

Insight briefing: Mid-year update on student career readiness

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Introduction

This insight briefing shares initial results from the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) which was launched as a feature of the [Compass+ career management tool](#) in September 2021. The [FSQ is a student self-completion questionnaire](#) that measures career readiness at points of transition across secondary education. The FSQ enables us to hear directly from students about their perceived knowledge and skills, providing evidence that can be used to link the [quality of careers education provision in schools and colleges](#) with the destinations and pathways that students pursue when they leave.

The primary purpose of the FSQ is to enable Careers Leaders to plan, target and evaluate careers provision with the support of student data. Within Compass+, Careers Leaders can view summary charts and drill down into the data to support their work. During the first half year since the tool was launched to secondary schools, special schools and alternative providers, over 100 schools in England engaged over 15,000 students in completing the questionnaire. Students answered questions about their labour market awareness, seeking information and guidance, planning next steps, transition skills and essential skills (mapped onto the [Skills Builder](#) framework).

The data, aggregated across schools, provides large-scale insight on student perceptions and how they compare according to stage of learning, student background and the characteristics of their school. Although 100 schools is a small proportion of the total number of schools in England, in spanning all regions and 63 local authorities, it is sufficient to point to areas of progress and where more support is needed. Further analysis will be carried out on the full year's data later in the year.

Most young people are positive about their understanding of careers as they start secondary school and this increases markedly with age

58% of young people started secondary saying they had learned about careers other than those of their family and carers. For students at the point of choosing GCSE subjects, 63% had heard different people (other than family) talk about their jobs, which rose to 73% in Key Stage 4 (KS4) and 84% in Key Stage (KS5).

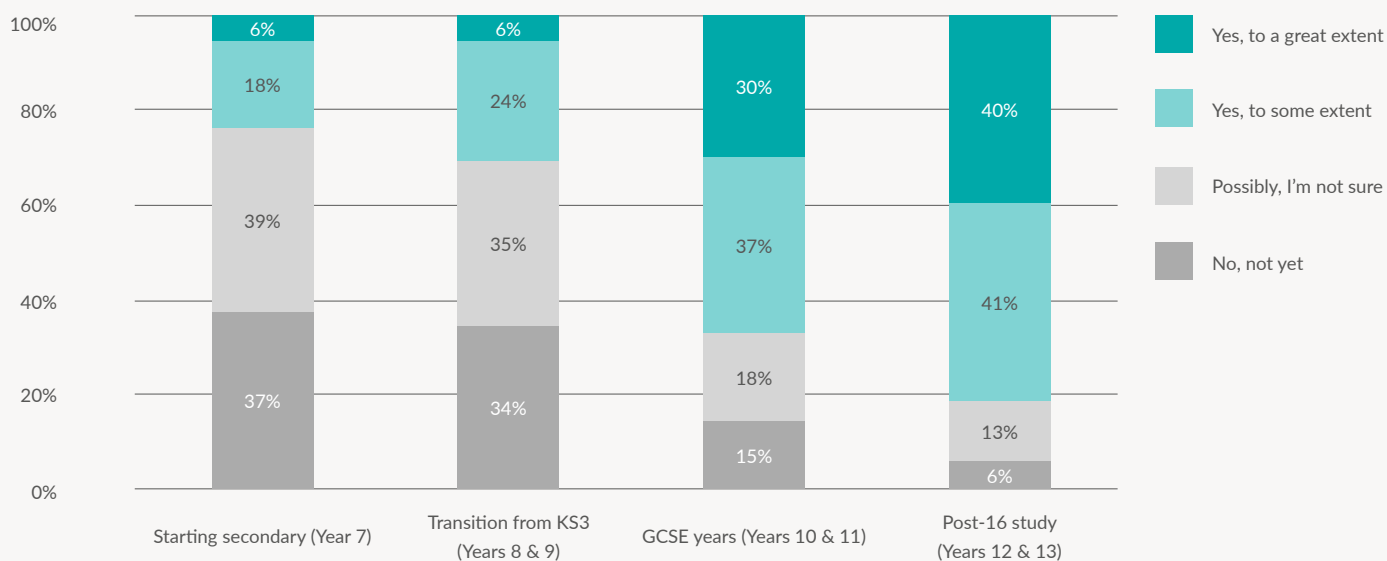
61% of students reported that they knew what skills employers need early on in secondary school, which rose steadily at each transition point to 84% in KS5.

