

# From outreach to intake: the business case

## Employer Standards for Careers Education – One year on



Launched in 2023 by The Careers & Enterprise Company, the Employer Standards aim to improve the quality and impact of employer engagement in careers education. As of September 2024, 811 employers from a wide range of sectors and sizes had self-assessed against the Standards, including a cohort of 139 who re-assessed their impact<sup>1</sup>. This significant and growing national dataset<sup>2</sup> is clearly demonstrating the value of high-quality engagement and the business case to do more.

<sup>1</sup> Re-assessing employers were those completing at least two self-assessments against the Employer Standards, an average of 371 days apart

<sup>2</sup> As of November 2024, a total of 874 employers have now completed the Employer Standards.



Employers doing the most intensive work with young people on meaningful opportunities (such as workplace experiences) are 47%pts more likely to report their outreach is helping to close skills gaps



81% of employers say their work in schools/colleges is helping to develop new talent pipelines



Employers who reassess have improved the inclusivity of their outreach by 8%pts

## At a glance – what do Employer Standards tell us?

**Standards drive improvement: 6+%pts** year on year.

Employers that **re-assessed** this year have **improved their score** by at least **6%pts** on each of the nine Standards.

Employers **score highly** on inclusivity; **65% target support to at least two under-represented groups**, rising to **81%** for those employers engaging over the long term.

Employers are playing an **important part in boosting awareness** of pathways into work like apprenticeships: This is reflected in **young people's understanding of apprenticeships which more than doubles from Year 7 to 11**.

Key sectors like **Health and Construction have strong and long-term outreach approaches**: Young people are also more interested in these sectors.

**Engaging with parents works**: Of the 39% of employers that do, over **90% say that their engagement is helping develop talent pipelines** which is **20%** higher than in those who don't.

And **high-quality sustained engagement saves money**: 10%pts increase in reassessing employers saying their engagement is helping to reduce recruitment costs.



“Engaging with the Standards two years running has helped us to reflect on our work and ensure it is having the greatest impact. We have particularly focused on improving our approach around Standard 5 (Preparing young people for application processes) ensuring that the young people we excite about our sector feel confident to apply for roles in our business.”

Paul Skitt, Skills Development Director, Flannery Plant Hire

## The 9 Employer Standards – how employers rate their progress

The Employer Standards framework has nine evidence-based Standards with related self-assessment questions. When employers meet the Standards, their educational outreach improves, as do young people's outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

### How employers rate their progress using the Employer Standards



After completing the self-assessment, employers gain:

1. An understanding of how they are performing against each Standard, from 'aspiring', through 'achieving', to 'exceeding'.<sup>4</sup>
2. Analysis of how they compare against employers of their size, sector and region.
3. Access to tailored recommendations and resources to improve quality.

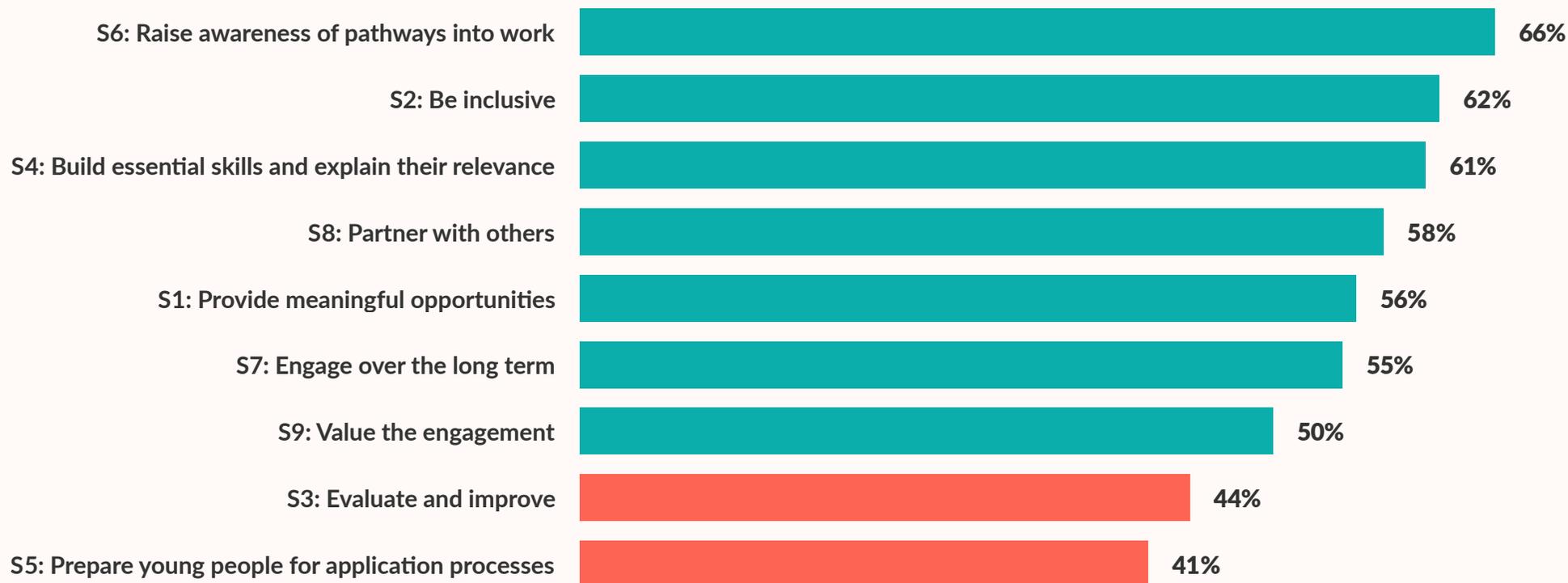
<sup>3</sup> The Employer Standards Self-Assessment has two question sets – one tailored for medium and large employers and another for small and micro employers.

