

Insight briefing:

Student career readiness in 2023/24

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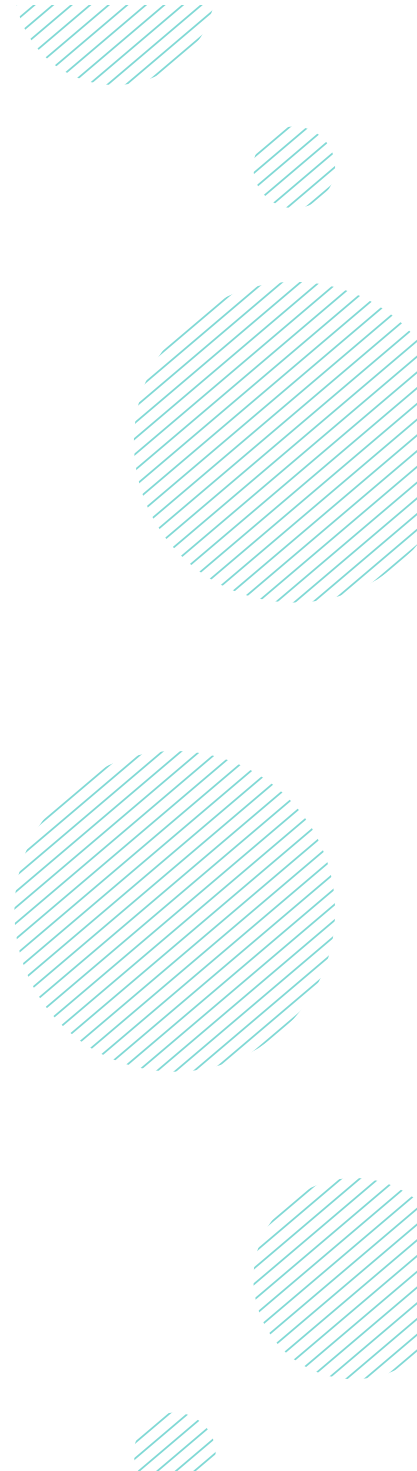
Introduction

Listening to students is key to delivering good career education outcomes. During the 2023/24 academic year, nearly ¼ of a million students from almost 1,100 secondary education institutions completed the [Future Skills Questionnaire](#) (FSQ), solidifying its position as the biggest ever set of learner feedback on careers education in England. This briefing highlights key findings from this national survey, bringing insight into students' own perspectives on their career readiness (such as who they get information from, how much they know about career choices and understand pathway options), skills and confidence.

The [FSQ](#), launched by The Careers & Enterprise Company in September 2021 as part of the Compass+ careers programme management tool, is freely available to state-funded secondary schools, special schools, and alternative provision across England. It is a self-completion survey that tracks students' career readiness at key transition points throughout secondary education. The FSQ enables Careers Leaders to plan, target and evaluate career programmes using student feedback. The continued growth in participation (more than double last year) reflects the increasing engagement of Careers Leaders with digital tools and data-driven practices.

Within the FSQ, students are asked to assess their awareness of the labour market, their ability to seek guidance and plan their next step, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary for transitions between educational stages or into employment. They are also asked about the eight essential workplace skills from the Skills Builder Universal Framework: listening, speaking, problem-solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership and teamwork.

Aggregated across schools, the data offers national insight into student perceptions, comparing results by stage of education, student background and school type. The sample covers 233,920 students aged 11-19, representing diverse backgrounds and regions across a wide range of educational institutions. These insights provide essential evidence for educators, policymakers and Careers Leaders to use to shape and enhance careers programmes so that every student is prepared for their best next step. By using this data, we can drive significant improvements in career readiness and create more equitable opportunities for students across England.



Executive summary

A key outcome of careers education is how confident young people are about their next steps. Do they understand the labour market, including industries of the future, and their options? Are they comfortable communicating their own skills to employers? Do they have a clear plan for the future? FSQ addresses these key questions by asking students about their knowledge and awareness, ultimately providing a consistent overall score of their reported readiness for work.¹

In 2023/24, 233,920 students from 1,109 institutions across 44 [Careers Hubs](#) completed the FSQ. The career readiness of this cohort is improving and is consistent with last academic year, while continuing to be broadly representative in terms of student characteristics². As use of the FSQ grows, the sample size has increased nearly 7-fold since the first year of rollout in 2021, driven by schools, sixth form colleges and the unified approach of Careers Hubs.

