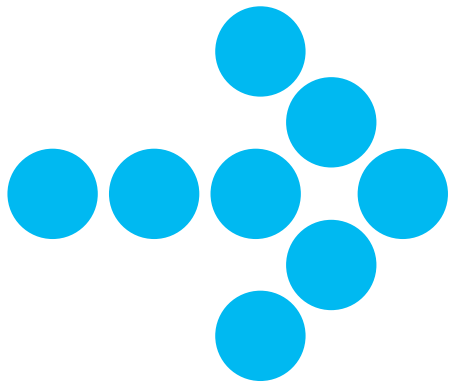




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Every School a Community:

**The Role of Alumni in Supporting
the Transition from School to Work**

Authors:

**Jake Hayman
& Laura Partridge**

November 2013

**“The culture of
community exists
but no one’s putting
it to good use.”**

– Head Teacher, Jordan



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About Future First

Future First's vision is that every state school and college should be supported by a thriving, engaged alumni community. Future First works with over 10% of state schools in the UK and has begun piloting the model in Kenya and the USA.

Future First supports schools to engage, track and mobilise their former students – both distant and recent school graduates. Our programmes see alumni re-engage with their old schools as career and educational role models, mentors, fundraisers, providers of work experience and much more.

On the back of this research, a new charity, Future First International, is being officially launched to grow the amount of alumni-based activities in schools globally, particularly schools in areas of greater need. Our intent is to help create fairer societies by supporting the school to work transition, at a global scale.

Our Thanks

We would like to give special thanks to Hugh McLean and Daniel Pop of the Open Society Foundations for going above and beyond in helping make this research happen; the Global Citizen Foundation for making their sponsorship of this work their very first grant and to Dr. Sarabajaya Kumar who has guided, advised and tirelessly edited this report.

More than anyone we would like to thank Ellen Petterson whose energy, ideas, resourcefulness and long hours made these scores of interviews over six countries possible. We would never have published this report without her.

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Research Report: Methodology

Over 6,000 adults across the six countries were polled to measure: (i) how they identified with their former schools; (ii) their propensity to give back to their former schools; and (iii) to explore where their own career support had come from. Further polling of approximately 3,000 young people surveyed them about the groups they identify with, what and who had influenced them and their opinions of how useful the support that alumni could offer could be.

In-country research, including interviews with Ministry of Education Officials, Head Teachers and other education experts and 28 focus groups involving almost 200 young people brought to life the quantitative research.

All research took place between April 1st and November 1st, 2013 and has been complemented with data from existing research including polling, interviews and focus groups that Future First has commissioned over the last three years in the USA, the UK and Kenya.

