

# Cotton Wool Kids

## Issues Paper 7

Releasing the potential  
for children to take  
risks and innovate



**Sir Digby Jones**  
HTI President

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# Author's Biography



Sir Digby Jones, HTI President.

## **Sir Digby Jones, HTI President and former Director-General, Confederation of British Industry (CBI)**

Sir Digby served as Director-General of the CBI, the UK's 'Voice of Business', from 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2006, where he regularly visited businesses in the UK and worldwide – taking their views back to those who make the rules. During his appointment he took the British business message to 70 different countries. He met on a regular basis political, business and media figures in the UK and around the world.

He holds a number of senior corporate advisory positions for a diverse range of organisations, including Deloitte, Barclays Capital, Ford of Europe, JCB, Monitise Ltd, Bucknall Austin Ltd, Thales (UK) Ltd, Alba plc, i-Clean Systems Ltd and Leicester Tigers Rugby plc.

In December 2006 he was appointed as the UK's skills envoy, campaigning for both private and public sector employers to raise the level of skills of all their employees to Level Two by 2010.

It was in corporate finance and client development with Birmingham corporate law firm Edge and Ellison that Sir Digby made his name. During the 1980s and 1990s he developed the firm's national and international presence and was also involved in most of the major management buy-outs and merger and acquisition activity in the West Midlands during that period. In 1998 he joined KPMG as Vice Chairman of Corporate Finance, where he acted as adviser to many public companies across the UK and in KPMG's global markets.

Sir Digby also holds a number of honorary academic positions and is associated with many charitable organisations, including HTI. He has a passionate interest in education, in particular the interface between education and business, and visited hundreds of schools and colleges during his tenure at the CBI.

He appears regularly on television, radio and in the newspapers, promoting the interests of wealth and job creation in the UK, the rest of Europe and beyond.

He was appointed a Knight Bachelor in the 2005 New Year Honours' List.

# Foreword

**In any sphere of life – whether you are running a business, a school, government department, charity or community organisation – success, progress and innovation depend on identifying, taking and managing risks.**

These skills are as necessary in our personal lives as our professional careers. We should all be capable of helping to build a healthy society by playing a responsible role within our families and local communities.

As Sir Digby says in this Issues Paper, our society and economy have developed through people who were not afraid to take a risk. But something has happened to dampen our enthusiasm for risk taking and children are becoming the victims of our risk aversion.

Overprotecting our children – swaddling them in cotton wool – is bad for society, the economy and young people's preparation for adulthood in a world full of uncertainties.

Of course we want our children to be safe, but risk taking is inherently in their nature and unless we give them controlled opportunities to experience it, judge it and manage it we will inhibit their development and capacity for innovation. At worst, we will be unwittingly complicit in channelling their natural thirst for adventure in completely the wrong direction.

Whilst we welcome the recent measures announced by DfES to recognise and support learning outside the classroom, the damaging consequences of our preoccupation with avoiding, rather than managing, risk extend way beyond adventure activities.

Risk education is about more than health and safety, more than a single facet of school life, more than guidance on how to avoid litigation: it is about cultivating a general can-do attitude towards all the diverse challenges and opportunities associated with contemporary life in a global economy and society.

HTI has long campaigned for young people to understand risk. Indeed, we owe our existence to the risk taken by a group of business leaders 20 years ago who wanted to create a catalyst for uniting education and business behind the aim of preparing young people for life and work. We continue to strive towards this aim at a strategic and specific level. Through our secondment programme – **Stretch** – we were instrumental, for example, in getting risk education into the National Curriculum.

Despite this achievement and while there are schools that take an innovative approach to developing risk management skills, many limit their view of risk education to health and safety compliance.

It is clear that to address the concerns expressed by Sir Digby, along with many other individuals and organisations across private and public sectors, we need wholesale culture change in our schools.

Culture change needs leadership and school leadership is HTI's business. This is why we are launching a major initiative – **Go4it** – to recognise, encourage and reward schools that are fostering risk taking skills in young people and thus promoting innovation development. You can find out more about **Go4it** on page 30.

Culture change also takes time and commitment. We already know there is a huge amount of support for our initiative across education, business and government. If you feel that you could contribute to our campaign in any way, no matter how small, I would love to hear from you.

Finally, I would like to thank Enterprise Rent-A-Car for their generous support and for sharing our vision and Sir Digby Jones, our President, for authoring this Issues Paper and articulating the case for culture change with characteristic passion and lucidity.

Anne Evans

“  
**Overprotecting our children - swaddling them in cotton wool - is bad for society, the economy and young people's preparation for adulthood in a world full of uncertainties.**  
”



Anne Evans, Chief Executive, HTI



Photography courtesy of Graiseley School, Wolverhampton

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If we never took a risk our children would not learn to walk, climb stairs, ride a bicycle or swim; businesses would not develop innovative new products, move into new markets and create wealth for all; scientists would not experiment and discover; we would not have great art, literature, music and architecture.

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Sir Digby Jones, HTI President.

# Introduction

**We live in a brutally competitive world, where the pace of change is relentless and often overwhelming. It can be a frightening, uncomfortable world, but for those with courage, skills and 'can-do' attitudes it is also exciting and full of opportunities.**

Risk is an inescapable and necessary part of every aspect of our lives, at home, in schools, at leisure and in our work. Identifying, understanding and managing risk are essential to progress, economically, socially and culturally. If we never took a risk our children would not learn to walk, climb stairs, ride a bicycle or swim; businesses would not develop innovative new products, move into new markets and create wealth for all; scientists would not experiment and discover; we would not have great art, literature, music and architecture.

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**Risk aversion is rapidly rising up the public agenda as an issue of national concern - and not before time.**

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We know this to be true, so why has risk aversion become a way of life in the UK?

During my seven-year tenure as Director-General of the CBI, I became increasingly concerned about our nation's growing resistance to taking and accepting risk. My polemics on this subject always provoked a huge postbag from every sector – often repudiating the grounds for my concerns. Yet everywhere I looked it seemed that people's capacity for understanding, evaluating and taking acceptable risks was being diminished by over-regulation, fear of litigation and the subjugation of personal responsibility by endless rights.

The prevailing culture of risk aversion that is taking hold of our nation – for reasons real or imagined – is potentially fatal to our economic and social wellbeing. We see the evidence of its insidious impact all around us: in our policy making; our legislation; in the public sector; in the private sector; in the way we parent our children and educate them.

By attempting to expunge risk from our lives all adults are colluding in a shameful deceit: not only are we regulating the lifeblood of enterprise out of people, we are also teaching the next generation of wealth creators that risk, failure and competition do not exist. But when our children leave the safety of their homes and classrooms they will be in for a big

shock, because out in the 'big, bad world', they are going to be confronted with risk, failure and competition every day. Risk aversion is rapidly rising up the public agenda as an issue of national concern – and not before time. The RSA Risk Commission and the Government's Better Regulation Commission have opened up the debate by calling for more rational, efficient and effective approaches to risk, responsibility and regulation. HTI and I believe it is time for action and action must start in our schools. Unless we educate our children about risk, help them to understand it, embrace it and exploit it, we will all suffer the consequences.

## What is this thing called risk?

Risk is a concept that relates to human expectations. In everyday usage it is often used synonymously with the probability of a loss or threat. In professional risk assessments the idea is that you look at the worst things that might go wrong, work out the probability of these things happening, their likely impact, how you might stop them and then you rank them.

Risk management is the process of measuring or assessing risk and developing strategies to manage it. Strategies might include transferring the risk to another party, avoiding the risk, reducing the negative effect of the risk and accepting some or all of the consequences of a particular risk. As a society our confused understanding of risk seems to have mired us in the second strategy: eliminating risk altogether.

In focusing on the negative aspects of risk we have forgotten that huge positives are also attached to risk taking.