¹ Career readiness score derived from students' responses to the career knowledge and skills questions within the FSQ.

² See [Technical Note](#).

The headlines



234k

233,920 students from 1,109 institutions in 44 Careers Hubs completed the FSQ in 2023/24 academic year



x2

Students in Year 11 were more than twice as likely to understand apprenticeships compared to students in Year 7 (almost on a par with A-level (80% vs 84%))



68%

Average career readiness score in Year 11, compared to 49% in Year 7



83%

Students in Year 11 have a plan for their next step



-15%pts

Girls eligible for Free School Meals were 15%pts less likely than non-FSM boys to feel confident talking about their skills in an interview at age 16

The largest ever study of young people's career aspirations and career readiness shows:



Insight 1

Young people show high levels of interest in critical sectors such as construction, digital and health. There are opportunities to ensure they are further inspired by these and other growth sectors.

Young people express ideas about what they would like to do in the future from Year 7 across a range of occupational sectors. This is often informed by personal interests such as sports, leisure and lifestyle. As they progress through school, these become more aligned with the labour market.

By Year 11, the most popular industries cover critical sectors linked both to the Government's [Industrial Strategy Green Paper](#) and those identified by [Skills England](#). These include [healthcare](#), [construction](#) and [digital](#), in part reflecting the [effectiveness of the education outreach](#) demonstrated by those sectors through the careers system (including through [Careers Hubs](#)).

There is an opportunity to further align school and college careers programmes with regional and national growth priorities as part of the careers system. Large scale student data included in this report demonstrate the 'demand' side of skills to inform the development of the system, including how employers can respond.



Insight 2

Young people feel more career ready as they approach key transition points, such as Year 11. There are challenges for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds – and girls – that quality careers education can mitigate.

Young people feel more career ready through their school journey, increasing on average from 49% in Year 7 to 68% by Year 11 and 79% by Year 13. However, those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and girls start off at a disadvantage which is difficult to overcome.

Disadvantaged students are less confident talking about their skills when applying for courses or jobs. They have career ambitions but are less sure footed when engaging with future employers, and this can narrow their career choices.

The highest quality careers education can – and does – compensate for this starting disadvantage.



Insight 3

By age 16, young people feel confident in most work-related skills but rate themselves lower on speaking, listening, leadership and teamwork.

Students' reported levels of essential skills needed for work dip during Years 8 and 9.

This can have an impact on how ready they feel for work. Young people with well-developed skills are more optimistic about their next steps.

By Year 11, despite most skills catching up, speaking and listening, teamwork and leadership do not return to Year 7 levels. This supports the case for earlier intervention. A new model of work experience – spread over a young person's time in school and focused on building skills – has the power to make a difference.

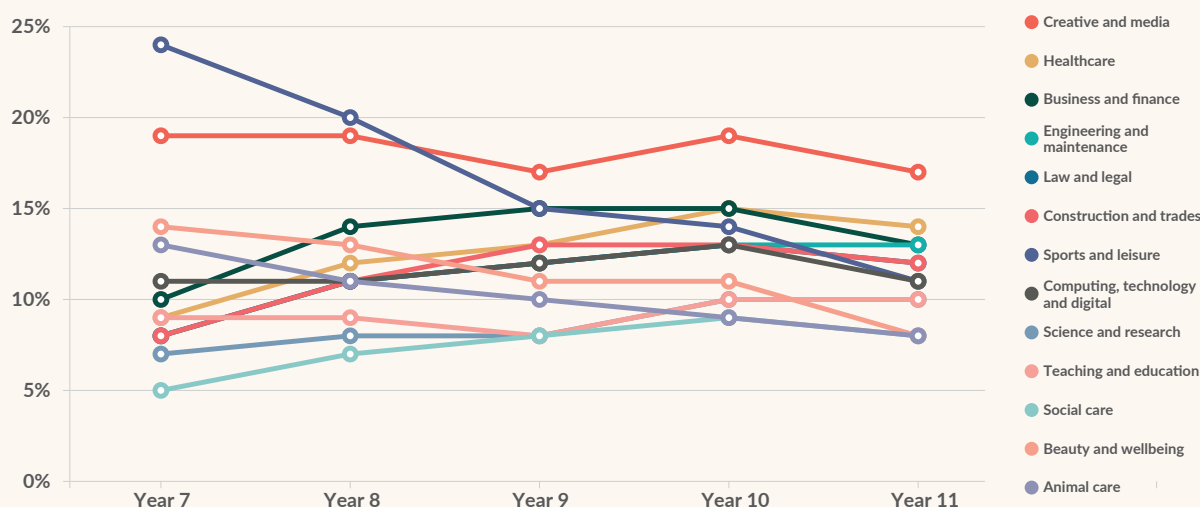


Insight 1

Young people show high levels of interest in critical sectors such as construction, digital and health. There are opportunities to ensure they are further inspired by these and other growth sectors.

