



# Ready for work

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Careers Education in England  
2023/24

# Introduction

This paper summarises insights from [young people](#) (over 230,000), [schools and colleges](#) (4,751) and [employers](#) (over 800) about careers education in the academic year 2023/24. The insights focus on:



**How careers education addresses disadvantage**



**The contribution of careers education to economic growth**



**How careers education drives readiness for work**

We are now gathering a huge amount of data from the system. This means we can increasingly see how interventions are driving [outcomes](#) for young people and employers, chart progress and identify gaps. We also have early indications of promise through a national [pilot of careers education in primary schools](#).

\*All references in this table and report from [here](#)

For a fuller explanation of how CEC drives impact, see [here](#).

## Key headlines

6 facts about the careers system in England\*



68%

Average student career readiness score in Year 11, up from 49% in Year 7



80%

Students in Year 11 understand apprenticeships (almost on a par with A levels, at 84%)



80%

Employers working with Careers Hubs say their work in schools and colleges is helping to bring apprentices into their organisation



92%

Secondary schools and colleges reporting progress in careers education



5.8

Gatsby Benchmarks met on average across state-funded secondary schools and colleges (5.9/8 for special schools, all institutions up from 2.1 in 2018/19)



6.3

Gatsby benchmarks achieved by schools and colleges in Careers Hubs compared to 3.8 for non members (5.3 for those joining since 2022)



## Insights focus 1

### How careers education addresses disadvantage



#### High-quality careers provision improves students' career readiness, especially important for disadvantaged students

Over 230,000 students are telling us about their career readiness and essential workplace skills. Students in schools with the best careers provision report they are more career ready than those in schools that perform less well. This effect more than compensates for lower levels of career readiness among students receiving Free School Meals (FSM) and shows the critical role of careers education in [closing gaps and reducing the risk of students becoming NEET](#).

#### Female FSM students report lower career readiness, but engagement with employers make a difference

Year 11 FSM girls have an average career readiness score of 63%, compared to 70% for non-FSM boys. [Confidence levels are also lower](#): 51% of FSM girls feel confident talking about their skills during interviews, compared to 66% for non-FSM boys.

Evidence, gathered over time, confirms that [sustained employer engagement](#) also helps close gender and class gaps in career readiness. [Pilot work in primary schools](#) is helping to reduce gender stereotypes, with girls showing greater interest in typically male-dominated sectors. Interest in Business and Finance rose by 30%, while Sport and Fitness saw a 15% increase, Digital 14% and Law 13%. The first two waves of the pilot have enabled over 200,000 primary pupils to benefit from 1,966 employer encounters.

## Over 230,000

Students are telling us about their career readiness and essential workplace skills.

#### Employers are stepping up to deliver more experiences for disadvantaged young people

Schools with more FSM students assess themselves [lower on Gatsby Benchmark 6 \(Experiences of Workplaces\)](#) than more advantaged schools, highlighting the need for greater employer involvement to provide high-quality work experience for more disadvantaged schools. Encouragingly, [65% of employers are targeting support to at least two under-represented groups](#), rising to 81% for employers engaging over the long term. Those providing meaningful opportunities over the long-term report the [most significant benefits to their businesses](#).

Meaningful interactions are [particularly valuable for disadvantaged students](#), helping them to build confidence and develop employability skills. In 2023/24 academic year, [a new programme designed to reinvent work experience](#) saw [more than 39,000 extra workplace experiences](#) being provided for disadvantaged young people through Careers Hubs. This programme demonstrated how structured employer engagement can improve equity of provision and remove barriers to access at scale.



## Insights focus 2

### The contribution of careers education to economic growth

#### Meaningful engagement with schools and colleges benefits employers

Over 800 employers have shared a self-assessment about their engagement with education. Nearly 4,000 Enterprise Advisers (business volunteers who collaborate with [schools, colleges](#) and Careers Hubs) have given us their assessment of the impact they are seeing.

[87% of employers report their work with schools and colleges encourages young people to take up careers in their sector](#) (95% for [Cornerstone Employers](#), who are members of Careers Hubs) and 81% say it helps develop new talent pipelines (92% for Cornerstone Employers). 80% of employers say their work is encouraging young people to apply for roles in their businesses (90% for Cornerstone Employers). It also saves money: 37% say their outreach helps reduce recruitment costs. [69% of Enterprise Advisers](#) say their engagement has helped increase young people's awareness of apprenticeships.