Figure 1: Location of Schools

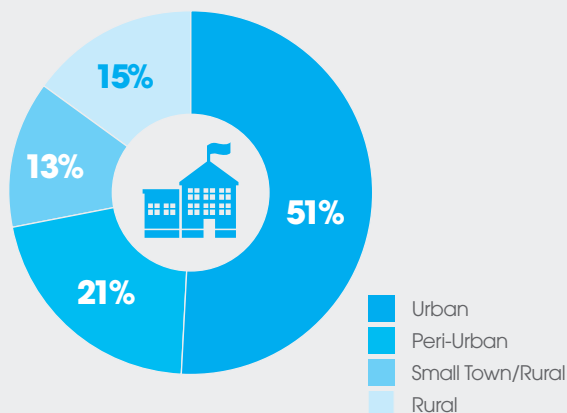


Figure 2: Type of School Visited

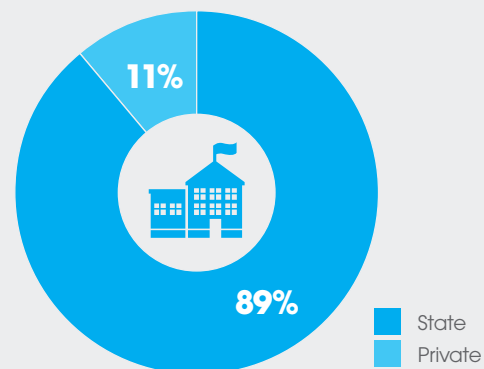


Figure 3: Academic Performance of Schools

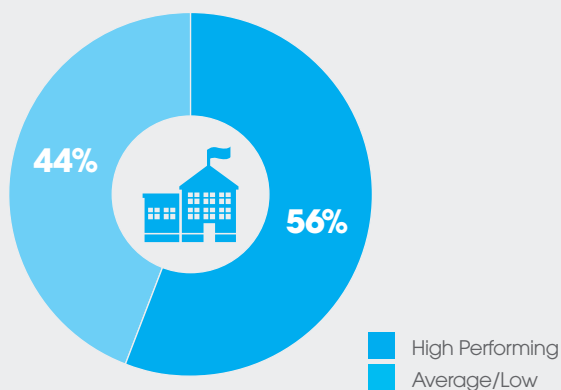


Figure 4: Socioeconomic Background of Students

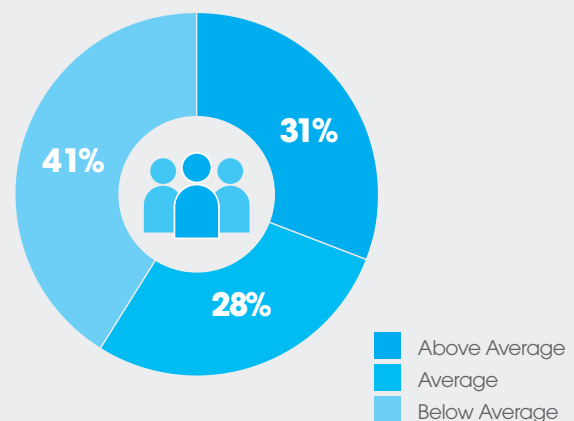
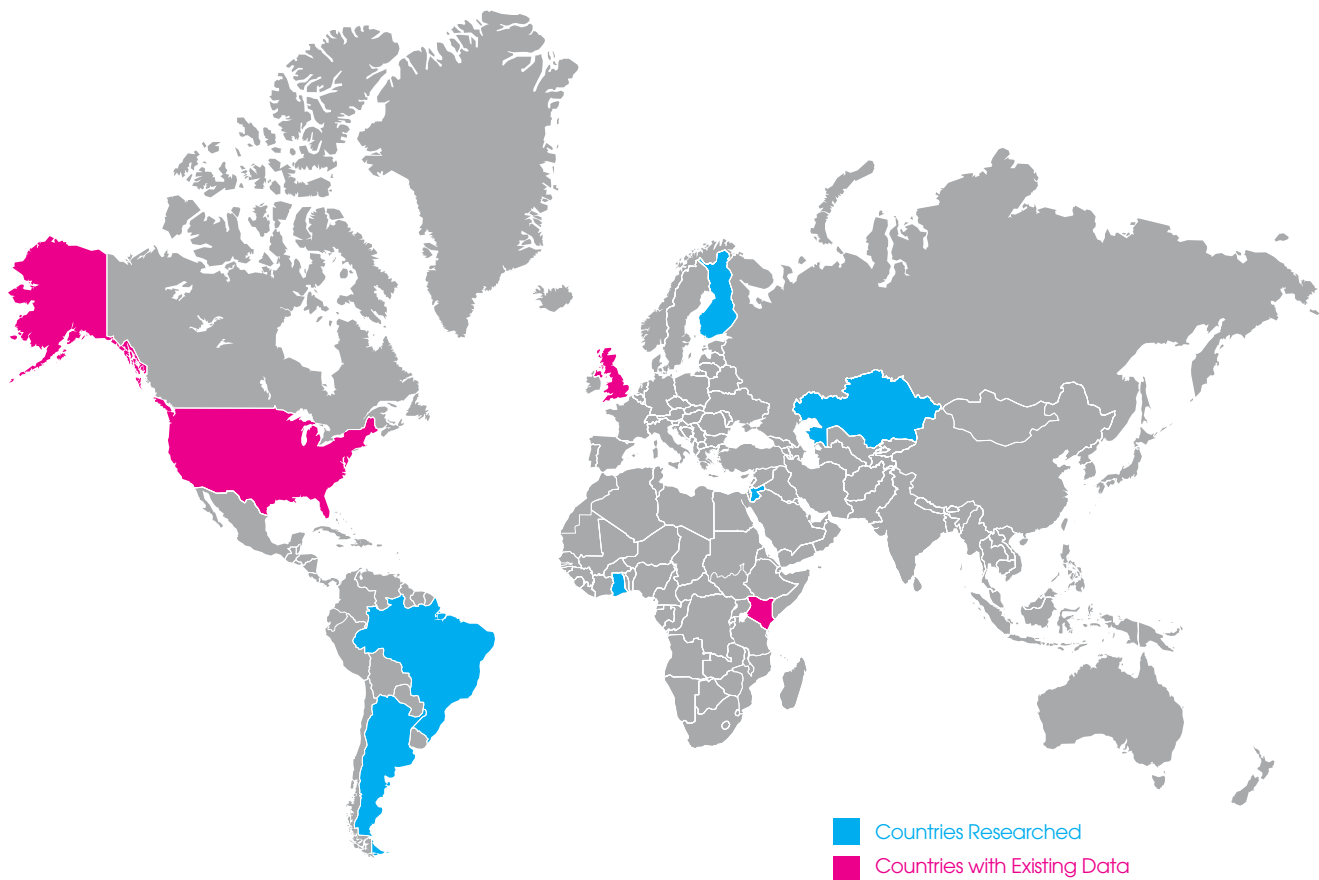


Figure 5: List of interviewees

	Argentina	Brazil	Finland	Ghana	Jordan	Kazakhstan	Total
Ministry of Education Official Interviews	2	4	3	5	2	1	17
Head Teachers Interviews	9	8	9	12	6	10	54
Focus Groups with Young People	4	7	8	6	3	3	31
NGO Representative Interviews	4	3	4	8	8	8	35
University Alumni Association Interviews	2	1	1	2	1	2	9
Total Interviewees	21	23	25	33	20	24	146



Foreword

Future First has been building alumni communities in state schools in the UK for five years now. Its work has led to a national rise in state school alumni engagement and a culture shift that is far greater than the organisation itself; the country has gone from less than 1% of state schools engaging alumni systematically to nearly 15%.

Future First manages the majority of alumni networks in the UK but has also seen a steep rise in schools creating and managing their own networks since its launch. In addition to this, as attention has been drawn to the resource that alumni can provide, competitive commercial organisations have also been established.

In 2012, Future First and the Open Society Foundations started a conversation about whether the potential for mobilising the local social and financial capital that alumni represent might exist in other parts of the world.

Together, a piece of research was scoped out to assess this potential in five diverse countries across four continents: Argentina, Brazil, Finland, Ghana, and Kazakhstan. With sponsorship from the Global Citizen Foundation, Jordan was added as a sixth country to ensure that the Middle East was also represented. The research took seven months from inception to publication.

Academic evidence indicates that young people from the poorest backgrounds disproportionately believe that people like them don't succeed, and that such beliefs become self-fulfilling over time. Or, as one Latin American NGO leader put it: 'people from the favelas never picture themselves as engineers'. Research also shows that young people with less access to work experience and careers insight opportunities are more likely to end up out of education, employment and training alumni networks can, in part, provide the solution to these complex problems by providing role models, access and insight where they have historically been absent.

So, why haven't these networks been systematically built around every school? This research shows that there is no issue with supply or demand. In each country studied, at least 28% of adults said that they would respond positively to the opportunity to contribute to their alma mater. Meanwhile, young people in every country reported that they would value the integration of former students into their formal careers provision.

Nor is it a question of culture. In every country studied, some form of local alumni activity existed and 65% of young people and 49% of adults identified strongly or very strongly with people from their (former) schools – a higher percentage than identified with people of their religion.

Current utilisation rates of alumni were found to be higher in private and elite schools than in state institutions, though expressed desire of former state school students to 'give back' was very similar to that of private school graduates. The opportunity that this finding supports – the propensity for graduates from all types of school and all parts of society to give back – is what has made this research so exciting for everyone involved.

We hope that this report sparks ideas, debate and action that can turn the potential and best practice identified into a more common reality for all young people.

Executive Summary

Six months of primary research backed up by national polling carried out by respected polling agencies, coordinated primarily by IPSOS Mori has led to the publication of this report.

Our research focused on three key elements, reflected in the structure of the report:

1. Current prevalence and best practice in alumni community building;
2. The size and scope of the opportunity to expand such communities;
3. The value of alumni communities to students, teachers and the wider education system.

Our main findings are:

- **Almost all elite schools¹ visited had formal alumni networks** and a significant degree of activity taking place within them;
- **State schools typically don't have formalised alumni networks** although alumni initiative and individual student-teacher relationships meant that in 89% of visited schools there was still some engagement with former students;
- **The primary purpose of networks in elite schools is alumni-to-alumni networking** while state school activity focuses more on how alumni can help current students;
- **The impact of alumni takes places beyond as well as within the school gates** – in Brazil, alumni have significant influence on career choices despite the general absence of alumni communities in schools;
- **The most common way in which alumni are mobilised in schools are as career and educational role models** and this is also the most desired form of engagement amongst school leaders and amongst alumni themselves;

- **There is significant untapped potential.** National polling reveals that while only 2% of alumni had given careers talks at their former schools, over 53% would be willing to do so. Significant numbers of alumni would also be willing to provide a work experience placement (51%), become a mentor (49%) or donate financially to their old school (42%);
- **There is strong appetite for alumni involvement in careers education from school leaders and students.** Students identified a combination of trained careers advisers and alumni as their preferred source of careers advice and 93% of Head Teachers said that they would find Future First's model of supporting schools to build an alumni community helpful at their school;
- **Young people identify very strongly with people who went to or go to their school.** Although the strength of that identity reduces into adulthood, it maintains strongly throughout life as a key feature of adult identity;
- **The existence or creation of a national annual event that can involve alumni in all schools** is a successful formula for more consistent and efficient network building;
- **There is no information for schools on alumni community building, no best practice and no government guidelines** – each school working with alumni is doing so in isolation.

Excellent examples of best practice were found all over the world, from Head Teachers piloting alumni integration into the curriculum in Finland to alumni staffing every extra-curricular club in a school in Kazakhstan.

