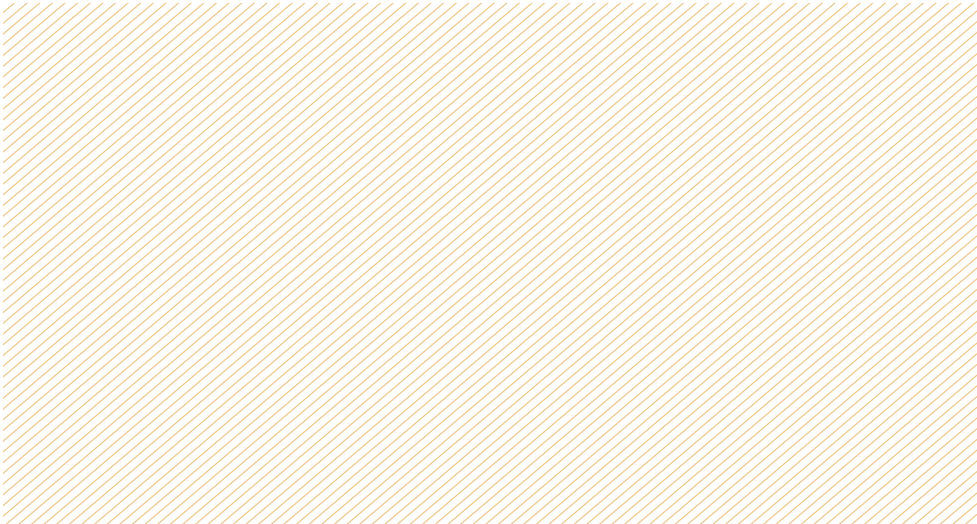
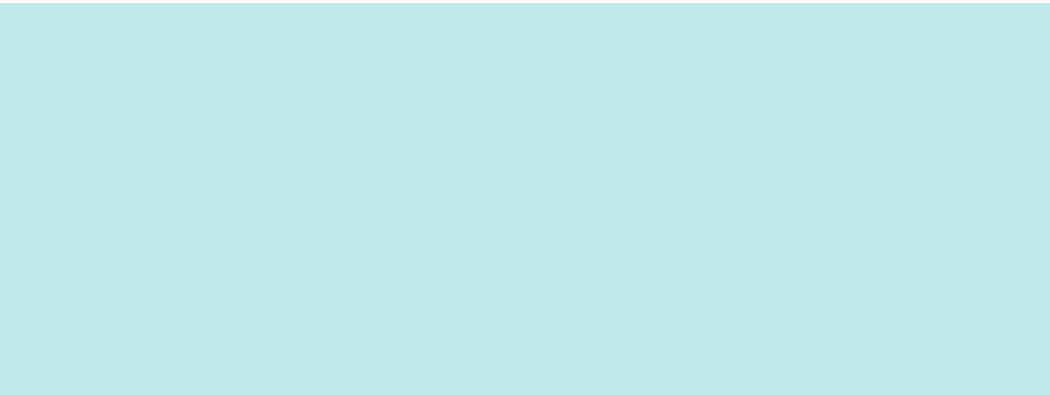


Supporting young people to understand and take up apprenticeships and technical pathways

The Careers & Enterprise Company



Introduction

The [Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper](#) states that “Skills are at the heart of our plan to deliver the defining mission of this government – growth.” It goes on to set out the government’s “plan to educate and train the workforce of the future and give people the skills and knowledge they need to succeed”.

Inspiring and supporting young people to explore a wide range of options, including technical pathways, is key to achieving these aims. This is underpinned by the [Schools White Paper](#): “The transition into post-16 education is crucial to support children as they become young adults, broadening their horizons with clear pathways into good jobs and the essential skills to thrive throughout life”. Boosting Apprenticeships and Technical Education (ATE) pathways is a strategic priority for The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC).

One aspect of this strategic prioritisation of boosting ATE pathways, is through transparent publishing of the state of ATE awareness amongst young people. This commitment has been agreed with the DfE as part of our Grant Funding Agreement with them.

This short briefing summarises progress and identifies where more needs to be done to ensure young people do not face preventable barriers to taking up apprenticeships and technical pathways. This is especially relevant at a time of qualification reform, with the introduction of V Levels from 2027 – a new qualification pathway for young people who want to combine academic and vocational learning – and the increasing prioritisation of young people within the Apprenticeship system.