Fig. 1: Young people express interest in different sectors from Year 7, which become aligned with the labour market as they mature

% students selecting each industry



Young people express ideas about what they would like to do in the future from Year 7 across a range of occupational sectors. This is often informed by personal interests such as sports, leisure and lifestyle. As they progress through school, these become more aligned with the labour market.

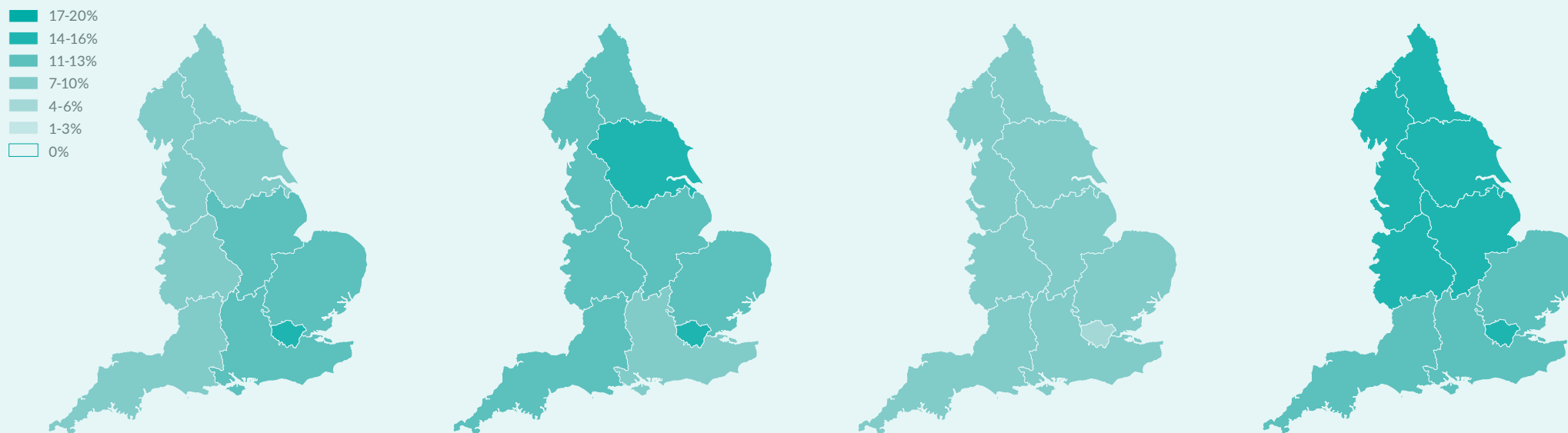
Choosing a career focus is an important life decision. Through the FSQ, students report interests in different industries throughout school and these change over time. 75% of students already have ideas about what they might do for a job or career in the future in Year 7, which sustains and steadily increases to 77% in Year 11.

Young people's industry interests become more aligned with the labour market over time. At the beginning of secondary school, they are most interested in sports and leisure (24%), creative and media (19%), beauty and wellbeing (19%) and animal care (14%). The proportion of students interested in animal care and sports and leisure industries declines with age whereas interest in law and legal and healthcare increases with age (Fig. 1).

By Year 11, a large proportion of young people (84%) have considered which post-16 option would be right for them, up from 61% in Year 10. There is an 8%pts increase between Year 10 and 11 of young people understanding the short- and long-term impacts of their education and career choices.

Fig. 2: Students' industry interests vary regionally

% or young people in Year 11 interested in each industry, split by region

Computing, technology and digital**Construction and trades****Animal care****Healthcare**

Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), 2023/24 academic year (Year 11, N=20,114)

By Year 11, the most popular industries cover critical sectors linked both to the [Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper](#) and those identified by [Skills England](#). These include [healthcare](#), [construction and digital](#), in part reflecting the effectiveness of the education outreach demonstrated by those sectors through the careers system (including through [Careers Hubs](#)).