We recommend that governments and education leaders start to look seriously at how to leverage the untapped potential to engage alumni with their old schools and begin to facilitate knowledge sharing between schools.

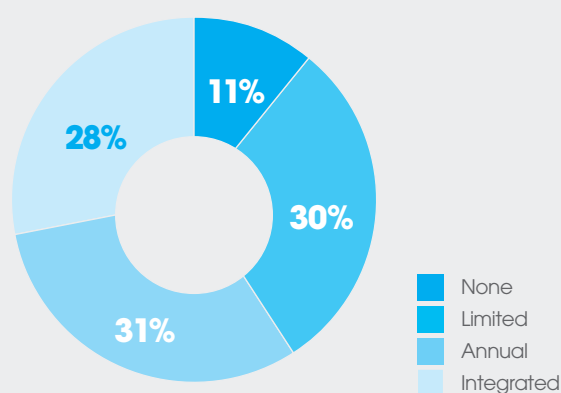
In the wake of this report, Future First's new international arm will offer support to national or local governments, NGO leaders, school leaders, social entrepreneurs or passionate educationalists who wish to explore the opportunity to better integrate alumni into their education systems.

Chapter 1: Current Prevalence of Alumni Networks & Best Practice in Building and Mobilising Them

Of the schools that took part in the research, 89% kept some contact with alumni yet the scope, depth and nature of the engagement varied hugely and was generally limited compared to the potential of the opportunity identified by both the school and our national polling data.

Government plays no role in alumni activities in any of the countries visited and no programmes were centrally coordinated or delivered at a national, regional or district level, leading to great diversity in implementation from school to school.³

Figure 6: Current Alumni Engagement Levels Observed



The one prevailing pattern is that there is a far greater investment in alumni community-building in private schools and the top-performing state schools.

Almost all elite schools have alumni communities with 67% of them having strong, 'integrated' alumni communities. In comparison, only 22% of state schools visited had integrated alumni networks and a majority of those were found in Finnish schools.

The impact of geography and demography on alumni networks was also revealing. In small towns, for example, brain drain patterns see 'successful' alumni move to the major cities for work but return trips home over national holidays seem to provide triggers for re-engaging with former schools..

According to in-country research, the highest overall levels of alumni engagement in schools were found in Finland followed by Kazakhstan and Ghana, with lower levels in Brazil, Jordan and Argentina. In Finland, renowned as the world's best education system for its consistently high PISA ratings, each and every school visited had an alumni community and the levels of alumni activity were high.

While the prevalence of networks is relatively consistent, the nature of them (how they are built and sustained) and the purpose of them (who they serve and how) vary greatly. This chapter looks at patterns in prevalence, nature and purpose.

Interestingly, the visibility of school-based networks in-country did not reflect national polling results. Only 9% of Finnish adults polled cited alumni as having had an impact on their career choices – the lowest level of influence across the countries researched. The highest levels cited were in Brazil, at 40%. Of course alumni support for current students will happen informally within communities, particularly in smaller communities where a large proportion will have attended the same school, and this could explain the national polling results.

“Maybe we have better opportunities but every student needs advice. We get to speak to the best people in the industry but everyone needs that.”

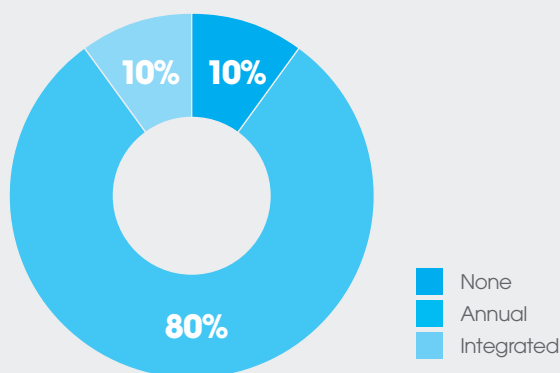
Private School Student, Jordan

1.1 How Alumni Communities Are Built

There are no instances of national guidelines or shared best practice about alumni engagement in any country visited. From one school leader to the next, no one knew what the other was doing. In Kazakhstan, for example, nine out of ten schools visited were actively engaged with their alumni but the Head Teacher in the tenth told us that such a programme would ‘never work in Kazakhstan’.

There were, however, general patterns in how alumni communities were generated. These have been synthesized into six forms and are described below.

Figure 7: Level of Alumni Engagement in Schools in Kazakhstan



1.1.1 National Culture and Events

While national guidelines for alumni community building were inexistent in the countries visited, a culture of reunion in some countries facilitated ongoing relationships between schools and their former students.

In Kazakhstan and Ghana, school reunions are highly valued. The vast majority of schools in Kazakhstan and a significant number of schools visited in Ghana⁴ base their alumni engagement around annual speech and prize-giving ceremonies or a culture of ‘home-coming’ weeks. In Kazakhstan, 80% of visited schools engaged with their alumni community on an annual basis with an additional 10% achieving an ‘integrated’ level of alumni engagement in school life.

“We celebrate our 10 year graduation anniversary for 3 days. The first day we meet with school and director and the second day we meet for a party in a restaurant.”

Former Student, Kazakhstan

On May 25th in Kazakhstan, schools across the country open their doors to alumni who meet with their former teachers – often bringing gifts such as flowers or chocolates in gratitude for the education and support they received, when they were at school. They sometimes then speak to groups of students about their post-school experiences.

In Ghana, the annual ‘Home-Coming Day’ or ‘Week’ for former students provides anchor events for alumni engagement with current students. In both countries, reunions to celebrate the alumni’s fifth, tenth or twentieth year since graduation are popular.

Case Study: Building a National Alumni Culture in the UK

Where a national culture of events engaging alumni has not existed, there is no reason that new campaigns can not be launched to create one. 2013 saw Future First UK launch an annual ‘Back to School Week’ campaign with a national newspaper, the i, and the National Union of Students to encourage a week of alumni volunteering each October at schools nationally.

Case Study: Class Presidents in Ghana

At an elite school in Accra, the Class President of each year group was crowned President of the Alumni Association at their graduation ceremony. They had an unwritten responsibility for keeping in contact with the year group to arrange monthly meet ups. These interactions fostered strong bonds, which became very clear when the wife of a former student passed away. His former year group stepped in and fundraised for the funeral and tuition fees for his two children. As one of the alumni said: "we are brothers and the school is our mother, we look out for each other."

1.1.2 Alumni-Led Engagement

In more than two thirds of cases found where schools are in touch with their former students, the impetus comes from alumni rather than the school itself.

Engagement of university students studying outside their home town is common as termly returns to their parents' home during the holidays provide regular opportunities to visit their school. Impromptu visits offer a platform for teachers to catch up with alumni and make ad-hoc requests for them to support activities in school or speak to students.

In Ghana and Kazakhstan where a tradition of reunions existed, alumni might organise activities with their graduating class at their tenth anniversary with or without contact from their school.

1.1.3 School-Led Alumni Engagement

School-led engagement is generally headed up by individual teachers or school leaders rather than the institution itself. Approximately 20% of schools visited keep some records of alumni contact details and only 10% have institutional databases, so pro-active outreach tends to rely on individual relationships. This can lead to a breakdown of the community when those staff members leave.

In these circumstances, individual teachers tend to seek out alumni they know to be successful or with whom they still have contact (often via Facebook) and invite them to careers talks or after-school clubs.

