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Mentoring and Link Teacher Roles within Young Enterprise

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Abstract

Since its' establishment in 1963, the Young Enterprise Company Programme has generated a large amount of interest and currently operates each academic year in the majority of secondary schools and colleges within the United Kingdom. It has often been incorporated as a core part of the curriculum, especially within GNVQ and the new AVCE courses. The programmes provided have expanded to include international operations, Team Enterprise plus Project Business UK.

The main aim of Young Enterprise are to encourage young people to establish and run a small business, together with allowing them to develop a range of business and entrepreneurial skills. The Young Enterprise programme may provide an ability for participating schools to complete parts of the AVCE curriculum, but how far does it go to developing the next generation of entrepreneurs within the United Kingdom, one of this government's aims (Nicholson, 1998).

A core component of the programme is the availability of mentors and advisers (BIC, 1988; Curtis, 1999b), without whom the programme would not exist and their involvement is greatly encouraged (DTI, 1988; BIC, 1988; Garavan & O'Conneide, 1994; Curtis, 1999b).

This research is examining a range of aspects including the reasons behind link teacher and Young Enterprise Business Adviser participation. This phase of the research occurred in early 2003, and evaluated reasons for involvement and participation together with background and previous experience of Young Enterprise.

Link Teachers facilitate the Company Programme within schools and colleges and were identified as a lynchpin of the Company Programme. However, many do not have formal business experience, particularly in a small business setting.

Business Advisers were found to come from a range of backgrounds. As such these possessed a range of skills and experience, although experience in a small business setting was found to be lacking. In addition, reasons for participation varied from wanting to assist the creation of entrepreneurs to employers sending the Business Adviser, even if they did not want to participate.

Recommendations from this research centre around greater training for Business Advisers and Link Teachers in entrepreneurial development and core business skills. In addition, further recommendations are made regarding the recruitment and motivation of Business Advisers, who hold a key role within the Young Enterprise Company Programme.

INTRODUCTION

The Young Enterprise Programme has championed the cause of our nations' youth in the development of business abilities and entrepreneurial skills for four decades (Curtis, 1999a). Throughout its operation, a considerable level of involvement has existed on the part of sponsoring companies, providing both funding and the availability of business advisers, without whom the programme would lose considerable value (BIC, 1988; Curtis, 1999b). Since the inception of Young Enterprise in the United Kingdom in 1959, with the first company operating in 1963 (Curtis, 1999a), over 25,000 companies are formed each year, with the aim of developing business skills in young people aged 15 to 19 years (BIC, 1988).

A core component of the programme is the availability of mentors and advisers (BIC, 1988; Curtis, 1999b), without whom the programme would not exist. Their involvement is greatly encouraged (DTI, 1988; BIC, 1988; Garavan & O'Connell, 1994; Curtis, 1999b). Each Young Enterprise company has two advisers, providing their time on a voluntary basis, who originate from either the public or private sectors (BIC, 1988; Curtis, 1999a). Individual advisers donate their own time, and more frequently, the company's time, to assist young people in the establishment of a company (BIC, 1988; Curtis, 1999a; Curtis, 1999b). This is not new and is certainly not in isolation, with other activities such as The Business Games and Livewire in operation (Project North East, 1989; Buxton, 2000), however the Young Enterprise programme is the largest in secondary education (BIC, 1988). All of these utilise the skills of business advisers, from companies such as HSBC, Royal Mail, Prudential and Rowntree plc, all providing premises from which to operate, advisory services and financial backing to these budding entrepreneurs (BIC, 1988; Curtis, 1999b), building on experience from the USA where business owners, families, educators and mentors possess the abilities to develop our future entrepreneurs (Gite, 1990).

The key purpose of and reason for the existence of partnerships is to create an ethos of learning by experience (Curtis, 1999b), allowing the participants to develop skills amongst peers with the guiding hand of their adviser (Project North East, 1989). The Young Enterprise Programme seeks to

provide skills and experience to individuals with these being seen as a key component of the overall programme (Curtis, 1999b).

The Role of the Mentor

Young Enterprise is reliant on mentors, acting in the role of Business Advisers (Jamieson, 1985).

Without these volunteer individuals, the whole Company Programme falls (Curtis, 1999a), unable to sustain its' criteria of using real-life business people as guides. However, "mentoring is a very tiring, emotionally draining experience" (Bailey & Brankin in Wilkin ed., 1992: 60). So why do the Business Advisers mentor Young Enterprise companies each year in a wide range of schools? This question has never been answered, and is one of the research aims of this ongoing process of research.

A Definition of Mentoring

There are two basic schools of thought regarding mentoring. The first is that mentoring just happens, with the second regarding mentoring as being formed through a structured or facilitated process (Murray & Owen, 1991). The concept of a mentor has become confused with other terms such as teacher, sponsor and godfather; blurring the lines such that identification or key activities becomes difficult (Zey, 1991), helping individuals in their own learning (Parsloe & Wray, 2000).

Using a definition from Zey, who defines a mentor as "a person who oversees the career and development of another person, usually a junior, through teaching, counselling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting or sponsoring" (Zey, 1991:7), this occurs in a number of areas, with a six-fold typology of mentoring activities being identified by Parsloe and Wray (2000):

- Business-to-business, allowing a large organisation to mentor a small or medium firm,
- Business-to-enterprise, where a mentor will guide new firms. Whilst Young Enterprise may apply here, it is more akin to schemes such as the Prince's Youth Business Trust,

- The Fair Deal programme, where those potentially with special needs to access employment,
- Special needs and community projects, where mentoring develops personal skills,
- Business-to-education, where business volunteers work within an educational setting, mentoring employees and students. This is the typology of mentor utilised within the Young Enterprise programme,
- Graduate or undergraduate mentoring, helping guide students within the education programme.

Clearly mentors and mentees will cross boundaries during the mentoring relationship. However, all of these fit the all-encompassing mentoring definition by the European Monitoring Centre of “off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking” (Parsloe & Wray, 2000).

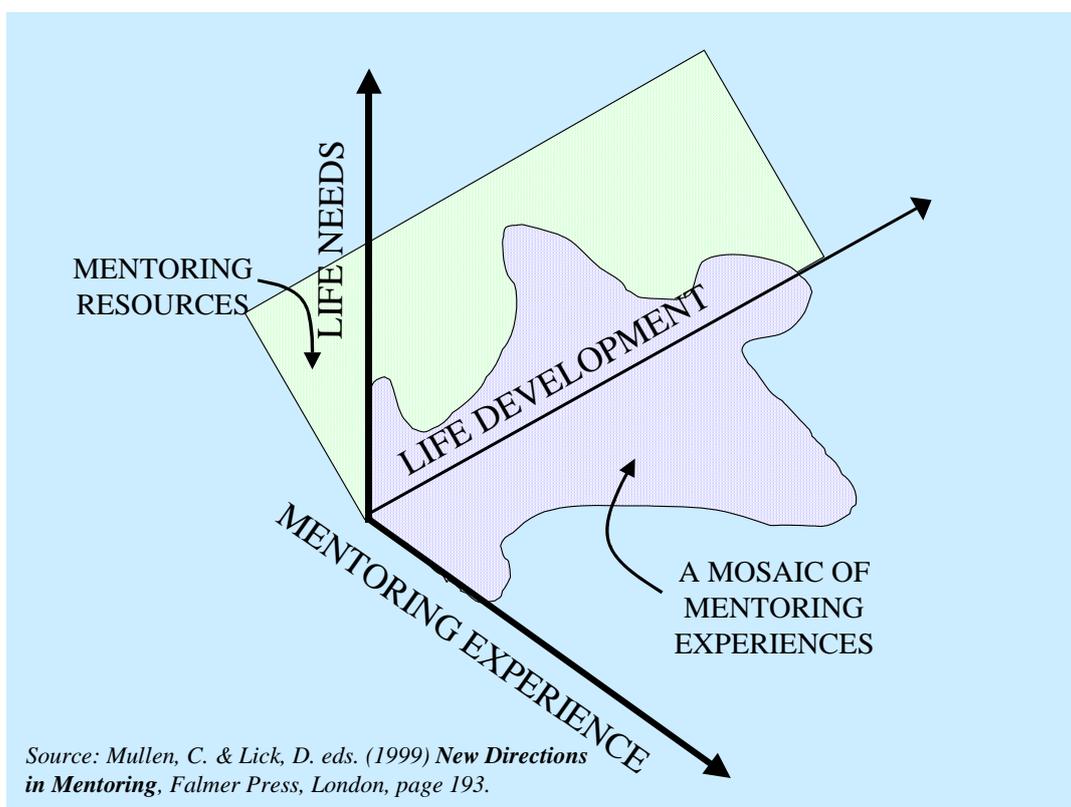
The Benefit Accrued from Being a Mentor or Mentees