In this Issues Paper, I explore three dimensions of risk to highlight why it is so vitally important for us to teach children to recognise, evaluate and take risks:

**The economic aspect of risk:** our future economic success – nationally and in the global arena – depends on creative, enterprising and highly skilled risk takers. These are the qualities our schools should be nurturing in young people. Stories of excessive political correctness that suggest failure is banned in exams and sports days, and risk aversion, that limits opportunities for play, adventure and exploration, stifle entrepreneurial spirit. Innovation and entrepreneurship have historically been two of this nation's great strengths, but statistics show that we are dropping down the international 'league' table in these areas.

**The societal aspect of risk:** rights go hand in hand with responsibilities: our children need to learn to take responsibility for their own actions. But in our rules-based, red-taped culture, in which every risk seems to be regulated, we are undermining a sense of responsibility for ourselves and for others.

**Risk in a democratic capitalist society:** teachers and children need to understand that wealth creation and a world-class education system are inextricably linked. Like a horse and carriage, you cannot have one without the other.

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Why do we take risks? The key reason is to expand our level of experience... Taking more risk means that one samples from a larger pool. While there is an increased chance of there being a problem, there is also a probability of finding something new and innovative.”

Sir Paul Judge, Deputy Chair, Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and HTI Patron.

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Through the education system we are looking for well rounded individuals who possess a positive and “can do” attitude. Many students believe that employers are only interested in their academic qualifications and do not always realise the importance of having the right behavioural qualities and skills which are essential in business. Sports, hobbies and interests outside of curriculum should be actively encouraged as we find those students who have broader interests generally have a lot more to offer. For all student levels we would like to see enterprise, critical thinking and commercial awareness increased.

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Paul Awcock, Head of HR - Recruitment, Norwich Union.

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Employers have long been saying that young people arrive at work without the basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, new research carried out by the Financial Services Skills Council for the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma shows that lack of problem solving and decision-making skills among new recruits are also severely limiting their potential.

One of the Diploma’s aims is to equip young people with the ability to take responsibility for dealing with risk. Personal learning and thinking skills will be a major component of the Diploma with students being given the opportunity to undertake problem solving and analysis in contextualised and ‘real’ work situations. It also aims to provide young people with financial capability and the ability to take responsibility for their finances, thus helping to reduce future debt problems for themselves and for UK plc.

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Teresa Sayers, Chief Executive, Financial Services Skills Council.



# The economic aspect of risk

**Our nation has a distinguished track record as a generator of ideas and inventions. What we have become less good at is innovation: in other words the ability to take our ideas and inventions to market and transform them into profit generating commodities.**

Because ours is a tolerant, liberal society that believes in free trade and open markets and is not subject to rampant protectionism, we are renowned the world over as one of the only places where outsiders are actively encouraged to come and innovate. Where else could entrepreneurs like EasyJet founder Stelios Haji-loannou find a country willing to welcome serious competition to its two national airline carriers with open arms?

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**Our society and economy have developed not by avoiding risk, but by taking risks and learning how to manage them.**”

I am immensely proud that we have this reputation, but we must not just become a nation that is great at watching others profit from innovation and risk taking: we need to be a lot better at doing this for ourselves.

We have a big task ahead of us in meeting our targets for innovation and enterprise. The statistics comparing our performance to that of other nations are sobering. Some reports suggest that adults and young people in the UK have a diminishing appetite for taking the risk of going into business. Our regard and support for entrepreneurial behaviour and entrepreneurs is low: only South Korea ranks lower. The United States' record on business creation is twice as good as ours and there is ever increasing competition from the emerging economies in India and China. The irony for schools is that even if they are successful at kindling entrepreneurial aspirations in their pupils, our risk averse climate is likely to keep their ideas grounded.

## Managed risks fuel progress

Our society and economy have developed not by avoiding risk, but by taking risks and learning how to manage them. Air travel, electricity, new technologies, modern medicine all involve risks, which we have learnt to reduce to an acceptable minimum. We face challenges - large and small - on a daily basis, which require

us to reappraise what risks we are prepared to accept. Global warming is a strong case in point. The options for reducing our impact on the environment have clear implications (or risks) for how we live and we will need to resolve how we manage the risk trade-offs that will undoubtedly be needed.

There is an element of risk in most professions and occupations. Successful investment management businesses need 'risk takers' to identify good investment opportunities and manage the risks involved. Successful manufacturing businesses need good managers who take risks by moving into new product lines and markets, but on the basis of good research, understanding the risks and knowing what action to take if risks start to become unacceptable. Successful sports people - Formula 1 drivers come to mind - need to be good risk takers, as well as having excellent fitness. These skills are just as necessary in the delivery of public and community services.

Our aspirations and success as a nation are vested in the next generation of wealth creators and innovators: people who are creative, enterprising and willing to take a risk to make their ideas a reality - not avoid it because of imagined fears. A risk-averse society does not innovate. It does not exploit scientific discoveries. It stagnates and eventually declines. And ours is rapidly becoming a risk-averse society.

## Risk embraces succeeding and failing

Now, more than ever before, it is vital that young people understand that risk embraces the twin concepts of succeeding and failing. The two are flip sides of the same coin. You do not prevent people from failing by stopping them from succeeding. Yet what we seem to be doing is giving young people the impression that risk and failure do not exist. This is a lie. In our over-anxious attempts to protect young people from danger - and ourselves from the litigators - we are restricting their development and capacity to contribute to the economy and society.

What messages are we communicating to young people when we attempt to eliminate every last vestige of risk from the curriculum, sport, play, home life and social life? Have we reached the stage where the only place children are able to take a risk is in the safe virtual reality of a computer screen?

I do not lay the blame for this state of affairs at the school gates. I know many schools are doing excellent work in cultivating enterprising attitudes through the curriculum, sport and extra-curricular activities - despite the red tape, bureaucracy and regulation. But the fact remains that there are too few of them, and there is still too much general dissatisfaction with the work-readiness of young people, for the problem to be denied.

This is a complex, systemic issue, which calls into question our whole approach to the relationship between risk, responsibility



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The insurance and financial services industry is all about assessing risk and enabling a suitable level of provision or protection to be made so that risks may be managed sensibly. It therefore provides an essential service to enable businesses to function and individuals to lead their lives knowing that they and their dependents have suitable financial protection.

Yet, ironically, many young people see the sector as ‘boring’ and an unattractive career choice. Perhaps if they were encouraged to have a greater appreciation of how to assess and quantify risk so that it can be managed rather than avoided, they may be more interested in pursuing a career in insurance or financial services. The CII is currently acting as a catalyst for a talent initiative which is trying to unite the industry around the need to raise its profile amongst young people and educate them regarding the range of career possibilities it offers. HTI’s Issues Paper and the *Go4it* initiative are very helpful in complementing this work. ”

Mike Orton, Human Resources Director, The Chartered Institute of Insurance and HTI Trust Board member.

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**I know many schools are doing excellent work in cultivating enterprising attitudes...despite the red tape, bureaucracy and regulation.**

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and regulation and the attitudes fostered, to a large degree, by alarmist and distorted reporting in the media.

Myth or reality, the following reported examples of excessive risk aversion vividly illustrate the need to stop this trend in its tracks.

Take traditional playground games... don't play conkers in the playground, you might get hurt; don't do backstroke in the swimming pool, you might bang into somebody; don't skip, run, throw snowballs, play on the ice, do handstands or cartwheels. All of these activities have allegedly come under the axe in schools somewhere in our country. I wonder how we survived our own childhoods!

In the school science lab, teachers feel stifled in what they can and cannot do by their understanding of health and safety rules. A recent survey of science teachers indicated that 87% had not allowed their students to undertake some form of experiment or practical work. So whereas pupils should be wowed by live experiments, many are being switched off the sciences to the detriment of the UK's capacity for innovation.

We hear of school sports days where there are no winners for fear of causing permanent damage to the self-esteem and emotional development of the 'losers'. One of my colleagues at the CBI told me that when his eight-year old was winning a running race he was instructed to hold back to give his fellow competitors the chance to catch up! There have been reports of schools banning ball games and teachers refusing to referee matches for fear of the consequences of injury.

