


# Insight briefing: Student career readiness in 2022/23

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Student career readiness in 2022/23. London: The Careers &  
Enterprise Company.

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# Introduction

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Hearing directly from students is essential to delivering effective career education outcomes. During the 2022/23 academic year, over 100,000 students from 574 institutions completed the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), making it one of the most extensive surveys of its kind in the country. This insight briefing shares headlines from this national dataset, amplifying students' voices on their careers knowledge, skills and confidence.

The FSQ was launched by The Careers & Enterprise Company as a feature of the Compass+ career management tool in September 2021, available to state-funded secondary schools, special schools and alternative provisions in England. It is a student self-completion questionnaire that measures students' career readiness at key transition points across secondary education. The primary purpose of the FSQ is to enable Careers Leaders to plan, target and evaluate careers provision with the support of student insight. The three-fold increase in the uptake of the FSQ during the 2022/23 academic year (c. 35,000 responses in 2021/22)<sup>1</sup> is indicative of the growing data-driven practice of Careers Leaders.

In completing the FSQ students reflect on their labour market awareness, ability to seek information and guidance and plan their next step. They are also asked about the specific knowledge and skills required for them to navigate and succeed in the transition between education levels or into employment and the eight essential skills mapped onto the [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#) (listening, speaking, problem-solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership and teamwork).

The data, aggregated across schools, provides national insight into student perceptions and how they compare according to stage of learning, student background and school characteristics. The sample represents 104,505 students aged 11-19 from diverse backgrounds, every region of the country and across different types of educational institution.<sup>2</sup> This is an opportunity to mobilise the collective voice of students and use their insights to point to areas of progress and to where more support is needed to drive positive careers outcomes.

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1 The Careers & Enterprise Company (September 2022). Insight briefing: Update on student career readiness in 2021/22. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

2 See Technical Note for further sample descriptives.

# Executive summary

Over 100,000 students from 574 institutions completed the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) in 2022/23. The insights from this larger cohort are consistent with those from the last academic year and are detailed below.



## **Insight 1: Students feel more career ready as they progress through secondary education.**

- An increased awareness of changing labour market throughout secondary school strengthens students' overall career readiness as they approach key points of transition.
- From Year 7, students have ideas about their future careers, and these ideas mature over time becoming more grounded in their increasing knowledge and experience of career pathways. By Year 11, the most popular industries include creative and media, healthcare and construction, reflecting some projected growth sectors.
- Differences occur in the career readiness of certain groups of students depending on background and characteristics. Female students and those receiving free school meals, and those with special needs had, on average, lower career readiness than their peers.



## **Insight 2: By Year 11, most young people understand traditional academic and vocational post-16 options and feel supported to make decisions.**

- Understanding of all post-16 pathways increases as students approach key points of transition. By Year 11, most students understood A Level and apprenticeship pathways - a significant rise from Year 7.
- Understanding of T Levels is steadily growing. Starting from a low base in Year 7, students in Year 11 were four times more likely to report understanding the qualification.
- By the time they reach Year 11, most students have considered their options and feel supported to make education and career choices.



## **Insight 3: There is more work to be done on supporting transition to the workplace and essential skills.**

- While most students rate their essential skills positively, there is variation between skills. By Year 11, students feel more confident in their ability to stay positive and creativity skills than in their leadership ability or listening skills.
- Transition skills, such as the ability to perform at interview and submit strong applications, support students to navigate and succeed in their transition to work. Students are less confident about these skills.