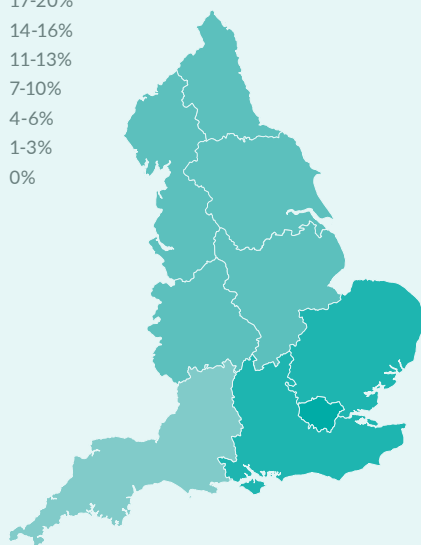
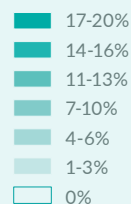
By Year 11, the most popular industries for students include healthcare (14%), construction and trades (12%) and computing, technology and digital (11%). These are in both the top ten occupations in critical and elevated demand across industries highlighted by Skills England³ in 2024 and the growth sectors in the Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper.⁴

3 Skills England (2024) [Skills England: Driving growth and widening opportunities](#). London: Department for Education

4 UK Government (2024). [Invest 2035: the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#). London: UK Government.

Fig. 2: Students' industry interests vary regionally

% of young people in Year 11 interested in each industry, split by region

Business and finance**Teaching and education****Manufacturing****Creative and media**

Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), 2023/24 academic year (Year 11, N=20,114)

Students' industry interests vary by region. 20% of Year 11 students in London are interested in business and finance, compared to 10% of students in the South-West. 14% of Year 11 students in Yorkshire and the Humber were interested in construction, trades and manufacturing, sectors where there is particularly strong employer outreach, compared to 10% of students in the South-East. High proportions of young people in all regions are interested in creative and media (between 14% in the West Midlands and 20% in London). This points to opportunities for targeted interventions by employers to align young people's career interests with local industries (Fig. 2).

There is an opportunity to further align school and college careers programmes with regional and national growth priorities as part of the careers system...

The Skills England⁵ report outlines that nearly 1 in 10 roles across the UK are in critical demand, particularly in health and social care, education, manufacturing and professional, scientific and technical industries. The Government's Industrial Strategy⁶ also places particular focus on eight growth-driving sectors which offer the highest growth opportunity for the economy and business, including advanced manufacturing and clean energy industries.

Addressing both interest in critical demand sectors as well as skills gaps through education and employer engagement is essential for future workforce readiness. Our research has shown that career readiness is driven by good careers education, in turn leading to better alignment with the needs of the labour market.

...Large scale student data included in this report demonstrate the 'demand' side of skills to inform the development of the system, including how employers can respond.

The significant dataset covered in this report indicates the potential to understand student intentions and target education, sector and employer resources at local, regional and national level to develop the skills system further.

Our Employer Standards data⁷ show that long-term engagement and higher quality outreach leads to greater return on investment for employers, especially in critical demand sectors, where it gives employers access to the diverse range of talent essential for growth.

5 Skills England (2024) [Skills England: Driving growth and widening opportunities](#). London: Department for Education

6 Department for Business and Trade (2024) [Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy](#). London: Department for Business and Trade

7 The Careers & Enterprise Company (2024) [Employer Standards for Careers Education - one year on](#). London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.



Insight 2

Young people feel more career ready as they approach key transition points, such as Year 11. There are challenges for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds - and girls - that quality careers education can mitigate.

8 Small increases nationally may be significant. Previous analysis found a 3.5%pt difference in average career readiness for students in schools with good careers education, so improved career readiness vs 2022/23 may partly relate to careers provision. However, differences may also relate to changes in sample composition with the larger 2023/24 sample size ([see here](#)).

