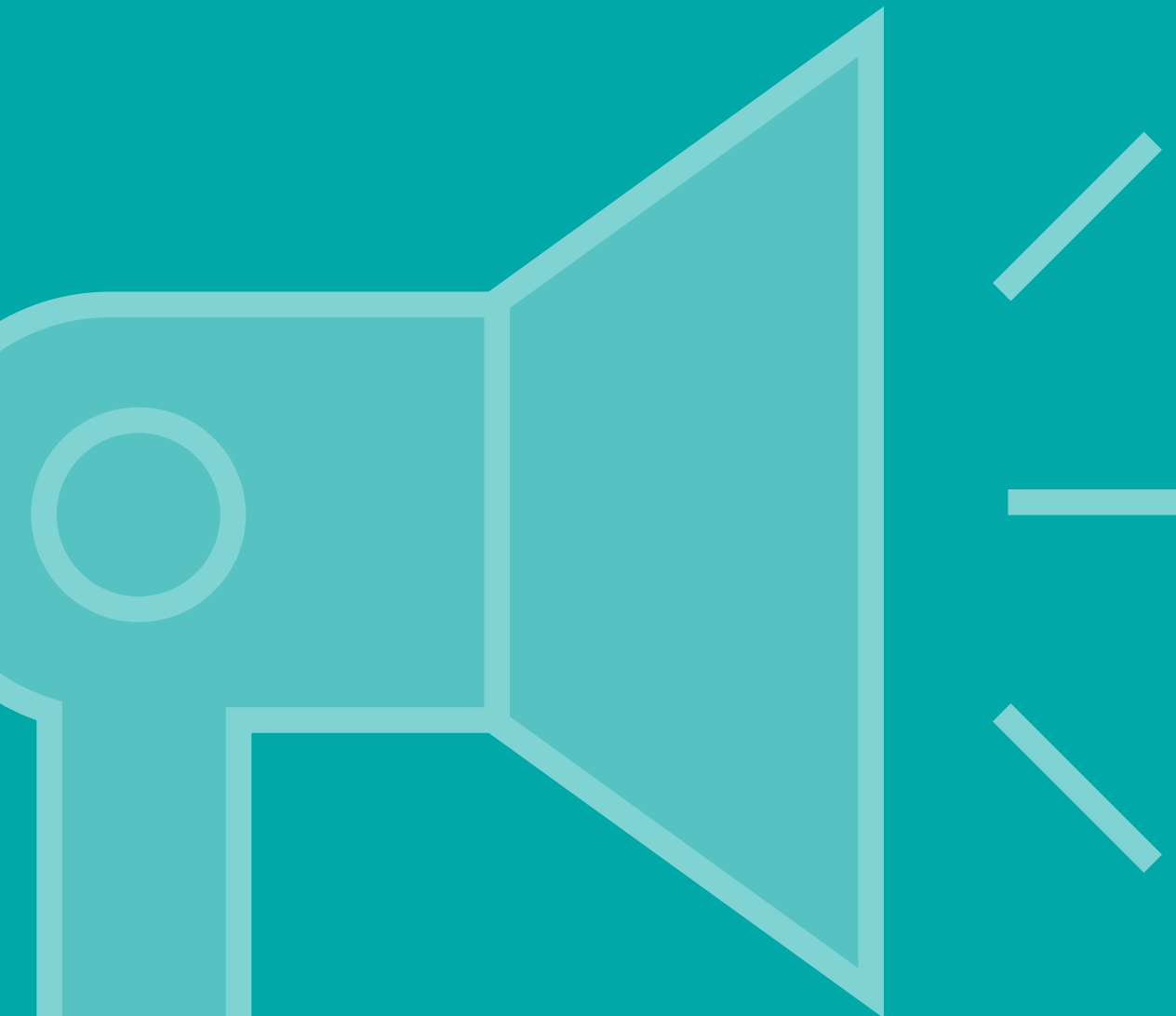


Employer engagement in careers education:

Insights 2020/21



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About this report

This report presents key insights into how and why businesses are supporting the careers education of young people in England. It is based on responses to fifty questions from around ninety highly engaged employers who work with young people via schools, colleges and Careers Hubs across the country. The goal is not to represent what all employers are doing in England, but to look at what best practice and engagement currently looks like across this group.