# The headlines in numbers



**100k**

104,505 students from 574 institutions in 40 Careers Hubs completed the FSQ in the 22/23 academic year



**8/10**

8/10 (79%) Year 11 students report understanding apprenticeships as a post-16 option, doubling from 39% of Year 7 students



**67%**

Year 11 students had an average career readiness score of 67%, compared to 46% for Year 7 students



**8/10**

By Year 11, 83% of students had a plan for their next step and 79% had support to make education and career choices



**80%**

80% of Year 11 students report knowing what skills employers need



**x4**

Students in Year 11 were four times as likely to report understanding T Levels, compared to students in Year 7



**2/3**

2/3 (67%) of Year 11 students felt optimistic about their future careers



**41%**

While students' generally rate their skills positively, 41% of Year 11 students do not feel confident talking about their skills in an interview

# Insight 1

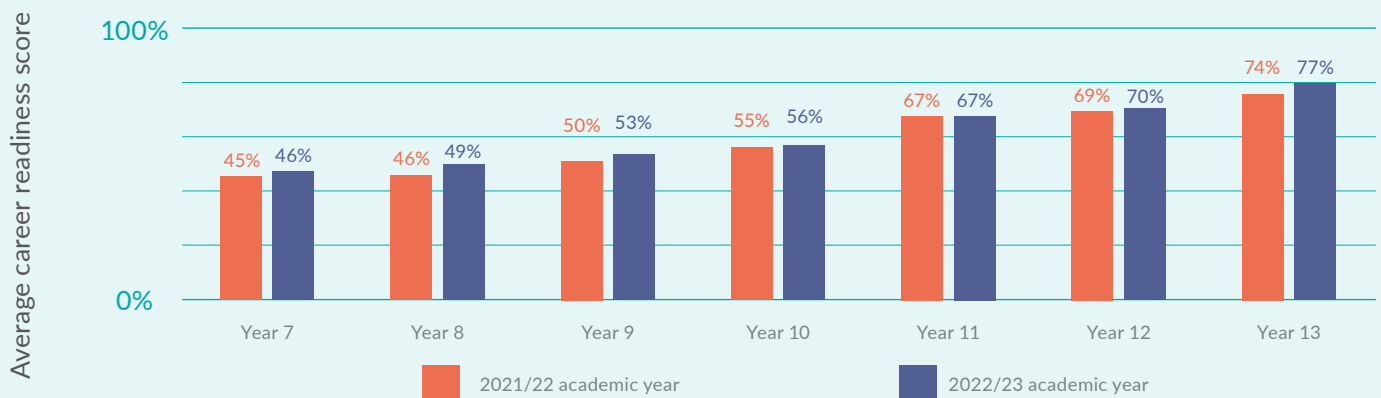
## Students feel more career ready as they progress through secondary education

### Students' career readiness increases as they approach key points of transition

Being career ready involves several attributes: understanding your pathway options, being aware of and being able to articulate your skills and understanding the labour market. By asking students to reflect on these things, amongst others, we can use the FSQ to calculate a career readiness score for students, equivalent to the proportion of questions each student responded positively to.

Despite the three-fold increase in sample size in 2022/23, students' average career readiness score has remained consistent with the 2021/22 academic year. Students felt increasingly career ready as they approached key points of transition, their scores rising from 46% in Year 7 (N=27,875) to 67% in Year 11 (N=11,238) and 77% in Year 13 (N=2,667) (Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1: Average career readiness score of students by year group. Comparison of data from 2021/22 and 2022/23 academic years.<sup>3,4</sup>**



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ). 2021/22 academic year, Year 7- Year 13 (n=34,013); 2022/23 academic year, Year 7- Year 13 (n=101,510).

While age was an important factor influencing students' career readiness, there were also differences in the career readiness of certain groups of students. Female students, those receiving free school meals (FSM), and those with SEND status had, on average, lower career readiness than their peers. There is emerging evidence that good careers provision improves students career readiness and has the potential outweigh some of these disadvantages.<sup>5</sup> We will continue exploring the complex and intersectional nature of student characteristics and their relationship to career readiness.

The incorporation of FSQ into the Compass+ tool enables tracking students' journeys from Year 7 to Year 13. As Compass+ is currently available to schools (and not Further Education Colleges and Independent Training Providers), Year 12 and 13 student responses only reflect the views of the small proportion of students attending school sixth forms.<sup>6</sup> While it is positive to see student career readiness continuing to increase into Years 12 and 13, the data does not represent the voices of the whole post-16 population. As a result, the remainder of this briefing focuses on responses up until Year 11.