<sup>4</sup> Employers are aspiring to a Standard if they score 0-49%; achieving if they score 50-89%, and exceeding if they score 90%+.

Across the nine standards, employers perform best on Standard 6 (Raise awareness of pathways into work), followed by Standard 2 (Be inclusive). Most scope for improvement is in Standard 5 (Prepare young people for application processes). See chart below.

### Employers' overall scores against each of the 9 Employer Standards

Overall scores against each Standard (%)



## The Business Case – top 3 insights



### 1. School outreach works: strengthening talent pipelines, closing disadvantage gaps and saving money

- Providing meaningful opportunities, such as careers talks, mentoring and workplace visits, leads to more sector interest, applications and closing skills gaps
- Engaging with parents, teachers and underrepresented groups helps to improve the effectiveness of early career recruitment, improve workforce diversity and develop new talent pipelines
- Outreach leads to direct business benefits (particularly for Cornerstone Employers) and reduced costs, with Careers Hubs driving improvements



### 2. Sustained engagement and higher quality outreach lead to longer-term benefits, especially in key sectors

- Those providing meaningful opportunities over the long-term report the most significant business benefits
- Employers repeating Standards assessments take a more long-term approach, are more inclusive, provide more opportunities and see more business benefits
- Health sector employers score above the average across all nine Standards; Construction and Digital higher than average across eight



### 3. Employer Standards highlight common challenges and opportunities

- There is more to be done to prepare young people for application processes, evaluate activity and measure the value of careers engagement
- Greater engagement with parents benefits both businesses and students
- Cornerstones and other employers who collaborate with Careers Hubs are leading the way



## Insight 1

### School outreach works: strengthening talent pipelines, closing disadvantage gaps and saving money

#### Providing meaningful opportunities leads to increased interest and business growth

- Employers who provide meaningful opportunities see an increase in sector interest, applications for roles in their businesses and are seeing skills gaps closing.
- Those doing the most targeted and intensive work in this area ('exceeding' at Standard 1 (Provide meaningful opportunities)) are almost twice as likely to report their work is closing skills gaps than those 'aspiring'.

#### Engaging parents, teachers and under-represented groups helps improve early career recruitment, workforce diversity and develop new talent pipelines

- Employers engaging with parents were 16%pts more likely to report their work in schools and colleges is helping them to improve the effectiveness of early career recruitment (91% for those engaging parents compared to 75% for those not).
- 90% of employers engaging with teachers say their work is helping to develop new talent pipelines and 77% of employers who target their work to under-represented groups say their outreach helps improve their workforce diversity.

#### Outreach leads to direct business benefits (particularly for [Cornerstone Employers](#)) and reduced costs

- Employers say their work in schools and colleges is encouraging young people to take up careers in their sector (87% overall, 95% for Cornerstone Employers.) and helping develop new talent pipelines (81% overall, 92% for Cornerstones Employers).
- 80% say their work is encouraging young people to apply for roles in their businesses (90% for Cornerstone Employers).
- 75% that it is helping to bring in new apprentices (86% for Cornerstone Employers).
- 37% of employers say that their outreach is helping to reduce recruitment costs.
- Employers engaging with their [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 Careers Hub).



## Insight 2

**Sustained engagement and higher quality outreach lead to longer-term recruitment benefits for employers, especially in key sectors**

### Those providing meaningful opportunities over the long-term report the most significant benefits to their businesses

- 96% of employers achieving or exceeding against Standards 1 (Provide meaningful opportunities) and 7 (Engage over the long-term) reported their engagement has encouraged young people to take up careers in their sector.
- 93% said it has helped to develop new talent pipelines.
- Commitment and sustained engagement strongly correlate with recruitment benefits.

### Employers repeating Standards assessments report improvement in their strategic long-term approach, inclusivity and providing meaningful opportunities

Employers who completed more than one self-assessment showed significant gain on average:

- a 9%pts improvement on Standard 3 (Evaluate and improve) and Standard 7 (Engage over the long term).
- 8%pts improvement on Standard 2 (Be inclusive) and Standard 1 (Provide meaningful opportunities).

