

From outreach to intake

Employer Standards for Careers Education



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Glossary



The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)

The national body for careers education in England, supporting schools and colleges to deliver modern, 21st century careers education.

Cornerstone Employers

These are employers who work directly with Careers Hubs to provide the employer voice and support high-quality careers education in their local region.

Careers education

A term used in this report to encompass all aspects of careers education - underpinned by the Gatsby Benchmark framework.

Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ)

A set of age-appropriate questionnaires for students asking questions about their career knowledge and skills (career readiness) and their essential skills for the workplace.

Careers Hubs

Groups of schools, colleges, employers and providers working together to improve careers education provision in a local area. Hub Leads oversee the work and target support.

There are over 40 Careers Hubs across England, coordinated by the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC).

Non-Cornerstone Employers

Employers engaged via sector and representative bodies to ensure the Employer Standards data set has wide base level engagement from SMEs and sectors.

Executive Summary

The Employer Standards is a new framework and tool developed by The Careers & Enterprise Company to help raise the quality of business outreach with education at scale. Over 360 employers have already evaluated themselves against nine evidence-based Standards. We are grateful for their commitment to this agenda. This is providing powerful comparative data about what's working and areas to improve (included in this report).

Two key findings stand out: when employers meet the Standards their education programmes improve; and their outreach efforts are more likely to lead to intake.

Employer Standards – key numbers at a glance

- **9 Standards** drawing on the best available evidence about what works in education outreach.
- Standards include: employers providing meaningful opportunities for young people (**Standard 1**), building their essential skills and explaining their relevance to prepare them for the workplace (**Standard 4**) and partnering with education and other businesses (**Standard 8**).
- **Over 360 employers have completed the standards.** 66% are large and medium sized employers¹ - including BAE Systems, Tesco, KPMG and Thakeham - and 34% are small and micro-sized employers - including organisations like The Mighty Creatives. There are different and tailored self-assessment questions depending on the size of the employer.
- These organisations collectively **employ over a million² people** operating and providing careers education outreach across the country.
- **95%** of Standards adopters intend to make improvements based on their assessments.

This report summarises key findings from the initial data gathered from self-assessments. It focuses on a sample of 342 employers who had completed the Standards by the end of September 2023. We have also used two other data sources to provide comparative analysis:

- Pupil feedback from the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) – completed by over 100,000 school aged young people last academic year (2022/23).
- Business insight data from employers completed as part of the initial Standards self-assessment, enabling links to be made between standard achievement and reported outcomes.

1 A total of 365 employers have now completed the Standards. The analysis in this insight report is based on a pilot undertaken by CEC's Cornerstone Employers and a range of employers of different sizes in different regions.

2 This is an approximate value, based on bands of numbers of employees working in the companies completing the Employer Standards.

Summary of insights



Insight 1: High quality employer outreach works. It boosts recruitment and improves outcomes for young people.

- Employers who use outreach to promote pathways to work are receiving more applications from young people. Those doing the most targeted and intensive work are four times more likely to report an increase in the number of young people applying for apprenticeships.
- Our data confirms these and other recruitment benefits. 83% of employers say their work in schools and colleges is helping them develop new talent pipelines, and this is higher for Cornerstone Employers who work most directly with local Careers Hubs (91%). Over a third of all employers (37%) say it reduces recruitment costs.
- Young people report more career readiness and understanding of apprenticeships as they progress through school³. This mirrors Standards data showing that outreach programmes increase in intensity as children get older and closer to decision points.



Insight 2: Some employers and industries are benefitting more. Ongoing and connected programmes are increasing student interest in sectors with shortages.

- Construction and health & social work are among the sectors with sophisticated outreach programmes that include long-term engagement and effective targeting. On average, employers in these sectors are achieving or exceeding 7.1 and 6.5 Standards respectively, versus 5.7 for all employers.
- This mirrors young people's awareness of and interest in these sectors (which have some of the most acute skills shortages)⁴. Student feedback via our Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) suggests there is increasing alignment between outreach activities and student interest.
- Cornerstone Employers, among the most engaged employers who play a key role in Careers Hubs, perform better against the Standards than others, achieving or exceeding on average 6.1 Standards, versus 4.9 for non-Cornerstone Employers. However size and capacity are important factors and all employers have strengths and areas for development.



Insight 3: The Standards are highlighting common challenges around supporting the interview and application process and the engagement of parents/carers.

- Standard 5 (Prepare young people for application processes) is proving the most challenging for employers to meet (average score of 41%). This finding is matched by FSQ data (58% of Year 11 students report they do not feel confident talking about their skills in an interview, contrasting with more positive responses on other career readiness questions).
- Parents exert the most influence on young people's career aspirations⁵ and are often the hardest for employers to reach. There are opportunities for businesses to make an impact in engaging parents (and some are already exploring work in this area).
- As the evidence base around how to improve pupil awareness of industries builds, there are opportunities for employers to use the Standards to drive impact and collaborate across sectors and with employer bodies. Careers Hubs, as regional entities, are well placed to encourage the use of Standards to shape careers provision in every region in the country and respond to the needs of fast-growing industries.

³ Careers and Enterprise Company (2023). Our Impact 2022-23. Available at: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/our-impact-2022-23/>

⁴ Gov.uk (2023). Employer Skills Survey. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/employer-skills-survey>

⁵ Youth Employment (2023). Youth Voice Census 2023. Available at: [youth-voice-census-2023-report.pdf](https://youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-census-2023-report.pdf) (youthemployment.org.uk)

What leading employers are saying about education outreach and the Employer Standards...

"It's about trying to attract more young people into STEM, making it translatable and relatable within the classroom. If we don't, as a sector, come together to support and strengthen that STEM pipeline of talent, industry is going to suffer."

"From a systems perspective the Standards gives you an opportunity to review your education outreach offer against a solid framework of best practice. It has helped us to evaluate and think about impact, purpose and audience, providing an opportunity for a 360 objective reflection."

"It's helped us focus on how we can attract more SEND young people. Previously we may not have naturally done targeted activity in that space. It's got us thinking about how we can make sure our outreach activity doesn't just accommodate those young people when they join, but actively takes more steps to encourage them into the organisation. We are getting bolder in our outreach and thinking about how we create a more inclusive environment through that."

Peter Caney, Head of Early Careers & Skills, BAE Systems.

"How jobs are done here is fundamentally different to even a decade ago. We owe it to young people to help them understand the diversity of careers emerging and the breadth of opportunity out there."