In numerous cases in Argentina, a retired teacher who wanted to remain involved in the school community on an on-going basis would lead on keeping alumni updated and engaged.

1.1.4 Development of Independent Alumni Clubs

The development of independent or semi-independent alumni clubs run by voluntary alumni chairs are present, but rare, in state schools and are much more common in private schools. In a number of cases in private schools, we found full-time paid staff running these clubs providing support to the volunteer leadership and helping coordinate between the club and the school.

Interestingly, every alumni club encountered across the six countries had a primary aim to serve alumni rather than current students. Their secondary aim was to support the school financially or otherwise, and helping current students was only a tertiary aim.

This hierarchy of purpose in some instances led to a tension between the school (who would prioritise donations and support for current students) and the Club, who prioritised fundraising for alumni-for-alumni activity.

1.1.5 Ongoing Access to School Facilities and Support

Some schools in Argentina and Finland, and universities in all countries included in the study gave students life-long access to their facilities and support.

One Argentine university said, "UADE is their home, they are always welcome." They explained that it is important to offer alumni such benefits in order to see them maintain their contact with and support for their old educational institution.

1.1.6 Effective Database Management

Alumni engagement through effective database management was the exception rather than the rule in the schools visited. However, without them community building is either completely undermined or extremely laborious.

Alumni databases were most commonly found in private schools, elite state schools and universities. University alumni clubs typically used specialist software such as Raiser's Edge or Cloupia's HP Data Management service, which is the same database that they used to store current student information. Meanwhile a handful of universities and one elite school had developed their own database specifically for the purpose of managing alumni contacts. Having such a database seemed to be central to the success of their engagement of alumni.

Databases allow any contact within the school to take on responsibility for building relationships with alumni through regular communications, without the need for personal connections.

These six alumni-engagement avenues are replicated in Future First's broader experience in Kenya, the US and the UK. If we combine our initial research in these countries to the case studies from this research, we find that none of the nine countries – each one a leading education system in their region – had coordinated national alumni programmes or any best practice guides, knowledge-sharing or resources for schools. Indeed, to date we have found no country outside the UK that has such a system.

The UK Cabinet Office's financing of Future First's alumni support programme for schools in 2012 may well have been the first example of a governmental support for a national alumni programme. A one-off grant from government allowed the organization to scale to work with nearly 15% of all state secondary schools and colleges.

Case Study: **An Alumni Office in Ghana**

In Accra, Ghana, we visited an elite state school that has invested in developing a staff team to run their alumni network as many universities and private schools do. This school had two professional staff (who were both alumni) and two interns (who were both recent graduates). They constantly collate news about the school and about their thousand-strong alumni database who in turn help disseminate information around a broader alumni network.

Case Study: **Student Clubs in Kenya**

Though no student-led 'alumni clubs' were visible throughout the study, one has recently been formed in the wake of Future First's work in Kenya.

A group of students launched a 'Future First Club' which is responsible for everything from helping find new alumni to sign up to their school's network to consulting with fellow students to decide what social and careers events to run with alumni and who to invite in when.

This club ensures that student views are represented in the design of the alumni programme and that managing the alumni network does not require significant school staff time.

1.2 Alumni Networks and Technological/ Communications Infrastructure

Technology cannot be seen as a pre-requisite for alumni networks. In Ghana and indeed in Kenya, networks have lasted effectively for a long time without the presence of strong communications infrastructure. However internet-based communications infrastructure will make a major difference to the ability to create, sustain and maximize alumni networks.

Access to electronic records – even in something as basic as a spreadsheet – makes the maintenance of alumni networks much more efficient. Using an advanced database that can interact with Facebook, LinkedIn and other platforms, keep records of the location and preferred activities of individual alumni, coordinate mail-merges and SMS outreach with responses automatically updated into individual records drives efficiency.

The widespread use of SMS in Ghana and the popularity of social networks, such as Facebook, make it easier to track and connect with former students than ever before. Disseminating messages directly using these channels is very valuable.

“(An alumni speaker) will have much impact because he will talk to them in the language they best understand. They will listen to him better than teachers or experts.”

School Leader, Ghana

1.3 How Alumni Communities Support Young People

While the alumni networks encountered have historically tended to focus on connecting alumni to each other, there are excellent examples of best practice in every country visited of instances where alumni are mobilised in support of current students.

The range of such activities undertaken by alumni is broad, but each activity generally fits into one of nine identified forms of mobilisation:

1.3.1 Career and Educational Role Models: Speakers in School

This is the single most common alumni mobilisation in every country besides Brazil.⁵ In 63% of the schools visited where alumni are involved in the school community, their support included or is exclusively based on talks about higher education, jobs and career pathways.

“It’s a more of a close encounter. It’s easier for (students) to relate because of the shared experience.”

Head Teacher, Argentina, on the power of alumni as role models

Some talks are part of planned careers days or half days (as is commonly the case in Finland and in elite schools elsewhere), while others were integrated into important school calendar events (e.g. alumni in Kazakhstan and Ghana returning to speak at school graduation ceremonies). Otherwise, they took place on an ad-hoc basis as alumni dropped into the school.

The Future First Model

Future First UK’s experience of developing alumni talks for tens of thousands of students has shown that structuring events in line with the curriculum, designing them in close collaboration with school staff and facilitation are key to success.

Lesson plans ensure clear structure and a facilitator ensures that sessions are interactive and that key threads of alumni stories are linked to students’ current experiences and focus.

Future First’s standard event formats are:

- Large assemblies of 100 to 500 students lasting 30 to 45 minutes involving, ideally, three to five former students;
- Workshops for 15-30 students on a topic that is specifically relevant to them can be run with 2-3 former students and last 45 minutes to an hour. These can be extended to two hours to include group work. Our evaluation shows that these are more valuable for young people than large assemblies.

1.3.2 Providers of work experience

The culture of formal work experience is stronger in some countries than others and so engaging alumni with such a process during school term time is only an option in the minority of countries visited.

This form of mobilisation was only consistently found in Argentina and Finland, where vocational schools in particular have a formalised work experience programme as part of their curriculum. Such schools seek places from both former students and local businesses.

1.3.3 Fundraisers or donors (cash or in kind)

Approximately 10% of schools visited had recently fundraised from alumni and 15% accepted in-kind donations. These cases were concentrated most strongly in Ghana for cash donations and in Kazakhstan for in-kind support. 67% of schools visited

Figure 8: Current Alumni Activity By Type
% of schools engaging alumni in activity⁶

Tutoring	5%
Teaching	16%
Volunteering in Clubs	16%
Mentoring	12%
Success Stories	63%
Cash donations	12%
Donate in kind	14%
Work Experience	6%
Board of Trustees	5%

Case Study: Careers Days in Jordan

One of the schools visited in Jordan runs annual careers days where all students are off timetable for a day and career talks, mock interview workshops and CV workshops took place across the school. 40 different volunteers were involved in last year's event, 90% of whom were alumni. The impact of this day was clear in the focus group with students, where they mentioned unprompted that this was one of the most important factors in influencing their university and career choices.

in Ghana had received donations from their alumni community. The national polling also showcased the strong culture of donating in Ghana. 61% of the polled adults were willing to donate to their old school, a higher percentage than in any other case country.

