

Taking part in the Young Businessperson scheme

14-year-old Carly Smithson reports on taking part in the Young Businessperson scheme at school

The aim of the Young Businessperson scheme was to give young people like my classmates and I a taste of what it's like running a business, providing an insight into the world of work, and raising awareness of the skills needed in the real world that can't be learnt in academic lessons, such as handling money and keeping records.

We were going to work in teams to set up and run small, and hopefully profitable, businesses from school. The first thing we did was attend a workshop with the scheme's leader, Matt. He encouraged us to think about businesses we might be able to create and manage with limited resources. **(1)**..... Take shoelaces. They stop your shoes slipping off, but also allow people to fasten their shoes comfortably, regardless of how big their feet are. It's a simple idea, but imagine how many pairs of laces there are, and how much money must be made from sales!

We spent the first half of the workshop coming up with problems we encounter in our daily lives. I find it annoying when food packets tear in the wrong place when you open them, so the food inside spills out or goes off more quickly than if it would if the packet could be re-sealed. **(2)**..... Matt then split us into smaller groups to choose one of the problems and consider a possible solution for it. My group worked on what I'd mentioned, and our suggestion was to create snack packets which could be re-fastened.

(3)..... 'But think about how much more expensive it would be than producing current kinds of packet,' he said. 'More resources would be needed so manufacturing costs would be higher. They'd take longer to make, too. Then there are existing products on the market, such as boxes with lids, which people can use and re-use for this purpose.' He wasn't being unkind, I realised, but pointing out considerations businesses have to make in order to make a profit.

It was a useful exercise aimed at developing our 'business heads'. Plus, we could never have made the packets at school without specialist machinery and equipment. (4)..... In the end, our group came up with a glove for washing dishes which would not only protect hands from hot water, but prevent the inconvenience of having to search around in the water to find a dropped cloth. Matt approved it, and our group was given a small amount of money with which to buy essential materials.

In addition to making the gloves, each person was assigned a specific role. (5)..... This would be used for promotional purposes, and to make sure every member of the group could explain things consistently to customers. We had a few minor disagreements along the way, but even those were no bad thing as we learnt to compromise and resolve conflict.

It was when we came to selling our products that we came up against our first real problem: not many of our classmates wanted a washing-up glove! We sold more to teachers than other students. (6)..... Matt was positive about that, though. He said we'd learnt a good lesson: we hadn't thought about the needs of our target market. He praised us on our teamwork, though, and said he'd recommend any of us for jobs in the future!

- A** He was pleased we'd tried to be more ambitious than other groups.
- B** We should have chosen something more straightforward, and that's what we decided to do next.
- C** Although we covered our costs, we made very little profit, which was disappointing.
- D** Successful organisations often offer a solution to a problem, we learnt.
- E** When we fed back our ideas, Matt wasn't as enthusiastic as we'd hoped.
- F** Other students shared their experiences and mentioned other minor but frustrating issues.
- G** I was responsible for creating an accurate description of our product.