The briefing covers:

- Young people’s awareness and understanding of ATE pathways
- The support schools are providing to help young people understand and progress onto technical pathways, including how they are responding to the enhanced Provider Access Legislation, and
- The wider factors impacting young people’s transitions into ATE pathways, including beyond the education system.

1. Young people's awareness and understanding of apprenticeships and technical pathways

Research commissioned by the Department for Education shows that awareness of technical pathways is high. The [October 2025 Parent, Pupil and Learner Voice \(PPLV\) survey](#) showed that 100% of surveyed Year 11 students had heard of apprenticeships and 81% had heard of T Levels (+14%pts since 2023).

This aligns with the data the CEC collects through the [Future Skills Questionnaire](#), completed by over 330,000 students from 1,425 secondary schools in 2024/25. This [data shows that](#), as they progress through school, learners become more career ready, their understanding of all pathways - including vocational ones - improves and their interests become more aligned with the labour market. The [stronger the careers provision, the higher students' career readiness](#) and the [less likely they are to be influenced by gender stereotypes](#) for jobs. In 2024/25:

- Understanding of apprenticeships more than doubled (from 38% in Year 7 to 79% in Year 11) and awareness of T levels increased (11% to 46%).
- Understanding of apprenticeships in Year 11 (79%) was almost on par with A Levels (83%).
- 90% of Year 13 learners understood apprenticeships and over two thirds understood higher technical education, including Higher Technical Qualifications.

Testimony from a young person who is at school and interested in an apprenticeship

At my school I learn a lot regarding technical pathways and apprenticeships. This is largely thanks to the careers team arranging talks with apprenticeship providers, employer project days, work placements, careers fairs and giving us access to a careers platform called Unifrog.

Work experience with employers has been extremely important in my journey as I have been able to network with employers/apprentices, gain valuable skills, develop real world experience in the workplace, gain industry insight and build my career confidence.

Engagement with employers has also played a key role in my development. Each interaction has helped me learn more about different industries and companies, gain deeper insights, build long lasting connections, understand the recruitment processes and access new opportunities.

When I finish sixth form, I would like to do an apprenticeship in either engineering, business, media or technology. I am lucky that I live somewhere with opportunities, which is not the case for everyone, but even so I know it will be really competitive to secure an apprenticeship. The support that my school provides includes careers advisor appointments, work placements, skills-building workshops, professional qualifications, apprentice talks, and much more so I am confident and hopeful I'll be able to progress into my dream apprenticeship with their support.

Z, 16

2. The support schools are providing to help young people understand and progress onto apprenticeships and technical pathways

The [Gatsby Benchmarks](#) offer a framework for schools to support all learners to understand and progress onto ATE pathways. The CEC's national support and infrastructure for schools and colleges comprises:

- Accredited professional training for school and college-based [Careers Leaders](#) (over 4,280 trained since 2019), with guidance on promoting ATE.
- Practical digital tools and resources including [a universal digital offer](#) supporting schools to increase learner understanding of technical pathways.
- Connecting training providers and employers to schools and colleges via 44 [Careers Hubs](#), covering 96% of educational institutions.
- Collecting and sharing large national data sets to drive continuous improvement ([94% returns from schools and colleges](#), [1300+ businesses](#), approx. [330,000 young people](#)).

Schools are [increasingly meeting the sub-benchmarks of Gatsby Benchmark 7](#) which reference encounters with further education colleges and independent training providers (ITPs). In 2024/25, 91% of schools reported the overwhelming majority of learners had meaningful encounters with FE Colleges (+12%pts since 2021/22). For encounters with ITPs this was 77% (+17%pts since 2021/22). Schools in a Careers Hub are more likely to achieve Benchmark 7 overall than those not engaged.

Since January 2023, schools have been required to comply with the enhanced Provider Access Legislation, ensuring that students have encounters with technical education and training providers in each Key Stage of their secondary education (see Box).