Survey data was collected in Autumn 2021 and explored what employers did in the 2020/21 academic year, how they adapted to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, and their plans for working with schools, colleges and Careers Hubs in the future.

The primary source for this report is data from ninety employers, which was cross-referenced with [large-scale data](#) from 3,893 secondary schools and colleges to understand how employers are helping to prepare students for the world of work.

The Careers & Enterprise Company, as the national body for careers education, uses this evidence to inform policy and practice.

Find out more about [The Careers & Enterprise Company](#), and contact us for more information about our work with employers: businesspartnerships@careersandenterprise.co.uk



Foreword

Oli de Botton

Chief Executive at The Careers & Enterprise Company

When I recently spoke to a group of business leaders about how we can work together to promote apprenticeships, one thing stood out. Every single one of them was utterly committed to working with schools and colleges to give young people a taste of the world of work. This is worthy of huge recognition (not least given the pandemic context) and, also, a source of great optimism about the future of careers education.

Sometimes the worlds of education and business talk past each other. But when they come together with co-ordination and purpose, young people benefit in extraordinary ways. They gain vital skills and experiences, and deep insights into what comes next. There are wider benefits too. Schools and colleges get access to new thinking and partners for their careers' programmes. Employers get a chance to support their future workforce.

We are privileged to work closely with hundreds of employers across the country and they tell us they work with students for two reasons. Firstly, it's because they are civic minded institutions, passing on knowledge and inspiration to young people who aren't sure what their future holds. But they also prioritise careers education because it makes commercial sense. Employer after employer that we speak to underlines how important working with schools and colleges is for improving their talent pipeline.

If the question is how do we hire the right apprentices, find the best trainees or support the best candidates to join our company, the answer includes getting involved in high quality careers education.

The insights presented in this report are not intended as a run down of what every business in the country is doing. Instead, it is a highly focused set of insights from many of the businesses who work most intensively with England's colleges and schools. It documents what they did during the pandemic, the innovation that took place, the types of programmes others can learn from and builds a picture about why engaging with careers education is good for business.

This report does not stand alone. It builds on the insights we've found from thousands of colleges and schools in our recent report [Trends in Careers Education 2021](#). Taken together these reports showcase the progress being made to help more young people to take their best next step out of the classroom and into the world of work.

In the year ahead we'll be looking at how we increase the number of employers working with the national network of Careers Hubs, as well as how we partner more employees directly with schools and colleges. But on top of this we will also work with businesses to design a set of employer standards to document what excellence in this space looks like.

We have more work to do to make sure world-class careers education is a reality for every student, and the role of businesses of every shape, size and type could not be more important in making this happen.



Foreword

Debbie Joce

Group Head of Early Careers at Babcock International Group

The past two years have been significantly challenging for young people, schools and businesses as we've all had to adapt our 'normal' daily lives to cope and live with the pandemic.

This has particularly disadvantaged young people, many of whom have not been able to access the full curriculum. Schools have worked extremely hard to ensure young people are not overtly disadvantaged and for businesses, it's meant we've had to review our delivery models and introduce virtual and now hybrid-working to make sure young people are not unfairly impacted.

I have no doubt that employers will welcome the Employer Engagement in Careers Education 2020/21 report as these insights provide a useful overview of what highly engaged employers around the country are undertaking to prioritise careers education.

This report also provides a synopsis of current trends. This enables employers to review their own plans and programmes against what other businesses are doing. These insights can also be shared among wider employer networks with the aim of inspiring others to engage more.