"Business is geared around value for money, but in this space some people can over-rely on the 'feel good factor.' The Employer Standards help raise the seriousness beyond feeling that you're doing good, to knowing that you're doing good."

Ian Browne, Early Careers and School Engagement Lead, Lloyds Banking Group.

"Our ambition is to help young people improve their confidence and employability skills. We can give them a meaningful encounter with an employer so they can understand the world of work. It helps us to create that diverse talent with our business and give young people business breadth early on."

"The Employer Standards have helped us go back to basics and think: is our offer simple? Is it meaningful? Is it sustainable and inclusive?"

"It helps you as an employer focus on what you should be doing and gives you clear guidance. Whether you're starting out your journey with school outreach or are many years into it, there's always something to learn."

Samantha Sullivan, Pre-employability and Work Placement Manager, Tesco.

"The NHS workforce is under significant pressure with challenges in recruitment and retention. So from a workforce perspective, we have to do things differently around education outreach and supporting our local communities and young people."

"The Employer Standards framework has enabled us to use best practice to deliver meaningful, high-quality opportunities in a standardised way, knowing that we can also measure how we develop and improve."

"They've helped us identify that we need to extend our engagement, committing long term and investing time with the same school(s) over a period of time."

Elaine Pope, Head of Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust.

Introduction

Employers are central to improving careers provision in schools and colleges. When young people meet with multiple employers in multiple ways, they gain skills, networks and social capital. They are better able to understand the new and changing routes into to work. Disadvantaged young people benefit most⁶.

There are clear business benefits too (which this report can evidence). The more sophisticated education outreach programmes are, the more they help employers to close skills gaps and the more diverse their talent pipelines become. At a time when skills shortages are acute, some businesses are gaining significantly from effective outreach.

The Employer Standards are designed to improve the engagement between young people and employers, to the benefit of each.



⁶ See <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/our-impact-2022-23/> for an explanation of how working with employers, with the framework of Gatsby Benchmarks, drives outcomes for young people.

The Employer Standards

There are nine Employer Standards, which together form a framework with related self-assessment questions⁷ (see below and appendix for summary). Each Standard is based on the best available evidence about what works. When employers meet the Standards, their education programmes improve; and their outreach efforts are more likely to lead to intake.



After completing the self-assessment, businesses gain:

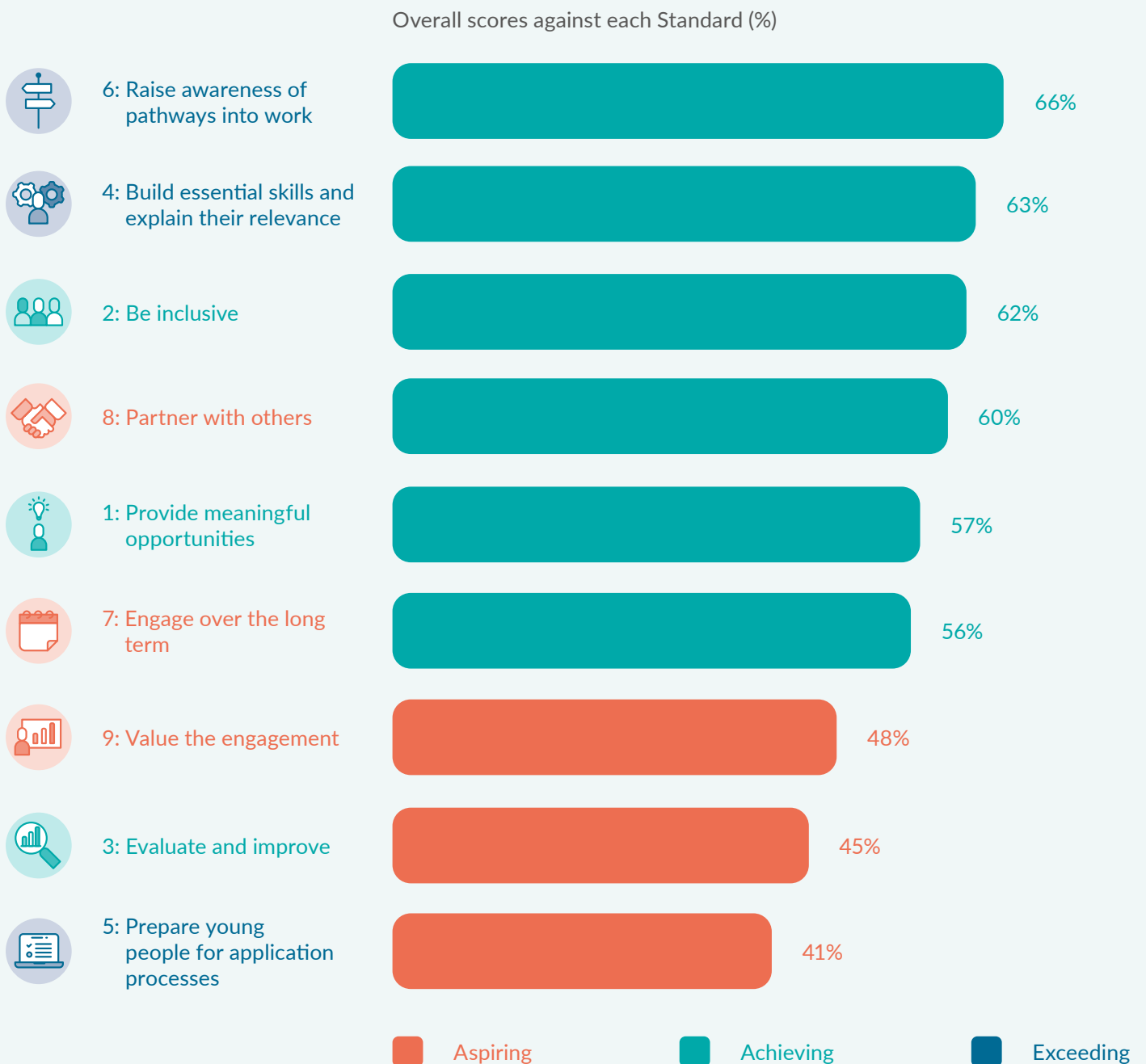
1. An understanding of how they are performing against each Standard, from 'aspiring', through 'achieving' to 'exceeding'.
2. Analysis of how they compare against businesses of their size, sector and region.
3. Access to specific support and resources to improve quality.

