



# SEED Schools Outreach Employer Starter Guide

SCHOOLS ENGAGEMENT AND EARLY  
DISCOVERY (SEED) PROGRAMME

# THE SAME OLD PROBLEM

Hi there,

I'm Kathryn from Built Environment Skills in Schools (BESS), and if we've met before, you know that I'm passionate about the built environment as a force for good. Everything we build shapes the way people live, work, and thrive. But to make that future happen, we need the right people joining our sector. And that's where things get tricky.



The construction industry has a skills shortage. The workforce is aging, and not enough young people are choosing careers with us. Schools aren't promoting our industry the way we'd like them to. Employers are struggling to recruit and retain... join in if you know the words to this song because we've been singing it for decades.

I care about this sector and I know you do, too. But employers keep trying the same things and expecting different results. So, what if the issue isn't how much outreach we're doing, but how we're doing it?

That's why I created SEED: a strategic, measurable, and effective approach to schools engagement. If you're going to invest time, effort, and resources into outreach, it needs to be worth it. For your business, for students, and for the future of the industry.

Every hour spent on an unstructured school visit, every careers fair that doesn't lead to follow-up action, and every presentation that doesn't resonate with students represents lost potential. Worse still, bad outreach damages industry reputation. If students and educators experience awkward or uninspiring employer encounters, they're less likely to engage in the future. SEED is designed to remove these inefficiencies, ensuring that if you're going to invest in outreach, you give yourself the best possible chance of success.

Feel free to connect with me on social media @BESSprogramme and let's finally move the needle with our outreach.

*Kathryn*

# WHY WE NEED TO CHANGE

“We’ve been running the same outreach activities for years and expecting different results. It’s time to stop and rethink what actually works.”

The construction industry has a skills shortage. You already know that. You’ve seen the headlines. You’ve felt the struggle of recruitment. And you’ve probably been told – more than once – that schools should be doing more to “sell” careers in the built environment.

The problem? Schools aren’t selling careers at all. That’s not their job.

Their job is to educate, guide, and prepare students for their future. If construction isn’t on their radar, it’s because we, as an industry, haven’t put it there effectively or consistently. Employers might assume that turning up to a careers fair or giving a presentation about apprenticeships is enough. But here’s the truth:

No long-term  
impact

No metrics or  
data captured

We forget 90%  
of what we hear

So what’s the fix? Smarter, more strategic engagement that actually resonates with students and educators – and leads to real action. We have to work like this audience matters, not just make ourselves busy doing some of the same things. Track what works and build on it.

This guide is your starting point. It’s not just about what you should do, but how to do it in a way that works.

# PLANNING EFFECTIVE OUTREACH

Great outreach doesn't just happen – it's designed. Here's how to structure your approach for maximum impact:



## STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR GOAL

What do you actually want to achieve? Raising awareness is too vague and almost impossible to measure, but perhaps:

- you want students to visit your website?
- you want teachers to include your industry in lesson plans?
- you want students to sign up for work experience?



## STEP 2: UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are you speaking to? A Year 9 class choosing GCSEs needs different messages and activities than Year 13 students about to enter the workforce.



## STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE RIGHT FORMAT

Not every employer activity needs to be a careers talk. Depending on the goal, you might consider:

- Interactive classroom activities
- Curriculum-based learning
- Virtual work experience
- Mentoring schemes
- Supporting teachers with lesson content



## STEP 4: CRAFT YOUR KEY MESSAGES

If students remember only three things from your session, what should they be? Repeat those messages throughout your activity to reinforce them, and keep your messaging sharp, focused, and relatable.

# PLANNING EFFECTIVE OUTREACH

## STEP 5: DESIGN AN ENGAGING SESSION

Forget death by PowerPoint! Your outreach should be interactive, visual, and relevant.