3 2021/22 academic year, 1st September 2021-31st July 2022; 2022/23 academic year, 1st September 2022-31st July 2023.

4 Sample only includes students who completed the mainstream versions of the questionnaire (excluding SEND version).

5 The Careers & Enterprise Company (2023). Ready for the Future: A review of Careers Education in England 2021/22. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

6 38% of students in Years 12 and 13 attend a school sixth form, with a further 36% attending further education colleges, 13% joining sixth form colleges, and 2% going onto apprenticeships. Source: [DfE key stage 4 destination measures, academic year 2020/21](#).

### Students start thinking about the changing labour market from an early age, and their understanding of it increases throughout secondary school

Reflecting their general career readiness, students' understanding of the labour market increases as they progress through secondary school. But, even from a young age, they consider how the labour market is changing. Already, by the start of secondary, almost two-thirds (64%) of Year 7 students told us they had thought about how jobs and careers might change in the future. This increased to 70% of Year 11 students.

By Year 11, 80% of students felt that they knew what types of skills employers need, an increase from 64% of Year 7 students. Similarly, over 8 in 10 (81%) Year 11 students had learned about careers other than those of their family or carers, compared to two-thirds of Year 7 students (66%). This perhaps reflects that the overwhelming majority (85%) of the institutions with students completing the FSQ had achieved Gatsby Benchmark 5<sup>7</sup>, which requires schools to provide multiple opportunities for pupils to learn directly from employers. Fewer students were aware of some types of businesses and employers in their area (52% in Year 7, 64% in Year 11) and knew how to find out how much they could earn in different types of jobs (51% in Year 7, 65% in Year 11), but there was still a steady increase in awareness between younger and older students.

### Students have ideas about their future careers from a young age, and these ideas mature over time

The proportion of students who had ideas about what they wanted to do for a job or career in the future remained relatively consistent over the year groups. Three-quarters (75%) of Year 7 students told us they had ideas about their future jobs. This dipped to 70% in Year 9 but rose again to 77% of Year 11 students. Despite over three-quarters of Year 11 students having ideas about their future, fewer (67%) felt optimistic about their future careers.

While students have ideas about their future careers from a young age, there were differences in which industries students reported being interested. Students' industry interests appeared to mature with age, becoming more grounded in their increasing knowledge and experience of the career and education pathways. Younger students were interested in animal care and sports and leisure industries, but this declined with age (animal care - 10% of Year 7 students interested compared to 6% in Year 11; sports and leisure - 17% of Year 7 students compared to 8% in Year 11). Interest in other industries, such as law and legal and healthcare, increased with age (law and legal - 6% of Year 7 students interested compared to 10% of Year 11 students; healthcare - 7% of Year 7 students interested compared to 11% of Year 11 students).

By Year 11, the most popular industries were creative and media (14%), healthcare (11%), business and finance (10%), law and legal (10%), engineering and maintenance (9%) and construction and trades (9%). These reflect some of the projected growth sectors highlighted in The Skills Imperative 2035<sup>8</sup> analysis, which projected employment prospects in the UK over the next twelve years. Health and social work, construction, professional services and arts and entertainment industries were all projected to see employment growth until 2035. Whilst there was some alignment between students' industry interest and the changing labour market, the most significant predicted growth sector was accommodation and food services, which only 4% of Year 11 students reported interest in. The report also predicted a decline in engineering, finance and insurance sectors, which were also popular choices among students.

7 N=573. 1 institution using the FSQ had not completed Compass in the last academic year.

8 Wilson, R., Hillary, J., Bosworth, D., Bosworth, L., Cardenas-Rubio, J., Day, R., Patel, S., Bui, H., Lin, X., Seymour, D. and Thoung, C. (2022). The Skills Imperative 2035: Occupational Outlook – Long-run employment prospects for the UK. Headline Report. Slough: NFER.

# Insight 2

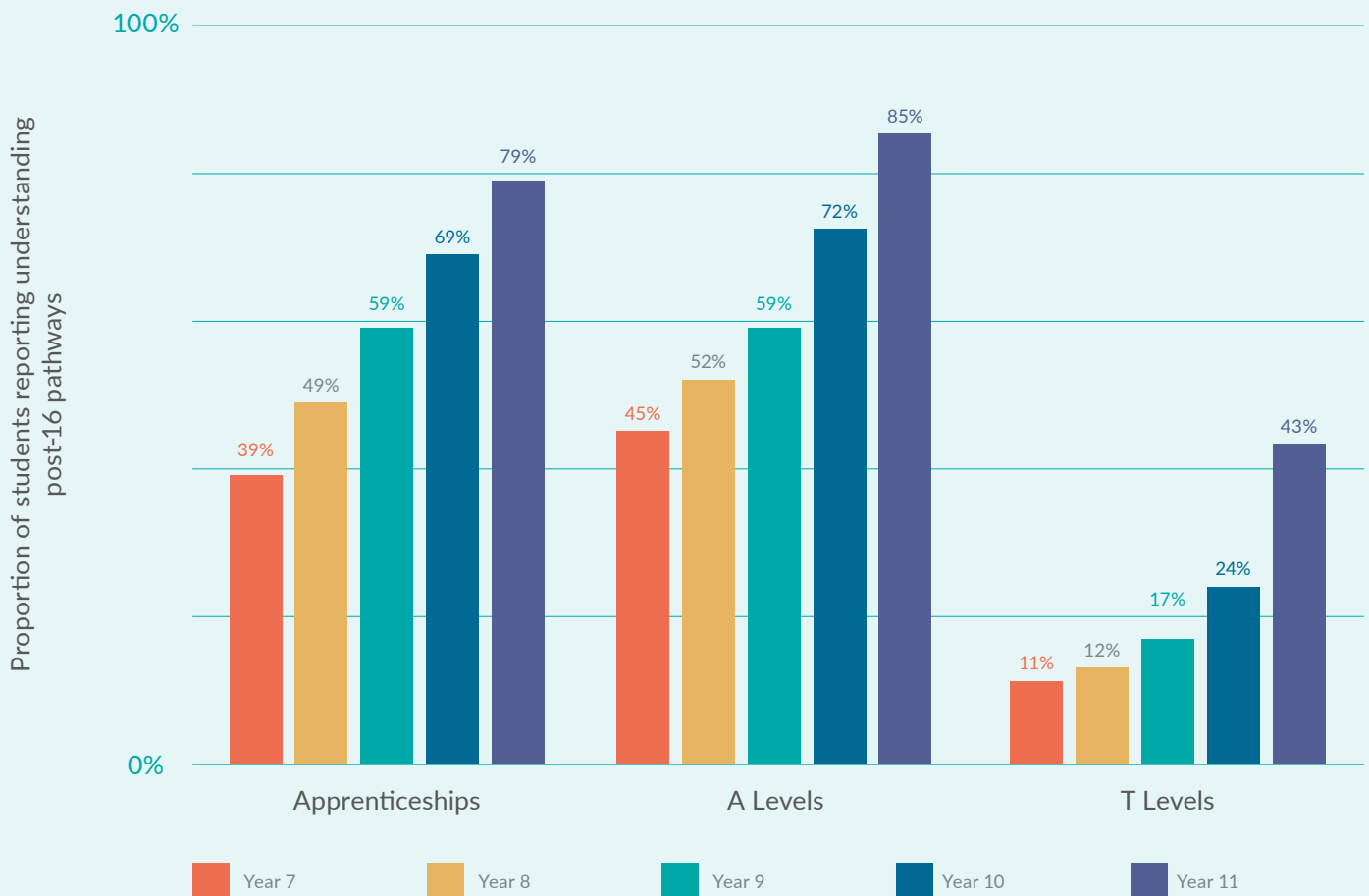
## By Year 11, most young people understand traditional academic and vocational post-16 options and feel supported to make decisions

### Understanding of all post-16 pathways increases as young people approach transition points

To make their best next step, students must be supported to make informed plans and decisions about their future. This means understanding all pathways available and how they link to future careers.

By Year 11, most students felt they understood A Level and apprenticeship pathways - a significant rise from Year 7. The proportion of students reporting understanding the post-16 apprenticeship route doubled from 39% in Year 7 to 79% in Year 11 (Fig.2). A similar increase was seen in the proportion of students understanding A Levels, from 45% of Year 7 students to 85% of Year 11 students.

**Fig. 2: Proportion of students responding positively<sup>9</sup> to questions on post-16 pathways by year group. 'Do you understand this option after Year 11? A) Apprenticeships, B) A Levels, C) T Levels'.**



Source: Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), 2022/23 academic year (Year 7 [n=27,875]; Year 8 [n=16,058]; Year 9 [n=21,224]; Year 10 [n=17,791]; Year 11 [n=11,238]).

<sup>9</sup> A response was considered 'positive' a student answered 'Yes, to a great extent' or 'Yes, to some extent'.



## Understanding of T Levels is growing steadily

The 2020/21 academic year saw the phased introduction of T Levels, a new post-16 qualification, in selected sectors and institutions. Despite starting from a lower base of understanding, we see a significant increase in the proportion of students understanding T Levels as they progress through school. 11% of students in Year 7 reported understanding the T Level route, compared to 43% of Year 11 students. While there is still more work to bring this up to the level of understanding of apprenticeships and A Levels, this four-fold increase suggests a positive trajectory. This is supported by the Government's increased national and sectoral focus on T Level promotion, alongside the CEC's ongoing efforts through Careers Hubs to amplify all apprenticeship and technical education routes. There was also regional variation in students' understanding of T Levels, perhaps pointing to the current uneven distribution and phasing of these qualifications across the country. As explored in our recent publication on apprenticeship and technical transitions, multiple factors, alongside an understanding of qualifications, influence take-up across the country.<sup>10</sup>

Exploratory analysis across the two academic years data suggests an increase in students' understanding of T Levels. For example, in data from the 2021/22 academic year (N=34,013), 11% of Year 9 students agreed they understood T Levels as a post-16 pathway. This year, 17% of Year 9 students agreed. Similarly, in the 2021/22 academic year, 37% of Year 11 students reported understanding T Levels, compared to 43% of Year 11 students this year. The proportion of students understanding other routes remained consistent across the academic years, indicating a true change in students' understanding of T Levels.

## By Year 11, most students have considered their options and feel supported to make education and career choices

By Year 11, the overwhelming majority (81%) of students had considered which post-16 option would be right for them, up from only half (56%) of Year 10 students. Similarly, 83% of Year 11 students had a plan for their next step after Year 11, compared to 56% of Year 10 students, highlighting the importance of this year for students' decision-making.

Support for young people intensifies as they approach key transition points. In earlier years, a smaller proportion of students knew who to go to for career information and guidance. Under half of Year 7 students (48%) knew who to contact for information, rising to only 54% of Year 9 students. However, by Year 11, almost 8 in 10 (79%) students felt they had support to make education and career choices. This could be support from school staff, parents/ carers, or friends. This perhaps reflects that, for many schools, the most intensive careers activities target older age groups. Evidence from our recent Employer Standards insight briefing highlights that employers engagement with young people increases as they get older and closer to decision points.<sup>11</sup> Programmes such as '[teacher encounters](#)' aim to empower classroom teachers to bring careers into the curriculum and provide students with support from more staff in their institution.