Early adopters are positive about the impact of Standards. 95% plan to take action based on their results. 85% found the resources useful or very useful. Around three quarters plan to complete the self-assessment again within a year.

Nationally, employers are performing best in Standard 6 (Raise awareness of pathways into work) scoring 66% on average, followed by Standard 4 (Build essential skills and explain their relevance) scoring 63% on average. The most scope for improvement is in Standard 5 (Prepare young people for application processes), currently scoring 41% on average (Fig. 1).

⁷ The Employer Standards Self-Assessment is made up of two questionnaires, reflecting the needs of different-sized organisations – one tailored for medium and large employers and another for small and micro employers.

Fig. 1: Employers' scores across the 9 Employer Standards.



Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All Employers, n=342).⁸

⁸ Employers are aspiring to a Standard if they score 0-49%; achieving if they score 50-89%, and exceeding if they score 90%+



Insight 1:

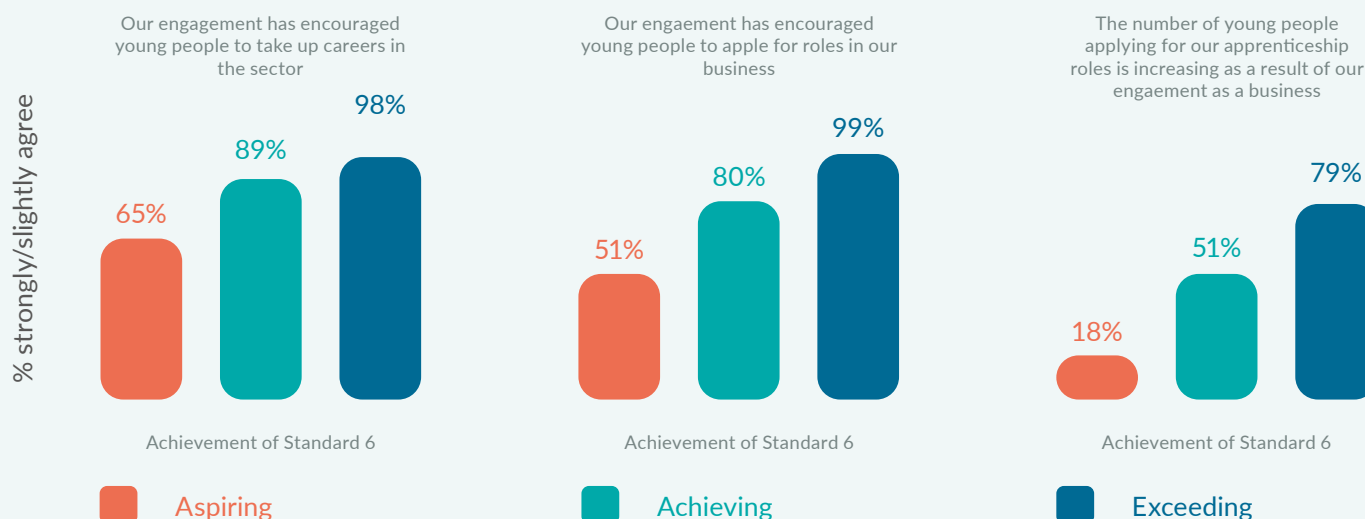
**Employer outreach works.
It boosts recruitment and
improves outcomes for
young people**

Insight 1: Employer outreach works. It boosts recruitment and improves outcomes for young people

Improvements in recruitment.....

Employers who use outreach to promote pathways to work generate more applications from young people. Those doing the most targeted and intensive work in this area (those 'exceeding' at Standard 6) are more than four times more likely to report an increase in the number of young people applying for apprenticeships than those in the 'aspiring' category (Fig. 2). This matches previous CEC research which highlights the importance of employers in promoting skills-based routes⁹.

Fig. 2: Employers that are doing most targeted and intensive work (Standard 6 – raising awareness of pathways) are more likely to report young people applying for apprenticeship roles in their organisation.



Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All Employers n=342).

Business insight data accompanying the Standards insights confirms these and other recruitment benefits, in particular for Cornerstone Employers. Employers say their work in schools and colleges is helping them develop new talent pipelines (83% agreeing overall, 91% for Cornerstone Employers) and supporting more young people to take up careers in their industry (86% overall, 91% for Cornerstone Employers). Around four in five say it's encouraging young people to apply for roles in their business (78% overall, 86% for Cornerstone Employers), and a similar proportion (75% overall, 82% for Cornerstone Employers) say their engagement is bringing in new apprentices (Fig. 3).

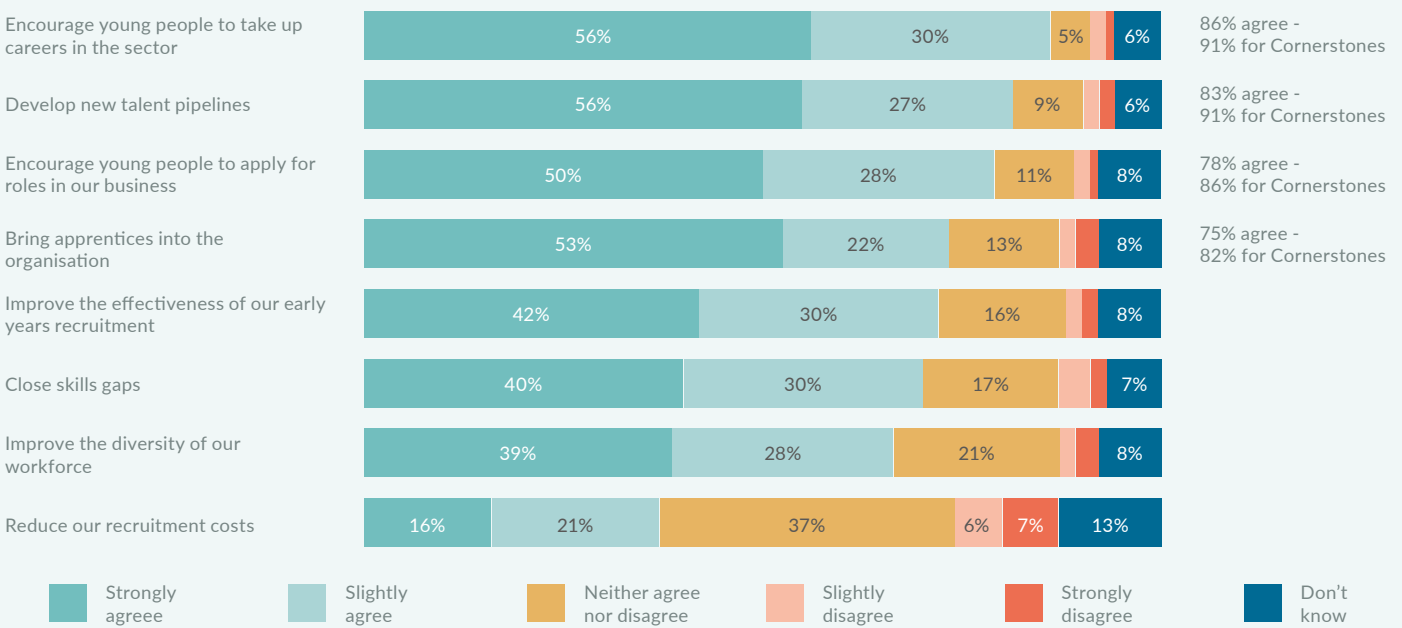
Outreach also delivers efficiencies and value for money. Seven in ten (72%) say it is improving the effectiveness of early years recruitment. More than a third (37%) say it is helping reduce recruitment costs; only 12% say it has not helped cut costs.