There are organisations that offer adventurous activities to young people and do so very successfully and professionally, but they have declined in number. A disproportionate response by the regulators to the very rare tragedies that occur has resulted in restrictions and reductions in many outdoor activities, with some nonsensical examples of extremist measures taken to protect children from injury. Hard hats and protective gloves for a walk in the woods...?

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Many parents believe the world is a far riskier place now than it was a generation ago. As a consequence, many are reluctant to let their children out of their sight. Technology has played a part too. For example, mobile phones and GPS navigation systems mean that the current generation of children are the first ever group of people in history who will grow up without ever knowing what it is like to get lost!

**Adventure provides learning, confidence, friendship, compassion and understanding. Very occasionally it leads to tragedy but overwhelmingly it does not.**

**Our aim is to stir the imagination of young people to the point where each individual is inspired to achieve more than they ever thought possible.** ”

Nick Barrett, Chief Executive Officer,  
Outward Bound Trust.

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The main aim must be to help teachers and educators to be competent to carry out the activities and teach pupils the life skills of assessing and controlling risk, not avoiding it. Unfortunately our profession is often hijacked by others with little or no competence and we get the blame. Increasing the knowledge and life skills of educators and managers should be seen as a priority for the sector if we want to make a lasting difference.”

Dave Garioch, Health and Safety Manager, London Borough of Sutton.

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I am sick and tired of hearing that ‘health and safety’ is stopping people doing worthwhile and enjoyable things. If you’re using health and safety to stop everyday activities, get a life and let others get on with theirs.”

Bill Callaghan, Chair, Health and Safety Executive.

## Learning about risk is vital

I am not suggesting that we expose our children to daily near-death situations in the interests of experiencing risk. Of course we want to protect our children, and teachers have a duty to identify, evaluate and measure risk, but when they have made a balanced assessment and put proper safety measures in place, they should be left to get on with activities without fear of litigation.

Advice for teachers and young people, seems to me to be key.

When the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published the findings of its research into the delivery of risk education in schools (2004), it revealed that whereas teachers felt confident that they were delivering risk concepts effectively, they were failing to distinguish between risk management and risk education. In fact, levels of awareness and understanding of the need to teach young people about risk assessment and control issues were low and often completely absent. In the main, risk education was about what was immediately necessary in the classroom to comply with health and safety regulations. Teachers confessed that they often felt inhibited and vulnerable, fearing personal liability and litigation.

A survey published by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents showed that 95 per cent of new teachers had not taken risk assessment training and were unaware of the need for conducting risk assessments in and outside the classroom. Nearly 75 per cent said they had not received any health and safety training as part of their induction to a school.

This is dispiriting, particularly as HTI, in partnership with the HSE, played a key role in incorporating risk education into the National Curriculum through a series of secondments.

The Better Regulation Commission in its report *‘Whose risk is it anyway?’* has called for ministers and senior civil servants to be trained on understanding risk and the options for managing it. There is clearly a strong case for extending training to our schools.

## Education paradox

There is a paradox as far as our exams and qualifications system is concerned. On the one hand GCSE and A-level results are soaring year on year. Yet the perception amongst the business community is that exams are harder to fail than pass and there is well-publicised discontent with young people's skills levels and attitudes when they enter the workplace.

CBI research has revealed that a third of employers have to train 16 year olds up to an acceptable standard of literacy and numeracy in their first year of employment. Almost two thirds of employers say that school leavers lack self management skills; over three quarters say that school leavers do not have a rudimentary understanding of business and finance; and nine out of ten employers say that health and safety regulations are an impediment to employing young people because they are terrified of being sued.

The system is failing and parental paranoia is making matters worse. We do our children no favours by shielding them from every imagined danger when all the statistics show they are under no greater threat to life and limb than they were 30 years ago. Yet whereas in the '70s, 80 per cent of eight-year olds were allowed to walk to school alone, today it is only 10 per cent and whereas 50 per cent of parents cited 'stranger danger' as a serious fear, now it is more than 90 per cent.

It is natural to want to protect our children, but in attempting to factor out every trace of risk from our children's lives we are opening up potentially far more sinister outlets for their natural sense of adventure and curiosity.

We need to set aside our often irrational fears and give children controlled opportunities to confront risk and challenges in different settings, so that they can experience winning and failure, learn to be creative and innovative, grow in self-esteem, motivation and confidence in their relationships with others and strengthen their capacity to deal with uncertainty.

These are exactly the skills that businesses and our public services are crying out for, but they are also vital life skills.

## **Develop winners – or face the consequences**

I want to see serious competitiveness in exams, sports days and activities designed to equip young people for society. We must not delude our young people that they can all be winners and that failure and risk do not exist: the world beyond the school gates is not a level playing field. I want winners to be encouraged and applauded, not held back because of political correctness. But I also want our winners - in fact all those in a position of influence - to take responsibility for helping those who are vulnerable and frightened to find a way of succeeding on their own terms in our changing, competitive world.

**“ We must not delude our young people that they can all be winners and that failure and risk do not exist.”**

If we are not instilling this understanding of risk, competition and enterprise into the next generation of wealth creators, I know of several billion highly educated, motivated, risk-taking young people in China and India who are just waiting for the opportunity to snatch our lunch and dinners from under our noses.

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**Most of passenger transport is commercialised, though highly regulated. Many of the sector's leaders took significant financial risks in setting up their operations. Our operators in turn look for employees with commercial awareness and a 'can-do' attitude. We intend to capture some of this requirement in partnership with employers and other sector skills councils in order to define the content of the new Travel and Tourism 14-19 Diploma. This will include employability skills, among which operators will be looking for positive attitudes towards business, as well as an appreciation of safe working practices.”**

Peter Huntington, Chief Executive, Go Skills.

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We hire 650 young people into Deutsche Bank every year. Qualifications used to be the key benchmark, but we're now looking at a far wider range of skills and qualities as indicators of leadership potential that will drive our business forward in a very competitive global marketplace.

The ability to establish trust with customers and colleagues is critical. One of the key qualities we're looking for is passion translated into achievement in any sphere - it may be sports, performing arts, drama, the military forces - but real passion is what makes excellent leaders. Sadly, there is a scarcity of this kind of person.

We're also looking for people who are inquisitive because as organisations grow in global reach tomorrow's leaders are going to need international understanding and to be inquisitive beyond their comfort zone.

Being successful in a global marketplace also requires huge amounts of collaborative skill in employees. We need people who know how to navigate through a large geographically spread organisation and collaborate with colleagues across the business because to deliver world class customer care we can no longer afford for people to focus in on their own narrow set of tasks - we need them to be adept at talking about the breadth of our business.

And finally we need people with excellent communication skills who are capable of well-rounded interaction with clients because continuity and consistency is critical to the quality of service we offer. When we find young people with these innate skills, we treat them like gold!

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David Fass, Head of Global Banking - Europe, Deutsche Bank.

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The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) conducts thousands of safety inspections each year on children’s play space. We abide firmly by our philosophy that play areas should be as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.

Providers of play opportunities are increasingly concerned about litigation and pressure from insurers. We may believe that we have a moral responsibility to protect our children from any harm whatsoever. However it is accepted amongst those in the know that exposure to risk is a fundamental part of children’s lives.

The ability to judge risks as adults is not something that we simply acquire at the age of majority. It is a skill that is learnt through exposure to hazards. When as adults, we encounter a new hazard or risk, we apply those skills that we learnt as children to the situation. As a child, we explore the world around us, building our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Children are less capable of judging risk for themselves, so they need a degree of protection. However if we remove all exposure to hazard then we deny children the ability to develop those skills mentioned above and the ability to formulate their own responses to hazards.