# 87%

**of employers report that their work with schools and colleges encourages young people to take up careers in their sector (95% for Cornerstone Employers).**

#### Employer partnerships help improve employability skills and close skills gaps

By Year 11, despite all eight essential skills improving, [young people score themselves lowest on social skills](#), including listening (61%), leadership (62%), speaking (68%) and teamwork (68%). This reinforces the importance of early intervention. However, by supporting students to understand and prepare for the full range of application processes, employers report seeing young people's [employability skills improving and skills gaps closing](#).

#### Young people are showing strong interest in key industries

Good careers education helps guide students towards industries that align with economic demand, [reducing the risk of focusing on over-subscribed sectors](#).

By Year 11, the most popular industries among students include healthcare (14%), construction and trades (12%), and computing, technology, and digital (11%). There is increasing alignment with national growth sectors and regional labour market needs identified in Local Skills Improvement Plans. Young people can be further supported to access opportunities from local growth plans and the national industrial strategy.



## Insights focus 3

### How careers education drives all young people's readiness for work

#### Schools and colleges engaging with the careers system achieve more impact

[Schools engaging with more of the careers system \(Careers Hubs, Careers Leader Training, Compass+ digital tools](#) and the student [Future Skills Questionnaire](#)) report an average 6.3 benchmarks achieved compared to 3.4 for those with no engagement. Schools in Careers Hubs demonstrate [stronger outcomes](#) in delivering stable careers programmes (+54%pts), using labour market information effectively (+41%pts) and workplace experiences (+24%pts) compared to non members.

#### Also driving collaboration between teachers, parents and employers

Engaging with parents and teachers strengthens the support around young people to become career ready. While [93% of schools encourage parents](#) to access labour market information, study options and career path information, more must be done to ensure they feel fully supported in guiding their children. Employers who involve parents are 16%pts more likely to report their engagement [improves the effectiveness of early career recruitment](#). The CEC's Teacher Encounters programme has improved teacher confidence [holding careers-related conversations with their students](#).

## 6.3

Schools engaging with more of the careers system report an average of 6.3 benchmarks achieved, compared to 3.4 for those with no engagement.

#### Interacting with employers improves students' understanding of the world of work

In 2023/24, [performance in secondary schools and colleges rose across all Gatsby Benchmarks](#). Experiences of workplaces improved the most (up 8%pts). [Early exposure in primary schools to the world of work improved pupils' understanding](#), challenging stereotypes and broadening career interests.

[Employers engaging with Careers Hubs](#) report school careers support is becoming more connected and responsive to sector skills and local economic needs (74% compared to 53% for those not engaging with a Hub). A new approach to work experience is currently being piloted in four Mayoral Combined Authorities and schools. It ensures a total of 10 days' worth of high-quality workplace opportunities for young people through a multi-year, multi-experience model throughout secondary education. Skills-based learning outcomes help young people become ready for work.

# How to drive more progress?



## Employers

Of all sizes, across all sectors, provide more meaningful workplace experiences to help remove barriers for disadvantaged young people, supporting them to gain the confidence and skills to become ready for work.



## Careers Leaders

Work with Careers Hubs to build relationships with employers and develop data-driven practice, helping young people to make informed choices, strengthening talent pipelines and supporting key industries' growth.



## Teachers & parents

Engage with Careers Leaders and employers to give all young people early exposure to the world of work, equipping them with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to thrive in their future careers.

# Glossary

## Careers Leader

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The lead coordinator of careers provision in schools and colleges.

## Careers Hub

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Partnerships between the CEC and Mayoral Strategic and Local Authorities connecting employers to young people through education.

## Career readiness

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A measure of a young person's career knowledge, skills and confidence.

## Gatsby Benchmarks

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Eight nationally recognised standards of world class careers education.

## NEET

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Not in education, employment, or training.



THE CAREERS &  
ENTERPRISE  
COMPANY

[Our Impact](#)

[Our Evidence](#)

[Modern work experience](#)