Cash donations in Ghana usually took the form of an alumni group negotiating a purchase on behalf of a school rather than offering cash, and in Kazakhstan schools, unable to take cash donations, instead looked to former students for donations of equipment or in-kind support with renovations.

In private schools, raising scholarship funds is a common activity and the sponsorship of individual students within education philanthropy is a common practice and common driver for donations. For example, a private school outside of Amman, Jordan received donations to fund tuition fees for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Students need to have an experience of the working world before they're alumni and they're out there.”

Head Teacher, Mercedes, Argentina on the value of alumni providing work experience

1.3.4 Volunteers in extra-curricular clubs

In Argentina and Kazakhstan, extra-curricular clubs for students are prevalent and often involved alumni volunteers. In Kazakhstan, particularly in poorer urban areas, school leaders emphasised the importance of keeping their students in school and away from potential trouble. Kazakh schools had the widest array of after-school activities and these are made possible in many cases thanks to alumni volunteers.

In Finland conversely there are no such opportunities as after-school activity tends to be based around youth centres rather than schools.

1.3.5 Teachers or teaching assistants

One recurring trend is the presence of former students amongst the teaching staff particularly in more rural areas, where the school leaders themselves are often former students.

For example, in Finland 33% of the visited schools had made a number of interim teaching assistant positions available to new leavers who had not yet gone to university. This approach not only solved a school need, but also helped up-skill new leavers.

1.3.6 Tutors

In the schools visited in Ghana, alumni are most commonly engaged as tutors or support teachers. Alumni provide additional academic support for students who have fallen behind or are being reintegrated into the system after time away. Head teachers explained that they quickly earn the respect of students because they came from that same local community.

Figure 9: Adult Willingness to Donate to Their Old School (%)⁷

Argentina	44%
Brazil	42%
Finland	11%
Ghana	61%
Jordan	53%
Kazakhstan	38%

1.3.7 Community-building

Many Head Teachers that we met expressed a belief that their alumni contribute in a large way to the building of the school community and culture.

For example, in Argentina, one top-performing school invites the most recent cohort of graduates of the school back into school for the first day of each academic year to 'accompany' the next cohort entering the school and initiate them into the school's culture.

1.3.8 School Governors

In Ghana, a national policy stipulates that at least two members of a school's member governing body be former students. This is not evident elsewhere although Future First's work in the UK has seen a growing interest in adults engaging as governors of their former schools.

1.3.9 Mentoring

Other than in one Ghanaian school, there was little evidence of alumni mentoring programmes, although Head Teachers – on average across the sample – rate this as their second favourite way to mobilise alumni.

Future First UK is in the process of developing a face-to-face mentoring programme to run across its network of schools. This, alongside its yet untested alumni e-mentoring platform will over time offer insight into whether technology-enabled mentoring programmes or short-term mentoring programmes can work at scale.

“When they (alumni) come back to teach, the students see them as role models. They want to be like them.”

Head Teacher, Ghana

Case Study: Curriculum Integration in Finland

In one Finnish school, a highly committed science teacher is piloting the integration of alumni careers education into the school's curriculum. This reflected a popular sentiment among school leaders that former students could help current students to see the relevance of their studies.

She asked volunteers from both local employers and the alumni network to come into lessons and talk through how current curriculum topics transferred to workplace activities in order to show “what the point in school is.”

Case Study: Matching Alumni and Students for Work Placements

In order to ensure careful matching of students and alumni for work experience placements, an elite Jordanian school runs careers survey for all students to find out about their career interests, skills and motivations.

They then match students to available placements with alumni based on fields of interest.

Case Study: School “Parents” in Ghana

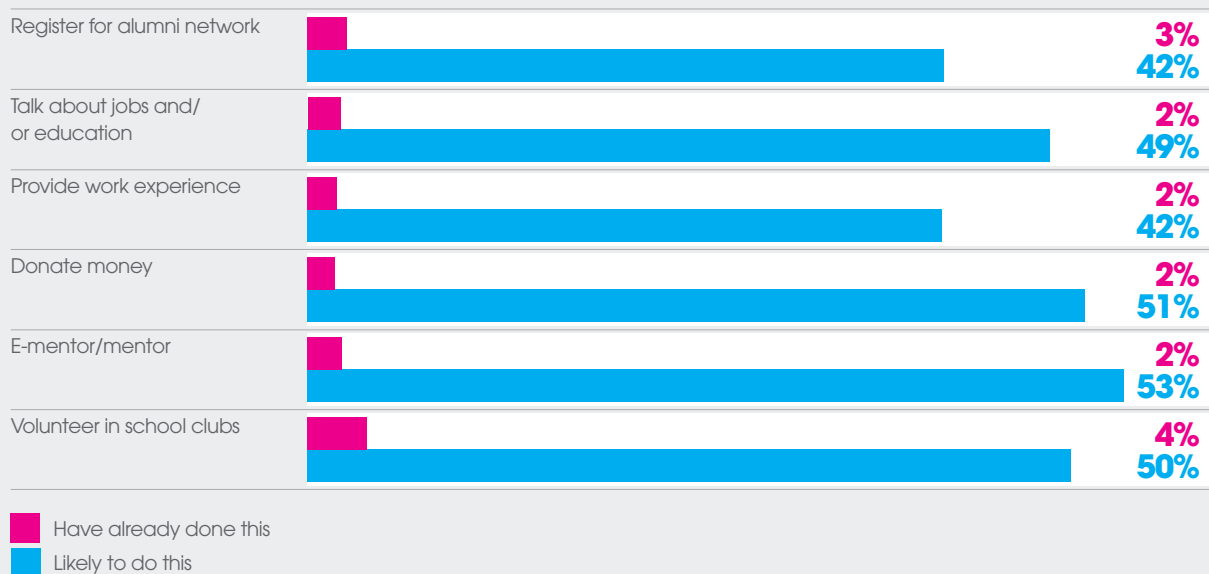
An innovative approach to mentoring was encountered at a Ghanaian school in a very poor area of peri-urban Accra, where at the very heart of a strong alumni community is an in-school buddy system that continued beyond the school gates. The programme saw new entrants to the school partnered with final year students. These ‘school fathers’ and ‘school mothers’ helped new students to settle in, navigate their school years and often even stayed in touch after the ‘parents’ had graduated. In a number of cases, they had taken their ‘buddies’ around universities and give them advice on courses. Clearly the students who were interviewed in the focus group at the school had benefited from the programme. One said, “we’re still in touch with our school dads and mothers, they really motivate us!”

Chapter 2: The Opportunity

While alumni networks exist around schools in countries across the world, beyond the elite schools existing networks have relatively low levels of engagement and mobilisation. Poor record keeping, communications strategies and dissemination of best practice all appear to be contributing factors.

Polling in the countries researched consistently shows, however, that there is significant untapped potential to engage alumni. Only 4% of adults have registered to be part of their school's alumni network. Yet, 50% would be interested in doing so.