Here’s an example: we might provide a children’s playground with a balance beam. Beneath the balance beam we provide some grass surfacing to reduce the severity of any injury upon impact, should a child fall. Note that we have not removed the risk of a child falling from the beam, but we have introduced a control measure to ensure that the outcome of any accident is not likely to be serious. A child is still exposed to the physical risk of falling, and they are able therefore to hone their motor skills in the process. If we say that the balance beam is too dangerous then the following can be the consequences: 1. Children are denied the opportunity to explore, and so develop, their balancing abilities. 2. A child attempts to fulfil their natural desire and right to play by stringing a plank of wood across two garage roofs. The child explores their balancing across the roofs, with the consequence that they fall onto the hard surface beneath.

Providing an appropriate mix between risk and safety is a balancing act, but it is one that we, as adults need to get right so that our children are not denied their natural right to play as enshrined within Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We are also at risk of producing a society that suffers greater injury in later life because it has not learnt the ability to deal with danger.

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David Yearly, Play Safety Manager, RoSPA.



## Point of view

Julia Elliott, Headteacher, Crosshall Junior School

I do think that we cultivate an anxiety about children and risk in our society and this is a big problem. If all the decisions children make in their formative years are 'safe and secure' because adults have made sure this is the case, how are they going to solve problems and make difficult decisions when they grow up?

We try to counter this anxiety at Crosshall Junior School by creating situations and opportunities where children are able to take a risk in a supported environment, in many different ways, to enhance their learning and develop their entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

For example, a few years ago we realised that the school building – a huge capital resource – was not being used effectively during lunchtime. We asked the children how they would like to use it and they requested a 'song and dance' hall, where they could rehearse and perform in front of the school. So we bought a CD player and set up a booking system for children to schedule their practice sessions, 'auditions' and performances.

Now some might say that this was 'risky', allowing children free, unsupervised rein of the hall. Some might say that allowing a child with severe speech difficulties to stand up with a microphone in front of the whole school is 'risky'. We don't see it like that. Because we listened to the children our hall is now booked up to six weeks in advance. We have a group of four eight year olds who have formed the school's first all-girl rock band because they didn't see why boys should have the monopoly. We also have 78 children taking drum lessons with a 'cool' drum teacher every week – because that is what the children wanted.

## We say 'you decide'

Crosshall is a foundation school, which means we have greater freedom and autonomy to take risks and allow our children to take them too. Our ethos is to say to children 'you decide', or 'it's your choice' and we provide an enabling environment to allow them to do this.

An example of this is our 'independent learning passes' scheme. Children have to demonstrate responsibility and accountability through three levels. When they reach level 3 they gain the 'freedom of the building', which means they can go anywhere they like and do anything they like in their free time. Interestingly, one of the things they love to do most is to go into nursery and help to teach the younger children. This fits very well with our desire to exploit the potential of children as teachers, not just learners.



Our Golden Ticket scheme, which again enables children from seven upwards to earn the privilege of doing anything they like in the school, has the same outcome, with older children often volunteering to help younger children with their chosen pursuits.

The same principles apply to learning in the classroom. We have a policy that children should never have to listen to a teacher for more minutes than their age. During these pauses in teaching, we ask children to turn to their partners and discuss the learning topic – again, they learn from one another. Similarly, if we are learning about Queen Victoria, for example, we don't just teach the facts, we ask children questions like 'was she a good queen?', which provokes a diversity of answers. Classroom discussions can be a risk! Who is the teacher and who is the learner?



Four nine-year old boys from Crosshall Junior School creating an animated film of Twelfth Night to be shown at the annual film evening.

## Teaching tolerance of ambiguity is key

One of the most important things education can do is to teach children tolerance of ambiguity and we, as teachers, should recognise that children are partners in the learning journey: we can learn from children too.

Take their facility with new technologies, which has made them very adept non-sequential learners, able to make super-fast decisions. Just because they don't do things in the order that we would doesn't mean it's wrong or bad. We should exploit the fact that they can do six things at once and give them opportunities to demonstrate their phenomenal skills.

At Crosshall we are acutely aware of the skills and attitudes young people will need to become global citizens and we actively encourage the development of leadership and entrepreneurial capabilities. For example our eight year olds run the stationery shop and are responsible for all the marketing, pricing and ensuring that a percentage goes to charity. We recognise that it is often the challenging children who have most leadership potential and we encourage children to recognise and celebrate these skills in themselves by recording their leadership achievements on a special notice board.

I believe that we are doing all we can at Crosshall to teach children tolerance of ambiguity, how to take risks, make decisions and take responsibility for their actions. The problem is that they only spend an average of 17.5% of their waking hours in school. Our influence in tackling risk aversion will inevitably be limited if the rest of society, including parents, is intent on making sure that children's lives are in perfect order.

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The RSA has established a Risk Commission, chaired by Sir Paul Judge, that intends to bring together the central themes underlying the risk debate and provide a strategy and tools to enable children, parents and the rest of society to adopt a rational, informed approach to risks.

Rejecting those aspects of modern life that we do not find comfortable (or comprehensible) would be a mistake. Rather we should adapt to the reality of modern life and learn to assess the incumbent risks that are associated with new technologies, medicines and changing social norms and values. There is a balancing act that needs to be performed between different forms of risk - the risk of participating in an activity and the risk of not doing so.

The RSA's competence based curriculum framework 'Opening Minds', tackles several of Sir Digby Jones' concerns head on. 'Managing risk and uncertainty', 'celebrating success and managing disappointment', 'financial literacy' together with an emphasis on creativity and initiative taking are key elements of the competences. They are the building blocks of the modules of work developed by each participating school.

There is an emphasis on team working and the modules of work are often based on real issues, giving interest and relevance to the curriculum.

Students work on these competencies both inside and outside the classroom and our evidence, from a growing number of schools, is that they add interest and enjoyment to the curriculum and are also likely to lead to improved academic achievement. ”

Lesley James, Head of Education, Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

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Our education system has much to answer for. Its primary purpose should be to empower young people to take control of their lives by encouraging them to take progressively increasing responsibility for their actions, their learning, themselves and each other. This is hugely prejudiced by such stories as teachers being too worried to take children on trips and of pupils not being allowed to play conkers unless they are wearing goggles. ”

Sir Paul Judge, Deputy Chair of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and HTI Patron.

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Risk management is part of an enabling process - it allows schools to deliver highly rewarding education. Paperwork on its own never saved a life. But we would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater if we dumped risk assessment altogether. ”

Lord Hunt, Minister with responsibility for workplace health and safety, keynote speaker at Safe Schools, Healthy Schools conference March 2006.

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Far from being risk averse, our experience is that more and more young people have a real appetite for the risks involved in setting up in business. Moreover, the changes we have recorded over a number of years seem to be part of a clear trend.

Research commissioned by Businessdynamics in November 2005 showed that 53% of young people (age 14-19) are interested in starting their own business. This is a dramatic increase on 45% in 2004 and part of a clear trend, we believe. In 2003 the figure was 43% and 33% in 2001.

Equally importantly, the gender gap is closing rapidly, 51% of women would like to start their own business compared with 55% of men. In 2004, the divide was 20%, with 55% of men interested, compared with only 35% of women.

However, there are strong national variations, with 56% of young people in England interested in starting a business, compared with 51% in Wales and only 38% in Scotland.

The traditional stigma of business failure also seems to be less important amongst the young. As many as 88% think that if a business fails the owner should be encouraged to try again. Only 17% think that it is usually the owner's fault. ”

David Millar, Chief Executive,  
Enterprise Education Trust,  
[www.enterprise-education.org.uk](http://www.enterprise-education.org.uk)  
(formerly Businessdynamics)

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It's vital that children understand and are able to manage risk so that they may benefit themselves and others when opportunities present themselves. My observations suggest that children are less afflicted by risk aversion than their guardians.

At LASER (Learning about Safety by Experiencing Risk, [www.lasersafety.org.uk](http://www.lasersafety.org.uk)) we bring together children and practitioners from the emergency services, local government and voluntary organisations in order to 'learn by doing'. Children are coached in how to recognise and manage opportunities and threats through learning experiences, which are 'as risky as necessary'. Learning is personal, practical, meaningful and useful and seeks to enable and empower children to take responsibility through the development of transferable life-skills.