.....and better outcomes for young people

There is a clear link between the intensity and focus of employer outreach and its impact on young people. Young people become more 'career ready' and their understanding of apprenticeships grows as they progress through school. This matches the Standards data which highlights that employers increase the intensity of their engagement as young people get older and closer to decision points (Fig. 4).

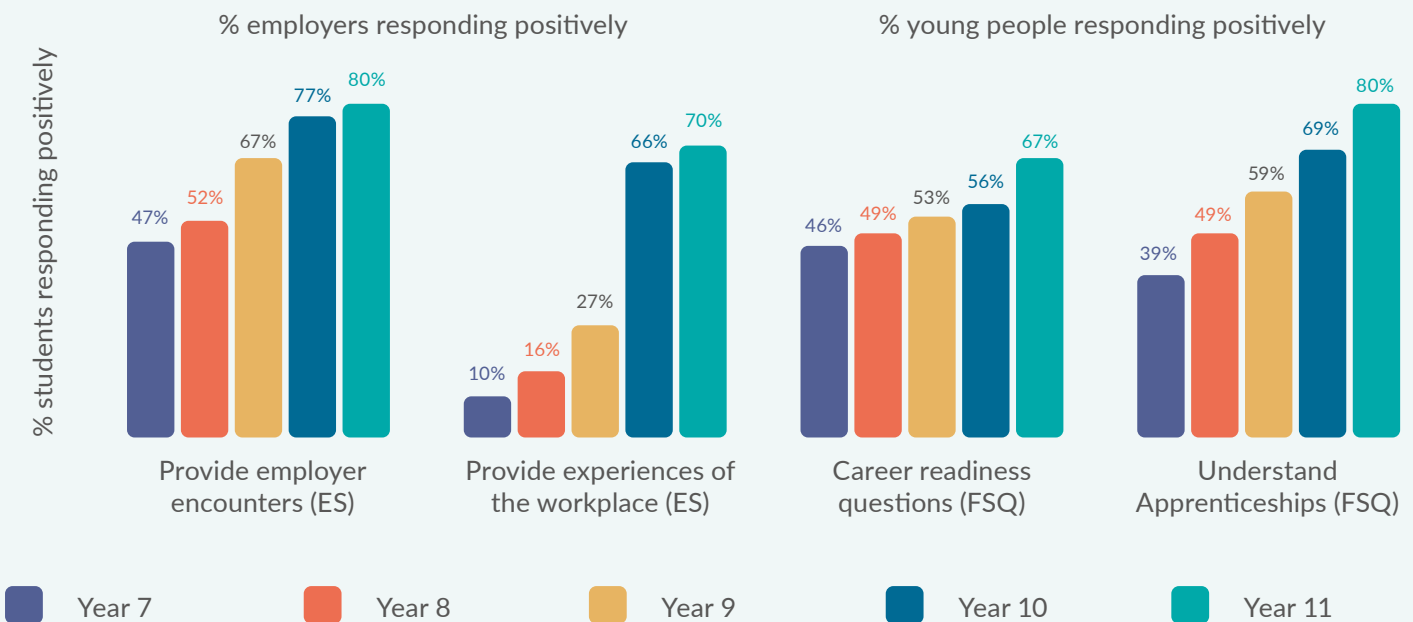
⁹ Careers and Enterprise Company (2023). Conditions for transition: Supporting young people onto apprenticeships and technical pathways. Available at: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-evidence/evidence-and-reports/conditions-for-transition-supporting-young-people-onto-apprenticeships-and-technical-pathways-a-regional-analysis/>

Fig 3: Employers report that their engagement is having direct business benefits.



Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All Employers n=342).

Fig. 4: Employers target provision at young people as they transition through secondary school. Young people's career readiness and awareness of technical pathways improve as they transition through secondary school.



Source: Employer Standards (ES) Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All Employers n=342); Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) 2022/23, Year 7 – Year 11 students (n=94,186)

68% of employers report that young people are becoming more career ready as a result of outreach programmes and 66% say young people's essential employability skills are improving as a result of their engagement. Employers that score higher on Standard 7 (Engage over the long term) are more likely to say that young people's career readiness is improving as a result of their engagement.



Insight 2:

Some employers and industries are benefitting more. Ongoing and connected programmes are increasing student interest in sectors with shortages

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The health & social work and construction¹⁰ industries are among the most sophisticated in their outreach programmes (Fig. 5).