### Health sector employers score above the average across all nine Standards; Construction and Digital score higher than average across eight

- Employers in these sectors see stronger business benefits than the average employer, including improving the effectiveness of their early career recruitment and improving the diversity of their workforce.<sup>5</sup>
- The CEC's Future Skills Questionnaire student data shows young people's interests in Year 11 aligning with those industries scoring highly for raising awareness of pathways into work.
- Other CEC research shows student career readiness is driven by good careers education, in turn leading to better alignment with the needs of the labour market.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> More details can be seen in their specific sector insight briefings (publication forthcoming)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-evidence/evidence-and-reports/careers-education-2022-23-now-next/>



## Insight 3

### Employer Standards highlight common challenges and opportunities

#### There is more to be done to prepare young people for application processes, evaluate activity and measure the value of careers engagement.

- Helping young people understand and prepare for the full range of application processes (Standard 5) offers the most scope for improvement (average score 41%).
- Those scoring higher on this Standard are more likely to report young people's employability skills improving and skills gaps closing.
- Young people also see potential for improvement. Just over half (54%) of Year 11 students said they knew about different types of recruitment and selection processes.<sup>7</sup>
- Employers score 62% overall for Standard 2 (Be Inclusive), showing it is a priority in their outreach.

#### Employers engaging parents and carers have greater impact.

- Employers that engage parents and carers in careers activities are more likely to say their engagement is leading to business benefits across the board.
- They are 19%pts more likely to say their education outreach is helping them close skills gaps than those not engaging parents.
- Overall, 39% of employers are currently engaging parents, so there is an opportunity here for more employers to accrue these recruitment benefits.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Future Skills Questionnaire 2023/24 (publication forthcoming), Year 11 students (n=26,726).

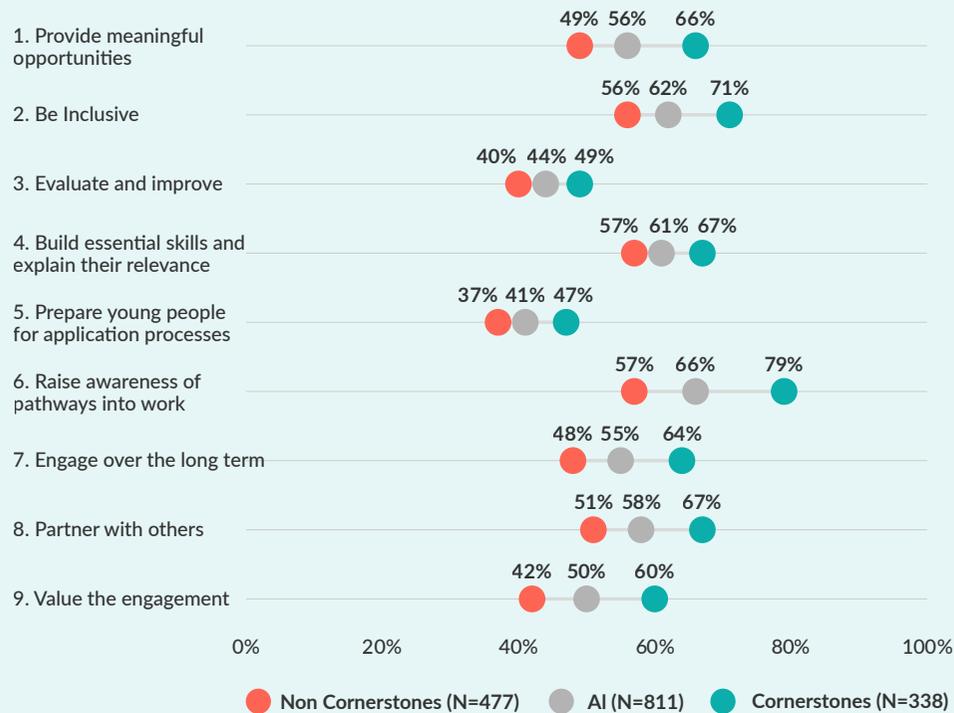
<sup>8</sup> The CEC [Talking Futures](#) Programme is focused on engaging parents

## Cornerstones and other employers who collaborate with Careers Hubs are leading the way across the board

- [Cornerstone Employers](#), and other employers working closely with their local Careers Hubs, perform better than those not engaging with Hubs.
- On average there was a 16%pt difference in favour of those working with Hubs, with Standard 6 (Raise awareness of pathways into work), showing a 24%pts higher score. This difference was similar for Cornerstones (see chart).

### Employers' overall scores against each of the 9 Employer Standards, by Cornerstone status

Overall scores against each Standard (%)



Source: Employer Standards Self-Assessments, Apr 2023 - Sep 2024



## Where next for Employer Standards?

The Employer Standards framework and self-assessment tool is helping employers focus their efforts. Employers who have reassessed and shared their data with us have shown the impact it has made – to students but also to their future workforce and bottom line.

All employers are encouraged to use this free tool to achieve similar benefits and ensure national support and resources are responding to need, by using the Standards Framework and associated resources and considering working directly through the CEC network of Careers Hubs and the provider network.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/>

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