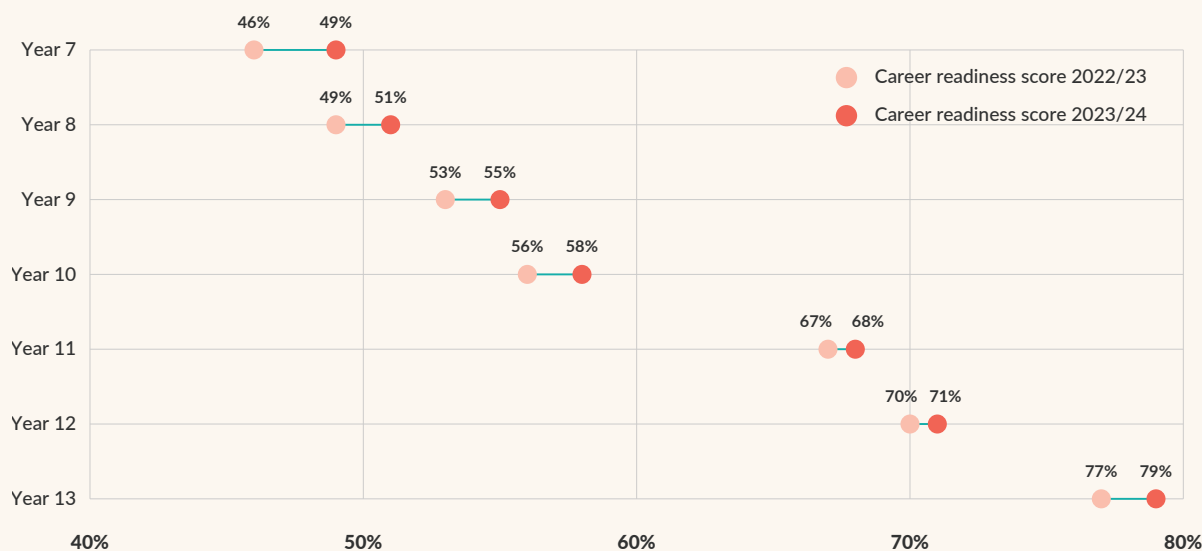
Young people feel more career ready through their school journey, increasing on average from 49% in Year 7 to 68% by Year 11 and 79% by Year 13...

Whatever the industry, becoming ready for work involves understanding pathway options, being aware of and able to articulate your essential workplace skills and understanding the labour market. By asking students to reflect on these things, we use FSQ questions to calculate a “career readiness” score for students, equivalent to the proportion of questions each student responded positively to.

Despite the doubling in sample size compared to 2022/23, covering a wider range of secondary schools, young people reported they were more career ready this year than last. There was a 2%pts increase in career readiness score for each year group between 2022/23 and 2023/24⁸, aside from Year 11 which saw a 1%pt increase. There are increases between each academic year, consistent with last year. The largest between-year increase is seen from Year 10 to Year 11 (+10%), before students transition to post-16 studies (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Students' career readiness scores improve across their school journey, and are slightly higher than last year

Average career readiness score calculated as the average % of the questions students responded positively to



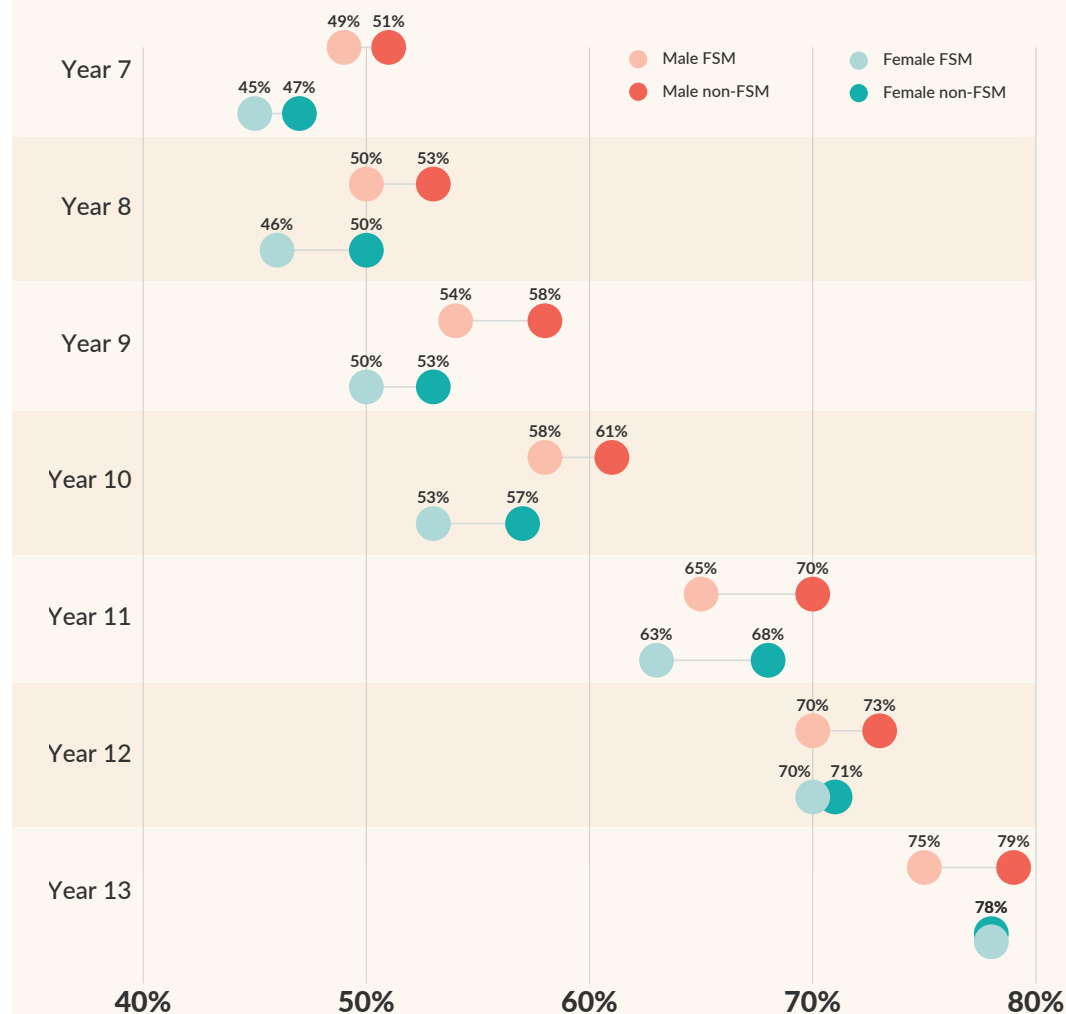
Source: Futures Skills Questionnaire data, end of July 2024 (N=228,673); end of July 2023 (N=104,447)