10 The Careers & Enterprise Company (2023). Conditions for transition: Supporting young people onto apprenticeships and technical pathways- a regional analysis. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

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

# Insight 3

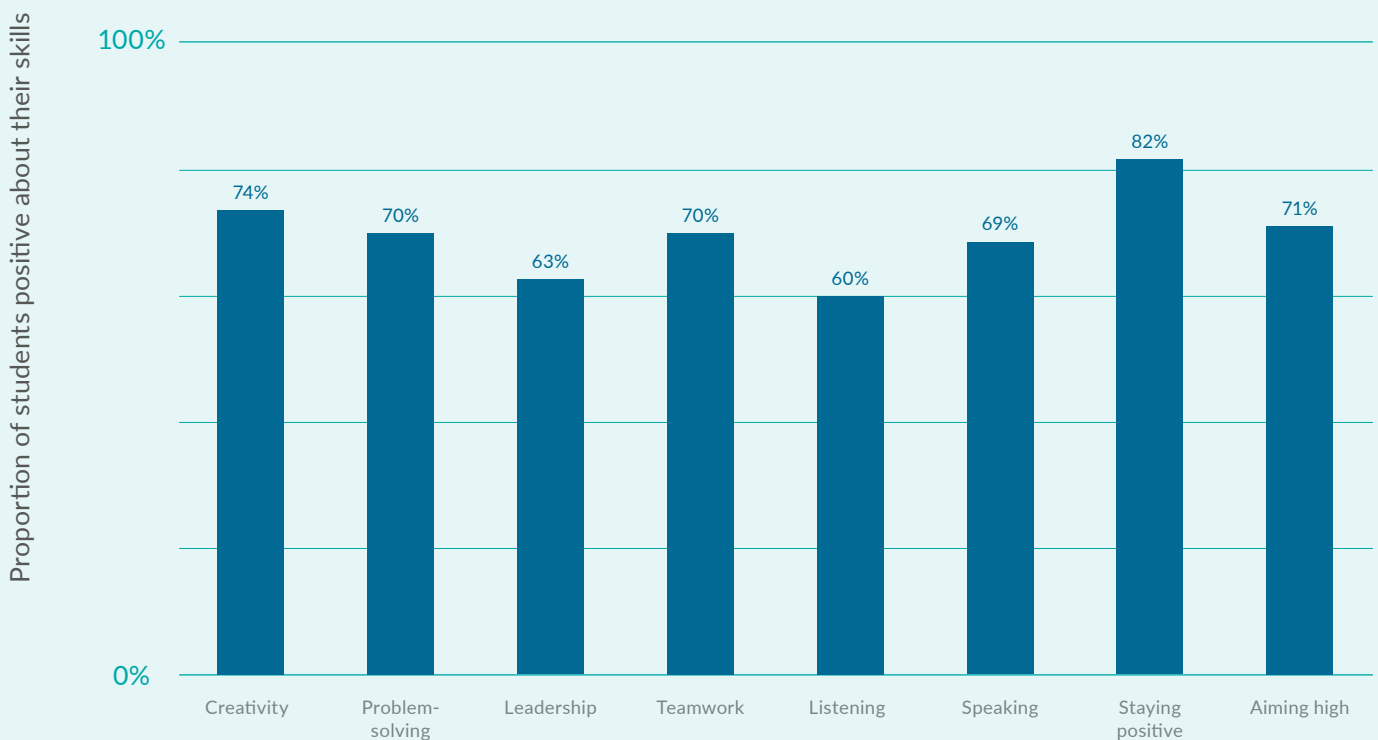
## There is more work to be done on transition and essential skills

### Most students rate their skills positively<sup>12</sup>, but there is variation between the skills

Mapped onto the [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#), students reflected on their ability to demonstrate eight essential skills (listening, speaking, problem-solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership and teamwork). As with last academic year, students' essential skills scores were high in Year 7 (70% average), dipped in Year 8 (59% average) and then steadily increased until Year 11 (70% average).

By Year 11, there were differences in students' confidence across the different skills (Fig. 3). Students were, on average, most confident about their ability to stay positive, with 8 in 10 (82%) Year 11 students saying they could identify the positives and negatives in an opportunity. More than 7 in 10 students were confident in their creativity (74%), problem-solving (70%) and teamwork (70%) skills and their ability to aim high (71%). Students were least confident in their listening skills, with only 60% being aware of how a speaker might exert influence through the way they speak.