This report, combined with The Careers & Enterprise Company's recent [Trends in Careers Education 2021](#) report, provides employers with a clearer picture of national activity to help inform their future actions.

Babcock International Group, along with other businesses, looks forward to supporting further projects focused on articulating best practice for employers and remains committed to working closely with Careers Hubs. This approach provides high quality engagement with young people and supports them with identifying their next opportunity along with helping employees and businesses to grow.



Executive summary

This report draws out key insights from some of the employers most involved in careers education across the country, analysing how practice is evolving and what activity is generating impact. It draws on survey data from ninety businesses of different shapes, types, sectors and in each region of England, and analyses their experiences of preparing students for the world of work.

Insight 1

Employers are strengthening their talent pipeline by working with schools and colleges

Employers increase student and teacher knowledge about different pathways into the workplace. Employers communicate this information through a range of different activities. For employers, these activities are an effective way to strengthen their talent pipeline. This year employers perceived young people to be better prepared for the world of work.

Insight 2

Employers are innovating digitally to provide wide-ranging opportunities for students

Employers adapted their engagement during the pandemic, particularly through online approaches. Blended models of in person and virtual engagement look set to continue in the future

Insight 3

Employers are influencing the careers education system locally as well as nationally

Employers didn't just work directly with students last year. They also worked strategically with schools and colleges to influence how careers education programmes were designed and delivered. In addition to this, employers strengthened the wider careers education system, particularly by working with Careers Hubs, and by influencing the local skills agenda where they work.



About the survey

Employers who work closely with schools and colleges across England, particularly through the network of Career Hubs, were invited to take part in an online survey over six weeks in September to October 2021.

The ninety organisations who responded were of various sizes, sectors and operated in every region of England. Over six in ten had over 1,000 employees, two in ten between 50 and 999 employees and more than one in ten had fewer than 50 employees. Eight in ten businesses taking part also operated across multiple locations.

Businesses were asked detailed questions about more than fifty different issues. This included ways that employers support young people through schools and colleges, their motivations and the impact they see, and how they work strategically in their local area. Ninety employers took part in the survey but some didn't answer every question. The proportions cited in the report are based on the number who responded to the question.

We would like to thank the employers who gave their time to help design these questions and respond to them.

Insight 1

Employers are strengthening their talent pipeline by working with schools and colleges

The employers who took part in this research reported that by working with schools and colleges they are strengthening their talent pipeline, increasing the diversity of their workforce and addressing skills gaps. By talking directly with students, their teachers and parents about the different routes into their businesses and sectors, they increased awareness, work readiness and the number of applicants, particularly from under-represented groups. However, skill gaps remain, highlighting that more needs to be done.

Employers increase student and teacher knowledge about different pathways into the workplace

Eight in ten employers shared information about career opportunities with schools and colleges and three-quarters provided information about entry requirements into their type of business.

For six in ten employers, this included talking to students about the significance of advanced and further and higher education qualifications and over a third reported increasing teacher knowledge of vocational routes including higher and degree level apprenticeships.

Employers communicated this information through a range of activities

Participation in careers fairs was a common approach taken by employers for engaging directly with students, with nearly six in ten taking part. Careers fairs often enable employers to engage with parents and carers as well as students; a quarter of employers said they talked to parents to help them understand vocational and technical pathways into their business.



For employers, these activities are an effective way to strengthen their talent pipeline

In this study, over four in five employers said that working directly with schools and colleges on their careers education programmes had helped them to develop their talent and skills pipeline.