...However, those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and girls start off at a disadvantage which is difficult to overcome.

While age is an important factor influencing students' career readiness, there are also differences in the career readiness of certain groups. Disadvantaged girls score lower in relation to career readiness throughout their time in secondary school. Year 11 FSM girls have an average 63% career readiness score, compared to 70% for non-FSM boys (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Girls receiving FSM have a starting disadvantage, and this continues throughout their time in school

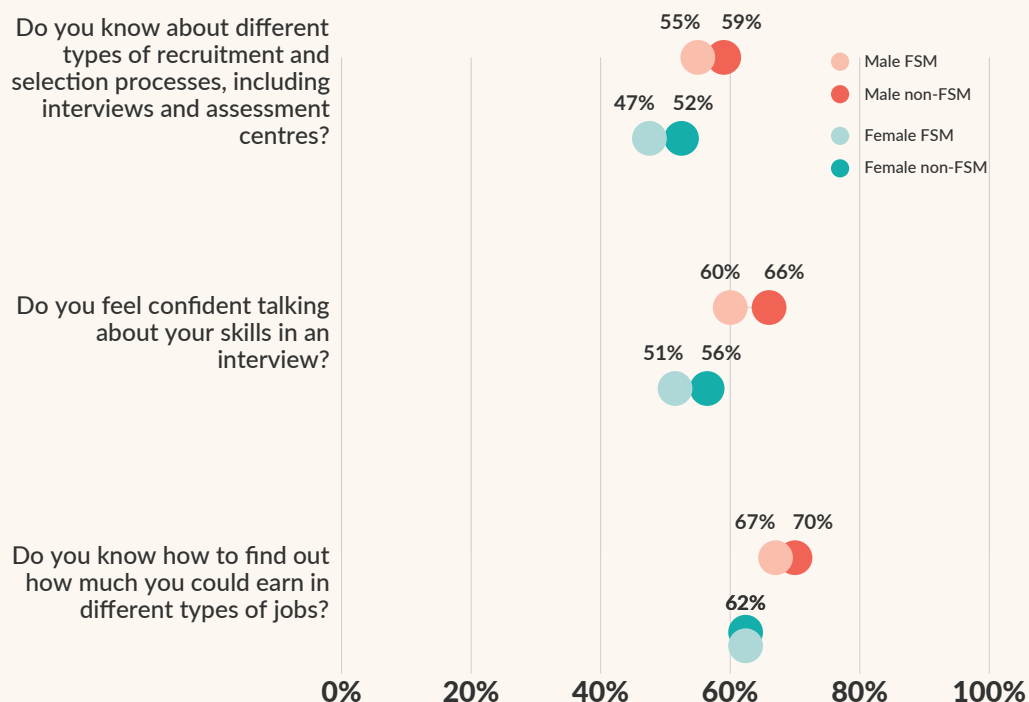
Average career readiness score calculated as the average % of the questions students responded positively to



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), 2023/24 academic year (n=223,327)

Fig. 5: Economically disadvantaged girls face barriers, in particular speaking about their skills in an interview and knowing about recruitment processes

% of young people responding positively to each question



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), 2023/24 academic year (Year 11, FSM N=3,956, non-FSM N=18,793)

Students at a disadvantage are less confident talking about their skills when applying for courses or jobs. They have career ambitions but are less sure footed when engaging with future employers.