- Use storytelling (real-life stories of challenges and successes)
- Incorporate discussion, debate and ideas (not just passive listening)
- Make it relatable (connect careers to their lives with local references and age-appropriate experiences)
- Think about design (images and colours are powerful ways to reinforce messages)

## STEP 6: HAVE A CLEAR CALL TO ACTION

Never leave students without a next step. Direct them to something you can track and measure, for example:

- A relevant website
- A quiz or online tool
- A follow-up session or Q&A
- A virtual work experience platform
- A game or competition

(Remember, you don't always have to create these. Many already exist)

## STEP 7: GATHER FEEDBACK & IMPROVE

Every session is a learning opportunity. Ask teachers and students for feedback that you can actually use to shape and improve:

- What worked?
- What didn't?
- What do they need more of?



# 5 BIG MISTAKES

If you've been doing outreach for a while but seeing little impact, chances are you're falling into one (or more) of these classic mistakes:



1

## Thinking Information = Inspiration

Much employer outreach is built on a very simple (but flawed) assumption:

*"If we just tell students about the careers available, they'll be interested."*

Unfortunately, that's not how decision-making works. If information alone changed behaviour, we'd all be eating perfectly healthy diets, exercising daily, and getting eight hours of sleep.

Students don't just need information. They need to understand why those roles matter and the value that they bring.



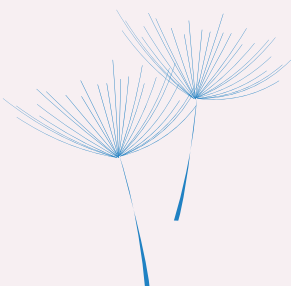
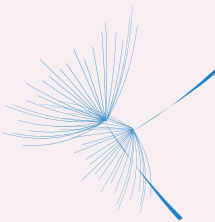
2

## Overloading Students With Too Many Options

Employers love to highlight the sheer variety of careers in construction. "There are over 100 different roles in the built environment!" sounds great – until you realise that too many choices often lead to decision paralysis.

Students don't think, "Wow, so many choices!" They think, "I have no idea where to start, so I'll just ignore all of it."

Instead, focus on a small number of well-explained pathways that students can actually see themselves in, that relate to the specific students you're spending time with.



# 5 BIG MISTAKES

## **Ignoring the Role of Teachers**

Teachers and careers advisors are major influencers when it comes to career decisions. They have daily contact with students, they shape expectations, and, importantly, they're often the ones parents go to for career information.

But here's the kicker: many teachers don't know enough about construction careers to feel confident making recommendations.

If they don't understand the industry, they won't encourage students to explore it. Engaging teachers effectively is just as important as engaging students.

## **Not Having a Clear Call to Action (CTA)**

What happens when a student leaves your session?  
Do they have a clear next step?  
Can they easily access more information?  
Is there a simple action they can take right now?

Some employer outreach is directionless – students hear a talk, take a flyer, and that's it. No follow-up, no engagement, no next step. Students are just learning to navigate the world of work, so if you don't offer them things to do next, they won't do anything.

## **Doing One-Off Activities With No Follow-Up**

A single careers talk won't change a student's life. Sustained engagement does.

If you're only visiting a school once and disappearing, you're wasting your time. Follow-up resources, digital content, and ongoing interaction keep students engaged long after the initial contact.



3

4

5



# THE OUTREACH CHECKLIST

Before your next wave of outreach activity, ask yourself:



**Can schools easily find information about your outreach activities?**

Make sure you've added a page to your website, or set out your offer and contact details on social media



**Do you understand what the school actually needs?** Research the school through their website and Government league table rankings to identify messages and opportunities



**Have you tailored your outreach to educators as well as students?**

Targeting educators directly is the most effective and efficient way to amplify your message and increase impact



**Do you have a clear next step for students to take?** Without a clear call-to-action (CTA), students who are interested but still many years from leaving education could lose momentum



**Have you brushed up on the Gatsby Benchmarks and the national curriculum?** These are both core foundations of the support that schools are looking for from external partners like you

# SCHOOL RESEARCH TEMPLATE

Ready to get started? Research a school in under 10 minutes to tailor your outreach and deliver something impactful and relevant. Use the prompts to make your emails and conversations more relevant, and track who you've contacted so you can follow up strategically.

