, and employer partnerships to provide work-based learning opportunities.

An evaluation found the programme resulted in significant long-run wage impacts: young men who attended one of the Career Academies earned nearly $30,000 more over the eight year period. While the Academies were found to have no impact on educational attainment, investment in career-related experiences were found to result in substantial and sustained improvements in labour market prospects. It is also one of only a few youth-focused interventions in the US that have been found to improve the labour market prospects of young men. The researchers emphasise that it is difficult to attribute the impacts to a particular feature of Career Academies but preliminary findings suggest that “substantial increases in students’ exposure to career awareness and development activities were associated with more substantial labour market impacts”. Career awareness and development activities included: job shadowing, work-based learning activities, career fairs, guest speakers and career-related guidance. The study demonstrates

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11 MDRC used a longitudinal random assignment evaluation assessing outcomes from nine schools across the US. The results are based on the experiences of more than 1,400 young people.
that it is possible to accomplish “the goals of school-to-career and career-technical education without compromising academic goals”.

**More information**

The case studies in this document came from the reports:


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