**Fig. 3: Proportion of Year 11 students responding positively<sup>7</sup> to questions on their essential skills (listening, speaking, problem-solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership and teamwork).**



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

<sup>12</sup> A response was considered 'positive' if a student answered 'I can do this really well' or 'I can do this quite well but could develop further'.

### Despite feeling generally positive about their skills, nearly half of Year 11 students are not confident talking about their skills in an interview

Over three-quarters (76%) of Year 11 students reported knowing how to make a good impression when applying for a course or job. But despite feeling generally optimistic about their skills and ability to make a good impression, students were less positive about the skills required for them to navigate and succeed in the transition between education levels or into employment. A significant proportion of Year 11 students said they did not feel confident talking about their skills in an interview (41%). This could be related to their understanding of recruitment and selection processes. Almost half (47%) of Year 11 students told us they didn't understand the different types of recruitment processes, such as interviews and assessment centres. Our recent Employer Standards insight briefing points<sup>13</sup> to opportunities for employers to play a helpful role here.



# Technical Note

This analysis is based on 104,505 students from 574 institutions who completed the FSQ between September 2022 and July 2023. Of these 574 institutions, the majority were mainstream secondary schools (517), with growing engagement from SEND institutions (46) and a small number of APs (9).<sup>14</sup> Institutions showed good geographical spread, representing students in every region of the country, 40 Careers Hubs and 125 local authorities.

The sample includes the views of students aged from 11-19. Over ¼ of the responses were from Year 7 students, with students in Key Stage 3 making up the majority (62%) of respondents. Based on the student level characteristics available, the sample was broadly representative of the student population. A slightly higher number of female students completed the FSQ (48% male vs 52% female). The FSM rate of the sample (20%)<sup>15</sup> was slightly lower than the average %FSM of the sample institutions (25%) and the national average FSM rate (24%).<sup>16</sup> 14% of students in the sample<sup>17</sup> were classified as having special educational needs, similar the national average in state-funded secondary schools (12%).<sup>18</sup> 18% of students in the sample have English as an additional language (EAL)<sup>19</sup>, reflecting the national average in state-funded secondary schools (18%).<sup>20</sup>

**Table 1: Number of students completing each questionnaire type by year group.**

	Year Group	Number of responses
<b>Starting Secondary</b>	Year 7	27,875
	Year 8	16,058
<b>Transition from Key Stage 3</b>	Year 9	21,224
	Year 10	17,791
<b>GCSE Years</b>	Year 11	11,238
	Year 12	4,629
<b>Post-16</b>	Year 13	2,667
	Year 14	28
	All year groups	2,995
<b>SEND</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>104,505</b>

Uptake of the FSQ has been quickest with those already engaged in the careers system. A higher proportion of institutions using the FSQ were in a Careers Hub (99%) compared to the general population (90%).<sup>15</sup> Institutions using the FSQ achieved an average of 6.1 Gatsby Benchmarks, significantly higher than the national average (5.5).<sup>20</sup> This higher achievement is driven predominantly by the over-representation of institutions achieving 8 Gatsby Benchmarks (27% of FSQ sample vs 19% of Compass sample) and smaller proportions of the FSQ sample achieving three or below benchmarks (9% of FSQ sample vs 19% of Compass sample). This is context for the results presented in this paper, providing insights into the career readiness of students with above-average experiences of the careers system.

14 1 institution was classified as 'FE', and 1 as 'Other'.

15 Pupil level FSM data is missing for 2,063 students (N=102,442).

16 Department for Education (2023). Schools, pupils and their characteristics (Academic year 2022/23). Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics> (Accessed: 23.10.23).

17 Pupil level SEN data is missing for 2,027 students (N=102,478).

18 Department for Education (2023). Special education needs in England (Academic year 2022/23). Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england> (Accessed: 07.11.23).

19 Pupil level EAL data is missing for 2,027 students (N=102,478).

20 Department for Education (2023). Schools, pupils and their characteristics (Academic year 2022/23). Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics> (Accessed: 23.10.23).

21 The Careers & Enterprise Company (2023). Insight briefing: Gatsby Benchmark results for 2022/23. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