## 1. School Overview

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of School: (tick as appropriate)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary School (Ages 4-11)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Academy Trust (may offer a different curriculum) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School (Ages 11-16) | <input type="checkbox"/> Further Education College (Post-16 Education)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sixth Form (Ages 16-18)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)          |

## How does the School Describe Itself?

Visit the school's website and social media. Look for:

- What language they use to define their values and priorities (e.g., academic excellence, inclusivity, employability, community engagement). \_\_\_\_\_
- How they position student success—are they focused on university progression, apprenticeships, technical education, or broad career exploration? \_\_\_\_\_

**EXPERT TIP:** What does this mean for your outreach?

- If a school is highly academic, they may need a clearer link to progression routes, such as how construction fits into degrees and professional careers.
- If they focus on inclusivity or employability, highlight diverse career pathways (apprenticeships, T-levels, work-based routes).

Review their Published Data. If they have a strong STEM focus, they might already engage with engineering or technology employers, making it easier to position construction as part of that world.

UK schools are assessed on factors like GCSE and A-Level results, student progress, and destination outcomes (what students do after they leave school).

- Where to find the data: Search for the school on Compare School Performance
  - Why does this matter? Schools that struggle with academic progress may be under pressure to demonstrate student outcomes, making employer engagement (especially work experience and apprenticeships) highly valuable.
- Above average (May focus on university pathways and academic success)
- Average (Likely to balance university, apprenticeships, and vocational routes)
- Below average (May prioritise work-readiness, technical education, and employer engagement)

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# SCHOOL RESEARCH TEMPLATE

## 2. Key Contacts & Decision-Makers

Identifying the right person to contact is critical. Sending generic emails to a school's general inbox rarely leads to action because schools are already overwhelmed with emails and approaches.

*Careers Lead* (primary contact for employer engagement)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Most schools are required to have a Careers Leader, responsible for implementing careers education and employer partnerships. If not listed on the school website, try:

- Searching LinkedIn
- Looking up the school's Gatsby Benchmark report (if publicly available)
- Using the Government's 'Get Information About Schools' database

*Headteacher/Principal* (for whole-school engagement or strategic partnerships)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*Other Relevant Staff* (Subject heads, STEM leads, SEND coordinators, apprenticeship coordinators, etc.)

If your outreach aligns with a specific subject area, reaching out to the Head of Department (e.g., Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) may be useful.

Name & Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Careers & Employer Engagement Strategy

Look for evidence that the school already works with employers. This can usually be found on their careers page, newsletters, or in reports such as the Gatsby Benchmark self-evaluation.

- Strong employer engagement presence (likely to be open to collaboration, but it may be competitive)
- Some employer engagement, but room for improvement
- No visible employer engagement (may need careful positioning of the value you offer)

# SCHOOL RESEARCH TEMPLATE

## 3. Tailoring Your Approach

Generic outreach doesn't work. Schools receive countless employer offers, so your approach needs to be relevant and useful.

### *What do you want to offer this school?*

- Careers Talk (General awareness of industry and career options)
- Classroom Activity (Engaging students in a practical or discussion-based session)
- Virtual Work Experience (Online activities that simulate real industry tasks)
- Worksite Visit (Providing students with hands-on exposure to the working environment)
- Curriculum Support (Embedding industry insights into subject lessons)
- Teacher CPD / Educator Training (Helping teachers integrate careers into their teaching)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### *How does this align with the school's priorities?*

- If the school has a strong university focus, provide examples of how your industry supports degree-level careers and professional routes.
- If they focus on vocational training, highlight apprenticeship pathways and real-world skills.
- If they talk about widening participation, discuss diversity, inclusion, and social mobility in your industry.

### *Your Key Message for the School*

This should be a concise, clear statement (1-2 sentences) that explains why your outreach is valuable to the school and their students.

Example: "We'd love to support your students in exploring real-world applications of STEM subjects, particularly in sustainable construction. Our interactive session aligns with Gatsby Benchmark 4 (Linking curriculum to careers) and provides insight into emerging career pathways in the built environment."