“Mentoring holds out considerable benefits for both the mentor and the protégé. It enables the protégé to find his feet more quickly and to establish a clear sense of career direction and purpose. It often rejuvenates the mentor and may advance his career, too.” (Clutterbuck, 1991: 22). Often, mentoring activities can further both the development of mentees and also mentors (Mullen & Lick eds., 1999). The process of career advancement is asserted by Zey, along with such aspects as intelligence and an advisory role (Zey, 1991) plus a psychological effect. Within a survey, many Fortune 500 CEOs listed an effective mentor as one of the keys to their success (Bell, 1998) and mentors also experience a sense of pride in seeing their protégés progress (Clutterbuck, 1991). In addition, Bell highlights a benefit to mentors themselves as; “superior mentors know how adults learn. Operating out of their intuition or on what they have learned from books, classes or other mentors, the best mentors recognize that they are, first and foremost, facilitators and catalysts in a process of discovery and insight” (Bell, 1998: 7-8). Shea agrees, stating that “sound mentoring respect the uniqueness of the mentee and strives to enhance the special strengths of that person” (Shea, 1997: 22).

Qualities of Mentoring Relationships

For the mentoring partnership to be wholly and truly affective, a number of qualities are required from both parties including balance, truth, trust, generosity, courage and a passion (Bell, 1998). Their life's experience becomes a mosaic generated through a number of mentoring experiences – creating a process of development based upon the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of their needs at one time or another.

Figure 1: The Mentoring Experience



There appear to be three types of mentoring relationship; that of the corporate mentor, the qualification mentor and the community mentor (Parsloe & Wray, 2000). Acting as a guide, the corporate mentor guides an employee of the firm throughout their life with the organisation. A qualification mentor simply takes the role during a period of study with the relationship ending at completion of the programme or withdrawal from it. The third relationship, that of the community mentor is of a friend, counsellor or adviser to individuals in a non-employment setting. Organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau take the form of community mentors, as do Business Advisers within Young Enterprise.

Methods of Mentoring

Eric Parsloe defines the job description of a mentor: “To be a fount of knowledge and perfection embodied, while always remaining approachable. Requires the memory of an elephant, the patience of a saint and an unremitting sense of humour” (Parsloe, 1995: 89). This somewhat tongue-in-cheek approach may not be far from the truth. According to Conway, “good mentors come from different backgrounds and ages, but what seems to distinguish them is a belief in themselves and others and a proactive view of life” (Conway, 1998: 21).

However, this may be true. Mentors do have to give of themselves: advocated by Bell is a four-letter acronym; SAGE, meaning Surrendering, Accepting, Gifting and Extending (Bell, 1998). Detailed below, it shows the meanings of the method:

- Most leaders are socially conditioned to *drive* the process of learning; great mentors *surrender* to it.
- *Accepting* is the act of inclusion; embracing, rather than evaluating or judging.
- *Gifting* means bestowing something of value upon another without expecting anything in return – an act of generosity.
- *Extending* means pushing the relationship beyond its expected boundaries – knowing when to give up the relationship to allow growth.

(Adapted from Bell, 1998:11)

A mentor is likely to undertake a number of roles, including that of a sounding board, a listener, a counsellor, a critical friend, a career adviser, a networker and especially a coach (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999). However, “mentoring is about releasing the potential of individuals, not about cloning or copying” (Conway, 1998: 23). These roles will alter and change over time and objective – however the mentoring activity is always aimed at a certain focal point, whether they take the role of a community mentor or any other typology. Whatever situation a mentee finds themselves in, the mentors’ and mentees’ needs may differ. In terms of their relationship, considerable importance rests on the availability of the mentor in terms of time and other resources, as advocated by Shea (1997).

Problems within Mentoring

Within Young Enterprise, the mentor relationship usually lasts for only the period of the Company Programme. This correlates with the initial period of a mentor relationship (Clutterbuck, 1991) where “the young protégé may well hold an unrealistically ideal picture of his mentor” (Clutterbuck, 1991; 76). Problems arise where the mentor takes control, believing they know best (Bell, 1998), where they feel a need to provide ‘assistance’ (Bell, 1998) and where the mentor wants to be needed (Bell, 1998). Other issues concern the gossip surrounding a male:female mentoring relationship, even where such gossip is completely unfounded (Murray & Owen, 1991), and issues concerning measurement of the results of mentoring – this can prove to be complex (Innovation Business, 2001).

Mentoring Schemes and Mentoring in Schools

For those who manage the mentoring process, it is considered important that these link teachers are “highly qualified personnel with subject and management experience” (Bailey & Brankin in Wilkin ed., 1992: 59), with some status in the school. However, for Young Enterprise no background to the Link Teachers is known. They simply exist, facilitating the process. A clear understanding of the essential nature of this component has arisen during the preparation for the research.

The Effect of Partnerships

It has been recognised that the use of participant:adviser relationships in enterprise activities has beneficial effects (Project North East, 1989; Carter & Jones-Evans, 2000), both of a financial basis (Buxton, 2000) and also of a qualitative nature, benefiting both participant and adviser (Curtis, 1999b). Within the European Union as a whole, this relationship is being encouraged on a greater level (Garavan & O’Cinneide, 1994) with the sole purpose being to create a more competitive Europe for the 21st century.

The use of advisers has also led to conflict occurring at a number of levels. The first of these is that there is often a rosy picture painted of a situation by an adviser (Project North East, 1989), leading to a misguided participant. In addition, the age gap between participants and advisers was also seen as detrimental to the relationship (Project North East, 1989). However, despite this, the British

government still has an aim to promote the use of advisers in enterprise activities due to the beneficial effects perceived to occur (DTI, 1988; Garavan & O’Cinneide, 1994; Carter & Jones-Evans, 2000).

The Impact of the Young Enterprise Programme

Founded in 1959 by the late Sir Walter Salomon, the aim of the Young Enterprise Programme is to provide young people with practical business skills, together with the assistance of a mentor in the shape of business advisers who are often a part of such programmes – referred to as “learning by doing” (BIC, 1988; USSBA, 1997; Curtis, 1999a; Curtis, 1999b). Young Enterprise is only one of a number of initiatives operating to enable young people gain valuable business experience whilst in education (BIC, 1988). However, in order to gain a clear focus on the development of entrepreneurs, this phase of the research examined only the Young Enterprise Company Programme and not initiatives such as Project Trident which seeks to provide only a short period of work experience to the student.

