
Technical Appendix

Aspiration interventionsⁱ

Very low or no impact for moderate cost, based on very limited evidence.



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Definition

By aspirations we mean the things children and young people hope to achieve for themselves in the future. To meet their aspirations about careers, university, and further education, pupils often require good educational outcomes. Raising aspirations is therefore often believed to incentivise improved attainment.

Key indicators of a young person's aspirations might be, for example, their reported desire to continue with education post-16 or pursue a particular job or career.

Aspiration interventions tend to fall into three broad categories:

1. interventions that focus on parents and families;
2. interventions that focus on teaching practice; and
3. out-of-school interventions or extra-curricular activities, sometimes involving peers and mentors.

The approaches used in these interventions are diverse. Some aim to change aspirations directly by exposing children to new opportunities and others aim to raise aspirations by developing general self-esteem, motivation or self-efficacy. For interventions which focus on self-efficacy and motivation specifically in a learning context please see Metacognition and self-regulation.

An important assumption underpinning these approaches is that low aspiration is a cause of low attainment. However there is little robust evidence of the direction of any causal relationship. It may be that poor attainment reduces aspirations, making it more important to improve attainment so as to raise aspirations than to tackle aspirations directly, or independently of capability.

Search terms: attitudes/expectation; aspiration; behaviour; intention; motivation; self-efficacy

Evidence Rating

Overall, the evidence relating to raising aspirations as a means to improve attainment is very limited. There are no meta-analyses of interventions to raise aspirations that report impact on attainment or learning. This lack of evidence does not mean that impact is not achievable, but should make schools cautious as to how they invest time or resources in this area.

There are two relevant systematic reviews, one of which includes some quantitative data. These indicate that the relationship between aspirations and attainment is complex and that the evidence for a clear causal connection between learning, changing aspirations, and attitudes to school is weak.

Although one study reports a range of effects on attainment (0.17 to 0.45 for parental involvement; 0.09 to 0.22 for mentoring and from 0.03 to 0.09 for extra-curricular activities) these effects are associated with other influences on learning, such as parental involvement in reading or academic mentoring, and so are not considered appropriate for use in a meta-analysis. The effect size presented is therefore indicative.

Cost Information

Costs vary widely and are hard to estimate precisely, but overall they are estimated as moderate. After school programmes typically cost about £5 to £10 per session, so a weekly programme lasting 20 weeks might cost up to £200 per pupil. Parental engagement programmes typically cost between about £200 per child per year when the school covers the staffing costs, and about £850 per child per year for family support involving a full-time support worker. Mentoring approaches aiming to raise aspirations in the USA have been estimated at \$900 per student per year or about £630.

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