Your Key Message: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### *Call to Action (CTA)*

How can the school find out more information about your offer? What is the next step you want the school to take? Make it simple and specific:

- Book a call to discuss options
- Sign up for a careers talk
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# SCHOOL RESEARCH TEMPLATE

## 4. First Contact Strategy

Many employer emails to schools get ignored because they are too vague, too long, or don't demonstrate clear value.

### Best Contact Method:

- Email (Most common but must be well-written and direct; check against a spam filter for any potential blockers)
- Phone Call (More direct but harder to get through)
- LinkedIn Message (Useful if the contact is active online)
- School Visit (Only if you have an existing relationship or a warm introduction)
- Through an Existing Contact (Enterprise Advisor, local careers hub, mutual connection)

**EXPERT TIP:** If they state a preferred contact method on their website, use that!

### Introduction Email or Call Script

Keep it short, clear, and focused on what's in it for them.

Example: "Dear [Careers Leader's Name],

I came across your school's careers page and wanted to reach out. We're working with schools to provide [brief value statement, e.g., engaging talks and curriculum-based activities] to help students explore careers in [your industry].

Would you be open to a quick call to see if this could be useful for your students?"

Your First Outreach Draft:

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### Follow-Up Plan

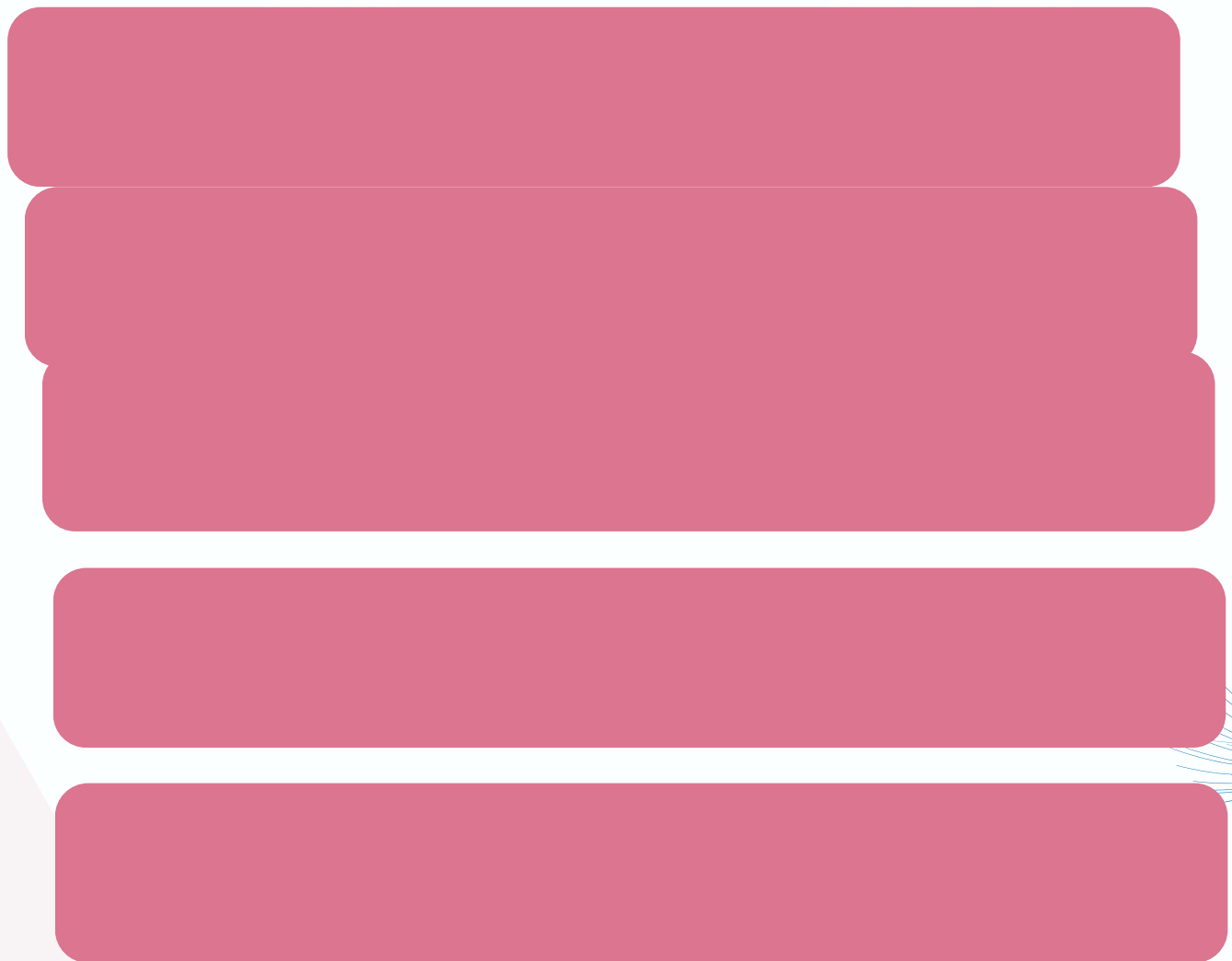
- Send a polite follow-up email after one week if no response
- Try a different contact method (LinkedIn, phone call)
- If no response after two attempts, move on to another school
  - Contact the local Careers Hub
  - Try to approach them through other employers with existing relationships, i.e., as listed on their website, or through your own networks