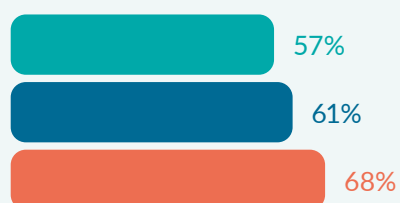
Fig. 5: Average employer scores for each Standard, by industry



Inspire young people for their best next step



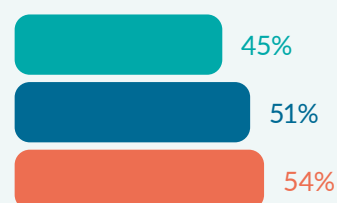
1: Provide meaningful opportunities



2: Be inclusive



3: Evaluate and improve



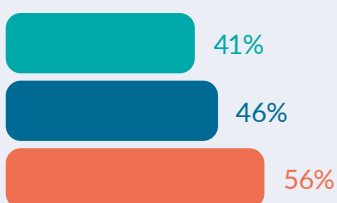
Prepare young people to be career ready



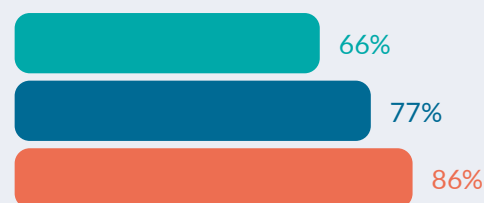
4: Build essential skills and explain their relevance



5: Prepare young people for application processes



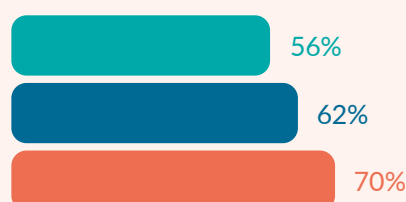
6: Raise awareness of pathways into work



Collaborate for success



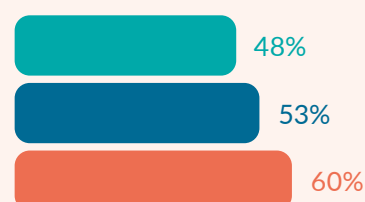
7: Engage over the long term



8: Partner with others



9: Value the engagement



All employers (n=342)

Health & Social Work (n=24)

Construction (n=37)

Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All Employers [n=342]; health and social work [n=24]; construction [n=37]).

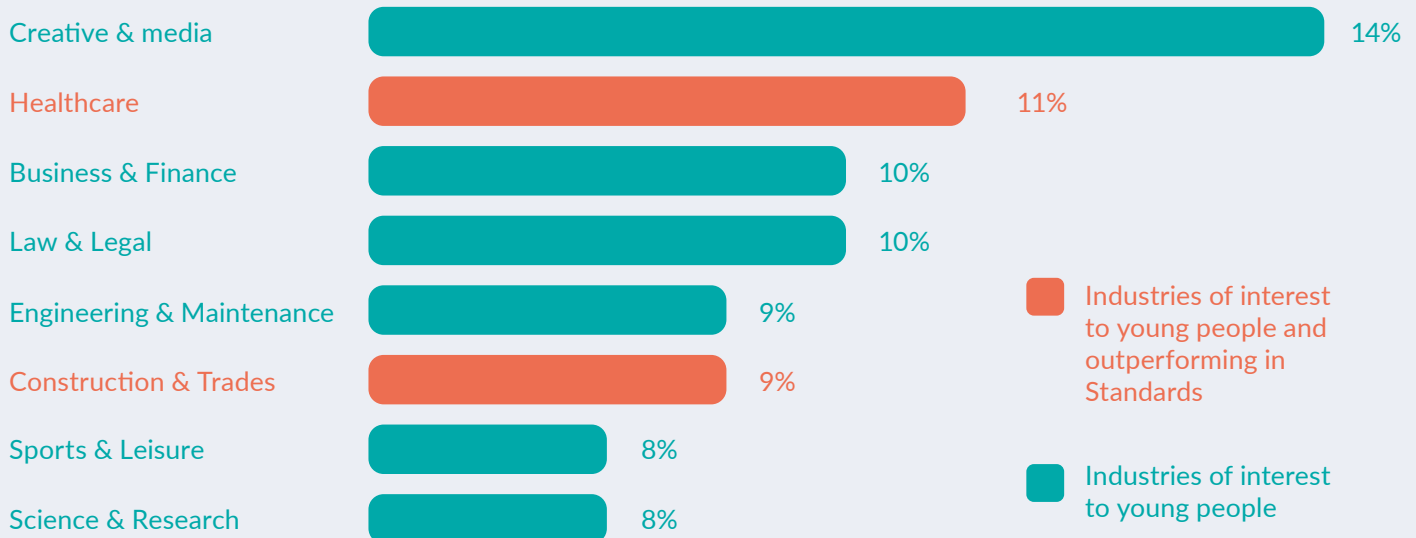
¹⁰ Some industries were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes: Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (n=4); Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply (n=6); Mining and Quarrying (n=3); Water Supply, Sewerage and Waste Management (n=2).

These sectors are among those with the most acute skills shortages. The 2022 Employer Skills Survey¹¹ showed that construction had the highest proportion of vacancies that were hard to fill due to skills shortages (52% of vacancies) and that this was also a factor in health and social work (40% of vacancies).

The outreach initiatives in these industries are making a difference to young people's perceptions. Pupil survey data indicates alignment between young people's interests in Year 11 and those industries that score highly for raising awareness of pathways into work. Healthcare at number two and Construction at number six are both among the top careers (out of 25) young people are interested in pursuing¹² (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: Young people's top industry interests in Year 11.

% students stating each industry as a preference



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire 2022/23, Year 11 students (n=11,238).