LASER scheme intervention is measured against a number of criteria, including the following learning outcomes in that the child demonstrates that they are able to:

- Recognise hazards and dangers
- Take and use safety advice
- Make judgements about possible harm or danger to self or others
- Take some responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others
- Summon help quickly. ”

John Vallender, LASER Programme Manager,  
RoSPA.



## Point of view

Alan Roach, Headteacher, Chalvedon School and Sixth Form College and Barstable School

I would like to reassure Sir Digby that there is a great deal of development and progress in the areas that give him concern. Enterprise Pathfinder schools, Education Business Link organisations, Vocational Education and the new Specialist Diplomas are all promoting change and making a difference.

Heads are being encouraged to lead change. A National Curriculum and narrow targets will not be the recipe for future progress in achievement. An enterprise culture at every level is what is needed and many of us have been working alongside senior government advisers to encourage and develop this in our leaders, in our teaching and learning, in the teachers and learners and in our communities.

As an educationalist, I can see the danger of promoting a narrow view of enterprise. Educationally, to focus on the commercial and financial dimensions without developing the personal, social, creative and eco-enterprise aspects of enterprise and leadership would be as short-sighted as we were as a nation parading a collection of traditional subjects as an education for life.

As Headteacher of both Chalvedon School and Sixth Form College and Barstable School, I am delighted to see our pupils engaging in competitive sport at school, district, national and international level. We continue to engage our pupils and students in adventure activities. We encourage competition, collaboration and mutual support. We find abilities and talents in every child that can be applauded and built upon. This has been the case throughout my 19 years of headship. The revolution taking place in education through the Academies Programme, leadership development and curriculum reform is what will transform such communities and enable our country to prosper.

Plans for the creation of two Academies to replace my schools are well advanced. I hope that Sir Digby might take heart from our new Vision for Learning:

(The following are edited extracts of these plans. Read the full Vision for Learning for the Academies at [www.hti.org.uk](http://www.hti.org.uk))

Two intrinsically linked Academies:

- At the hub of their community and the catalyst for community change
- The vehicle for personal engagement with the learning process, raised aspirations and positive, self-determining social improvement.

The Academies will have a pupil-centred approach to learning, systems to support the individual learner and outcomes that reflect the highest level of achievement and personal development for an individual pupil. The Academies will generate partnerships with business and the community and the confidence and optimism of parents and investors. They will deliver a generation of highly motivated, independent thinking and entrepreneurially oriented young people, able to support, drive and energise regeneration and community change.

The Academies will provide two inter-related strands of curriculum delivery. The first will meet the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and Key Stage assessments; the second, the Enterprise Curriculum, will develop competencies and thinking skills to enhance the academic outcomes but also the entrepreneurial and self-determining skills for life beyond the school.

In the learning context of traditional subjects, the learning group of pupils of broadly similar ages will work together for a proportion of the time. However, within that learning group there will be a differentiated approach to tasks; each learning group might have within it three levels of activity. The pupil follows an activity with specific learning outcomes appropriate for him/her as an individual learner. Learning plans will provide opportunities for pupils to move from one level to another as needed. Learning Groups may come together for lead lessons, demonstrations and information exchange as well as exhibitions and celebrations of success.

To deliver the Enterprise Curriculum, however, a different approach is needed. Enterprise in this context is used in its broadest sense to encompass the notion of personal or group activity that generates change, improvement and success. Six aspects of enterprise and sport will provide the framework for the delivery of this curriculum.

In the 11-14 Enterprise Curriculum pupils will work through their family cluster (one of a number of learning clusters) of 25/27 pupils of all ages and consider aspects of financial, commercial, social, creative, eco and personal enterprise. Learning will be through real contexts, in partnership with outside agencies, against specific criteria, but open to the approach chosen by pupils to meet those criteria. Family Clusters may come together as an enterprise cluster for lead lessons, presentations or discussions.

Sport forms a key element of this curriculum. Healthy lifestyles, physical activity and the principle of 'personal best' form the cornerstones of the vision. Values which we need to embed in the thinking of young people if they are to become truly entrepreneurial include: developing a competitive spirit

in terms of personal or organisation improvement; team building and the concept of playing to personal strengths; participation, reliability, commitment to others and personal effort for the benefit of the whole 'team'.

Running concurrent to the curricula will be the Young Leadership Programme, designed in partnership with business, to identify, nurture, apply and celebrate from an early age the leadership qualities exhibited by young people. In the particular social context of East Basildon, leadership qualities are often overlooked, have little outlet other than through anti-social behaviours and remain a lost resource for the community.

Economies of scale and effective organisational structures enable the curricula to deliver a wider range of skills and develop a greater knowledge base at a higher level than previously. The Academies' vision is for a learning environment that is available to pupils from 8am-6pm, with learning taking place beyond the designated hours as an enterprise and leadership enrichment process in which all will engage.

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Fear of litigation, terrifying and lurid headlines, single-issue campaigns, lack of trust, lack of information, confused accountability and a ‘something must be done’ mentality’ all swirl around the policy-making process and put impossible pressure on the system and ministers for rapid and decisive action. Unfortunately in too many cases, the more rapid and decisive the action, the worse the resulting regulation turns out to be, failing to solve the problem, while bringing extra costs and unintended consequences. ”

*‘Whose risk is it anyway?’* The Better Regulation Commission.

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When examples of excessive risk aversion, or indeed health and safety myths, are publicised, we enter a vicious circle that serves to reinforce disproportionate behaviour. ”

Bill Callaghan, Chair, Health and Safety Executive.

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Parents today face strong social pressures to adopt a precautionary approach towards child-rearing. Intimidating public campaigns endlessly remind them about the many risks their children face. It is difficult to retain a sense of perspective when the safety of children has become a permanent item of news. ”

Frank Furedi, Professor of Sociology, University of Kent.

# The societal aspect of risk

**Research has shown that one of the biggest disincentives to schools in allowing children the freedom to take risks is the fear of litigation. No wonder, when the media report that more than half of all parents would take legal action if their child suffered a personal injury. As a result, teachers spend endless hours filling in reams of risk assessment forms for a walk in the woods or a trip to a castle. Who can blame them for thinking why bother?**

This regulatory overload is a reflection of the blurred and confused boundaries around risk, health and safety, regulation and responsibility that are pushing us ever closer to becoming a nanny state.

In a nanny state over-regulation is the norm, nanny knows best and nanny is there to make sure it happens. In a nanny state people's sense of responsibility for their own actions and for the wellbeing of their neighbour is eventually eroded: all that is left are our rights. And when you reach a situation where you have rights coming out of your every pore but no responsibility or accountability, the automatic reaction if things go wrong is to point the finger of blame elsewhere and call in the lawyers.

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**When children see those in authority behaving in a way at home, at work and in public life that is in stark contrast to the principles of enterprise, accountability and responsibility for self and others, we are seriously curtailing their potential.**”

Ironically there is no evidence to suggest that the number of claims has increased. Our so-called compensation culture appears to be perception-based, but perception can be as damaging as reality when it results in regulatory knee-jerk reactions to public outcries for action. The more we regulate, the more our anxiety grows and the more we become paralysed from taking a healthy, well-balanced, responsible view of managing risk.

## Fear breeds fear

Our fearfulness of litigation and reluctance to take or give responsibility causes us to see disaster and sniff a lawyer around every corner. It leads to playground equipment being ripped up because children might fall off it; teachers who are frightened to give children access to adventure activities/conduct live science experiments because there might be an injury; employers who are frightened of dealing with an underperforming employee because of their gender, ethnicity, religion or disability; chocolate manufacturers who are pilloried as purveyors of ill health and obesity.

For fear of a never-ending list of imagined dangers, parents prefer to sit their children in front of the television or computer for hours on end and ferry them half a mile up the road, rather than let them walk. Over-protective parenting not only undermines young people's capacity for understanding risk and taking responsibility, but also teachers' capacity for developing can-do attitudes and resourcefulness.

The same is true of disinterested or negligent parenting. I have visited many schools and have frequently been struck by how lack of parental engagement impacts on learning effectiveness. Every teacher I have ever met has wanted to make a difference. How disheartening it must be to know that all your commitment to giving a child the best possible start in life is fruitless because there is no-one to motivate or encourage them at home.

## From debate to action

Children take their lead from adults. When children see those in authority behaving in a way at home, at work and in public life that is in stark contrast to the principles of enterprise, accountability and responsibility for self and others, we are seriously curtailing their potential.

I am cautiously optimistic that the current groundswell of discontent with our national preoccupation with risk aversion will eventually lead to change. The new Compensation Act, for example, will hopefully restore a sense of balance to the litigation process so that hugely valuable school trips are not victims of further attrition.

But cultural change – and this is what we are talking about – takes time and, with global pressures bearing down on our competitiveness, time is not on our side. We need to move from debate to action and that is a responsibility that we must all – government ministers, policy makers, regulatory bodies, leaders of business, education and public services and parents – take on board.

There are few countries that are better placed to take globalisation forward to the benefit of everyone in our society. But we will not do it by valuing rights over responsibilities, allowing people to believe they can litigate at will, emasculating teaching control and governing our country in a way that puts regulation first and ignores the consequences.



## Point of view

John Martin, Headteacher,  
Castle Hill Junior School.

Teachers and headteachers make decisions that involve some element of potential risk on a daily basis. These can range from whether a school trip should take place, to whether pupils should be allowed to play outside when it is raining.

Set these common scenarios against headlines such as 'Head bans conkers' and 'Sports day cancelled because somebody might lose' and you can touch the challenge of reaching a mature debate that leads to progress for all concerned.

The 'nanny state' stereotype is as commonly put at schools' doorsteps as is the charge of falling exam rigour or a lack of competition in schools. Many of us share business concerns that we very much do need competition, reasonable risk and assessment but never seem to be heard. We are on the same side, share the same passion to improve, but have to work in the legal framework designed for the benefit and protection of all.

Life is a risk-filled competitive environment in which educational leaders have a critical part to play. Many teachers will have taken children along a journey from failure to success, unsure at the outset whether success would be reached.

I remember a wonderful group of children in my school who 'couldn't' sing. Their disappointment following a poor performance at a local music festival prompted us to risk trying to turn their failure into success. The following year, after a great deal of practice, that same choir enjoyed 1<sup>st</sup> place at the festival. Our staff reflected on the calculation – and reward – of the risk that had been taken.

Contrary to the overt types of risk that spring to mind (injury, damage or loss), teachers constantly take risks of a more subtle, but equally important kind. In nurturing a shy child towards confidence, a skilled teacher invariably knows when and how to stretch that child. With a new or unfamiliar class, however, an error of judgement can set a pupil-teacher relationship back many weeks, causing the teacher and child additional work to rebuild trust before new ground can be covered.

Successful schools, like successful businesses, often have wide-reaching stakeholder groups.

All schools serve children, parents, governors, local authorities and local agencies such as health and social services. Not to mention local and national inspectorate bodies. Dealing with so many vested interests brings a risk of getting the balance between such groups wrong, a problem



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Life is a risk-filled competitive environment in which educational leaders have a critical part to play. Many teachers will have taken children along a journey from failure to success, unsure at the outset whether success would be reached.

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Members of the Castle Hill Junior School choir, who turned 'failure' into success when they worked hard to gain first place in a local music festival after a disappointing performance the previous year.

not unique to education. The determination to hold to your own school's agenda and not be driven by numerous national and local 'priorities' presents real risk to schools. Ignoring the short term desire to be top of the league tables for a long term community strategy requires support from many, and long term initiatives can often be ignored due to the risk of a negative press or intense scrutiny that actually undermines caring professionals.

I believe in school uniform, competitive sports, manners, hard work and homework to name but a few basic principles, principles that thousands of other colleagues embrace, and yet where are the reports 'school has traditional sports day', 'strict code of conduct introduced', 'school trip huge success'?

School leaders are on the same page as industry in many ways and just as passionate about our role in an increasingly competitive world. We need to engage and share the debate in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Heads need to visit business and hear the challenges, business needs to visit schools – a lot has changed!

*Stretch* assignments through HTI and *Take5* are just one route to consider. Let's talk, support each other, shape and share an agenda that will benefit all. With the future of our nation in our hands, it has to be worth the risk!

# Risk in a democratic capitalist society

**Over-regulation and the encroaching nanny state are the biggest obstacles to 'socially inclusive wealth creation', something I have always believed in and which should be integral to a democratic capitalist society.**

If business is restrained from creating wealth through over-regulation there will be less wealth available to put back into society. We urgently need to construct a climate that is supportive of, rather than hostile to, wealth creation, so that everyone can share in the success of responsible business. Rule-makers (local, regional, national and European government, regulators and development agencies) and influencers (education and the media) must unite behind this goal.

Equally, business only has the right to a society that allows it to get on with the task of wealth creation if it goes about it in a socially inclusive way. We have to earn the respect of the communities in which we operate and the people whose lives we affect by our actions.

## **Business creates opportunity for all**

Socially inclusive wealth creation means recognising that profit is good, but not an end in itself and that the fruits of economic success must be distributed fairly across society. I do not want to be part of a world of fat cats and rapacious profits, where the only goal is to line the pockets of greedy shareholders. Most businesses do not want this either, because they recognise that their fortunes are firmly rooted in society.

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**If teachers want better schools, buildings and resources, it is in their interests to teach the future generation of wealth creators that risk exists, profit is good and that it is only through the wise use of wealth generation that we can create a better society for all.**”

But let's get one thing clear: it is business that generates the wealth that creates and sustains our public services. Without business there would be no schools, hospitals, armed forces, or prisons. With the wealth that business creates we pay taxes, or we employ people and they pay tax, and some of that tax goes to pay good, hardworking people in the public sector who in turn pay tax. But it all comes back to the wealth that business creates. I just wish that this was more widely recognised and understood!

The concept of risk and reward is a central tenet of a democratic capitalist society and young people in particular – our future wealth creators – should be encouraged to understand this. We must ensure that it is not defeated by the politics of envy or by people intent on destroying capitalism.

When people invest their money, reputations and careers in a business enterprise, they are taking a risk and, in return for taking risk successfully, they deserve reward. Nobody has the right to criticise shareholders' return on investment if they do not understand the risk taken to earn it – or the wider benefits to society.

## **Positive shift in teacher attitudes**

In the seven years that I was at the CBI I saw a big and positive shift of attitudes in teachers towards business, but I still came across those who believed that business is bad, profit is a dirty word, employers are out to exploit their employees and that all our public services are made possible by government. Profit generation and a world-class education system go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. If teachers want better schools, buildings and resources, it is in their interests to teach the future generation of wealth creators that risk exists, profit is good and that it is only through the wise use of wealth generation that we can create a better society for all.

Teachers and businesses must, therefore, engage more effectively on a daily basis if children are to embrace the principles of democratic capitalism. Understanding how business operates – the concepts of wealth creation, profit, loss and return on investment – complemented by an appreciation of how to manage personal finances – borrowing, mortgages, credit cards and pensions – reinforces the importance of taking personal responsibility for the choices we make and their consequences.

Schools are working hard to embed enterprise learning into the curriculum for 14-16 year olds. Enterprise education is viewed by the government as a key component in improving the economic well-being of the nation and individuals. It aims to develop exactly the attributes, skills and attitudes I call for in this Paper, including the ability to make reasonable risk/reward assessments. But Ofsted research has shown that many schools are struggling to make progress, with many failing to take up their annually allotted five days of enterprise education.

Lack of direct experience of business and its needs, lack of time and not least lack of support from the business community inhibit the effective delivery of enterprise education.

## Schools need more support from business

Businesses should be doing a lot more to reach out and support schools. It frustrates me that so few have meaningful links with schools, when schools give us our most important resource. Why, when businesses invest endless time and effort in winning and retaining customers, do they give up after the first attempt at getting hold of their local headteacher? This suggests to me that businesses simply don't think that a relationship with their local school is that important. There is no excuse for this level of apathy, particularly when the new 14-19 Specialist Diplomas are so dependent on business input. Equally the amount of bureaucracy and red tape imposed by the rule-makers does little to encourage engagement, particularly in the SME sector.

I urge business to be more creative and committed to winning the respect and understanding of young people through the quality of work experience they offer and the way they engage with their local schools. If we want students and teachers to see that business is creative, dynamic, exciting and socially responsible we need to offer real opportunities for them to understand what business is about. Mentoring and work shadowing are just two of the most effective ways I know of giving young people real insights into working life and raising their aspirations. I had a young law student work shadowing me for two weeks when I was at the CBI: after three days he wanted to be Director General of the CBI; by the end of the two weeks he had set his sights on becoming Prime Minister!

Bridging this gulf between education and business is where HTI has such a valuable role to play, in particular a shared understanding of the demands this 21<sup>st</sup> century world places on young people. Its secondment programme, **Stretch**, the **Take5** programme and Strategic Forum Group give leaders from education, business and government the opportunity, by engaging with each other, not only to gain really deep insights into leadership and employability issues across the sectors, but also to influence the leadership agenda for the benefit of young people and their future employers.

I know of no other organisation that offers such a depth of experience and understanding of one another's worlds, which is why I am proud to be HTI's President.

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Much has been done to raise schools' awareness of enterprise education, but great uncertainty remains about how it should be implemented for all students, the expected learning outcomes and how it should be assessed. This is particularly true of schools that have not been involved in the pathfinders or are not part of the specialist business and enterprise schools' network... much remains to be done if enterprise education is to be firmly embedded in the curriculum and, although there is evidence of progress, this remains the case.

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*'Developing enterprising young people'*, Ofsted, November 2005.

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We need a new system that provides children with skills for their own time, not that of their grandfather’s grandfather.”



## Point of view

Sean McDougall, Managing Director,  
Stakeholder Design



Sean McDougall, Managing Director,  
Stakeholder Design

The article on the front page of the *Times Education Supplement* said it all: “Downing Street has intervened to find out what has gone wrong with the multi-billion pound Building Schools for the Future scheme.” BSF is one of the mainstays of Britain’s efforts to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy. It will cost the country over £40 billion (£6 billion this year) but, so far, results have been disappointing. Why is this?

It is clear that there have been worries right from the start about Britain’s capacity to build on this scale. Moreover, by describing BSF as a ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity, politicians have created a situation in which we are rebuilding or renewing almost every school in the country without any institutional memory or experience of school building to draw on. Inevitably, mistakes are made.

It would be much better to spread the building programme so that, every year, a small proportion of our schools were being rebuilt. This would allow for constant improvement and help break with the convention that all schools should look like Grange Hill.

As for how they operate: it is almost two centuries since the Victorians adopted the church service as their model for education. Today, we ask children to dress up as if going to church, then to sit silently in rows facing the front while a teacher plays the role of parish priest. We allow children time off at Easter and Summer to help with planting and harvesting. Instead of preaching religion, our schools teach obedience and silence.

Victorian schools stressed slow progression up a single career ladder. They produced obedient specialists who worked as welders, soldiers, missionaries and civil servants. The words that we associate with learning – “schooling”, “uniform”, “class” – come from a time that is vastly different to the one we are about to enter. We need a new system that provides children with skills for their own time, not that of their grandfather’s grandfather.

Other countries are already well on the way. In Singapore, children as young as eight are working in environments that look more like design studios than classrooms. Their task is to work together, building and programming robots that can defuse bombs and clean up oil spills. The children create websites to keep people informed of their progress and develop business plans to sell the resultant technology.

Some teachers may feel uncomfortable with Singapore’s emphatic emphasis on work ethic (perhaps we have not yet felt the heat in the same way that they do, nestled between the rampant economies of China and India), but there are other approaches. New Zealand, has *Unlimited*, a school located on the top floor of a shopping centre in central Christchurch. Here, children are fully integrated into the local business environment and can learn at whatever level suits them best (including university). I met three on a recent visit: one runs a logo-design company with clients as far afield as the United States, another has his own record label, and the third runs events.

These children are all developing key employment skills such as problem-solving ability, team-working, communication and work ethic. By 2020, when the BSF programme is due to complete, these children will have a fifteen year head start on their British counterparts.

We can catch up, but not while we persist with an ‘old school’ approach to schools renewal. I am proud to be helping the DfES with “Project Faraday”, so called because science teaching has scarcely changed since Faraday was alive. Our task is to put the delight back into science learning, and thus open up hundreds of careers in science to a generation who perceive it as boring and irrelevant. If we can add in enhanced ability to persuade, to work with others and to innovate then so much the better. The question then is: will British employers be able to cope with people who ask questions and want to change things?

Sean McDougall is MD of Stakeholder Design, an international innovation agency for business and the public services. He previously led a DfES/ Design Council funded campaign showing how good design can be used to improve educational outcomes.

[info@stakeholderdesign.com](mailto:info@stakeholderdesign.com)



Many UK classrooms today have changed little from their Victorian predecessors.



Children in other parts of the world are working in environments that look more like design studios than classrooms.

# Achieving culture change

## Time to *Go4it!*

**How do we tackle this national issue that threatens to undermine our success as individuals, organisations and as a country? Leadership is key and leadership – specifically in our schools – is HTI's business.**

Risk education has always been one of the central themes for HTI's work. Through a series of teacher stretch assignments to the Health and Safety Executive we played an instrumental role in incorporating risk education into the National Curriculum. In partnership with plastics and paper manufacturer Bunzl plc and with the creative input of award-winning theatre in education company CragRats, HTI secondees developed and piloted **BSafe**, a drama based resource for developing risk awareness and management skills in work experience pupils.

It has become clear, however, that individual initiatives like these and many others are failing to achieve sufficient national impact. To attain true culture change in our schools, we need a coherent, intensive, long-term drive and this will take several years.

**Go4it** is HTI's response to the challenges raised in this Issues Paper.

**Go4it** is a high profile campaign, running in parallel with a national awards scheme of the same name, that aims to achieve culture change and recognise, foster, reward and celebrate innovation development in schools throughout the country.

The campaign will involve working closely with leaders from education, business, government, the media and influential organisations already active in this arena to raise awareness of the importance of developing risk management skills - in the broadest possible sense - in the next generation of wealth creators. This will be a sustained and intensive campaign, running over a minimum five-year period.

The **Go4it** national awards scheme, open to all schools in the UK, will offer an evidence based and independently accredited means of assessing how effectively schools are developing a risk-positive climate that promotes innovation in a number of ways and over a period of time.

**Go4it** schools will demonstrate:

- A commitment to developing a spirit of adventure in pupils during school hours and through extra curricular activities;
- A 'no fear of failure' culture, where staff and pupils embrace the fact that they can learn from mistakes;
- A learning ethos that promotes critical thinking, decision making and problem solving skills;
- An understanding of the bigger picture that frees pupils to be creative and make balanced judgements about the degree of risk inherent in particular decisions and situations;



Bronwen Freake

Caroline Reynolds

Bronwen Freake was recruited by HSE from Greenbank Residential School in Cheshire for a one year stretch assignment that aimed to incorporate risk education into the National Curriculum so that children could gain an appreciation of the risks of modern day life and how to manage them. Acknowledging Bronwen's important contribution to this initiative, Lesley James, Head of Education at the RSA said:

“Your input gave us a much fuller description of risk within our final report than would have been possible had the RSA worked on its own... you were tremendously helpful... in terms of supplying innovative curriculum materials (for one of our school's projects).”

Caroline Reynolds was seconded from Avonmouth CE Primary School to continue Bronwen's work at HSE by ensuring that every LEA in the country received guidelines about fulfilling National Curriculum requirements for teaching risk management.



- Links with a broad range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations that expand learning experiences for pupils;
- An innovative and well-embedded approach to enterprise education;
- A programme of continuing professional development for teachers that develops their own capacity for creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as that of their pupils.

Schools that successfully meet the **Go4it** criteria will receive an innovation inspired sculpture and a certificate to display prominently in the school foyer. They will also be eligible to use the **Go4it** 'kite mark' on promotional material and will benefit from local, regional and national publicity.

The **Go4it** mark will communicate positive and meaningful messages to local and national government, employers, parents, schools and pupils:

- Ministers and local government officials will recognise **Go4it** schools as models of best practice in promoting a culture of innovation;
- Employers will recognise **Go4it** schools as providers of future employees with the attitudes, skills and behaviours they need to compete in a global marketplace;
- Parents will recognise **Go4it** schools as committed to developing essential life, work and social skills in their children that will equip them well for adulthood;
- Schools will value **Go4it** accreditation because it recognises the many ways, within and outside the formal curriculum, that teachers develop the whole child to fulfil a worthwhile role in society;
- Pupils will value **Go4it** as it will develop their cognitive skills of analysis, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving through experiencing new and different challenges. This experience will create a greater sense of achievement and confidence, leading to improved employability.

## Go4it and get involved

Many individuals and organisations across education, business and government already share our vision for creating a culture that fosters risk-taking and innovation and welcome the **Go4it** initiative. We have set ourselves an ambitious goal and we need help to achieve it.

If you feel you could support our campaign, as an organisation or individual, by contributing your time, expertise or resources we would love to hear from you. Please contact Liz Formby, on 024 7641 0104 or email: [l.formby@hti.org.uk](mailto:l.formby@hti.org.uk).



“

The principles of sensible risk management are very relevant to schools. They make clear that health and safety is about managing risk responsibly. It is not about stopping important learning activities where the risks are properly managed, nor about creating a totally risk free society. Indeed, children encountering risk sensibly managed are presented with an unrivalled learning opportunity.

Exposure to well managed risks helps children learn important life skills, including how to manage risks for themselves. ”

Bill Callaghan, Chair, Health and Safety Executive.

“

A safe learner, through the quality of the learning experience, gains an understanding of the importance of health and safety, identifies and controls risk and develops a set of safe behaviours. In other words, the learner plays an active part in the process and develops practical transferable skills from their experience. This should be a positive and practical perspective with learners being risk aware, not risk averse. ”

Marilyn MacFarlane, Senior Policy Manager, Learner Health and Safety, Learning and Skills Council.



# Acknowledgements

HTI is deeply grateful to the following individuals and organisations, which have contributed viewpoints and expertise to this paper, both directly and through published reports.

Paul Awcock, Head of HR - Recruitment, Norwich Union  
Tony Bandle, Head of HSE Risk Policy Unit  
Nick Barrett, Chief Executive Officer, Outward Bound Trust  
Petrina Beck, Education Specialist Group, IOSH  
Lee Broughton, Manager of Corporate Communications - Europe, Enterprise Rent-A-Car  
Bill Callaghan, Chair, Health and Safety Executive  
Julia Elliott, Headteacher, Crosshall Junior School  
David Fass, Head of Global Banking – Europe, Deutsche Bank  
Frank Furedi, Professor of Sociology, University of Kent  
Dave Garioch, Health and Safety Manager, London Borough of Sutton  
Peter Graham, HTI Trustee  
Peter Huntington, Chief Executive, Go Skills  
Lesley James, Head of Education, Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

Sir Digby Jones, HTI President, and former Director-General, Confederation of British Industry (CBI)  
Sir Paul Judge, Deputy Chair, Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and HTI Patron  
Sean McDougall, Managing Director, Stakeholder Design  
David Millar, Chief Executive, Enterprise Education Trust (formerly Businessdynamics)  
Marilyn MacFarlane, Senior Policy Manager (Learner Health and Safety), Learning and Skills Council  
John Martin, Headteacher, Castle Hill Junior School  
Mike Orton, Human Resources Director, The Chartered Insurance Institute and HTI Trust Board member.  
Alan Roach, Headteacher, Chalvedon School and Sixth Form College and Barstable School  
Teresa Sayers, Chief Executive, Financial Services Skills Council  
John Vallender, LASER Programme Manager, RoSPA  
David Yearly, Play Safety Manager, RoSPA

Edited by Sue Langmead  
Design by Olivia Woods

## About HTI

HTI is an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise that works in partnership with education, business and government to develop exceptional school leaders for the future of young people.

Over the past 20 years we have built an unrivalled national network for dialogue and interaction between education and business. Working at the strategic interface between business and education, we are uniquely positioned to broker the messages we 'hear' across the sectors to facilitate a greater understanding of each other's worlds.

All of our work is focused on achieving measurable impact around the core themes of leadership, employability, creativity, diversity and sustainability.

Through the **HTI Leadership Centre**, our trading arm, we offer a wide range of innovative professional development and training opportunities, including our pioneering *Stretch* secondment programme for teachers to work as managers in business and our *Take5* scheme for business employees to work with school leaders.

We also offer consultancy, conference and conference facilities.

Surpluses derived from the Leadership Centre are covenanted to the HTI Trust.

Through the **HTI Trust**, we aim to influence education leadership thinking, policy and practice by bringing together leaders from education, business and government to debate and research priority issues for education leadership. The outcomes of this cross-sector collaboration set the agenda for our own development projects.

By becoming a member of the HTI Trust's Strategic Forum Group businesses, schools and government officers have a unique and powerful opportunity to debate priorities for the school leadership agenda, influence future thinking around education reform, and most importantly, impact on and influence the employability skills and talents of young people entering the job market. Contact Liz Formby on 024 7641 0104 or email: [l.formby@hti.org.uk](mailto:l.formby@hti.org.uk) for more information.



Lee Broughton, Manager of Corporate Communications – Europe, Enterprise Rent-A-Car

“  
Risk and business success are inextricably intertwined. You cannot have one without the other...A country's economy lives or dies by its attitude to business and hence its attitude to risk.  
”

## Sponsor's comment

**Enterprise Rent-A-Car is a company founded on principles of entrepreneurialism and empowerment.**

Our founder, Jack Taylor, took a big risk when he set up his first office above a car dealership in St Louis, Missouri. Today every single one of our 7,000+ branch managers has the responsibility for running his or her branch as if it were an independent small business; those same principles hold true fifty years and billions of dollars later.

It's why we are proud to support Sir Digby Jones' Issues Paper for HTI, Cotton Wool Kids.

Risk and business success are inextricably intertwined. You cannot have one without the other. And as the paper points out, without the wealth created by growing businesses you cannot have public services, hospitals, schools and roads. A country's economy lives or dies by its attitude to business and hence its attitude to risk.

If young people want to get ahead, and be responsible for creating the wealth that keeps us all afloat, they have to understand risk and be comfortable with their ability to assess and manage it. This has to be part of their education right from the beginning, because that is how the world works.

To borrow a phrase, "you do not prevent people from failing by stopping them from winning". We also want to see schools and universities put their emphasis on encouraging young people to take sensible risks and to learn as much from their failures as their successes. There is in fact no such thing as failure, only feedback.

Only by embedding an understanding of risk and how to manage it, will we see more entrepreneurs emerge, more future Jack Taylors willing to turn a market opportunity into a multi-billion-dollar powerhouse.

HTI, through a combination of stimulating cross-sector debate via this Issues Paper and mobilising action through its ambitious **Go4it** initiative, has a key role in making this happen, and we at Enterprise are proud to be a part of their vision.

Lee Broughton

# Ban risk for our children!

No winning  
No losing  
No competition



Campaigning for a risk-free world

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