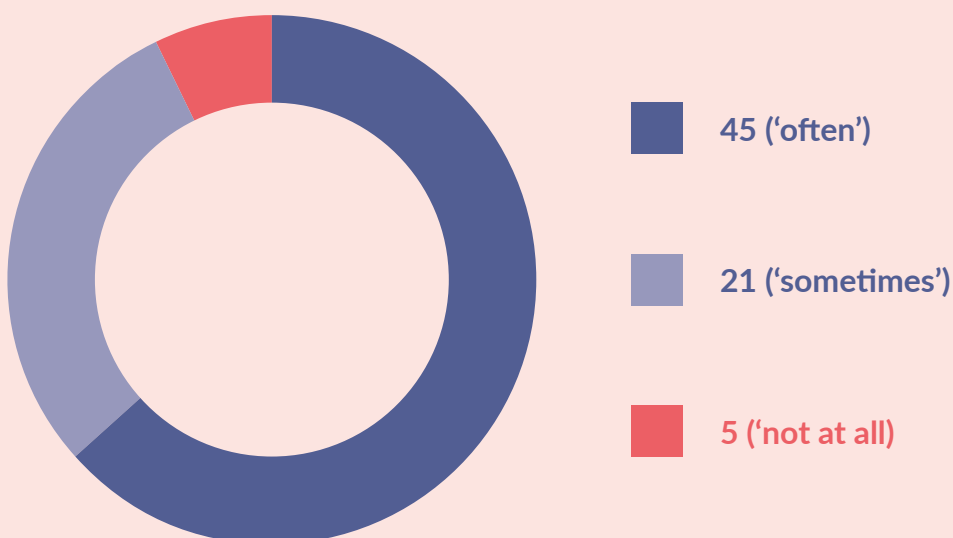
For nine in ten employers, this was attributed to the increased knowledge of students, teachers and parents about their business and wider sector. It was also achieved through workplace experiences; approximately two-thirds of employers reported that they recruited young people who had been on their work experience or placement programme.

The strengthening of talent pipeline also related to diversity. Over two-thirds of the employers said that working with young people in this way helped them to attract a more diverse workforce.

Many businesses taking part in the survey had staff members who partnered with local schools and colleges to act as 'Enterprise Advisers', volunteer consultants on their careers education programme. Seven in ten businesses who took part in this programme reported that this role improved their access to future talent, such as new apprentices for their business.

“We have run educational encounters for SEND groups, understanding the importance of these students having the same opportunities as those in mainstream education but specific to them.”

Number of employers out of 71 recruiting young people who had been on their work experience or placements programme:



“We are better able to understand the needs of young people & their perceptions of working in our sector. We are able to engage meaningfully with schools and colleges as we are guided as to their needs and can target our approach accordingly.”

Employers perceive young people to be better prepared for the world of work

More than nine in ten employers taking part in this research believed that business engagement with schools and colleges is helping young people to be better prepared for the world of work.

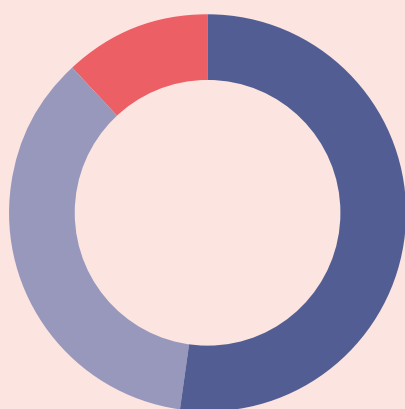
Programmes increased students' knowledge and skills needed for different roles, and also helped to increase their understanding about their specific industry.

Nine in ten employers also stated that improving young people's career knowledge and skills was one of the key motivations for working with schools and colleges on their careers programmes.

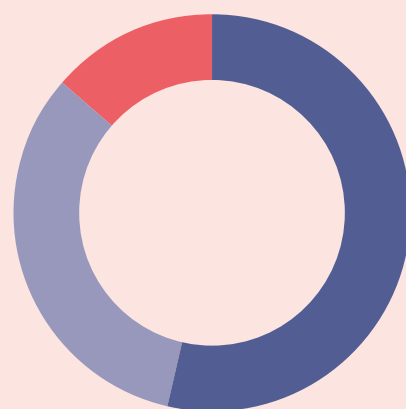
Employers also reported that nearly six in ten of the young adults they recruited in the last two to three years have been well prepared for the workplace, with the right skills to do their job.