Young people receiving FSM and girls report particular challenges. 58% of FSM students feel confident about their next step after Year 11, compared to 68% for non-FSM. By Year 11, only 51% of FSM girls feel confident about their ability to talk about their skills during interview, 15%pts lower than their non-FSM male peers (66%) and 9%pts lower than FSM boys (60%). Girls are also 8%pts less likely to know how to find out how much they could earn in different types of jobs (Fig. 5).

The highest quality careers education can – and does – compensate for this starting disadvantage.

Good careers provision improves students' career readiness and can outweigh the disadvantage associated with being in receipt of FSM. Our previous analysis on 2022/23 data found that a student in a school providing the highest quality career provision (as measured by achieving all eight Gatsby Benchmarks) would typically have a career readiness score 3.5%pts higher than a student in a school achieving only one Gatsby Benchmark. Such provision is estimated to more than compensate for the average disadvantage associated with being in receipt of FSM (who typically have a 1.5%pts lower career readiness score than students not in receipt of FSM). It also leads to career interests that are better aligned with the labour market: girls with a 100% career readiness score are twice as likely to choose engineering.⁹

⁹ Careers and Enterprise Company (2024). [Careers education 2023/24: Now and next](#). London. The Careers & Enterprise Company.



Insight 3

By 16, young people feel confident in most work-related skills but rate themselves lower on speaking, listening, leadership and teamwork.

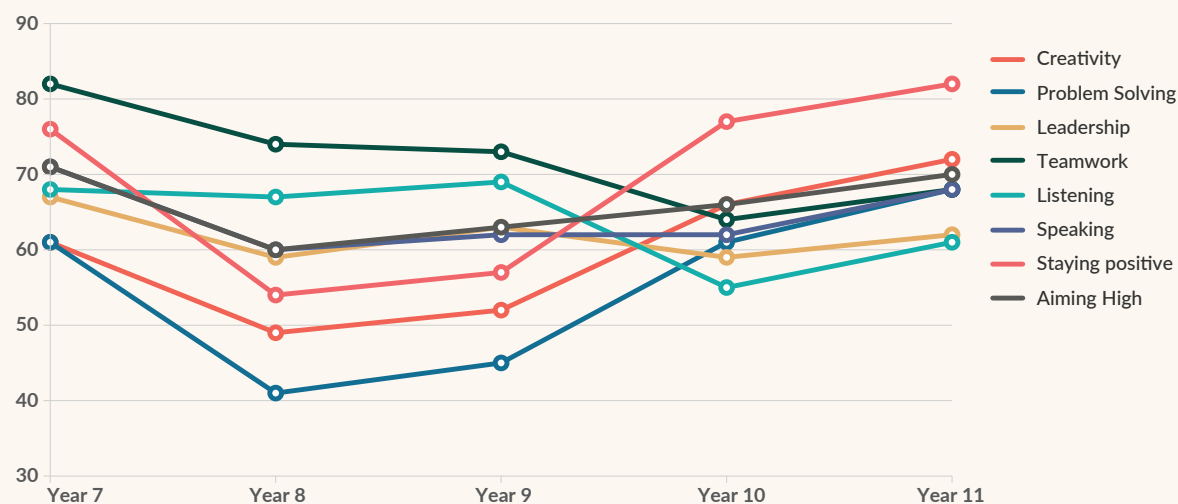
Students' reported levels of essential skills needed for work dip during Years 8 and 9, but mostly recover by Year 11

Essential skills are those required in the workplace and are defined as: listening, speaking, problem solving, creativity, staying positive, leadership, teamwork and aiming high¹⁰. As with the last academic year, students score themselves highly in Year 7, with a dip in Year 9 for almost all (apart from listening), followed by a steady increase until Year 11.