About the Provider Access Legislation and the role of the CEC

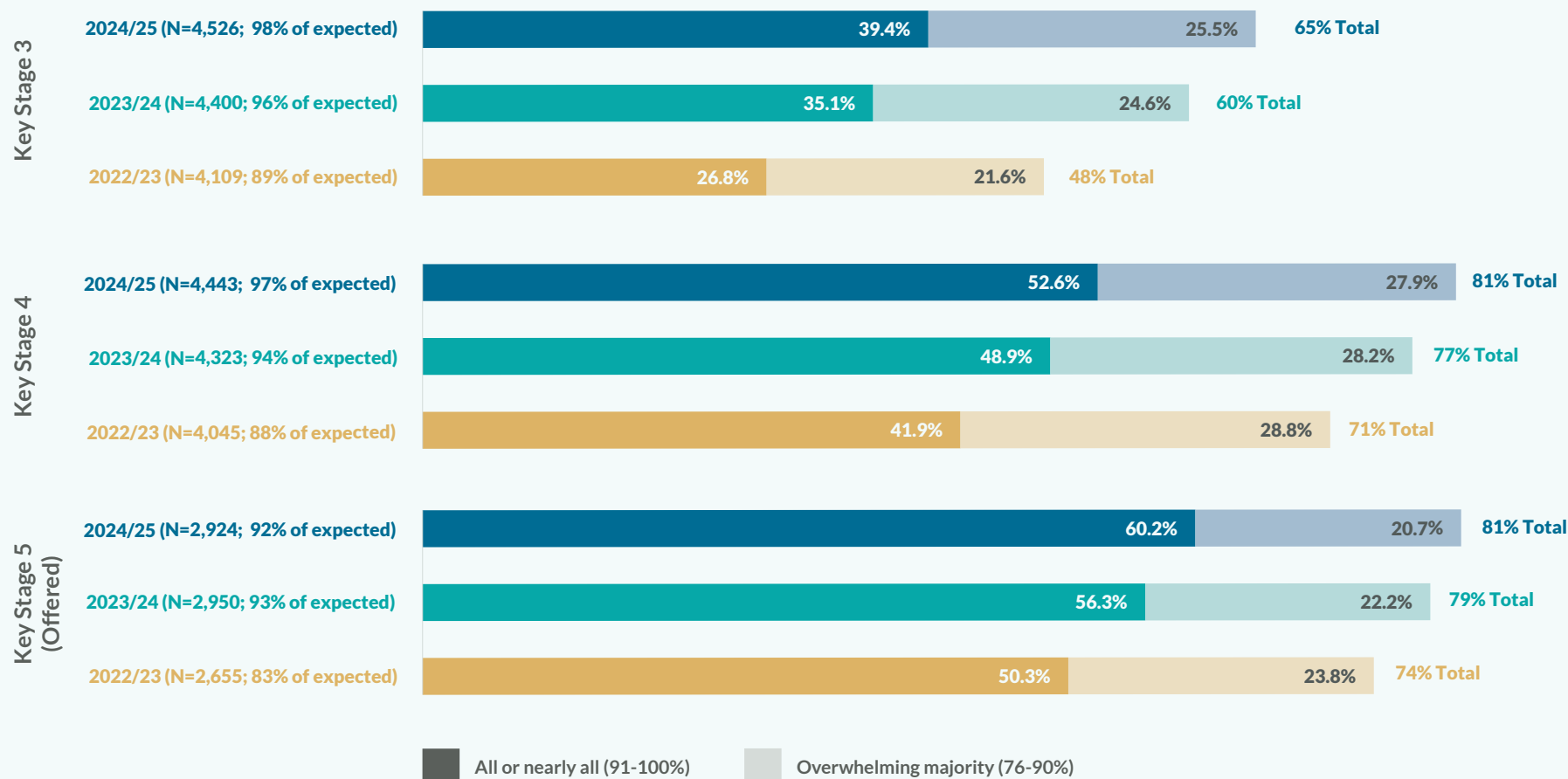
The [updated provider access legislation \(PAL\)](#), enacted in January 2023, specifies schools must provide at least six encounters with providers of approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships for all their students. These schools are required to meet the legal duty: academies, alternative provision academies, community, foundation or voluntary schools, community, foundation special schools (other than those established in hospitals) that provide secondary education, pupil referral units.

The CEC provides support to schools to meet the provider access requirements. National support includes a [dedicated webpage](#), dedicated tools and advice (for example on [how to meet PAL in SEND settings](#)), and a [single point of contact](#) for providers to raise concerns where they think schools are not meeting the requirements of the enhanced legislation.

2. The support schools are providing to help young people understand and progress onto apprenticeships and technical pathways

The proportion of schools where most students received (in both Key Stages 3 and 4) or were offered (in Key Stage 5) 2+ PAL encounters in each is increasing (see Fig.1).

