

Since 2008, the BiG Challenge has provided schools in Sheffield with a programme to stir up entrepreneurial spirit and develop employability skills. There is every reason for same model to work just as well elsewhere.

The BiG Challenge started life as part of a portfolio of activities funded through the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative. The review of this programme concluded that BiG Challenge was, '... one of the most successful aspects of the LEGI programme. It has introduced an entrepreneurial mindset in schools and... is widely perceived as encouraging young people to become more enterprising.'

The format has been tried and tested over the years and refined as funding has become progressively restricted. With over 20 schools involved each year, 2,330 teams between the ages of 11-18 have now generated over £100,000 of profit.

While the process may be well-rehearsed, BiG Challenge does not just happen on its own. An 'Enterprise Pipeline Delivery Group' brings together stakeholders that include the Council, Sheffield's two universities, the FE college and Enterprise Advisors who work with local schools. Although the group reviews initiatives in their own areas and plans joint initiatives, the BiG Challenge provides a common reference point that engages all parties.

Launched early in the Autumn term, often with help from past winners, the competition ends during February, with an awards event around April. The proposition is simple: Starting with £25, see how much money you can make. Individual schools often use assemblies to launch the challenge and some even encourage students to shape ideas through the summer break so they hit the ground running in September.

A variety of prize categories, including 'Flying Start', 'Best Website' and 'Made in Sheffield' helps to motivate students, even if they don't make it to the list of finalists. The awards and other aspects of the challenge are sponsored by local businesses and funders.



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The groups that make the final cut are faced with the ordeal of presenting to a judging panel. Although not intended to be intimidating, it takes place outside the school and away from teacher support. The judges' verdicts are guided by a scoring grid and remain secret until the final gala dinner event, where the overall winners are sent on an overseas trip sponsored by the law firm DLA Piper.

There is no doubt that making profit and the prizes provide an incentive for young people. But, a 2013 review revealed that most students also recognise how the challenge helps them to develop skills and inform choices about future life – an important factor for schools that are now required by OFSTED to help young people develop 'employability skills' and make informed choices – including about the possibility of 'self-employment'.

To find out more about the programme: success@bigchallenge.biz

