

# Findings from research into the impact of non-teaching ambassadors

*This document sets out the findings from research into the Teach First Ambassadors Network. It was commissioned by Teach First and undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of non-teaching ambassadors on the Teach First vision that no child's educational success should be limited by their socio-economic background.*

## Teach First and the ambassador community

Teach First is an independent charity whose vision is to ensure that no child's educational success should be limited by their socio-economic background. Over the two-year Leadership Development Programme (LDP), Teach First participants are supported to become outstanding classroom leaders in schools in challenging circumstances. Alongside the Teach First participants, there are over 2,000 ambassadors (alumni of the LDP) who continue to raise the achievement, access and aspirations of young people across the country from both inside and outside of the classroom. In ten years' time, this number will have grown to over 11,000. At any one time, around 58 per cent of the ambassador network continues to address the vision as classroom teachers or school leaders with the majority working in Teach First eligible schools. The other 42 per cent of the network choose to pursue alternative careers, undertake further study and/or take a career break. It was this group of non-teaching ambassadors that was the focus of this study.

## Research design and methods

Fifty-nine case studies were undertaken comprising interviews with 60 ambassadors, 52 stakeholders (primarily employer representatives) and 27 beneficiaries (primarily children and young people). Face-to-face and telephone interviews were undertaken between November 2012 and March 2013. Given the relatively small sample and the fact that ambassadors opted into the study, they are not necessarily typical of non-teaching ambassadors as a whole. However, their views provide insights into the ambassador experience and potential impact.

## **The profile of participating ambassadors and their activities**

The non-teaching ambassadors who participated in the research worked in a range of sectors, industries and occupations. Just under half were currently employed in the business sector and over a third worked in third sector organisations, many of which were focused on addressing the Teach First vision (about a sixth of ambassadors were working for Teach First and related Teach for All organisations). Around a tenth of ambassadors had started their own charity, social enterprise or business.

Most ambassadors (about four fifths) were involved in multiple activities to address educational disadvantage. A minority reported lower levels of engagement, often on a more infrequent basis, and a few were not currently involved. The main reason given for low levels of engagement was a lack of time. Other reasons included a lack of local opportunities and working in occupations that did not present suitable opportunities.

The most common ambassador-related activities were: one-to-one support and mentoring for children and young people; school governance; and supporting the vision through advocacy and fundraising. Most ambassadors reported taking part in activities designed to address educational disadvantage in their own time, while some were currently employed in organisations addressing educational disadvantage. Such organisations provided opportunities to continue working towards the Teach First vision as part of their day job, both in the UK and overseas.

## **Views of ambassador impact**

Most ambassadors thought they were having an impact on children and young people, although many pointed out that this was hard to quantify.

Many of the ambassadors were directly involved with children and young people, largely through the Higher Education Access Programme for Schools (HEAPS). This was reported to have a range of impacts on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including: developing their confidence and key skills and raising their aspirations to apply for university. For example, ambassadors encouraged high achieving students to apply for 'Russell Group' universities, which the mentees would not have considered without the ambassadors' influence. Inspiring young people to achieve and providing access to advice, information and opportunities were also mentioned by ambassadors. Examples included several ambassadors arranging for their mentees to visit their workplaces to gain an understanding of routes from university to careers; and an ambassador encouraging a mentee interested in finance to attend a HEAPS experience day on the subject.

Many ambassadors described their impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people as 'indirect', because they worked through other individuals and organisations. Some of the most notable examples of indirect impact were provided by those working in overseas charities and Teach First's sister organisations in developing countries

(such as Teach for India or Teach For Malaysia). Impacts included providing access to education for some of the world's poorest children, improving the quality of teaching and increasing pupil attainment. One ambassador, a senior manager at one of Teach First's sister organisations, explained how the organisation had grown from nothing to an organisation that now trains high quality teachers that teach some 16,000 primary school pupils.

Some ambassadors were involved in their companies' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, often helping to encourage recruitment of disadvantaged young people. For example, one firm's CSR scheme encouraged staff to use up to three days for charity work each year. An ambassador harnessed this resource by organising employability skills training at her company. She invited pupils from Teach First schools and arranged for colleagues to provide workshops on skills such as writing CVs, interview techniques and making presentations. Other ways in which ambassadors thought they were having an indirect impact included being a school governor, supporting teachers, advocacy for the vision and fundraising for Teach First.

Stakeholders identified a range of impacts that the ambassadors had on their organisations, including leadership, staff development and evidence-based approaches. Stakeholders said that ambassadors had raised awareness of educational disadvantage and encouraged them to challenge their own thinking.

## **Enablers and barriers to making an impact**

Ambassadors said that the Teach First network was a huge help to them in making an impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people. It provided them with access to volunteering opportunities, support for new social enterprises, and a forum in which ambassadors could discuss ideas with like-minded individuals. Similarly, ambassadors valued the Teach First-organised events and conferences. Many ambassadors identified their employers as enabling their involvement in vision-related activities, for example through allowing flexible working, access to resources and mentoring from more senior staff.

Many ambassadors did not identify any barriers or challenges to making an impact. Where challenges were identified, the key issue was a lack of time to engage in activities aligned with the Teach First vision. Ambassadors whose jobs were not aligned with the vision had to confine most of their activities to their personal time. Location was a barrier for some, with those working outside of London and abroad reporting that there were few (if any) Teach First-supported activities that they could get involved in.

## **Future plans**

About two-thirds of ambassadors reported that they planned to continue with or start new activities aligned with Teach First's vision. Most employers said they would continue to support ambassadors to be involved in the vision in future. About a quarter of all

ambassadors interviewed said that that they would consider going back into teaching in the medium- to longer-term.

## Conclusions

Based on the interviews conducted, the research identified four main levels of impact from the ambassador network, representing different types of ambassador impact, reach and influence:

1. support for the Teach First vision through raising awareness and fundraising
2. impacts on individual young people's aspirations, attainment and access
3. improving outcomes via supporting teachers
4. embedding improvements for disadvantaged children and young people at an organisational or system level.

This research has identified numerous examples of non-teaching ambassadors' impact on children and young people through improving achievement, increasing aspirations and providing access to opportunities. Ambassadors were inspired by and committed to the Teach First vision and spoke passionately about the importance of addressing this agenda. This study shows the potential of the ambassador network to contribute to the Teach First vision of ensuring that no child's educational success is limited by their socio-economic background and highlights some of the ways in which this potential can be maximised.

## For more information

A version of this document can be found at [www.nfer.ac.uk/TeachFirst](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/TeachFirst)

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