

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Get on board

A project that encourages children to build cardboard boats is also teaching them about the world of work

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The background

Bristol's seafaring history provides a wealth of learning opportunities for children and adults of all ages. The Young Shipwrights scheme ties in with school projects on exploration, slavery and, of course, the great Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who built the SS *Great Britain* in the city.

The project is part of a wider programme of activities in Bristol called My Future My Choice, which aims to open the eyes of schoolchildren to the opportunities life has to offer and to help them see the links between their aspirations and education.

The project

Workshops are sponsored by employers and children work with business volunteers to build metre-long cardboard yachts, which race in the city docks as part of Bristol's annual harbour festival.

The kits have been designed by shipwright Warwick Moreton, who worked on the replica of John Cabot's wooden ship *The Matthew*, which sailed to Newfoundland in 1997, 500 years after the original voyage.

Children also get the chance to visit a boatyard and see boatbuilders at work, as well as exploring their maritime heritage in the museum and going on a boat trip.

The boatbuilding workshops are held at the harbourside's M Shed museum, which opened in 2011, as part of its Ingenious Engineering programme, which also involves workshops on flight, design, hydraulics and radioactivity.

As well as sessions for schoolchildren, aimed at Year 5 pupils, a family workshop enables parents to work alongside their offspring to create functioning sailboats. The emphasis is on working with the hands – wrighting, rather than writing.

A crucial element is the chance for children to get to know people from the world of work and learn more about their jobs and lifestyles. The aim is to help the children align their sense of self with people who make and create, take risks and work to achieve success.

The boats take to the water in the Ship Shape and Bristol Fashion sailing race. This year, they were ferried to the start point in a narrowboat

and launched after a cannon was fired. Very few sank and most survived in the water for 30 minutes or more, watched by a crowd of 3,000.

Prizes were awarded to the winner, the best boat and the prettiest boat. Next year the project and the race will be supported by the Initiative (Business West), which is backing a long-term project to use the rivers, docks, gorge and estuary in Bristol to develop exciting ways to learn in partnership with business beyond the traditional classroom.

One pupil who took part says: "It was amazing to see our boat get free and sail across to the other side and when they announced it as the winner I couldn't believe it. We still have the boat even though it got soggy and the sand fell out."

Tips from the scheme

The volunteers are key to getting the most out of the project. The answers they give to the pupil "interviewers" help to reinforce messages about the skills and attitudes needed to be successful.

Evidence that it works?

The scheme has received plentiful positive comments from schools involved. "Carefully planned activities provided powerful learning opportunities for the children, who showed amazing levels of engagement," says Stuart Parslow, a teacher at Avon Primary School.

"We all really enjoyed building boats and being quizzed by the children," says Marcus Fischer, a design engineer from Rolls-Royce.

Other regions of the UK have experimented with the project and are exploring ways of adapting it to make it relevant to their locality.



The project

Name Young Shipwrights

Started 2011

Run by My Future My Choice, initially in Bristol and now being adopted by other regions

Numbers taking part

Over two years, 1,025 children and 130 volunteers have made 195 boats