Figure 10: Alumni Contributions - Propensity and Practice (%)⁸

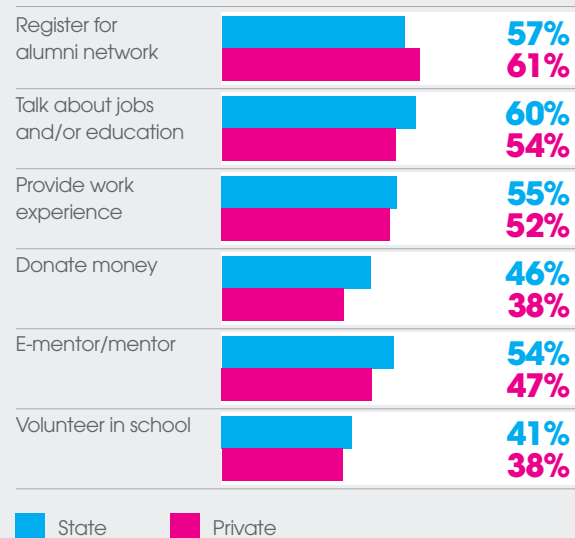


In each country, the expressed desire to give back to their old schools whether as career role models, mentors, donors, work experience providers or volunteers was found to be slightly higher among state school than private school alumni.

“(Future First) is very interesting because it’s happened here through teachers and coordinators but never in a formal way. It definitely would be good to do it formally.”

Head Teacher, Pernambuco, Brazil

Figure 11: Adult Propensity to Volunteer - State vs Private School Alumni (%)⁹



2.1 Untapped Potential

Alumni are not just interested in joining a network, they also showed strong propensity to actively give back to students at their old school.

53% of adults globally are willing to go back to their former school to talk about their job and career path and 51% are willing to offer a work experience placement to a current student at their old school.

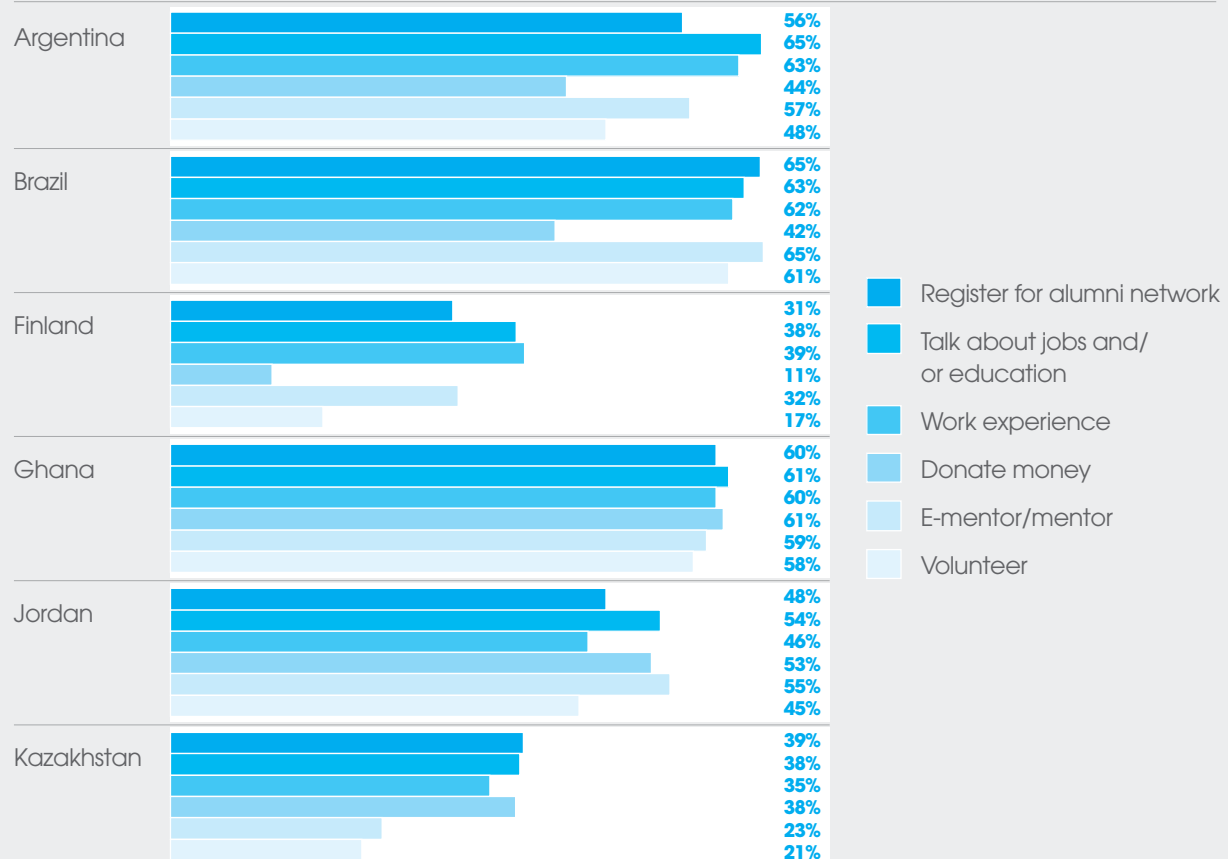
There are variations across the sample. In Brazil and Jordan, mentoring was the most popular form of support that adults are willing to pledge to young people at their old school, with a high 65% of adults in Brazil saying they would be likely or very likely to mentor.

Meanwhile, in Finland, more adults are willing to offer a work experience placement to students at their old school than anything else.

Whilst the least popular activity across all countries is alumni donations to their old school, the numbers who said they would be willing to donate are still vast enough to transform education-based fundraising in every country visited.

Finland is the country with the lowest propensity to give back in this study. Yet, if you look at the potential size of the opportunity by looking at response rates as a proportion of the total population, it shows that over 543,000 volunteers, 1.2m career role models and US\$ 87.2 m in donations are available. This equates to US\$ 199,000 per high school¹¹. So the potential is substantial.

Figure 12: Adult Volunteering Propensity by Country and Type (%)



Overall there are such significant numbers of alumni ready to contribute that schools could never have capacity to take advantage of all the opportunities for support available.

Polling found that alumni of all ages are likely to give back at similar levels, with only a modest difference in willingness across the age categories. The group least likely to give back to their old school are the early-stage career group, aged 25-34 years. Interestingly, these young adults are the most likely to donate money to their old school, with 36% willing to do so. It seems that while volunteering time may be limited by focus on work, they're happy to financially support their old school.

