What young people tell us about their work readiness

THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

The Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) is the largest source of information on young people's readiness for the world of work. In its fifth year (2025/26), **over 500,000 learners from nearly 2,000 secondary education settings across England** completed the survey, telling us what they know about the world of work, their aspirations and confidence.

This is a summary of what they told us in relation to 3 key questions:

- **How ready do young people feel for the world of work by year 11?**
- **What jobs and careers are they interested in?**
- **How confident are they in their skillsets?**

See here for more information about the Future Skills Questionnaire.

1. How ready do young people feel for the world of work by year 11 (age 16)?[1]

Most young people are exploring jobs and possible careers:

- 82% have ideas about their future career (vs 81% in Year 7, age 11, reaching 87% by Year 13).
- 78% have considered how jobs and careers may change in future (vs 73% in Year 7).
- 70% feel optimistic about their future career prospects, vs 66% in Year 7, reaching 76% by Year 13.
- 69% know how to find out how much they could earn in different jobs.

They understand pathways and are planning for what comes next:

- More than twice as likely as Year 7 learners to understand apprenticeships (82% vs 39%).
- 84% understand A levels, 49% T Levels and 56% other vocational routes such as BTEC.
- 84% have a clear plan for their next step, while 69% feel confident about taking it.

But are less likely to have made direct connections with people in the world of work:

- 44% have contacted someone working in a job that interests them (vs 57% by Year 13).

Responses also vary between learners from different backgrounds and by where they live:

17%pts difference

between White British learners eligible for Free School Meals' (FSM) understanding of A Levels (70%), compared with non-White British learners not eligible for FSM (87%).

15%pts difference

between proportion of learners in London reporting understanding T Levels (42%), compared with those in the North West (57%).

6%pts difference

between proportion of FSM girls reporting understanding vocational routes (55%), compared with FSM boys (49%).

1 Year 7 (N=136,070), Year 11 (N=62,383), total sample , all age (N=527,700)

What young people tell us about their work readiness

THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

2. What jobs and careers are they interested in?

Young people's career interests change over the course of their secondary education:[1]

	Year 7 (% interested)	Year 11 (% interested)
Most commonly selected industries	**29%** Sport **20%** Art, film, music, books **16%** Animal care **16%** Beauty and hair **12%** Health	**16%** Health **14%** Art, film, music, books **12%** Sport **11%** Construction **11%** Finance
Most commonly selected jobs	**27%** Sports player **18%** Creative roles **13%** Engineer **11%** Doctor **11%** Teacher	**16%** Creative roles **15%** Engineer **11%** Builder/electrician/plumber **11%** Lawyer **10%** Doctor

Year 11 Career interests vary by region, gender and SEN (Special Educational Needs) diagnosis:

- 20% of learners in London are interested in finance and banking, compared with 7% in the North East (vs 8% and 14% for builder, electrician or plumber).
- 20% of boys report interest in a career in construction compared with 3% of girls.
- 25% of girls report interest in a career in health, compared with 8% of boys.
- 6%pt difference in aspirations to be a doctor or work in finance between learners in mainstream settings with and without SEN (5% vs 11% for doctor, 6% vs 12% for finance).

3. How confident are they in their skillsets?

Most Year 11 learners believe they understand what employers value:

- 81% of learners know what skills employers need (vs 68% in Year 7).
- 78% know how to make a good impression when applying for a course or job.

However, awareness does not always translate into interview confidence or readiness:

- 66% in Year 11 feel confident talking about their skills in an interview. That compares with 71% for boys (non-FSM) and 58% for girls (FSM).
- 58% understand different recruitment processes, including interviews and assessment centres.
- Confidence in some essential workplace skills declines across year groups (teamwork 12%pts lower in Year 11 than in Year 7).[2]

See full insight briefing and further data tables by year group and region here.

And different groups rate themselves differently across individual essential skills:[2]

9%pts lower

70% of Year 11 White British FSM boys rate their problem solving skills positively compared with 79% of non-FSM White British boys.

11%pts lower

Learners with SEN rate themselves lower on teamwork (63% vs 74%) and speaking skills (65% vs 76%) than those without SEN

2 Based on the 8 skills in the Skills Builder Universal Framework