

Retail

Sector demand landscape

- The UK retail sector employs about [4.6 million people \(12.7% of the UK workforce\)](#) and [generated ~£114.7 billion in 2024, around 4.4%](#) of the economy.
- As of late 2025 there were around [90,000 unfilled vacancies](#) across Wholesale & retail trade, which, if left unfilled for a full year, would imply up to ~£4 billion in lost output.
- [Recruitment difficulties and skills shortage vacancies remain widespread](#), and employers report technology change as a growing driver of skills needs.

The business case for Retail engagement in careers education

Employers in the retail sector showed the highest level of achievement in:

- **Standard 7:** Engage over the long term (-11%pts vs other sectors).

Engaging over the long term is crucial to address the workforce challenges employers in the sector face, however, employers in the sector were less likely to achieve all 9 Standards compared to all other employers, especially Standard 2: Be Inclusive (-26%pts) and Standard 8: Partner with others (-23%pts).

Amidst skills shortages and economic pressures, engaging in careers education with schools and colleges helped most employers in the sector to:

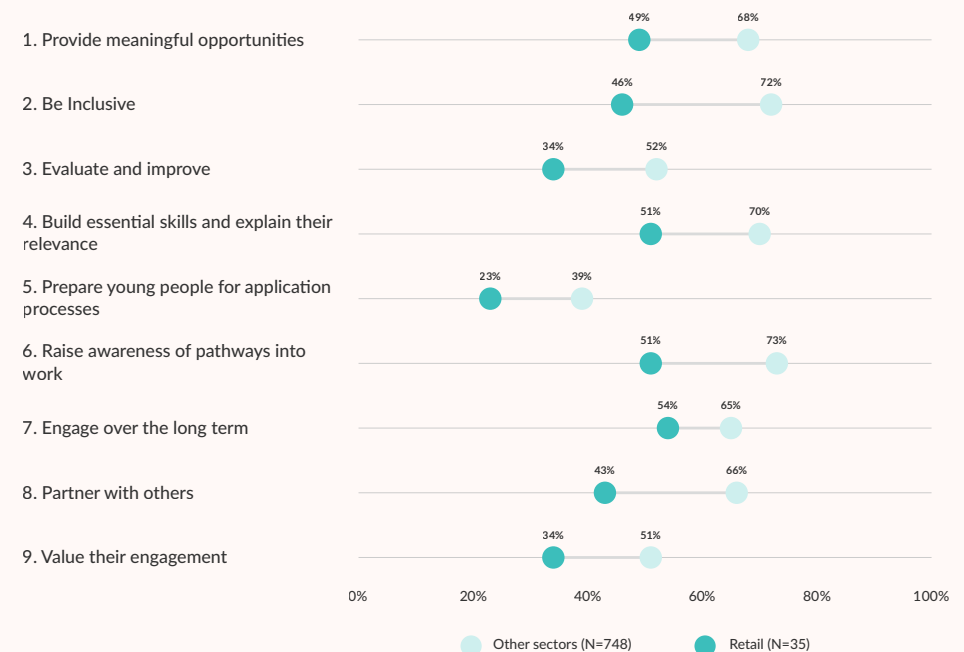
- **encourage young people to apply for jobs in the sector** (83% reported this benefit)
- **develop new talent pipelines** (77% reported this benefit)
- **closing the skills gap** (71% reported this benefit).

Most employers in the retail sector agree that **young people's essential employability skills are improving** because of their careers outreach (66% reported this benefit)

Whilst the benefits reported above are positive, they are below the levels seen in other priority sectors. Employers in those sectors scored, on average, higher against the Standards, and reported these benefits more often, showing the link between quality outreach and business benefit.

Fig 1: Employers in the Retail sector were most likely to achieve Standard 7

% of Employers achieving or exceeding each standard in the Retail sector compared to employers in other sectors



Source: Employer Standards data, end of September 2025 (N=783; Retail, N=35).

Young people's interest in the industry and confidence in their Essential Skills

Moderate engagement from the retail sector is also reflected in the interest from young people: **5% of Year 11 students expressing a desire to work in the sector.**

Among the most popular roles for aspiring retail professionals are:

- sales & marketing roles (47%)
- creative roles (31%)
- customer service (23%)

There is a slight gender disparity: girls are more likely to be interested in this sector (6% vs 4% for boys).

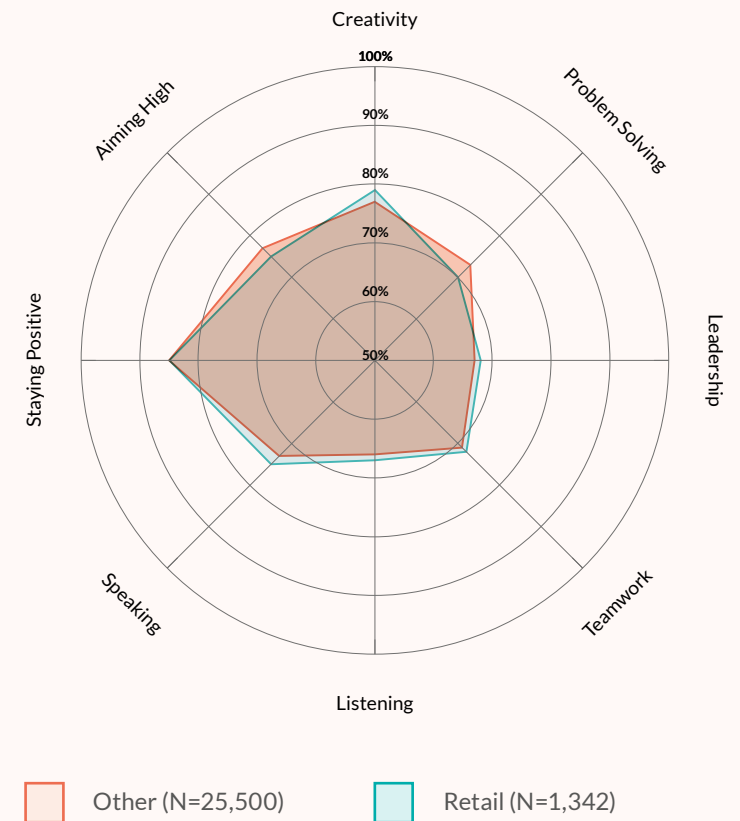
Overall, employers who help young people practise and progress essential skills in workplace experiences are 72% more likely to say that that young people's employability skills are improving as a result of their engagement.

According to Future Skills Questionnaire data, young people in year 11 interested in retail are more often confident than their peers in **Speaking** (+2%pts) and **Creativity** (+1%pt). However, they are less likely to feel confident in Problem Solving (-3%pts) and Aiming High (-2%pts).

[To see the full insights, including other industry snapshots, click here](#)

Fig 2: Young people interested in the sector are more likely than their peers to be confident in Speaking and Creativity

% of Year 11 young people saying they are confident in each Essential Skill



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire data, end of July 2025 (Year 11 responding to the industry/career question, N=26,842)