# LINKS AND RESOURCES

The construction industry has a skills shortage. You already know that. You've seen the headlines. You've felt the struggle of recruitment. And you've probably been told – more than once – that schools should be doing more to “sell” careers in the built environment.

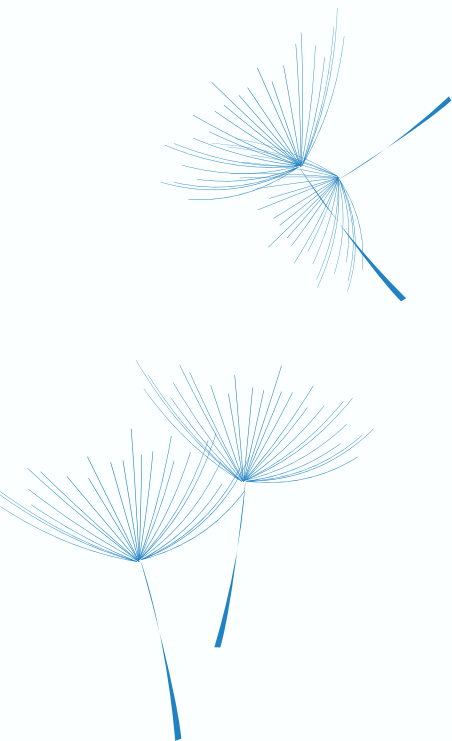
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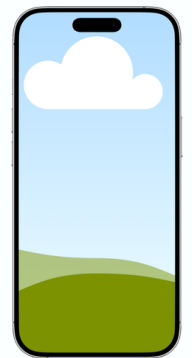
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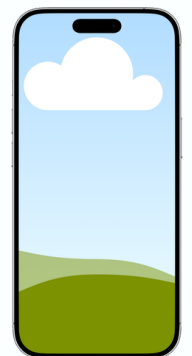


# WHAT NEXT?

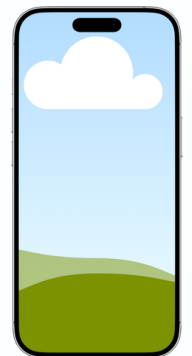
Take the scorecard



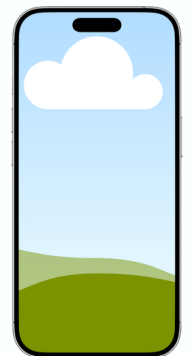
Watch the webinar



Sign up to the CEC Give An Hour scheme to get started with schools outreach and be matched with appropriate schools in your area



Trial the learning hub



Part of:

