

Insight briefing: Update on student career readiness in 2021/22

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Introduction

This insight briefing shares headlines from national data on student career readiness from the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ). The FSQ was launched by The Careers & Enterprise Company as a feature of the Compass+ career management tool in September 2021. It 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 insight. Within Compass+, Careers Leaders can view summary charts and drill down into the data to support their work. During the first year of the FSQ tool, 194 schools in England engaged 34,986 students in completing the questionnaire. Students answered questions about their labour market awareness, ability to seek information and guidance and plan their 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 194 schools is a small proportion of the total number of schools in England, in spanning all regions and 85 local authorities, it is sufficient to point to areas of progress and where more support is needed.

The [first results](#) from mid-way through the academic year were shared in March 2022. The headlines are consistent with the full academic year data. The current briefing updates the figures and adds further detail including insight from Careers Leaders on how they are using the FSQ to improve careers education and reflections from focus groups with students about how they have developed career readiness skills. The full analysis will be available later this academic year.



Young people are positive about their understanding of careers as they start secondary school but this increases markedly with age

45% of Year 7 students answered positively across all career knowledge and skills questions, rising to 67% in Year 11. 63% of young people started secondary saying they had learned about careers other than those of their family and carers. This rose to 77% in Year 11 and 87% in Year 13. 63% of students reported that they knew what skills employers need early on in secondary school, rising to 79% in Year 11 and 87% in Year 13.

Similarly, knowing about earnings in different types of jobs increased from 50% at the start of secondary to 70% in Year 13, and students were more likely to have thought about how jobs and careers may change in the future by Year 13 (74%) compared to when they started secondary school (66%).

Students understood the value of labour market knowledge as reflected in this quote from one of the focus groups.

Awareness of the range of learning pathways, including apprenticeships, develops across secondary education

A-levels are the route understood by the highest proportion of students. 46% of young people understood A-levels at least to some extent by the start of secondary, rising to 88% in Year 11. Awareness of apprenticeships was also strong. This route was understood by 39% of students starting secondary, rising to 81% of those in Year 11. Understanding of traineeships and T levels was considerably lower.

Over 80% of students in Years 11 and 13 have a plan for their next step after school or college

By Year 11, most young people (85%) had thought about which learning pathway might be right for them (compared to 24% at the start of secondary), demonstrating the way in which they are connecting knowledge and awareness with their own skills and preferences. The process of distilling these thoughts into making choices during KS4 was evident in the data. During Year 10, 58% reported having a plan for after they leave school which rose markedly to 86% in Year 11. This proportion dipped in Year 12 (73%) as students considered their options for after they finish sixth form, and rose again in Year 13 (83%) when they were closer to transition. In Compass+, as this quote shows, Careers Leaders are able to quickly identify the individual students who don't yet have a plan from this data.

"[It's important to know about the labour market] so you know a range of different options, and then if things don't work out you can always try something else."

Year 10 student

"If they're quite low in their percentage [on FSQ score], I will then refer them back for a careers interview... I use it as a measure of prioritising my students."

Careers Leader

As students prepare to leave school, the majority have support to take their next steps, but more could be done to signpost younger students to online information

80% of students in Year 11 and 81% of those in Year 13 said they have support to help them make education and career choices, which may be from careers advisers, teachers or friends and family. However, with clearer signposting, students could make better use of online information. Across KS3 and KS4, over half of students either didn't know of trustworthy websites to support career choices, or were uncertain. By Year 11, this had fallen to 22% of young people saying they didn't know trustworthy websites and a further 20% saying they were unsure.

Most students rate their skills positively but nearly half are not yet confident talking about their skills in an interview

As was the case halfway through the year, on average, two-thirds of students (65%) reported confidence in their ability across the eight essential skills (as mapped onto the steps of the [Skills Builder](#) universal framework). Scores were higher at the start of secondary (71%), dipped in Year 8 (58%) and rose steadily to 70% in Year 11 and 74% in Year 13. 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.

In KS4 and KS5, young people were less confident in their ability to talk about their skills in an interview than they were about the skills themselves. However, this improves with age: by Year 11 58% of students feel confident to some extent, as do 62% of Year 13 students. Similarly 54% of Year 11 and 64% of Year 13 students say they are familiar with recruitment and selection processes.

Some students are aware of the value of these skills from early in secondary school as reflected in this quote.

"If you know you've got the requirements for the job, but you don't know how to convey that, it doesn't support your argument as much."

Year 8 student

Careers Leaders are using FSQ data to improve careers support

From qualitative interviews, three key uses of the FSQ by Careers Leaders emerged.

1. **Evaluating the impact of their careers programme.** This included sharing the results with teachers, securing support from senior leaders for investment in resources and evidencing impact to governors or Ofsted.
2. **Improving the careers programme in response to the FSQ data.** E.g., organising events to address low awareness of pathways, employer talks about interview processes and providing additional signposting to careers support for younger students.
3. **Targeting support at individual students to address gaps.** E.g., implementing interventions based on individual needs or providing one-to-one guidance for students without a plan.

"The FSQ has been really useful to help me make changes to fill the gaps in students' knowledge."

Careers Leader

Technical note

The analysis is based on 34,986¹ students who completed the FSQ between September 2021 and July 2022. The students were 52% female, 48% male. 19% were eligible for Free School Meals.

The FSQ is tailored to points of transition with an accessible version for students with SEND. The analysis in this report covers version analysis and year group analysis for more detail. The positive score is reported, which is the average number of students answering positively to a question.

The numbers completing each version² were:

Version of questionnaire	Year group	Completions
Starting secondary	7	8416
Transition from Key Stage 3	8	5895
	9	8128
GCSE years	10	5280
	11	3534
Post-16 study	12	1587
	13	1028
SEND	All year groups	973

The students covered 194 schools: 175 mainstream secondary, 14 special schools and 4 Alternative Provision (one school reported as 'other').

The school sample is fairly representative of schools nationally in terms of percentage of students on FSM (26% compared to 29% in mainstream, alternative provision and SEND schools combined nationally and 23% in mainstream secondary), proportion of mainstream schools with a sixth form (53% compared to 60%) and region. The number of responses per school ranged from 10 to 881. The average number of responses per school was 182.

¹ 144 responses with a miscoded year group and 1 Year 14 response were excluded from this analysis

² See footnote 1 above for differences between table total and overall total respondents