However, scores on key social interaction, "soft" or "human" skills (leadership, teamwork, listening and speaking) do not fully rebound by Year 11 to the same levels (Fig. 6). These trends may relate to changes in awareness of what skill achievement requires or changes in self-awareness and confidence, as well as changes in actual skill levels as young people mature.

Fig. 6: Proportion of students in Year 7, Year 9 and Year 11 meeting the expected age-based skill level typically dips after Year 7 and rises by Year 11 on creativity, problem solving and staying positive

% of young people responding positively to each question



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), 2023/24 academic update to (Years 7-11, N=210,430)

This can have an impact on how ready they feel for work. Young people with well-developed skills are more optimistic about their next steps.

Young people who rate themselves highly on the essential skill of 'aiming high'¹¹ ("High-aspiration young people"), display a strong sense of confidence. Their average career readiness score is higher than for lower aspiration young people and the gap widens over time: from a 19%pts difference in Year 7 to a 25%pts difference in Years 10 and 11. These young people are also far more likely to feel optimistic about their future careers: 85% feel positive, compared to only 45% of those who do not rate their skills highly (40%pts difference).

By Year 11, speaking and listening, teamwork and leadership do not return to Year 7 levels, supporting the case for earlier intervention...

By Year 11, there are distinct differences in students' reported scores across the different skills. Young people score themselves highest on staying positive (82%), their creativity (72%) and their ability to aim high (70%). Students score themselves lowest on their listening skills (61%), leadership (62%) and teamwork (68%). Despite these variations in scores, the majority of young people are meeting the expected level across all eight essential skills.

... A new model of work experience – spread over a young person's time in school and focused on building skills - has the power to make a difference

This evidence suggests that, while overall skill development improves by Year 11, key social skills that employers value lag behind others, reinforcing the importance of early interventions.

Early and consistent exposure to different workplaces, employers and employees is key to ensuring these key social skills develop as expected, promoting both work readiness and confidence as students prepare to transition beyond school. [Equalex](#), the CEC's new model of modern work experience, focuses on these areas and aims to help all young people get ready for the world of work.

¹¹ Those who respond that they "can do this really well" (the highest possible score) to the age-appropriate question on the Skills Builder Framework on the essential skill: 'aiming high'.

Technical Note

This analysis is based on 233,920 students from 1,109 institutions who completed the FSQ in between September 2023 and July 2024. Of these 1,109 institutions, the majority were mainstream (1,007), with growing engagement from SEND institutions (69) and a small number of AP settings (19). Institutions showed good geographical spread, representing students in every region of the country, in all 44 Careers Hubs. All institutions but one were in a Careers Hub. 98% of institutions in the sample had completed Compass in 2023/24 and tended to be high achievers against the Gatsby Benchmarks. They achieved on average 6.1 benchmarks, higher than the national average of 5.8.

The sample includes the views of students aged between 11 and 19 years old. Over $\frac{1}{4}$ of these responses were from Year 7 students, with students in Key Stage 3 making up the majority of respondents. Based on the student level characteristics available, the sample was broadly representative of the student population. A slightly larger number of female students completed the FSQ (52% compared to 48% male). 15% of students in the sample were classified as having special education needs, slightly higher than the national average (14%)¹², and a 1%pt increase from 2023/24. 18% of students in the sample speak English as an additional language (EAL), slightly lower than the national average (20%)¹³. The average school-level proportion of young people eligible for FSM was 28%, 3%pts higher than the national average (25%)¹⁴ and increasing year on year. However, the proportion of young people eligible for FSM completing the FSQ was considerably lower (22%, N=50,061). 24% of students in the sample are eligible for Pupil Premium, unchanged from last year.

A variety of weighting methods were explored for the data, including direct stratification methods and raking methods, using combinations of the following variables: number of benchmarks achieved, year group, gender, FSM, Ofsted grades, region, and CEC institution type, among others. The weighting was found to make only a modest difference to career readiness and essential skills question results for the large scale FSQ version data, suggesting limited effect on findings for most policy questions. As a result, the statistics in this report are based on unweighted data.

	Year group	Number of responses
Starting Secondary	Year 7	63,476
Transition from Key Stage 3	Year 8	34,653
	Year 9	49,808
GCSE Years	Year 10	36,405
	Year 11	26,088
Post-16	Year 12	12,942
	Year 13	5,301
	Year 14	16
SEND	All year groups	5,231
Total		233,920

¹² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

¹³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/330782/england-english-additional-language-primary-pupils/>

¹⁴ Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - [GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://gov.uk/explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

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