Figure 13: Size of donation alumni are willing to pledge to their old school if asked (% of alumni)¹⁰

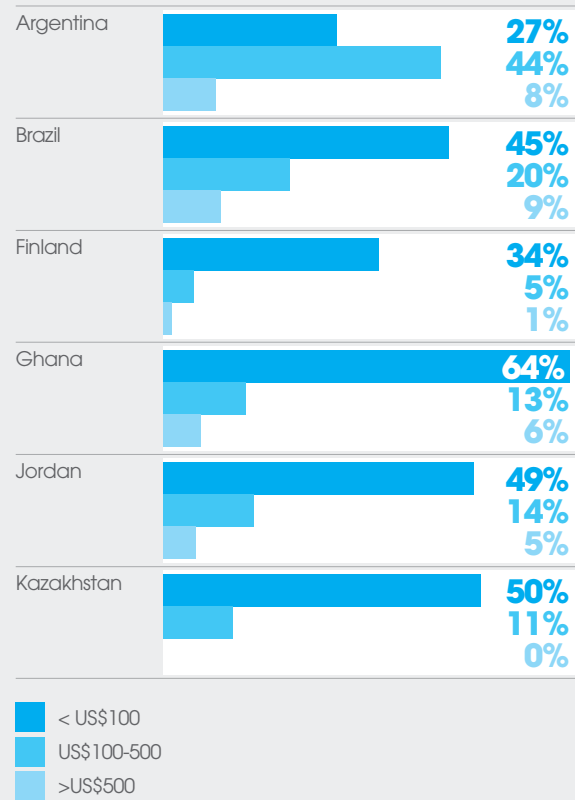
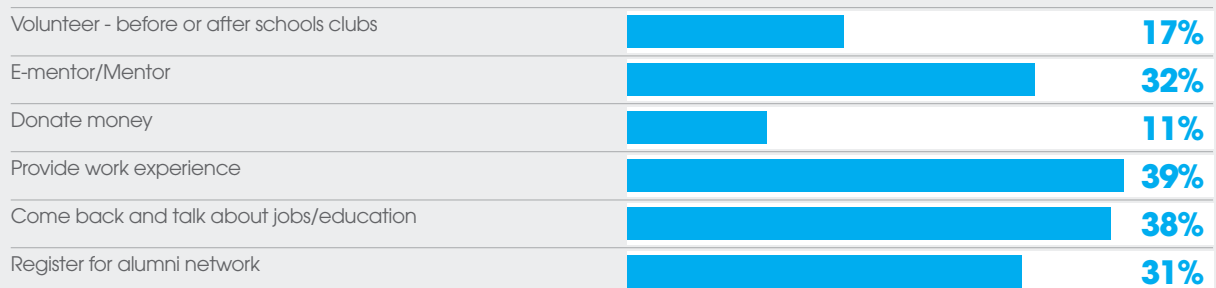


Figure 14: Finnish Adults' Propensity to Give Back to Their Old School



Chapter 3: The Value of Alumni Networks

3.1 Different Stakeholder Interpretations of the Value of Alumni Networks

3.1.1 Young People

In every case country, a significant percentage of the young population want alumni engagement to be part of their school career support. The most desired form of school careers support is a combination of informal alumni advice and formal careers advisory services.

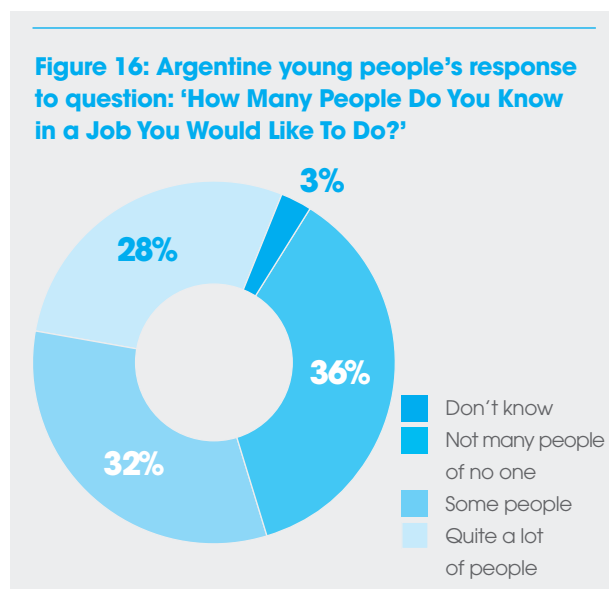
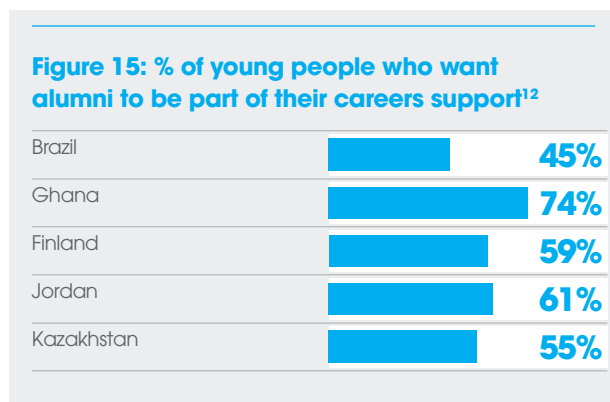
This combination of formal, impartial advice mixed with real life case studies, personal stories, career insight and access to opportunities is promoted by Future First as the best approach to careers support.

This sentiment was backed up by young people in focus groups in every country visited. As one Kazakh student explained: *“It’s good to hear from both career advisors and graduates... it’s important to hear from graduates because they sat in the same classrooms and so we’re close to them.”*

Focus groups in all countries demonstrated the huge sway that individuals in jobs have on young people. Almost half of those young people encountered across the study who had a firm career direction were able to cite an adult they personally knew in that job.

Such results showcase the critical impact of individual role models on young people.

This creates two key challenges in less affluent and less well-networked communities.



The first is that young people from poorer backgrounds have less access to these crucial career role models. The global polling showed that a quarter of young people in state schools know few or no people in a job they’d like to do – leaving them at a huge disadvantage.

‘I met an engineer years ago and just wanted to do it.’

‘I have a friend who is an ex-student from here who does this (marketing).’

‘I have uncles and aunts who are lawyers and can see myself doing it.’

Students, Brazil, on what they want to do and who influenced that decision

The second challenge is that family backgrounds can be reinforced and young people with less of a range of role models may assume that people like them do a certain type of job, which might limit ambition or scope for their career and education choices.

“It’s good when alumni come to talk because some students don’t know the recruitment requirements for different jobs, but alumni bring the latest developments.”

Head Teacher, Ghana

In some cultures, strong parental influence on career choices can have disadvantages as well as advantages. Polling of young people in Ghana, one of the fastest growing and most rapidly changing economies in the world, showed that 83% of young people are “very influenced” by their parents in their careers choices. The parents of today’s Ghanaian students grew up in an economy that is wholly different from the one that their children will enter as the country moves towards an industrial and knowledge-based economy with increased privatisation¹³. This limits the scope of advice well-meaning adults can give to current students.

The famous statistic that 65% of jobs our children will work in have not been invented yet¹⁴ inherently limits the ability of parents to give the relevant, current career insight that near-to-peer advisors (such as alumni, elder cousins and siblings) can provide. Equally, teachers – the second greatest influence on careers choices – tend to have limited job market exposure and lack updated information.¹⁵

For these reasons, it’s important that programmes exist to expose young people to adults (and young adults in particular) in as many careers as possible who can provide both inspiration and information that is relevant to the job market today. Research from the UK shows that people who are able to recall four or more interactions with employers while at school were 80% less likely to be out of education, employment and training than those who could not recall any interactions.¹⁶

One interesting part of the research was the limited difference visible between genders. The confidence levels between genders are very closely matched and from 50 interviews with school leaders, there was little sense that the pathways between boys and girls graduating high school are at all different. A new



generation of young women is growing up in a world that is clearly more equal than the one their mothers grew up in but will, as a result, lack as much access to relevant role models as are available for young men.