Fig. 1: Proportion of schools where 76%+ students received or were offered 2+ PAL encounters in each Key Stage is increasing*



Source: CEC Compass returns, 2022/23-2024/25 (Annex A gives more information on reporting levels, sample sizes and question breakdown)

While there has been improvement, more needs to be done to achieve full compliance, especially in Key Stage 3. School reporting levels (based on those using the Compass tool, used by 94% of schools and colleges) have increased steadily. 98% of eligible schools that report using Compass now report PAL compliance data for Key Stage 3, 97% for Key Stage 4 and 92% for Key Stage 5.

Careers Hub support, encouraging progress and facilitating provider access, makes a difference. Schools that have been working with a Hub for more than a year demonstrate higher levels of compliance than those just joined (31%pts more likely to say 76%+ students receive 2+ encounters in Key Stage 3, +29%pts in Key Stage 4 and +28%pts in Key Stage 5).

Case Study: Strengthening Provider Access across Cheshire and Warrington

Cheshire and Warrington Careers Hub has worked collaboratively with schools (including those with sixth forms, and post-16 providers including further education colleges, sixth forms, Independent Training Providers and employers to significantly increase the number of learners benefiting from meaningful Provider Access opportunities.

The Careers Hub delivered a coordinated programme of partnership meetings, speed networking events and online engagement sessions. These events were designed to:

- Enhance schools' understanding of the breadth and variation within post-16 pathways
- Support providers to build and strengthen relationships with schools
- Ensure that Provider Access activities are purposeful, high quality and aligned to learner need

The series of events has also provided a valuable platform to challenge common misconceptions around different post-16 routes, including apprenticeships, technical education and vocational pathways. As a result, new collaborative relationships have emerged, helping to ensure Provider Access requirements are met in a meaningful and impactful way.

To further support schools, the Hub developed an Independent Training Provider Directory, organised by industry specialism. This practical resource helps schools easily identify relevant providers and broaden the range of technical and apprenticeship opportunities presented to learners.

This targeted and strategic support has led to measurable improvements in young people's understanding of technical pathways. In the region, clear targets are set to drive improvement, for example the ambition that for Key Stage 4 learners understanding of apprenticeships reaches 95% by the end of the academic year.

3. The wider factors impacting transitions into apprenticeships and technical education

Many factors influence a young person's successful transition into ATE pathways. These include not just the learner and school, but also the labour and training provision market and other conditions, like access to transport and impact on benefits entitlements. While [apprenticeship starts increased overall by 4.1% from 2023/24 to 2024/25](#), the increase was just 1.2% for 19-24 year olds and starts for under 19 year olds fell by 5%. This aligns with UCAS and Sutton Trust research which finds nationally [three in five learners do not pursue apprenticeships due to lack of availability](#).

To understand the complex set of national and local factors, in 2022/23 the [CEC developed the ATE transitions framework](#). This supports every Careers Hub area in England to examine the relative impact of factors influencing young people's successful transitions in their area and direct local action (Annex B lists the eight factors).

The framework was used to run a full review process across all Careers Hubs in 2022/23 and 2023/24, with a targeted review of employer opportunities in growth sectors in 2024/25, informed by publicly available and CEC data on the identified factors. Local expert groups - including employers, educators, local government and young people - agreed the relative impact of each factor on young people's transitions onto technical pathways in their region.

Analysis offers sharp insight into the priorities in each local area and their relative importance to each other, stimulating collective action. The [most recent national analysis](#) shows:

- Nationally the average score for seven of the eight factors has improved, indicating some positive change at system level, although this picture varies by area and more needs to be done.
- Since the enhanced provider access legislation, "Promotion of ATE options" (PAL compliance data informs this judgement) has improved nationally.
- Progress has been made on "Employer willingness to offer opportunity" and "Enthusiasm for occupations with opportunities".
- Careers Hubs have used the framework and its tailored five point Likert scale across the eight factors to prioritise action, with a range of interventions that have led to improvements including:
 - › In Dorset promotion of ATE options (+2.2 points out of 5)
 - › In Solent conversion rate of interest to take up (+1 point)
 - › In West Sussex enthusiasm for occupations with opportunities (+1 point).

The framework is now being used to target and address local barriers (see case study).