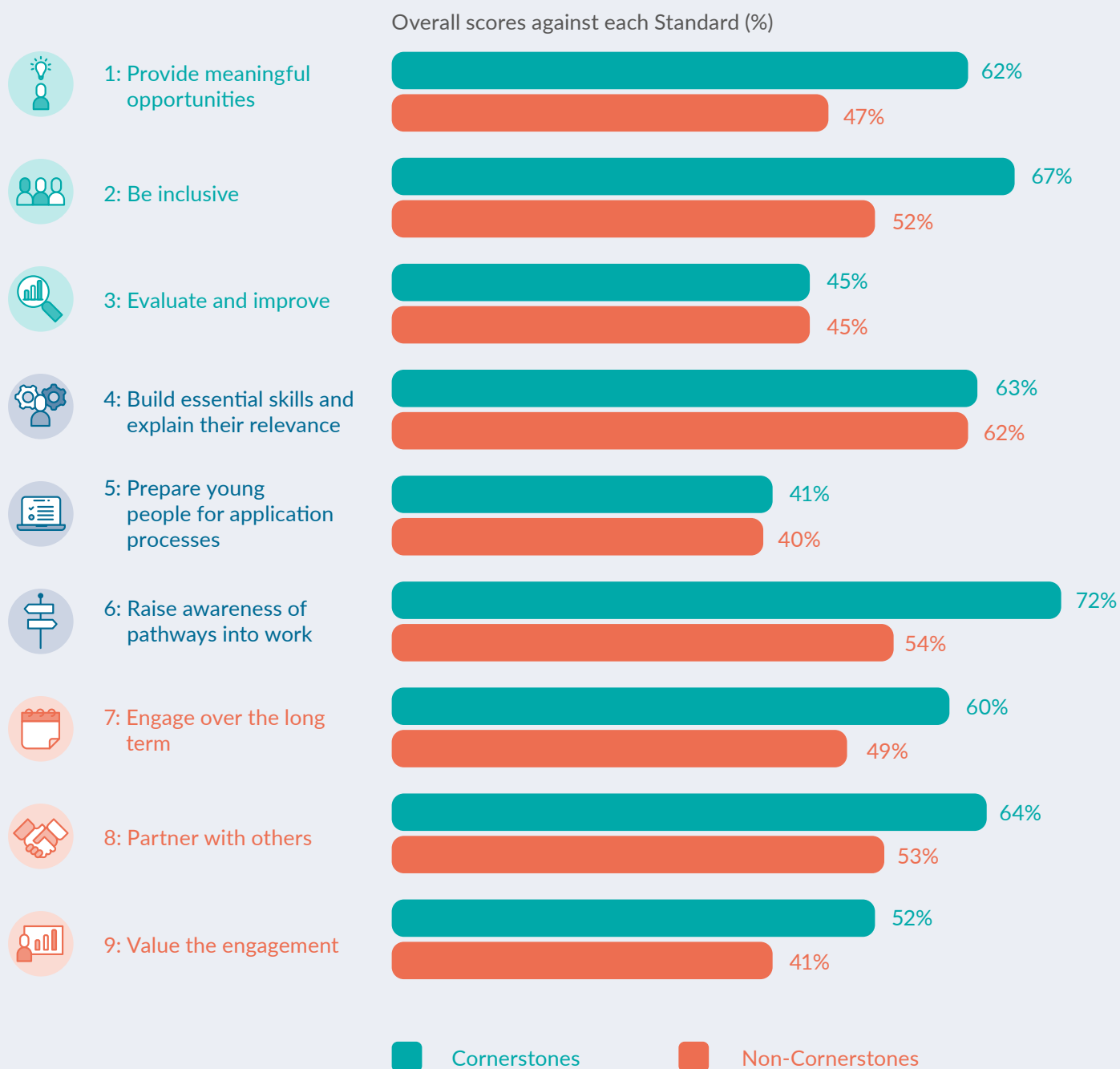
Cornerstone Employers, who work as sustained and ongoing employer members of regional Careers Hubs, perform better than non-Cornerstone (Fig.7) Employers (although medium and larger employers perform better in general). They also report more positively about seeing benefits for their business (91% of Cornerstone Employers say their work in schools and colleges is helping them develop new talent pipelines, versus 83% overall). However, all employers have areas of strength and areas to develop – and self-assessments are tailored to employer size.

11 Some industries were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes: Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (n=4); Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply (n=6); Mining and Quarrying (n=3); Water Supply, Sewerage and Waste Management (n=2).

12 Gov.uk (2023). Employer Skills Survey. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/employer-skills-survey>

13 As the number of completions of Standards increases CEC intends to explore whether employer outreach leads to interest from young people at the regional level.

Fig. 7: Cornerstone Employers are driving the most impact, achieving higher scores across nearly all Standards.





Insight 3:

The Standards are highlighting common challenges around supporting the interview and application process and the engagement of parents/carers

Insight 3: The Standards are highlighting common challenges around supporting the interview and application process and the engagement of parents/carers

The Standards offer a systematic way for national and local gaps in employer outreach to be identified. Support can then begin to be targeted through Careers Hubs and by employers themselves, drawing on resources provided through the Standards and through the CEC (and a range of providers)¹³. Our goal is to support more effective employer outreach across the country - to the benefit of both young people and business.

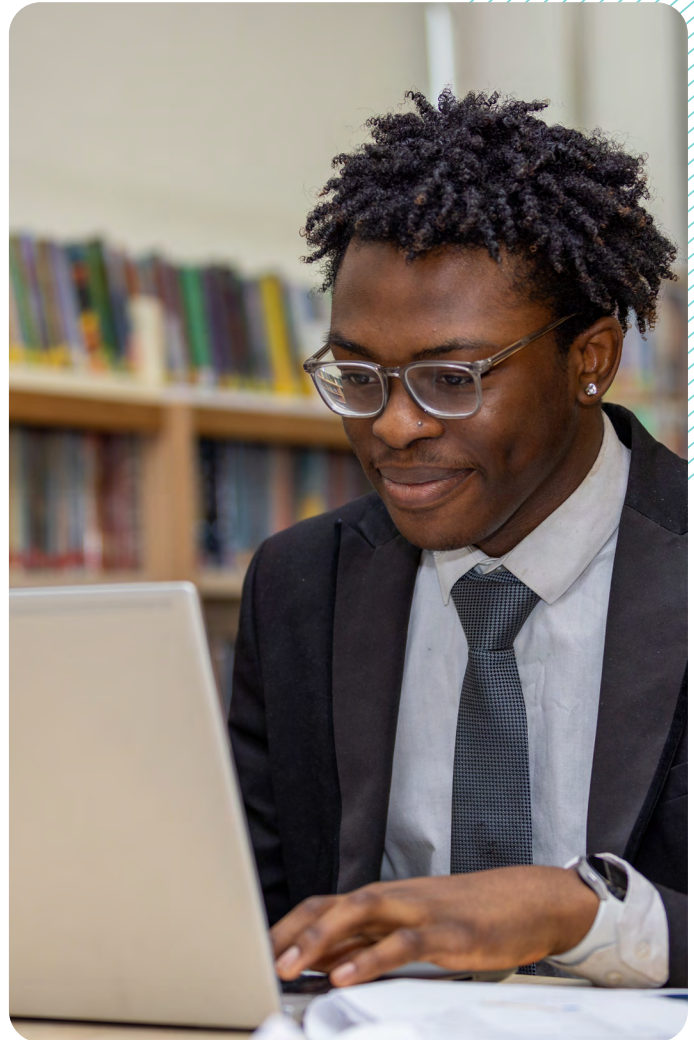
There is more scope to prepare young people for the application processes

Helping young people understand and prepare for the full range of application processes (Standard 5) is the Standard with most scope for improvement. On average, businesses score 41% in this area, and those that score higher are more likely to say that young people's employability skills are improving. The current focus of support is on understanding applications (72%) and interview practice (71%). However, only 35% offer support on other assessment processes (like assessment centres, group activities, psychometric tests and presentations), which are an increasing feature in recruitment and selection.

