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| **Creating social value through ‘alternative provision’ in the construction industry**This is the fifteenth fact-sheet about recent international peer-reviewed social procurement research at UTS. It summarises an exploratory research project which looked at the concept of alternative provision as an innovative way for the construction industry to create social value in the communities in which it builds.Alternative provision (AP) describes the wide range of interventions where pupils at risk of disengagement from mainstream education are removed from mainstream education into alternative forms of education. AP provides with a range of complementary vocational, academic, life skills, therapeutic, work skills, work experience, environmental and creative education. This fact sheet reports preliminary research which explored construction AP delivered by five organisations in Wales (UK), using the work of Basil Bernstein’s theories of sources of consensus and disaffection in education. Disaffection arises when students cannot or will not accept the expressive order (conduct, behaviour) and/or the instrumental order (knowledge, skills) of the school.The article which is the basis of this summary is cited in the footnote of this factsheet. Given the positive preliminary findings, further research is currently being undertaken with a larger sample to dig more deeply into the potential of AP to create social value through the construction supply chain.Please feel free to distribute this factsheet to anyone who may be interested.Professor Martin LoosemoreUniversity of Technology Sydney<https://profiles.uts.edu.au/Martin.Loosemore> |
| **Why the study*** Despite the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the construction industry continues growing and face severe skills shortages in many countries.
* In Australia, in 2023, labour demand is projected to grow by 42,000 to a peak of 442,000, more than double the projected available labour supply.
* To recruit the workforce it needs to deliver current and future project pipelines, the construction industry needs to tell a better story of the prospects available, given its negative public image around its relatively poor health and safety, record, masculinised and exclusionary culture, long working hours, insecure work, poor mental health and well-being and a poor working environment.
* It also needs to diversify its workforce.
* The construction industry offers a wide range of jobs for a wide variety of people from non-traditional groups who can help address skills shortages. These include: people with a disability; migrants and refugees; Indigenous people; young people at risk; and ex-offenders, although previous fact sheets show that many face significant barriers to working in the industry.
* While the pathways for entry into the construction industry for many of these groups have been explored, one group which has received relatively little attention are young people in school.
* Even less attention has been paid to those school students who are at risk of failing and disengagement from mainstream education because they struggle with traditional classroom-based education.
* In many countries, school leavers are encouraged to pursue academic pathways in preference to trade qualifications despite the latter providing important pathways into work for such students.
* Although a few studies have examined the difference school-based interventions can make in encouraging young people to consider a career in construction, this tends to be in mainstream education settings rather than AP settings.
* Yet research has found that initiatives such as school-based vocational construction programme pre-apprenticeship programmes are instrumental in supporting young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds transitions from school to work by giving them practical training and work experience in a real working environment.
* Despite these encouraging albeit limited insights into the potentially positive impacts of exposing school students to construction work as part of their formal education, the role that AP can play in recruiting people to work in the construction industry has yet to receive any research attention.

**Aim*** The aim of this research was to address this gap in knowledge by utilising Bernstein’s theory of consensus and disaffection in education to explore the following research questions:
1. What different types of AP does the construction industry deliver?
2. How is construction training delivered to young people who have struggled with behaviour (the expressive order) in school in a highly regulated industry?
3. What skills and knowledge can construction training offer young people who have struggled with academic learning (the instrumental order)?
* Bernstein’s theory helps examine whether pupils who have challenges following school rules (the expressive order) will be able to follow the many regulations (such as Occupational Health and Safety) which require workers to behave appropriately on a construction site. It also helps us to understand how construction work (which involves practical and hands-on learning) can help disaffected students re-engage in education as a result of exclusion from the academic learning environment which dominates most school curriculums (the instrumental order).

**What we did** * Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with professionals implementing five construction AP programmes in Wales.
* Programs were selected because they delivered construction training where school pupils were removed from a classroom in a mainstream school or a pupil referral unit (PRU).
* A PRU is a type of school for young people who cannot cope with the demands of mainstream education.
* The interviews were undertaken by a team of researchers from construction and education backgrounds.
* The interviews aimed to explore the culture of construction AP particularly concerning the expressive and instrumental orders described in Bernstein's sources of consensus and disaffection.
* Interviews lasted one to two hours, and questions focussed on exploring how they worked with children and young people; what their intervention involved; what they did differently than schools or PRUs and what were the outputs and outcomes for children and young people.

**What we found** * A variety of AP models were being employed. Some examples include:.
1. A housing maintenance organisation delivered workshops for pupils struggling in mainstream education in areas of trades skill shortages which were designed to complement the school curriculum, including plumbing, electrical, painting and decorating and carpentry workshops.
2. A commercial construction training organisation which focussed on plant and groundworks training working learners from a local PRU on a project which involved refurbishing an old colliery site where students engaged in building, grounds clearance, manual handling, first aid, dumper truck training and OH&S training.
3. A construction company which provided pupils with practical trade taster sessions, including bricklaying, tiling, plastering and carpentry. They also delivered employability sessions, including careers advice, mock interviews and CV workshops.
4. An environmental organisation that delivered plumbing, cookery, carpentry art and photography. Pupils were referred to them if they were having difficulties in school. They used purpose-built classrooms in the environmental organisation's factory to deliver education and hand-on training in the factory.
5. A vocational training provider developed a pre-16 AP program which focussed on literacy and numeracy for 16-year-olds who were about to leave school using tutors from ‘real life industry backgrounds’ delivering a range of vocational options such as bricklaying, carpentry and painting and decorating.
* Pupils had not previously engaged with employers because they were 'deemed as unemployable' and 'struggled with any career support.'
* Providers kept numbers at a minimum to maximise AP impact and manage any potentially disruptive behaviour.
* Practical construction workshops were designed in collaboration with schools to contextualise the national curriculum. This was vital if they wanted to progress into a construction career. Most of their education was on a live construction site, supported by some minimal and practical classroom-based education.
* Participants were clear with pupils of the need for academic ability in construction and that it

was not just about tiling and wallpapering; they also needed academic skills, particularly literacy and numeracy.* Initiatives focussed on practical training and education such as bricklaying, plastering and tiling in a way which replicated a real-world site environment.
* The results demonstrate that disaffected pupils were not anti-education and were open to learning in a more practical hands-on environment.
* Respondents explained that when pupils were busy doing something not classed as a classroom subject, they were enthusiastic and committed learners and they saw a completely different side to them. They were well-behaved. They did a really good job, and the trades supervisors were impressed with their skills.
* They attributed improvements in behaviour to a high student-teacher ratio and a hands-on alternative curriculum.

**What this means*** Findings indicate that AP can support socio-economically disadvantaged groups into employment in the construction industry and give them valuable work experience which aligns with nationally accredited qualifications.
* AP represent a novel way for the construction sector to create social value in the communities in which it builds – especially in disadvantaged areas where school exclusion is a problem.
* AP can potentially play a role in meeting the future skills needs of the industry whilst meeting requirements for training people from disadvantaged communities.
* However, while our data shows that AP can help to re-engage disaffected students with education, there is no data on whether AP results in better employment outcomes.
* Future research could explore whether construction training could help young people educated in AP secure apprenticeship and employment opportunities, as this group is known to face barriers to employment.
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