



**Katie Hart**

**Director, Cambridgeshire Enterprise Services.**

How many A-levels does Sir Richard Branson have? Or Sir Alan Sugar? Or the dragons from the Dragons' Den? Some of Britain's top entrepreneurs don't even have any O-levels, but the point isn't what they don't have, it's what they do have and why. Because, without fail, what our most successful self-made businessmen and women have is experience of enterprise from a young age.

Richard Branson started his first two businesses at the age of 15. Both failed but he left school at 16 to launch a (successful) magazine, his first charity at 17, and by 20 he'd founded Virgin. He is now worth more than £4billion. Alan Sugar also left school at 16 and famously began trading out the back of a van he bought for £100 before founding Amstrad when he was 21. Now he's worth more than £8million. Bill Gates, the richest man in the world with \$56billion, was just 14 when he launched his first venture – making £20,000 in the first year. I could go on, but you get the point – and that's not to cast aspersions on the benefits of qualifications (Gates went to Harvard), it's to highlight the importance of early exposure to business.

More and more these days, good qualifications aren't enough. With the numbers of A grades increasing yearly, employers and universities are looking for that extra something - whether it's Duke of Edinburgh, volunteering in the community or running the school tuck shop.

And schools are also tuning into the benefits of enterprise teaching. Cambridgeshire Enterprise Services has been touring the county with BoomBizz™, a business simulation game that provides hands on experience of running a small business. Funded by the East of England Development Agency, BoomBizz™ has been played in 24 schools by 4,300 pupils – and the kids love it.

It's not just about putting maths and English to a practical (and fun) use, it's about improving an entrepreneurial culture by demonstrating that starting a business can be a real option for all, whatever their background.

And because it's interactive, players also learn the vital skills of team building, problem solving, decision making, creativity, risk evaluation and more. Participants often discover skills they never

knew they had and their motivation and enthusiasm for business can pay huge dividends in future life.

Earlier this year the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study, the largest annual survey of entrepreneurship in the UK, showed that young people and graduates from the East of England are more likely to be entrepreneurial than their counterparts across the rest of the country. Compared to the national average, almost a third more young people aged between 18 and 24 in the East of England are setting up their own businesses.

Overall, the East of England has seen an increase in entrepreneurial activity since 2005 and at Cambridgeshire Enterprise Services we've certainly seen that reflected in the numbers of people through the doors taking advantage of our free one-to-one advice and mentoring services. Who knows, some of them may become the Bransons, Sugars and Gates' of the future.

Ends

Cambridgeshire Enterprise Services is the umbrella organisation which incorporates the enterprise programmes located in Cambridge, Peterborough, Ely, Huntingdon and St Neots. Services they offer include one-to-one support, networking events, advice on available workshops and access to a comprehensive range of on-line information. One of the services Cambridgeshire Enterprise Services currently offers is the BoomBizz™ game.