This is an area where young people also see potential for improvement. Just over half (53%) of young people in Year 11 said they knew about different types of recruitment and selection processes, including interviews and assessment centres. 58% said they felt confident talking about their skills in an interview¹⁴.

....and opportunities to engage parents/carers

Employers that engage parents/carers in the careers conversation are more likely to say their engagement is leading to business benefits across the board. These employers are 30% more likely to say their education outreach is helping them close skills gaps (82% versus 63% not engaged with parents). Overall, 41% of employers are currently engaging parents.¹⁵

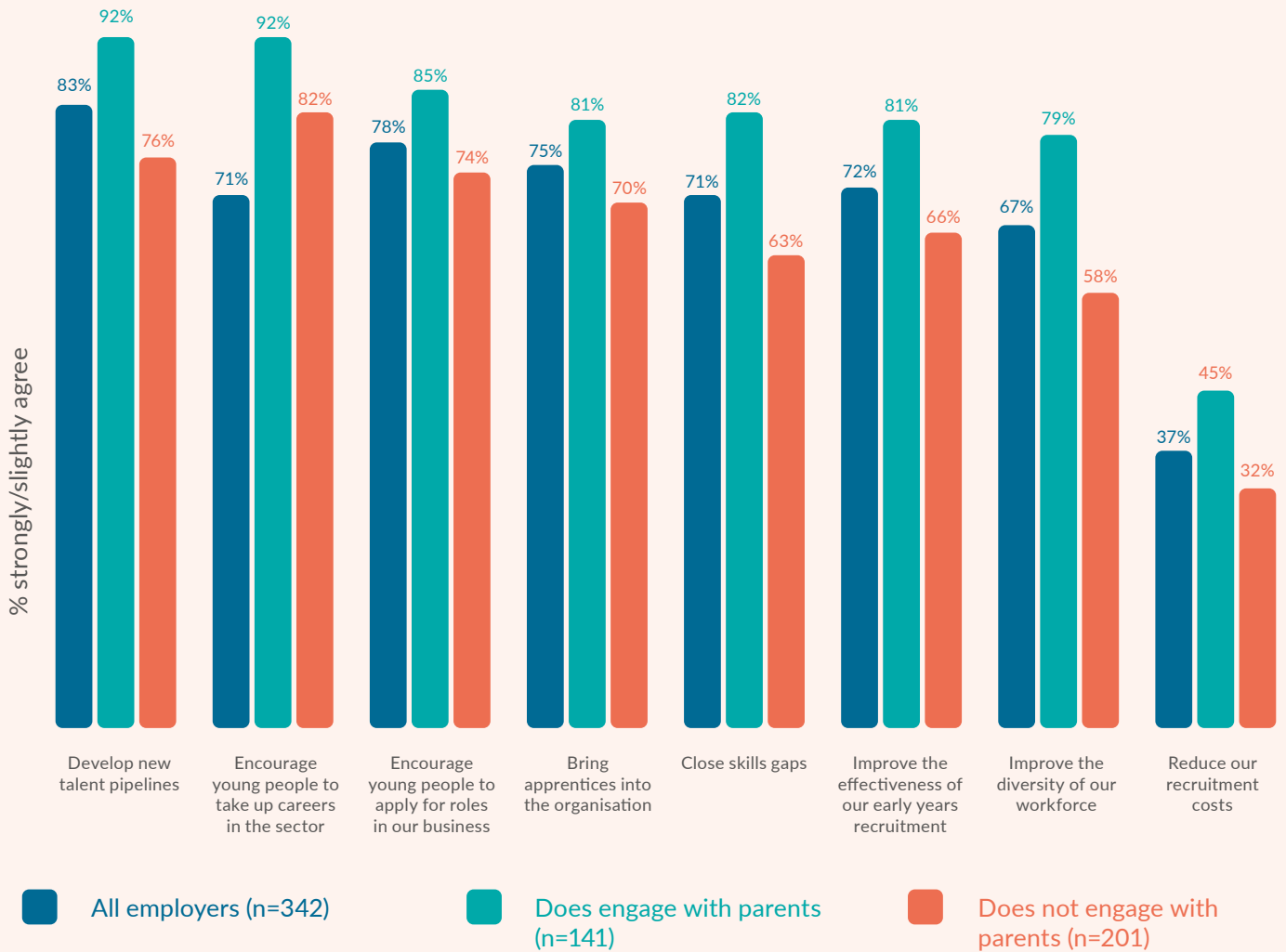


13 Careers and Enterprise Company (2023). Employer Activity Provider Directory. Available at <https://find-activity-provider.careersandenterprise.co.uk/search-for-employers> from end November 2023

14 Future Skills Questionnaire 2022/23 (publication forthcoming), Year 11 students (n=11,238).

15 Parental engagement is measured by 3 questions in Standard 8 (Partner with others): if employers share information about early career opportunities, about pathways/subject requirement(s) to enter the profession, or about the changing world of work.

Fig. 8: Employers that engage with parents are more likely to report that their engagement has direct business benefits.



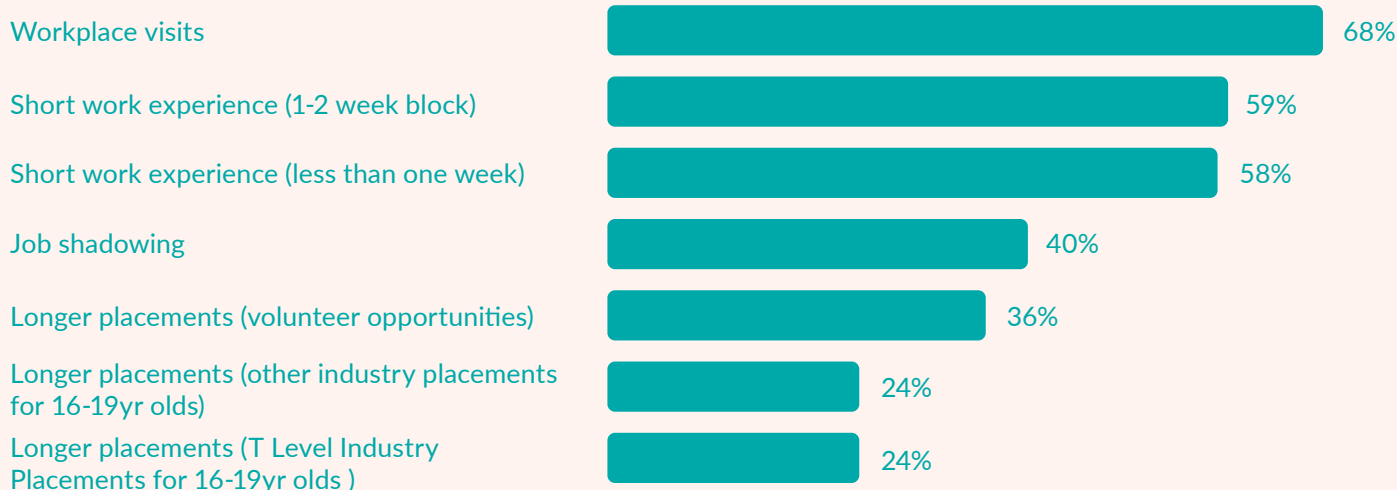
Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All Employers n=342; Employers that engage with parents n=141; Cornerstone Employers that do not engage with parents n=201).