Case Study: Taking a system-wide look at young people's transitions in Lancashire

The ATE Transitions Framework analysis in Lancashire identified the most significant barrier to transitions was that the number of employers currently offering ATE opportunities did not fulfil the level of interest from young people. In parallel, the Digital Sector is rapidly growing and T Levels in Digital are being rolled out across the region.

Supported by investment from Salesforce through the Digital Futures Accelerator Fund, a T Level agency has been set up to provide year-round support to 60 learners and 49 local businesses, involving mentoring and digital project work to connect employers to their future workforce pipeline and increase the number of employers supporting digital T Level placement opportunities.

Through placements hosted at the coworking space more employers, especially SMEs, are now actively engaging with T Level learners, including from harder-to-reach backgrounds. They are now being supported to progress into digital pathways and careers that are vital to growth in this region.

Annex A – Provider Access Legislation national data

The [enhanced provider access legislation](#) is described as follows in DfE Statutory Guidance:

“In schools, the governing body must make sure that learners in years 8 to 13 receive at least 6 encounters with a provider of technical education or apprenticeships.

As a minimum, schools must offer:

- 2 encounters that are mandatory for all pupils to attend that take place any time during year 8 or between 1 September and 28 February during year 9
- 2 encounters that are mandatory for all pupils to attend that take place any time during year 10 or between 1 September and 28 February during year 11
- 2 encounters that are mandatory for the school to put on, but optional for pupils to attend, to take place any time during year 12 or between 1 September and 28 February during year 13

These 6 meetings are timed to inform consideration of post-14, post-16 and post-18 options and progression to the next stage of education or training.”

*Data from end August each year. Expected reporting levels based on those using Compass tool.

National data on proportion of schools achieving requirement

	Proportion of schools achieving		
Key Stage 3	AY 24/25*	AY 23/24*	AY 22/23*
What proportion of students in Year 8/9 have had at least two meaningful encounters with providers of apprenticeships and technical education during KS3 phase that meet the requirements of PAL?	N=4,526 schools (98% of expected*)	N=4,400 schools (96% of expected*)	N=4,109 schools (89% of expected*)
Overwhelming majority (76-90%)	25.5%	24.6%	21.6%
All or nearly all (91-100%)	39.4%	35.1%	26.8%
76%+	64.9%	59.7%	48.4%
Key Stage 4	AY 24/25*	AY 23/24*	AY 22/23*
What proportion of students in Year 10/11 have had at least two meaningful encounters with providers of apprenticeships and technical education during KS4 phase that meet the requirements of PAL?	N=4,443 schools (97% of expected)	N=4,323 schools (94% of expected)	N=4,045 schools (88% of expected)
Overwhelming majority (76-90%)	27.9%	28.2%	28.8%
All or nearly all (91-100%)	52.6%	48.9%	41.9%
76%+	80.5%	77.1%	70.7%
Key Stage 5 (offered)	AY 24/25*	AY 23/24*	AY 22/23*
What proportion of students in Year 12/13 have been offered at least two meaningful encounters with providers of apprenticeships and technical education during KS5 that meet the requirements of PAL?	N=2,924 schools (92% of expected)	N=2,950 schools (93% of expected)	N=2,655 schools (83% of expected)
Overwhelming majority (76-90%)	20.7%	22.2%	23.8%
All or nearly all (91-100%)	60.2%	56.3%	50.3%
76%+	80.9%	78.5%	74.1%

Annex B – ATE Transitions Framework eight factors

Category	Factor	Description
Labour Market	Employer need	The need of employers for skilled workers
	Employer willingness to offer opportunity	The degree to which employers are offering tangible opportunity for learners through, for example, placements or apprenticeships
Transition	Access to relevant training options	The extent to which relevant training options are accessible in a specific place
	Conversion rate of interest to take up	The extent to which interest in ATE pathways is actualised
	Promotion of ATE options	The degree to which ATE options are promoted
Learner	Enthusiasm for occupations with opportunities	Young people's relative enthusiasm for occupations and industries which have a sufficient supply of opportunities
	Understanding of ATE routes	The extent to which young people identify they understand ATE routes
	Existing skill levels match requirements for next step	The extent to which young people are able to access ATE pathways with their existing level of skill

Source: Conditions for Transition: Apprenticeships and Technical Education Transitions Framework, CEC, 2023



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[Our Impact](#)

[Our evidence](#)