This came across clearly in national polling of young adults in Jordan where young women found the Future First model almost twice as useful as young males. This result reflects the Jordanian job market where women are increasingly better educated than men but disproportionately suffer from unemployment.¹⁷

3.1.2 School Leaders

93% of Head Teachers interviewed as part of the research said that support in building and maximizing alumni communities would be useful at their school. This reaction was a combination of their belief in the value of engaging with alumni and their concern that their current approach wasn’t as systematic or informed by best practice as it could be.

Figure 17: % of young people in Jordan who say that Future First would be helpful¹⁸

Male		30%
Female		54%






When asked about how the school helped students prepare for their futures, 41% of Head Teachers mentioned the support of their alumni without prompting and a total of 89% of school leaders said that they are in touch with them in some way. The concept is not new but the application is currently limited.

When asked if alumni had any specific value over other adults in jobs who are willing to offer these sorts

“In the first year of school when you say about university, students think it’s a dream and that it can’t happen. Then they see ex-students and they believe that it can happen to them too.”

Head Teacher in Pernambuco, Brazil

Figure 18: Types of Alumni Support Desired by Head Teachers (Scale 1-5)¹⁹

Talk about careers/education		3.7
Provide work experience		2.9
Mentors/E-mentors		2.7
Donors		2.2
Volunteers in school clubs		1.9

of support to students, many school leaders were quick to say ‘of course.’

Of the countries researched, the one with the lowest current levels of alumni engagement, Brazil,²⁰ there was the strongest level of interest in the building communities, with every Head Teacher interviewed saying that Future First’s model would be useful. The majority of Head Teachers indicated that there was a significant need for alumni communities due to the lack of support at home. As one Head Teacher in a poorer area expressed it, “students need a lot from parents but their generation isn’t very successful (and so can not provide advice).” She felt like the alumni community could be especially powerful for showing students what’s possible in light of the deficit of parental role models. The belief in alumni communities was also visible in the national polling of young people: 89% of the respondents felt it would be helpful to receive support from an alumni community.

3.1.3 Government

Local and national government support for the idea of alumni programmes in state schools was found to be very strong across all countries visited.

The rationale behind government support for alumni networks varies from country to country based on local priorities although the idea of provision of access to career role models stood out as a priority across all countries.

As a senior Ghanaian government representative explained, “we should set up pilots in low income areas where education as a societal development tool is losing its effect...Farmers in cocoa growing areas might not see the rationale for education because their kids will be cocoa growers too, but we need to show them how to be business leaders.”

This sentiment has also been reflected in the Kenyan Ministry of Education’s desire to extend alumni activities out of Nairobi and into the poorer, more rural areas where they perceived the value to be much greater.

Government representatives also spoke of the programme’s alignment with policy themes of social mobility, strengthening school communities and providing practical access to advice and opportunities.

Indeed, every single government interview was followed by an unprompted conversation about whether Future First could or would consider practical implementation in that country.

“One of the most important things when you look at equity is family background. If you come from a good family, you get good guidance.”

Finnish National Board of Education

Conclusion

There is no doubt that alumni networks can be used to help young people navigate the transition from education into employment and to support schools to finance extra-curricular activities and infrastructure projects. Current best practice in private schools, elite state schools and universities shows just how great the impact of this intervention can be when effectively implemented.

However, the current pattern of high levels of alumni activity in elite schools compared to mainstream schools, in spite of the equal propensity to give back among alumni from all school types, has a negative net impact. Alumni networks are currently serving only a small section of society and reinforcing social hierarchies more often than they facilitate social mobility.

This paper was designed not just to spark thought but, where opportunity was uncovered, to spark action. It shows that the scope and size of the opportunity varies from country to country. Yet, even in the countries with the smallest opportunity to engage willing adults to provide support to their old school communities, the untapped potential is significant.

Future First aims to raise awareness of this untapped potential through the dissemination of this report and inspire educationalists across the world to take on the mantle of building communities around every school. We hope to see other providers emerge, bringing with them new ideas and increased activity.

Future First International is being launched to support alumni activity in schools internationally. We will work to disseminate current best practice, provide consultancy and direct support on all aspects of alumni network building and mobilisation and also help with technology solutions.

Government strength to roll programmes out within schools, strength of technology infrastructure and the level of development of a national culture of alumni volunteering will be the key three factors that determine how efficient it is for any given country or region to embark on an alumni programme across their schools.

Our global vision is to see an exponential increase in the number of schools actively building communities of former students globally led by the initiative of schools, NGOs and governments. There is no reason why every young person should not have access to the wealth of opportunities and support networks that their former students can provide. We are intent on making sure that they do.

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27. Sheila Osei Boakye, Head Teacher, Prempeh Academy, Afiyena, Ghana
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29. Mr Kofi, Head Teacher, Immaculate Heart RC School, Christian Village, Accra, Ghana
30. Focus Group of Teachers, Immaculate Heart RC School, Christian Village, Accra, Ghana
31. Focus Group of Students, Immaculate Heart RC School, Christian Village, Accra, Ghana
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35. Mr Awari, Head Teacher, Business Senior High School (BISCO), Tamale, Ghana
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37. Mr Saaka, Programme Director, School for Life, Tamale, Ghana
38. SM Baba, Head Teacher; TT Tampuli, Deputy Head Teacher and Osman Wahou, Deputy Head Teacher, Savelugu Senior High School, Savelugu, Ghana
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87. Focus group of students, Escola Técnica Estadual Cicero Dias, Recife
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- 1 We define 'elite schools' as private schools and state schools that are selective either through examination or location.
- 2 We define 'integrated' alumni programmes as monthly visits by alumni to their school as part of a planned programme of activities.
- 3 Figure 6 illustrates the cross-country average of alumni engagement as identified by head teachers in all visited schools, including both private and state schools.
- 4 This was true of 80% of schools in Kazakhstan and 42% of schools in Ghana.
- 5 In Brazil, the most common current alumni mobilisation is volunteering in school clubs, which 25% of schools interviewed had done.
- 6 Figure 8: Cross-country average of alumni engagement as identified by head teachers at all visited schools.
- 7 Figure 9: National polling illustrating likelihood to give of adults to donate money to their old school.
- 8 Figure 10: Cross-country average of national polling, showcasing adults' likelihood to give back vs. percentage who has already contributed to their old school.
- 9 Figure 11: Figures as cross-country averages based on all national polling.
- 10 Figure 13: Based on national polling.
- 11 Based on sample population's response in national polling. Respondents were asked how much they were willing to donate to their old school if asked to donate tomorrow. The sums are extrapolated to the total population of the age cohort polled (19-65). Available amount per school shows total amount divided by number of government funded high schools.
- 12 Figure 15: Based on national polling.
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- 17 Jordan's National Employment Strategy 2011-2020, Ministry of Planning and International Coordination.
- 18 Figure 17: Based on national polling of young Jordanians who thought the Future First model would be very useful.
- 19 Figure 18: Head teachers were asked to rank the five types of alumni support on a scale from 1-5, 5 being the most valuable and 1 the least. The graph shows the cross-country average.
- 20 Nearly two thirds of schools visited in Brazil didn't have any contact with their former students.

“Every Brazilian has a talent for something (but) we need some inspiration, influencing – when we find our objectives and skills we go for it... through talks (with people in jobs) we get our inspiration.”

Student, Recife, Brazil

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**“I want to go out
there, become
someone great
and help the
school in the future.”**

Student, Accra, Ghana