...the more precise, the more impact

The Standards are a framework for continuous improvement and effective targeting. In a complex area like workplace experiences (where resources are limited), there is an opportunity to use them to encourage and benchmark employer engagement (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9: Employers are more likely to have held workplace visits and short work experience in the past year (Standard 1: Provide meaningful opportunities).

% employers offering

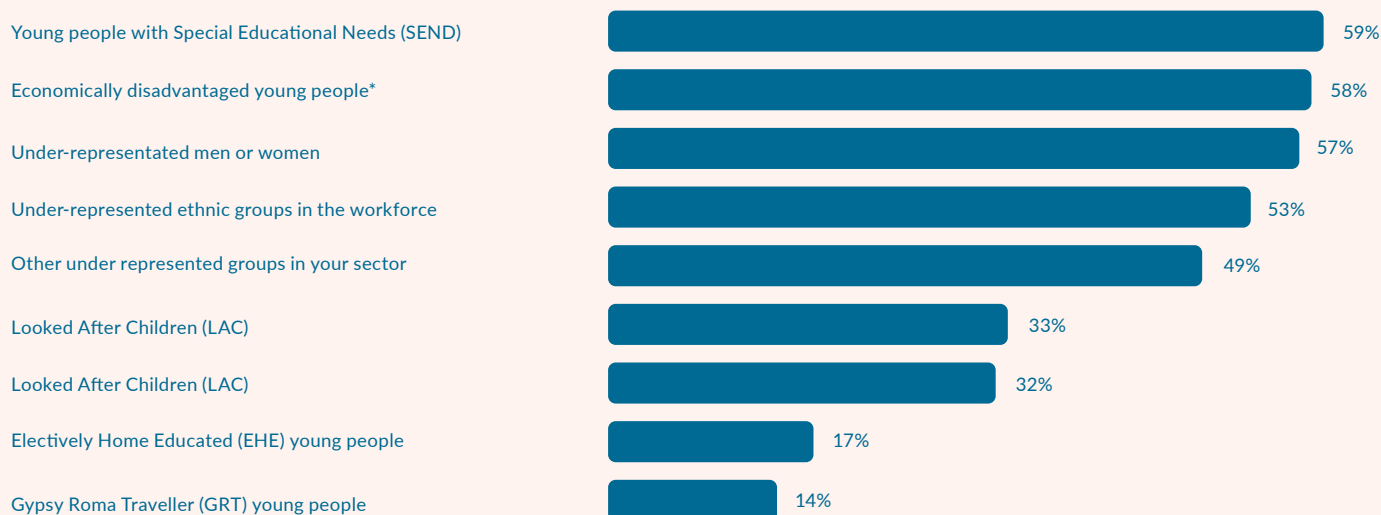


Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All respondents as at end of September 2023 [n=342]).

Standards can also be used to help employers to reflect on their outreach and focus on targeting groups of young people that face most barriers. (Fig.10)

Fig. 10: Employers seek to proactively engage with a range of groups of young people that may face additional barriers (Standard 2: Be inclusive).

% employers seeking to engage each group



*those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)

Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr-Sep 2023 (All respondents as at end of September 2023 [n=342]).

Where next for Employer Standards?

The Employer Standards will be released for use by all employers in November 2023. This briefing has focused on insights from the first tranche of Standards adopters. We intend to continue to encourage their take-up and share insights to ensure impactful employer outreach at scale. We will also use the data to ensure we can provide support and guidance to employers on identified areas of development.

For more information, including how to take a self-assessment, please visit the [Employer Standards portal](#).



Appendix - Employer Standards

Summary of each Standard



Inspire young people for their best next step



1. Provide meaningful opportunities

Give young people a taste of work by offering meaningful experiences with clear aims. Tailor activities to your audience and involve a breadth of young people from your workplace to make it relevant.



2. Be inclusive

Engage with schools, special schools or colleges most in need of support. Break down barriers – consider the relatability of the messenger, actively challenge stereotypes and preconceptions, and adapt to include all young people.



3. Evaluate and improve

Establish whether you are achieving impact and adapt where needed. Conduct evaluations with young people, teachers and employee volunteers.



Prepare young people to be career ready



4. Build essential skills and explain their relevance

Support young people to develop and practice essential skills so young people, teachers and Careers Leaders can reflect on and see their value in the workplace.



5. Prepare young people for application processes

Help young people understand and practice a range of application and selection processes, supporting them to describe their skills and experience effectively.



6. Raise awareness of pathways into work

Provide information about opportunities, pathways, subjects and qualification requirements for roles in your organisation and sector, linked to the local labour market – particularly at key transition points.



Collaborate for success



7. Engage over the long-term

Extend your engagement with schools, special schools and colleges by having repeat exposure with the same cohorts of young people and providing employees with long term volunteering opportunities.



8. Partner with others

Identify priority needs of a school, special school or college. Share knowledge about job opportunities, local labour market, and pathways with others - including teachers, Careers Leaders, parents, Careers Hubs, and activity providers. Support teachers/tutors to relate classroom learning to the world of work. Collaborate and share best practice with other employers.



9. Value the engagement

Embed careers education within business planning and enable employees to engage with outreach. Recognise impact on young people and share with employees. Review against business objectives.

The Careers & Enterprise Company
(2023). From outreach to intake:
Employer Standards for Careers
Education. London: The Careers &
Enterprise Company.

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