

Maltby Academy

Meet our Board: **Christopher Eccles,** **Associate Principal of Maltby Academy**

Associate Principal of Maltby Academy, Christopher Eccles, is a Board member of the Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp).

A highly experienced school leader in teaching and learning and performance management, he is passionate about building aspiration in young people, especially those who have come from challenging backgrounds. We caught up with Chris to find out why he is supporting Hepp.

Why did you choose to develop a partnership with Hepp?

We have a very diverse community here and opportunities for some young people can be limited. For example, 33% of our young people attract pupil premium and for some no one in their family has ever gone on to higher education. We need to show them what opportunities are out there. By working with Hepp, we can give them opportunities to visit universities as well as impartial, accurate information to broaden their outlook. It gives them greater choice and aspiration moving forward.

Why do you think is Hepp important for schools in this region?

Hepp provides a platform for schools to develop closer links with universities and colleges that offer higher education, rather than having to build those partnerships themselves. As schools, we have a responsibility to help our young people explore what study and career opportunities are out there, but it can be time-consuming and we are not always well placed to do that. Hepp has the impartial resources and expertise to help schools.



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From your experience, what are the barriers that stop young people from entering higher education?

Some of it is around lack of aspiration and fixed outlook – there may be an expectation in the family that they will go down a particular route because that's what members of their family have always done. Some of it is around the cost of higher education, which is publicised widely on the news, and young people may get a skewed perception of what that really means for them. They may not hear about the benefits in terms of employment and earning potential going forward.

What is your view of degree apprenticeships as an option for some young people?

Degree apprenticeships are long overdue, in my view. I think they're an absolutely fabulous idea in terms of marrying together the world of work and academic study. It means we can now give some young people who might otherwise have dropped out of education the opportunity to develop higher level skills and access a profession or a particular industry which they might not otherwise have felt able to.

How does Hepp help with this sort of information?

Hepp can help us get that information about degree apprenticeships to youngsters when they are only 13 or 14, because it's hard for educationalists to know about some of these opportunities. Even if the careers person in school knows about apprenticeships, they may not know about what's entailed in practice and all the different options. Having people who understand the nuts and bolts of these opportunities come and speak to our young people and open their eyes to what's possible is fabulous.

As a member of the Hepp Board, what do you think Hepp's priorities should be?

I think Hepp should be aiming for engagement with as many young people across South Yorkshire as possible, especially in demographic areas where there is low uptake of higher education. We need to start raising students' aspirations from age 11 upwards, it's too late to start age 16. We need to make sure they are getting timely, accurate information because the landscape is changing so fast – the range of opportunities out there now are totally different to when I was looking and even teachers and parents who've been to university themselves are not in a position to know and advise young people who are looking for what's next.

What would you say to schools not currently engaged with Hepp?

I would say to other schools that Hepp is offering a great opportunity for some free, independent advice, guidance and support for their young people to find out about higher education. We know from research that the more direct contacts young people have with people who are working outside of the school environment, that has a positive impact. It allows them to see things from a different perspective.

How do you think a school can make the best of Hepp in their school?

You need someone who can be the key link with Hepp and this needs to be an acknowledged part of their role. Ideally they will be responsible for careers and progression in some way. At Maltby our Hepp liaison staff member leads on post-16, but also has an overview of raising aspiration through our 'Enrich and Inspire' programme right down to Year 7. You need someone who can see the bigger picture. That Hepp link contact needs to map out a plan of activity throughout the year, from September to July, looking at how the activities can fit into the school's current schemes of learning around careers advice and guidance. Embedding activity throughout the year helps to reinforce the messages about progression.



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