



Communication Skills and Young people – a compelling case for action

The growing problem

The ability to communicate is one of the most important skills we have. Unfortunately it is an ability fewer and fewer young people are developing.

What's more, one fifth of the UK population are under 16s – that's 12 million people who, according to research, aren't learning enough about speaking and listening.

“We've got far too many people not just without the right skills, but without the right communication skills...And that's going to be a big problem for the future.”

Tony Blair, quoted in the Guardian, 14 Feb 2006

Of course, the problem needs to be tackled when the children first start their education. And nearly a quarter of all primary school pupils with special needs suffer from communication difficulties.

BT believes that speaking and listening are vital aspects of communication and form the foundations of learning and social development. There is a growing body of evidence that proves this. According to the World Health Organisation, skills such as effective communication are necessary in helping people to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Recent international research has shown that schemes aimed at developing these skills have produced startling results. Those young people who are taught to speak and listen to others tend to improve their behaviour, and are less likely to engage in negative or self-destructive actions.

These schemes also help to dramatically improve a young person's sense of self worth and self-awareness, and therefore contribute to that person's ability to cope with the emotions of everyday life.

BT's own research backs this up and shows that young people with good communication skills are much less likely to get into trouble, have greater mental and physical well-being, and are more likely to make progress both in school and after graduation.



The need for action

Although the problems faced by children as a result of poorly developed communication skills are all too clear, not enough is being done to solve them.

“Too little attention has been given to teaching the full National Curriculum programme of study for speaking and listening.”
From an Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, DfES, 2006

Because of this, the UK is now seeing a real decline in the communication skills of its children. This view is echoed by the Government’s watchdog on teaching and examining, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA);

“Speaking and listening skills have often taken second place to reading and writing. There is a sense that this needs to be changed so that learners and teachers communicate effectively and learn through talking. These communication skills are essential for life and work.”

But it’s not just children in the UK who are affected; the same issues are just as relevant for school leavers. Young adults with poor skills will simply be unable to secure the best jobs or academic positions, because they lack the necessary communication abilities.

According to research published in February 2006, more than half of the 222 companies who took part in a graduate recruitment survey thought they would be unable to fill all their vacancies. This lack of confidence is based on the impression that many university leavers are lacking the necessary teamwork, leadership and communication skills.

It is important to remember that, while learning these vital communication skills important, it still isn’t enough. Young people should be allowed and encouraged to engage with society, by having platforms from which they can put their developing skills to good use. In other words, to make their own world a better place, and inspire other young people to do the same.

How BT is responding

“Establishing these life skills is the answer to the decline in standards of communication amongst young people, and it must happen right from the start of a child’s life.”

Dave Hancock, Head of BT Education programme

In order to reverse this trend, we are launching the ‘Better World’ campaign.

It combines the information and resources of our education programme, with the engagement and fundraising ability of ‘Am I Listening?’ to create a programme that encourages, equips and empowers both young people and adults to develop their communication skills, and to use them together to create a better world.

The campaign will work in three main ways:

Firstly – help young people in need

We aim to do this by ensuring that they are heard and helped, by working in partnership with ChildLine to raise awareness and funds, and helping the charity answer more calls. We will also work with education partners to create tools that will aid parents and teachers in identifying young people with communications problems.

Secondly – learning communication skills for life

We want to help everyone in the UK understand and enjoy the benefits of improved communication skills. We provide practical education tools including free, high quality resources and information through the BT Education website to help young people, from pre-school onwards, communicate at school and in the home.

We are also creating a communication framework for life, by supporting young people from their earliest years through to successful employment.

Thirdly – campaigning to create a better world

Through the Better World website, initiatives such as the Seen & Heard awards and our work with the UK Youth Parliament and other partners, we are providing young people with the platforms and the opportunities to use their communication skills to achieve real social change.

Want to know more?

Whether you’re a young person or an adult, you can improve your communications skills to get more out of life. Learn more at www.bt.com/betterworld

Or for more information contact: **0870 333 0373**.