Similarly, knowing about earnings in different types of jobs increased from 48% at the start of secondary to 71% in KS5, and students were more likely to have thought about how jobs and careers may change in the future by KS5 (72%) compared to when they started secondary school (66%).

Young people report a similar level of understanding about apprenticeships by KS4 as they do of A' levels

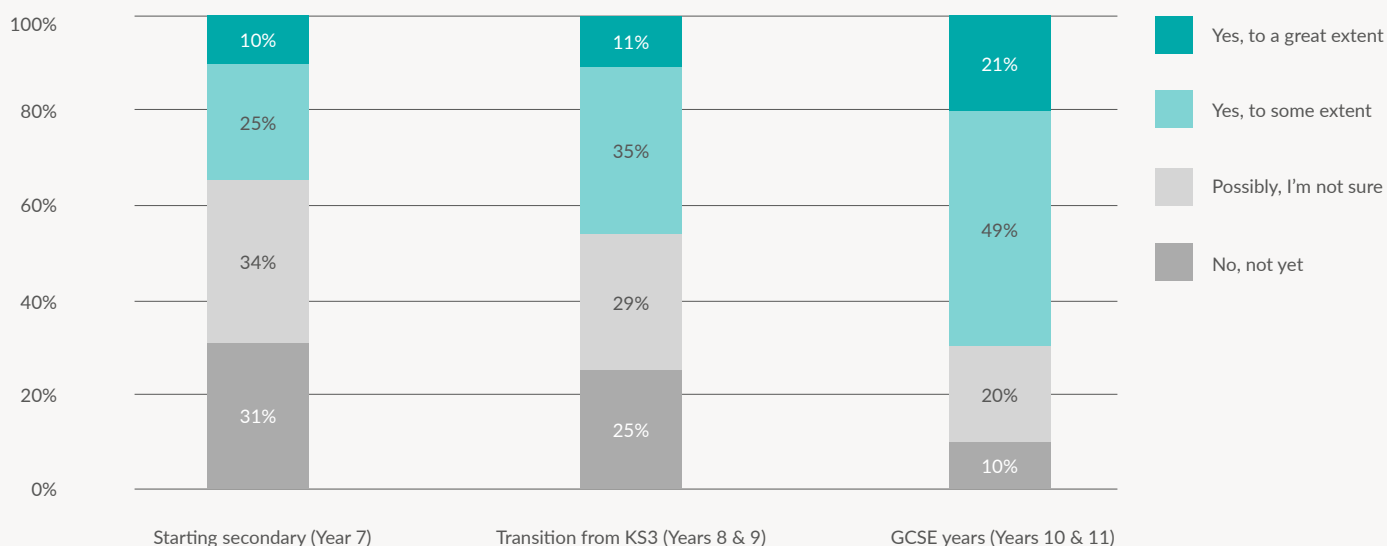
Although the majority of young people said they have ideas about what they might want to do for a job or career from early on (73% in Year 7), a much smaller proportion had thought about their next step after school at this stage (24%). This increases as students progress through school and learn about potential pathways.

Have you thought about which of these (pathway) options might be right for you? (Following questions about each post-16/post-18 option)¹



By KS4, 70% of students reported that they understood apprenticeships with a further 20% saying ‘possibly’. This compares to 35% understanding the pathway as they join secondary school and 46% later in KS3.

Do you understand this option after Year 11 – Apprenticeships?



In line with other [recent research](#), the proportion of students who said they understand apprenticeships (at least to some extent) was only a little lower than the proportion understanding A levels: 70% compared to 77% in KS4 and 46% compared to 53% in KS3.

By KS5, the vast majority of students (93%) understood the range of higher education options, including higher and degree apprenticeships.

¹Students in Key Stages 3 and 4 were asked about their understanding of apprenticeships, A levels, traineeships, T levels, and vocational routes such as BTEC. Students in Key Stage 5 were asked about intermediate apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships, higher education (university, higher and degree apprenticeships), and employment.

There is a need for more signposting to careers support for younger students

By KS4 and KS5, the majority of students said they had support to make education and career choices either to some extent or a great extent. However, the findings showed that there is a need for more signposting to careers support for younger students.

Similarly, students who knew of trustworthy websites that can help them decide what to do in the future were in the minority during KS3. In KS4 and KS5, there was still a sizeable group (30%, 28%) who were uncertain, but by post-16 study over half (55%) were confident that knew where to go online.

Across the 8 essential skills, on average two-thirds of students are confident in their ability

The FSQ also asks questions about essential skills, mapped onto the steps in the [Skills Builder](#) universal framework for essential skills. Across the 8 essential skills, on average two-thirds of students reported confidence in their ability. Scores were higher at the start of secondary (72%), dipped in Key Stage 3 (59%) and rose steadily through KS4 (65%) and KS5 (73%).

Overall, students rated their skills most strongly in the areas of teamwork, staying positive and listening. The areas of lowest confidence were problem solving and leadership.

The mid-year data indicates a link between a school's careers provision and the career knowledge and skills reported by students

Initial analysis indicates that Gatsby Benchmark scores (based on Compass data from the end of the previous academic year) have a link with self-reported career readiness across a range of areas including access to information and guidance on careers, awareness of local businesses and employers, and understanding of pathways. The total score across the career readiness domains was associated with the number of Gatsby Benchmarks achieved by the school at the start of the academic year.

The end of year FSQ data will be analysed more deeply with further consideration of scoring, student and school context and the timing of completion within the academic year.

As data on student career activity participation amasses, there will be potential to track impact on career readiness in more detail

Many Careers Leaders are now making extensive use of the [Compass+](#) career management tool for tracking, reporting and benchmarking careers provision in schools. Midway through the 2021/22 academic year, 1,150 schools had recorded a total of 30,000 activities, participated in by close

to 700,000 students, with an average of 5 activities per student. Careers Leaders are using this data to identify gaps in provision and for groups of students, enabled by the link to management information systems (MIS).

The mid-year show that within the 1,150 schools, careers activities are recorded for the majority of students (an average of approximately 70%). Students on FSM are accessing activities at a slightly higher rate (constituting 21.6% of the students with recorded activities compared to 20.3% of all students in the schools using Compass+).

As more schools record the careers activities that individual students participate in, it will become possible to explore the link between self-reported career readiness and careers provision at an individual and cohort as well as school level, and to understand better the activity that is associated with progress.

Technical note

The analysis is based on 15,385 students who completed the FSQ between September 2021 and 18th February 2022. The students were 55% female, 45% male. 20% were eligible for Free School Meals.

The FSQ is tailored to points of transition with an accessible version for students with SEND. The numbers completing each version were:

- Starting secondary (Year 7) – 3,358
- Transition from Key Stage 3 (Years 8/9) - 6,068
- GCSE years (Years 10/11) - 3,925
- Post-16 study (Years 12/13) - 1,513
- SEND (all ages) - 521

The students covered 100 schools: 91 mainstream secondary, 7 special schools and 2 Alternative Provision.

The school sample is fairly representative of schools nationally in terms of percentage of students on FSM (22% compared to 20% for mainstream secondary), proportion of mainstream schools with a sixth form (50% compared to 60%) and region.

The number of responses per school ranged from 10 to 880 with a mean average of 154.

Bivariate associations between FSQ and Compass data were tested using chi-square for categorical variables and Pearson correlation for the total scores, at the 95% confidence level. Multivariate models will be developed for the full end-of-year data.