

Accelerate – an investment with ambition for system change by The Wood Foundation

What is Accelerate?

Accelerate is committed to developing young people who are empowered, informed, engaged, and motivated to succeed in life. It is focussed on culture, collaboration, and pedagogy, working in partnership with 11 North-east schools developing meaningful community-connected learning opportunities, as well as learning and teaching approaches including oracy and project-based learning. The tailored investment in each school provides professional learning opportunities, collaborative networks, and individualised coaching support.

It was founded after three years of national and international research and collaboration with organisations such as the Edge Foundation.

[Visit the Accelerate site for more information.](#)

Who is involved?

Four schools joined its first cohort in autumn 2019 – Alford, Banff, Kemnay, and Portlethen Academies.

In August 2021, three further Aberdeenshire schools joined the network: Mackie, Mintlaw, and Aboyne Academies. The Wood Foundation has also welcomed the following Aberdeen City schools: St Machar, Bucksburn, Oldmachar, and Harlaw Academies.



Impact in 2020/21

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning opportunities which inspire and motivate the adoption of innovative learning and teaching models are a key tenet of the Accelerate investment.

Aberdeenshire's education practitioners committed more than 100 days to professional learning in 2020/21. The Wood Foundation invested more than £250,000 in professional learning and capacity support in activities including:



Ford NGL acting as coaches to the school teams and supporting the design, development, delivery, and reflections of the School Leaver Profile events.

How We Crew with XP providing inspiration for the development of small learning communities.

Project-based learning training providing practitioners with the tools to deploy new protocols in their classroom.

Insights and senior management mentoring which supported deliberate personal and professional development, exploring key strengths, opportunities, and teamworking.

Service design training to better understand the needs of the school community.

£250K

investment from The Wood Foundation

100+

days committed to staff professional learning

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTINUED

The Wood Foundation has also funded the appointment of dedicated Business and Community Support Officer (BCSO) posts to develop relationships which bring learning to life, and work in partnership with school staff to support the development of real-world curricular opportunities. This represents a direct investment of more than £100,000 in 2020/21.

HIGHLIGHTS

The schools' commitment to Excelerate have seen exciting and positive changes developed and implemented to evolve curriculum, culture, and collaboration. Excelerate does not provide a one-size-fits-all solution, rather the inspiration, tools, and networks to inspire new practice therefore implementation has varied across settings.

Highlights from the 2020/21 academic year of some of the innovative practice being modelled include:



School Leaver Profile: More than 250 members of school communities attended School Leaver Profile events. Staff and students collaborated with cross-sections of local industry and community members to identify and explore the key skills and attributes that should be developed through the curriculum. These included confidence, communication, and resilience.



Small learning communities: Inspired by XP, staff worked collaboratively to develop small learning communities to provide daily structured support to students. This was a welcome and important support during lockdown and continues to provide consistency and develop relationships.



Restructured timetables: Schools have reviewed their timetabling to implement new structures. This has included dedicated time for practitioner collaboration opportunities, as well as the introduction of 100-minute lesson blocks to allow for deeper learning, and the opportunity for senior students to lead their own learning each afternoon.



Interdisciplinary, expeditionary, and project-based learning: Each of the schools has demonstrated implementation of new learning and teaching protocols, enhanced and inspired by Excelerate professional learning. These are providing rich learning experiences for young people, bringing the curriculum to life for all students.



Industry and community: The BCSOs engaged with faculties throughout the schools developing targeted interactions with local and national industry and community experts to contextualise learning.

PROGRAMMES DIRECTOR'S COMMENT

Georgie Hughes, Programmes Director at The Wood Foundation, said:



“2020/21 was an incredibly challenging year but to see the impact of and commitment to change from our partner schools has been incredibly impressive. The learning from our national and international partners has been contextualised for students and they are benefitting from increased collaboration and innovation, as well as learning experiences which bring the curriculum to life.

“We enter the new academic year with hope and excitement for the continued embedding of these change principles in our partner schools. We are delighted to have welcomed seven additional North-east schools to the network as we grow this collaborative.”

2021/22 priorities

NEW SCHOOLS

The latest schools to join the network are currently taking part in in-depth baselining activity to fully understand their current position and the opportunities to realise their vision for change. More than 90 focus groups will have taken place by December with school departments and leadership teams.

ORACY

Up to three members of staff from partner schools have been identified as Oracy Leads and are undergoing a year-long programme of training with Oracy Cambridge in order to cascade their learning and create a whole-school approach to oracy. Communication was identified as a key skill at the Excelerate School Leaver Profile events held with Banff, Kemnay, and Portlethen Academy communities. The ability to present, be confident, and actively question will be important for young people as they progress through their education and onto their post-school pathways. Oracy feeds into Excelerate's vision to empower young people as active citizens navigating a dynamic labour market.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Project-based learning protocols are a key tenet of the Excelerate investment. Meaningfully engaging business and community with opportunities which provide young people with rich and impactful learning experiences is incredibly important. By February, 400 North-east teachers will have undertaken project-based learning through Excelerate.

EXCELERATE VIRTUAL CAREER EXPO

The Virtual Career Expo is currently underway. More than 80 career insight videos have been collected from those working in the active and growth sectors which Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have identified as key. These are accompanied by a workbook to support learning, industry panel events, and the opportunity for pupils to share questions with representatives.

More than 1500 pupils will take part in the event, focussing on the early secondary age group.

Inspired by Academies of Nashville's Career Expo, the BCSO team engaged their local network to highlight career pathways, skills, experience, and qualifications needed for a range of jobs to help inform choices at school. These resources will support schools' wider work in relation to the 3-18 Career Standards, DYW and SDS.

[Visit the Virtual Career Expo site for more information.](#)



Aberdeenshire Council comments

Cllr Gillian Owen, Chair of Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services Committee, commented: "Working with partners strengthens our ability to help prepare young people for further learning, life and work. This comes in many forms, from work placements to community projects and much more. The Excelerate programme is an outstanding example of how our schools are being supported to go one step further in terms of bringing the curriculum to life, working alongside local businesses and community partners and delivering interdisciplinary and project-based learning opportunities."

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT EXCELERATE

For more information please view our **Excelerate Learning Hub**

<https://sites.google.com/view/excelerate-learning-hub/home>

Or send us an email: info@thewoodfoundation.org.uk.

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Trustees: Sir Ian Wood (Executive Chairman), Lady Helen Wood, Graham Good