Similar programmes have operated throughout the world for many years, with programmes in the United States including the Young Entrepreneur Programme, Junior Achievement and Boys & Girls Clubs – creating a new generation of entrepreneurs referred to as kidpreneurs (Gite, 1990). This experience is able to directly contribute towards the aspects required to make entrepreneurs operate successfully (Osborne, 1995). Research has been limited in all of these programmes, with little empirical evidence available to support the effectiveness of such schemes (Crowley et al, 1995).

Should the research prove that the programme is effective, this would provide the evidence required for Young Enterprise to emphasise its importance to potential participants, schools and companies, ensuring that the programme continues to be available to all who wish to participate in the future.

Research Problem

Within the Young Enterprise programme there is no current evaluation of the impact of Business Advisers or Link Teachers, although an initial evaluation of Young Achievers has been conducted in

the south of England. Therefore the research problem proposed for this component of the research was:

“Both Business Advisers and Link Teachers recognise and value the benefits they provide to Young Enterprise through their involvement in the Company Programme”

Investigative Methodology

The research methodology for this followed a previous pilot study from early 2002. In the pilot 50 Business Advisers and 50 Link Teachers were contacted, with 14 and 12 responses respectively.

Widening the research base to the Yorkshire and Humber region meant that questionnaires were sent to 192 Business Advisers and 122 Link Teachers, making a total of 314 contacts. Each Link Teacher and Business Adviser received a questionnaire with a pre-paid envelope. The questionnaire contained a range of questions designed to identify their motivation for taking on the voluntary role of Business Adviser or Link Teacher and their perception of the benefits of the Young Enterprise programme.

Additional questions examined their employment history, their perception of entrepreneurs, the contribution of Young Enterprise to the creation of entrepreneurs and their own employment plans.

Questions were designed on either a Likert scale or a range of available options for the more detailed questions.

Research Findings

Questionnaires were sent out to Business Advisers on the 26th of February 2003 and to Link Teachers on the 5th of March. In total 314 questionnaires were sent; 122 to Link Teachers and 192 to Business Advisers. By the 18th of March the vast majority of questionnaires had been received, with only five being received after this date. The total number received was 70 from Link Teachers – a 57.4% response rate and 100 from Business Advisors – a 52.1% response rate, leading to a 54.1% response rate overall.

Each of the respondents were asked how long they had been in the role. Nearly a third were in their first year, although 43% did not know how long they had been in the role. Taking out this answer, the figure for advisers in their first year rose to 58%. This is a very high figure for a role which

requires experience to be an effective mentor. Very few advisers had been in the role for more than five years.

Figure 2: Length of Time as a Business Adviser

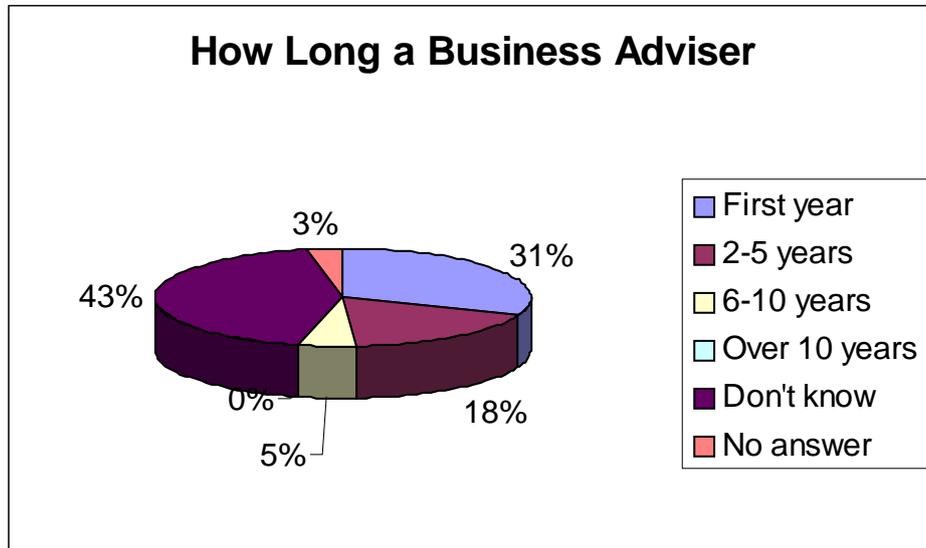
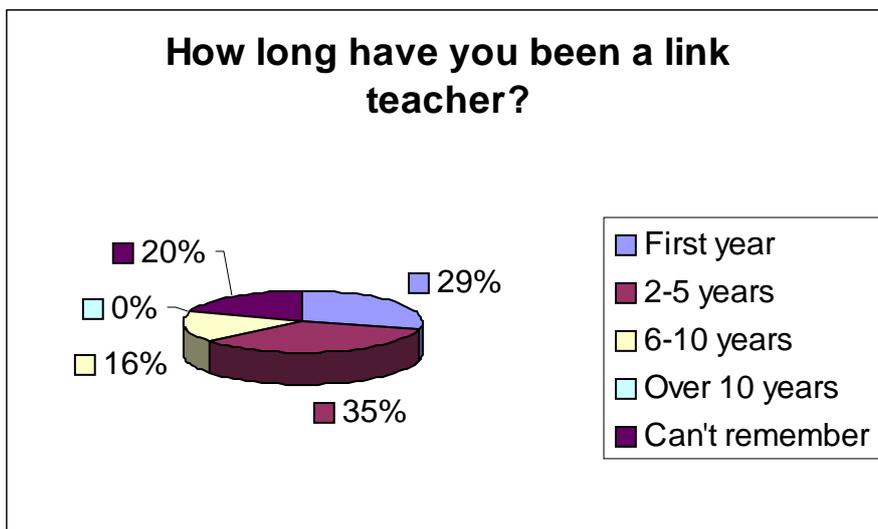


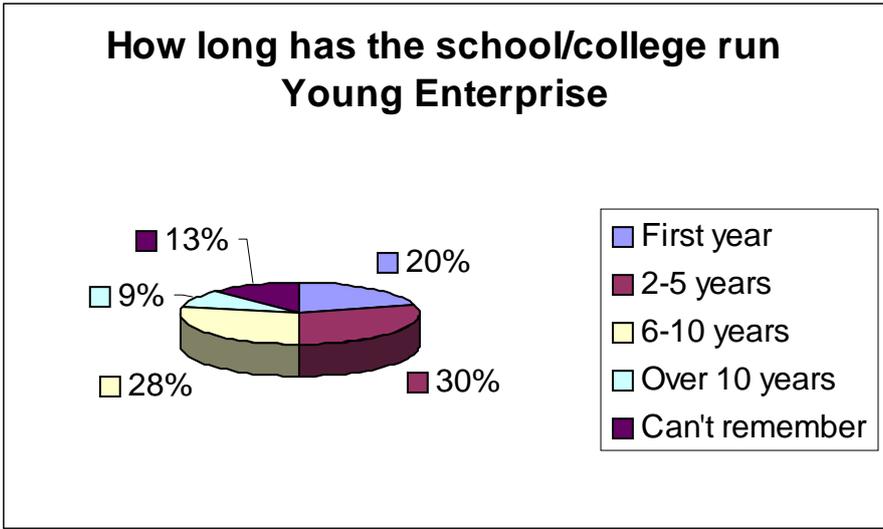
Figure 3: Length of Time as a Link Teacher



Link Teachers followed a similar pattern, where a significant percentage were either in their first year (20%) or had been in the role for less than five years (35% for 2-5 years). This lack of longevity in the role should also be highlighted as an issue.

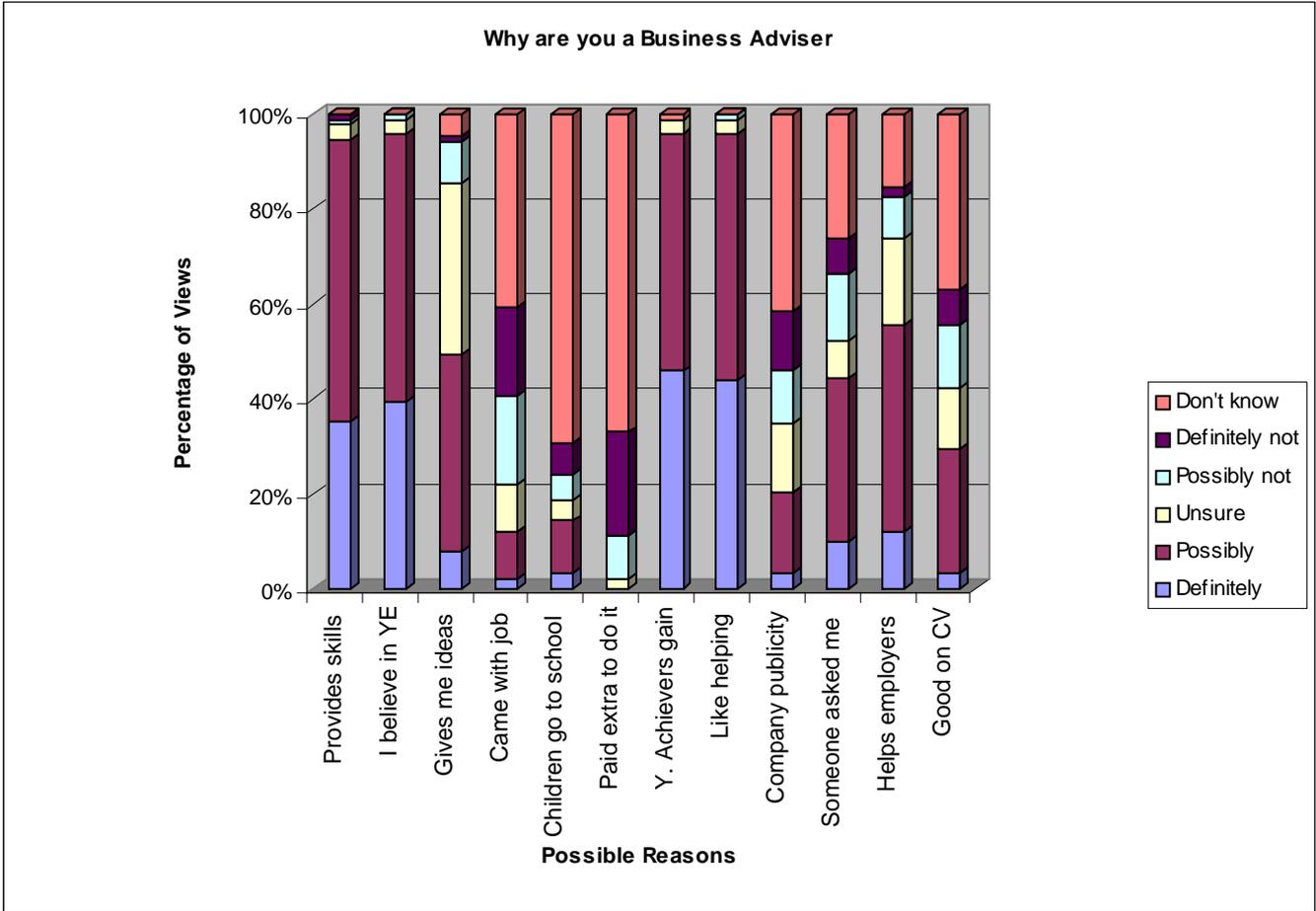
Figure 4: Length of Operation of Young Enterprise Company Programme

In addition, Link Teachers were asked how long the Young Enterprise Company



Programme had operated within their school or college. A significant percentage (37%) had been operating for over five years, showing evidence of a continuation of business start-up activity over a period of time.

Figure 5: Reasons for Being a Business Adviser

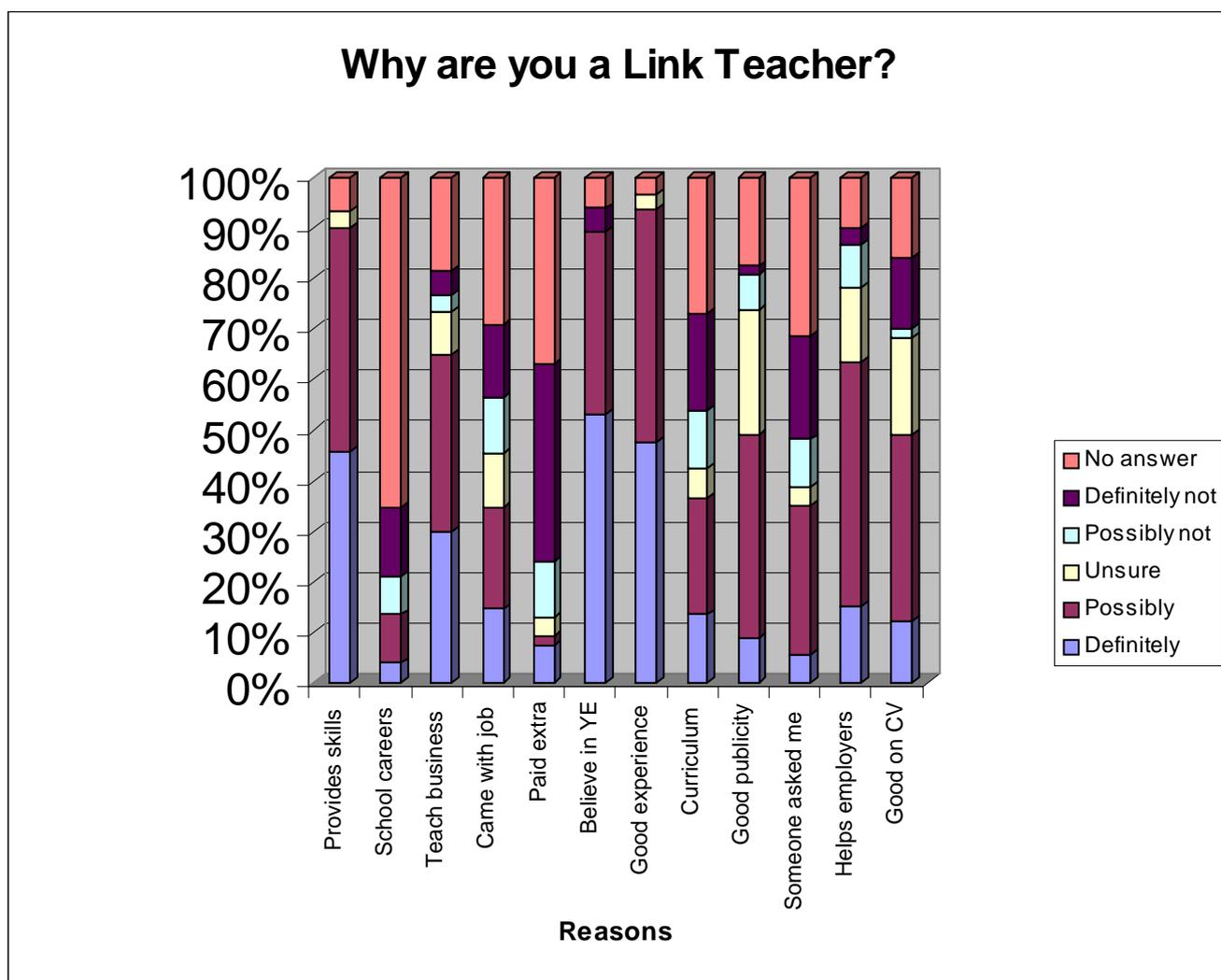


Business Advisers took the role due to four main reasons: Firstly because they like helping others, also they believed in Young Enterprise and that by participating, the Young Achievers benefit through the skills and experience gained. No adviser was paid more to take the role, although 13

advisers' children attended the school they advised in. However, 20 advisers stated that the role of adviser came with their job – which may question their motivation.

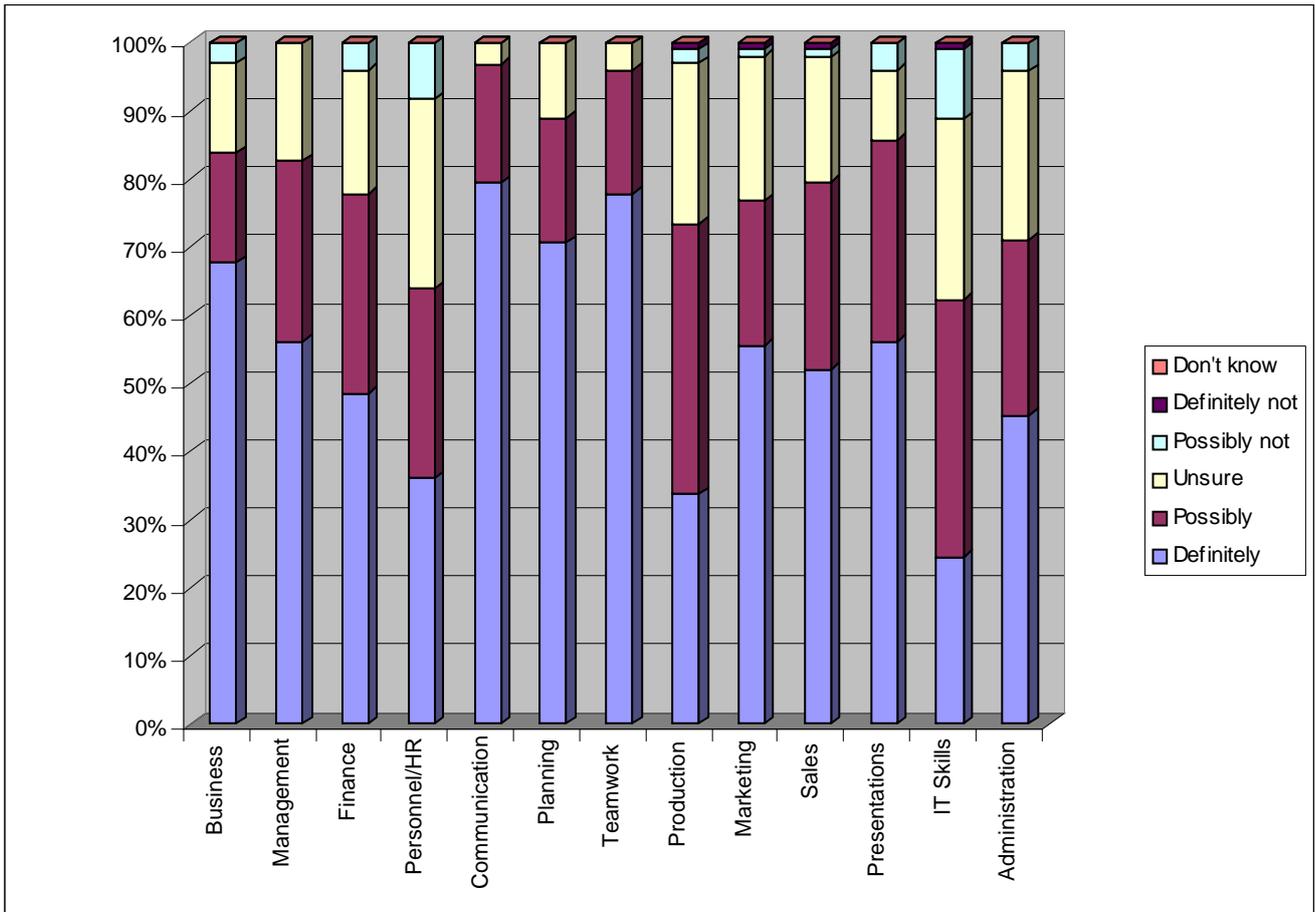
Link Teachers took the role due to the experience and skills it provided for Young Achievers and their belief in Young Enterprise. Several stated that they were paid extra and a significant number stated that the Link Teacher role came with their teaching job. In addition, a significant number replied that having the Link Teacher role was beneficial for their curriculum vitae.

Figure 6: Reasons for Being a Link Teacher



When considering skills development, Young Enterprise was viewed by both teachers and advisers as developing a range of skills, particularly planning and teamwork. Link Teachers in particular saw a range of skills being developed, and they are possibly the best-placed individuals to view this in operation. In addition, general business, management and presentation skills were provided.

Figure 7: Does Young Enterprise help develop skills (Business Adviser)?



It was evident, as shown in Figures 6 and 7, that both advisers and Link Teachers believed a wide range of skills were being developed through the programme – concurring with their earlier response regarding skills development.

Figure 8: Does Young Enterprise help develop skills (Link Teachers)?

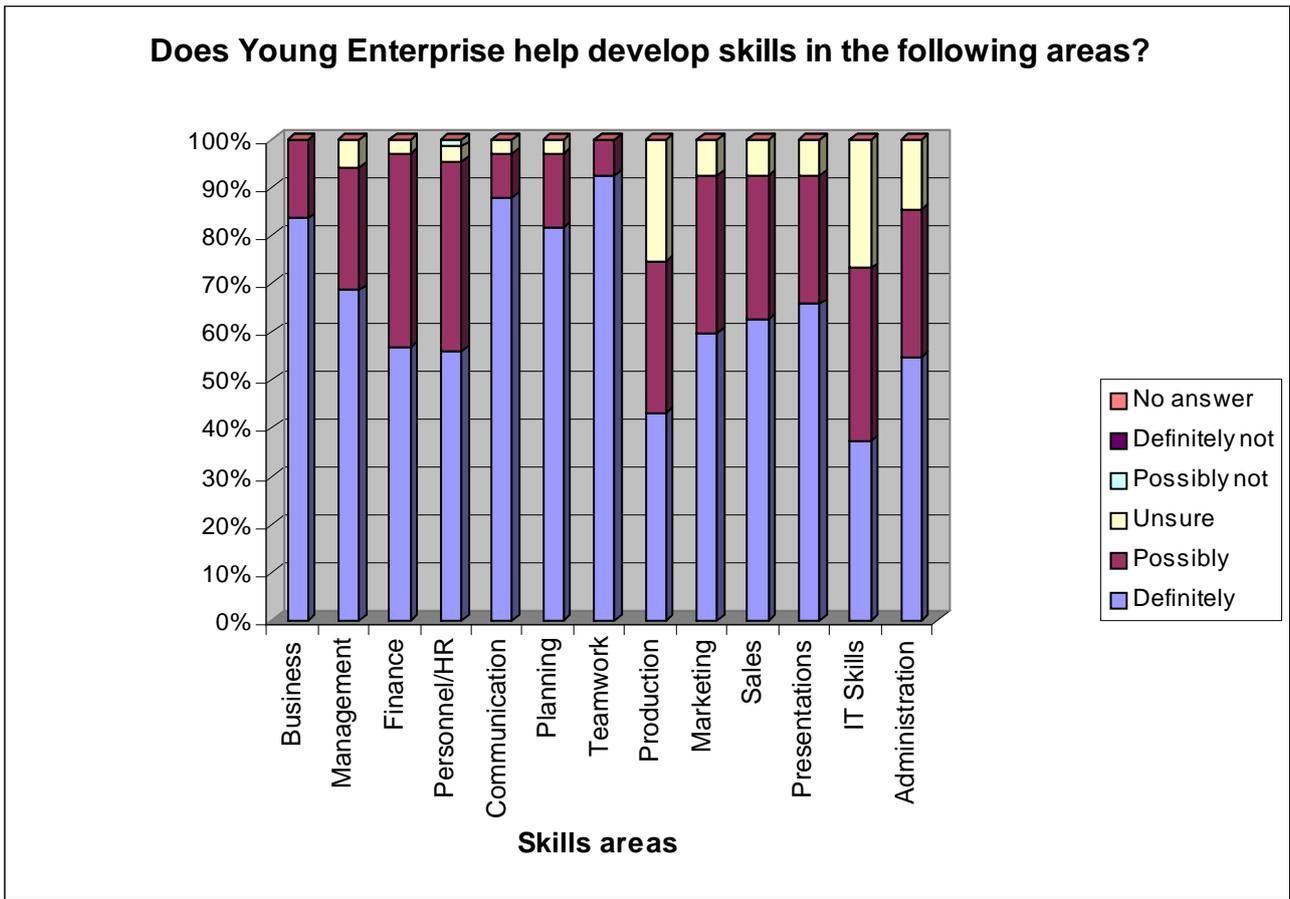
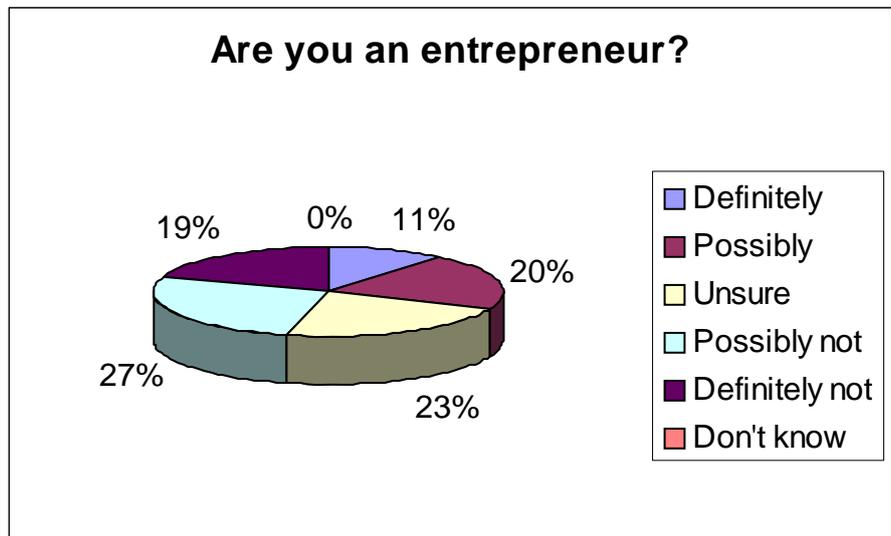


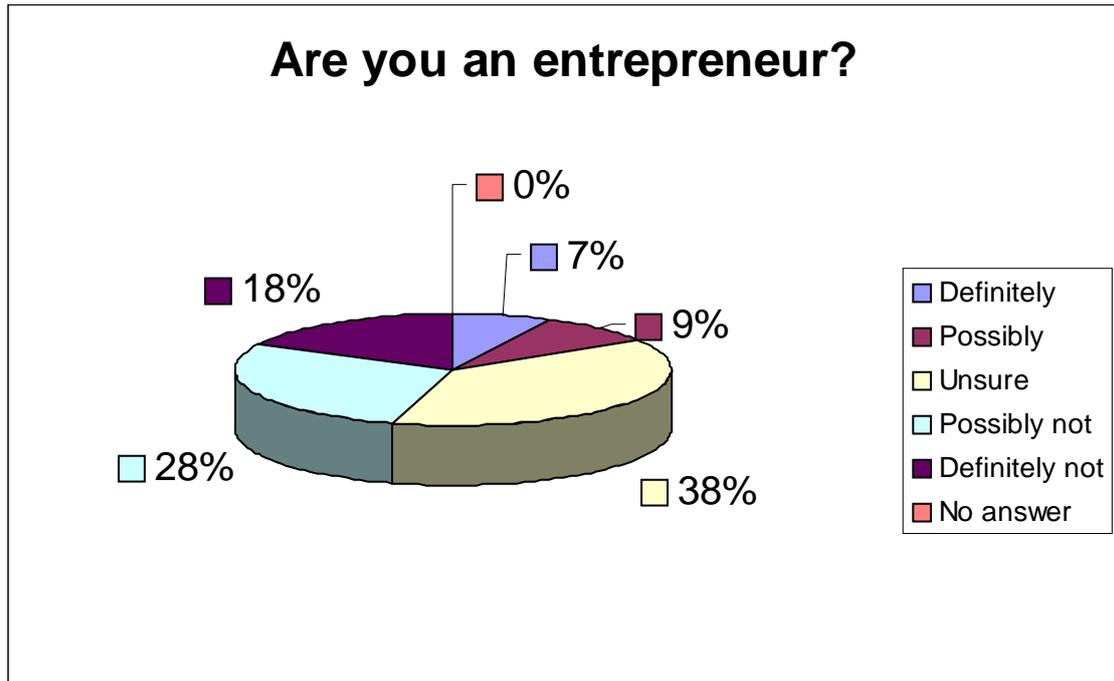
Figure 9: Business Advisers' views on being an entrepreneur

The purpose of the questionnaire was also to gain the facilitators' own perspectives of entrepreneurship. Each respondent was asked whether they were an entrepreneur. No definition was given as it was felt that



this would bias responses. Nearly a third of Business Advisers thought they were entrepreneurs whilst only 16% of Link Teachers did. However, a considerable number of Link Teachers asked why they were being asked this question and others on entrepreneurship, as the concept of entrepreneurship did not apply to them.

Figure 10: Link Teacher's perspectives on being an entrepreneur



When asked “What makes an entrepreneur”, a good idea together with a risk-taking propensity were viewed as key aspects with 84% of advisers agreeing, compared with 80% and 82% from Link Teachers. Only a quarter of respondents believed that people were born to be entrepreneurs. The influences of previous practice (11% yes) and childhood (8% yes) were viewed as of little importance by advisers, with teachers also agreeing that childhood (10% yes) was influential. An adviser or mentor was seen as influential by 21% of advisers and 22% of teachers.

Figure 11: What Makes an Entrepreneur (Business Advisers)?

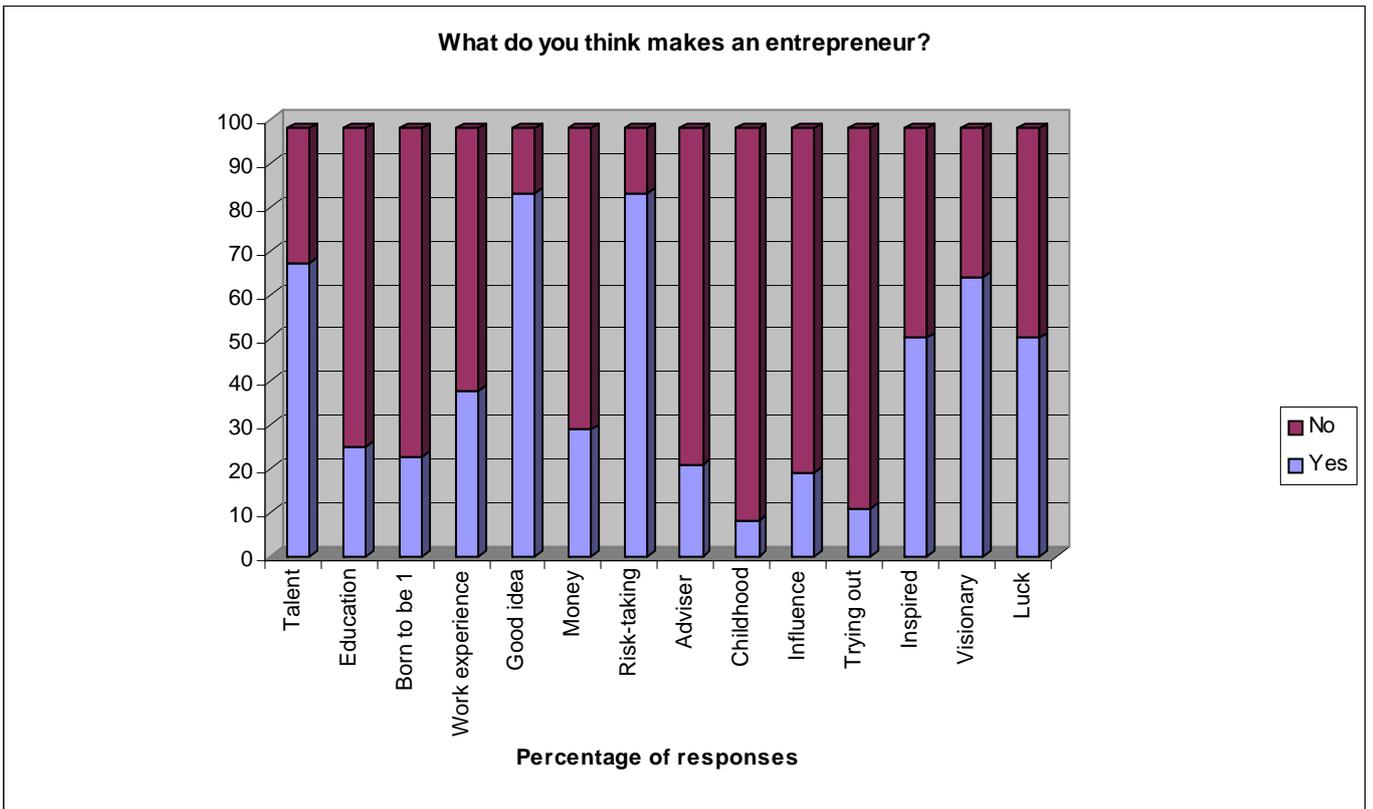
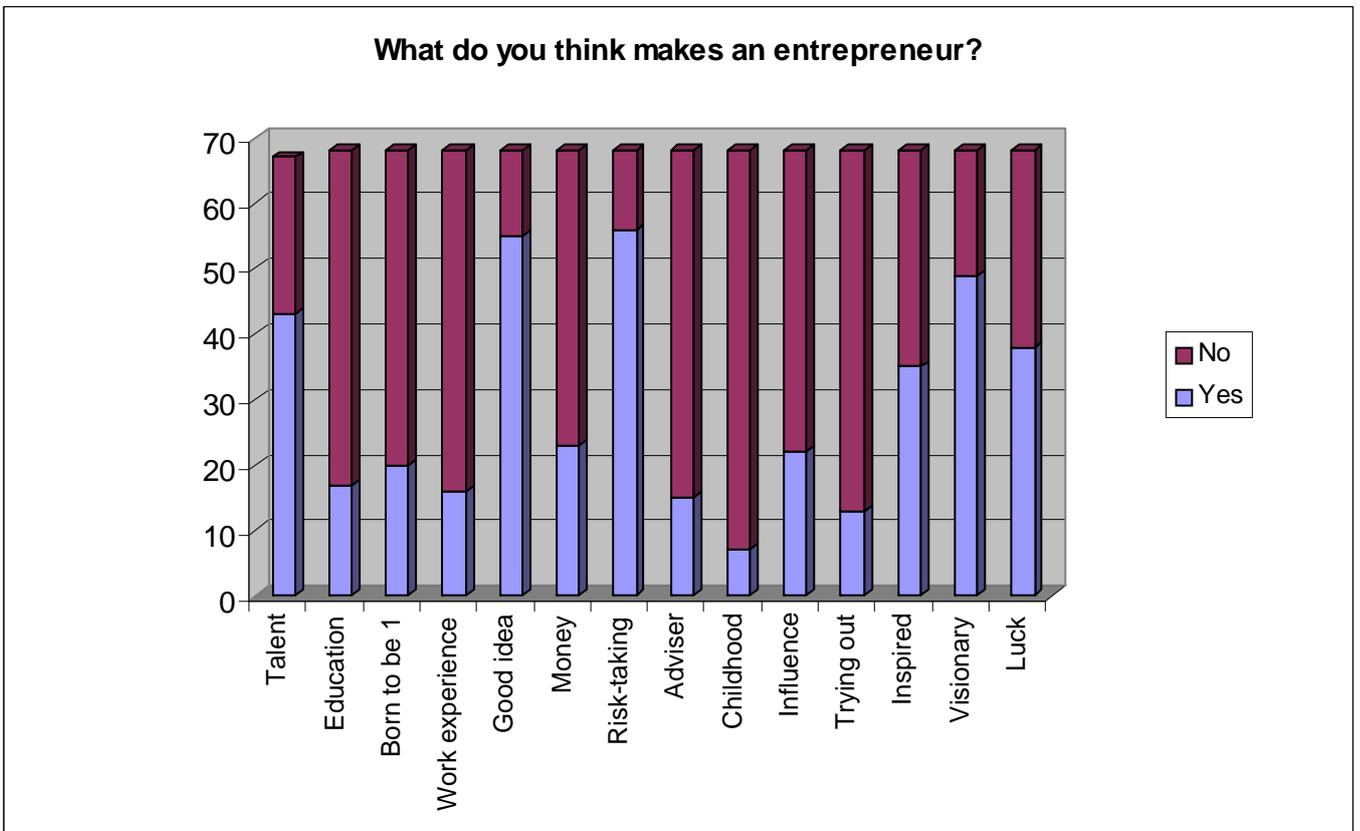


Figure 12: What makes an entrepreneur (Link Teachers)?



However, when asked “What would make you become an entrepreneur?”, their views differed. The only significant factor according to Business Advisers was that of a good idea (75% yes) whilst all other factors decreased significantly. For Link Teachers the decrease was even more marked – and

very few respondents cited more than one factor as being influential, although a good idea (68% yes) and having a vision (51% yes) were the most common factors.

When asked “Does Young Enterprise create entrepreneurs?” two Link Teachers and eight Business Advisers thought that it may not. However, a significant percentage believed the Company Programme did. A total of ten respondents cited actual evidence of a continuation of the mentoring relationship beyond the stated role. These mentors had continued their relationship with the Young Achievers following the termination of the eight-month company. The examples given were of small but growing firms, created and managed by the now ex-Young Achievers, who were continuing this relationship in an informal capacity.

Figure 13: Does Young Enterprise Create Entrepreneurs? (Business Adviser)

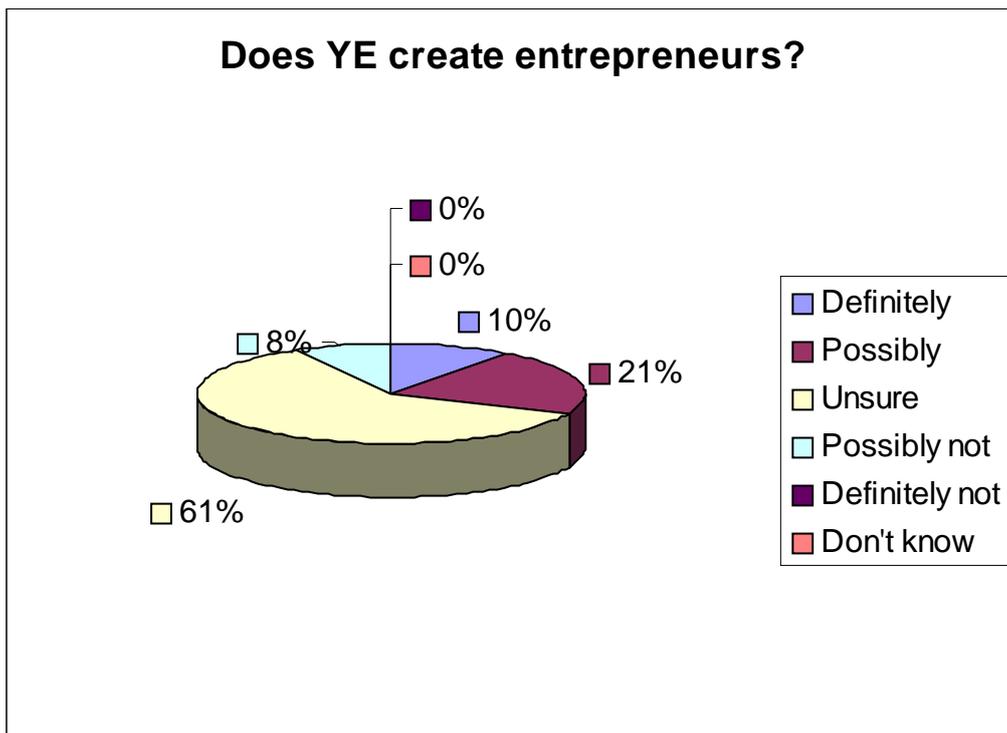
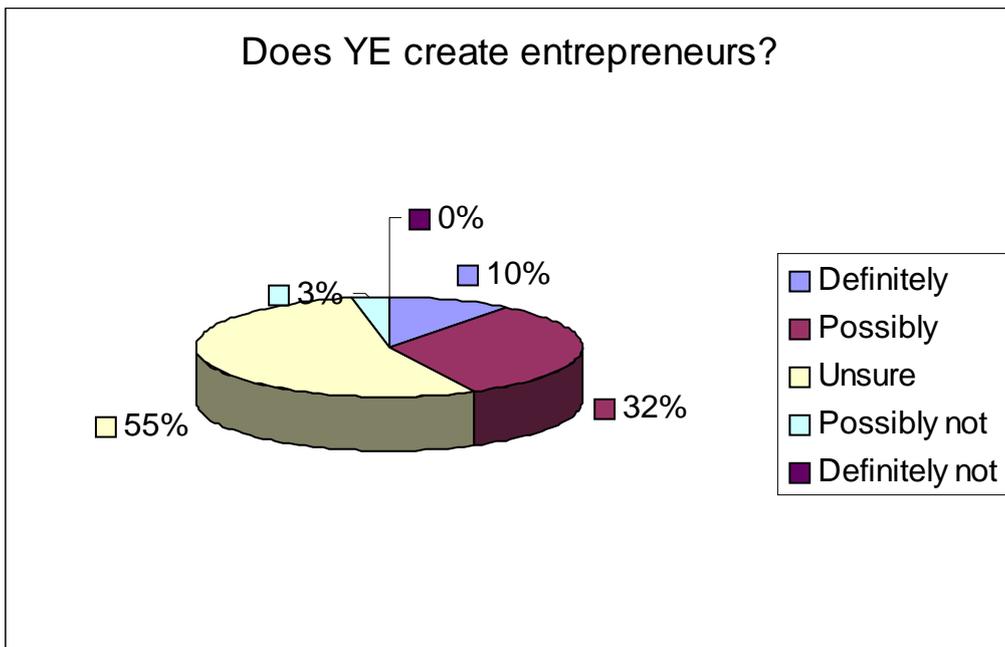


Figure 14: Does Young Enterprise Create Entrepreneurs? (Link Teachers)



Further questions in the research process examined current/previous occupations and the propensity to start a small firm – designed to identify both their experience and also their inclination to move into an entrepreneurial role. These were used in order to identify both experience beneficial to the Young Enterprise Company Programme and also the inclination to develop themselves in the direction and experience of running a small firm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a community mentor, the Business Adviser enters the school and provides advice in a non-employment setting, clearly identified by Parsloe & Wray (2000). Here the function must be one of facilitation – with Business Advisers being clear of their role within the firm. As the new Young Enterprise company starts, this role will be vital to ensure the success of the firm not just in terms of financial figures, but in the skills and experience the Young Achievers gain from the process. Those participating in a youth business programme may never have been in a traditional business setting prior to the start-up of their firm. Therefore common knowledge should not be presumed and advice should be encouraging and directional.

As identified by the research, few of the Link Teachers had been previous Young Enterprise achievers. In addition, many received little tangible benefit for their actions. However, they

perceived significant benefits for all participants in the programme. Young Achievers learnt business skills, and Link Teachers gained through experience. As such they identified the programme as being worthwhile. Those taking the role of Link Teachers came from a wide range of backgrounds, many having gone into teaching later in life. This provides significant benefits for Young achievers even though Link Teachers only facilitate Young Enterprise - when the Business Advisers are away Young Achievers will continue to ask questions. However, many were new to the role - longevity in being a Link Teacher was rare, despite the perceived benefits.

Business Advisers saw similar benefits. When working, their experience came from a wide range of activities. These add value to the Young Enterprise programme. In addition, whilst opinion was divided amongst the Link Teachers as to whether entrepreneurs are formed, a significant number of instances were cited regarding businesses having been formed as a result of Young Enterprise. These came about as a direct result of the Young Enterprise company programme, with one company (DubIt) recruiting a Young Enterprise Area Board employee a year after formation. The Business Adviser role also suffered from the short lifespan of advisers - a significant number were in their first year of advising.

Two strands of this research programme have now been completed; research into Young Achievers will occur between September 2003 and May 2004. This is designed to identify their perception of the influence from their mentors. Recommendations drawn from the research so far highlight the need to manage the continued participation of Link Teachers. Reasons behind the short life-span of Link Teachers and Business Advisers need to be investigated further.

CONCLUSIONS

Both Business Advisers and Link Teachers perceive significant value for the Young Achievers and also for themselves within the Young Enterprise Company Programme. This is a significant area and should be used as a basis to promote Young Enterprise further.

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