However, this research also found that more work needs to be done to provide students with the right skills to apply for jobs, as two thirds of employers (66%) had vacancies that were hard to fill due to a low number of applicants with the required skills.

59 out of 67 employers said their engagement work impacted 'a lot' (35) or 'a little' (24) on young people's understanding of their organisation.



58 out of 68 employers said their engagement work impacted 'a lot' (36) or 'a little' (22) on young people's career knowledge and skills.



Insight 2

Employers are innovating digitally to provide wide-ranging opportunities for students

During the pandemic employers continued to engage with young people in many different ways to support their careers education. The range of different types of business engagement with schools and colleges expanded, with virtual talks, workshops and projects becoming common. The ability of students to experience workplaces (for example through visits or work experience) was harder hit by the pandemic, but in future employers plan to reinstate face-to-face engagement and use it in conjunction with virtual approaches.

Employers engaged with schools and colleges and directly with young people

Employers engaged with schools, colleges and young people in numerous different ways during the last academic year.

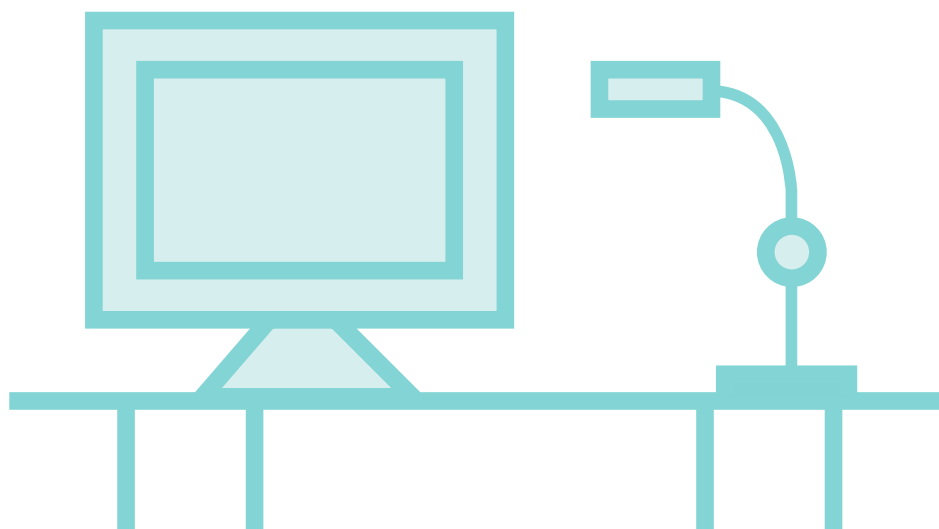
Seven in ten employers talked to students about their industry, bringing them to life with examples of diverse pathways and opportunities.

Over half of employers ran events and created tasks for students to complete, and around a third took part in speed networking or 'career carousel' activities. Supporting students with mock interviews and speaking to them at careers fairs were some of the most common forms of employer engagement, with over half taking part in this.

Work experience opportunities were offered in some form by seven in ten employers, ranging from short placements for less than a week, to regular placements over an extended time period. A fifth of employers also opened up their workplaces for visits and a quarter offered internships and holiday placements.

With schools and colleges, four-fifths of employers shared information about employment opportunities and requirements for entry-level jobs and progression. Over half of the employers had worked with subject leads or teachers to incorporate careers into the curriculum in subjects like maths, English and science.

Over half of the employers taking part in the research delivered three or more activities in 2020/21.



Employers adapted their engagement during the pandemic

With stay-at-home orders, business disruption, school closures and home working, the pandemic meant the ways in which employers could engage with schools, colleges and young people changed considerably.

The majority of employer engagement happened online during the last year, with employers beaming into classrooms, creating online platforms, and engaging with students virtually.

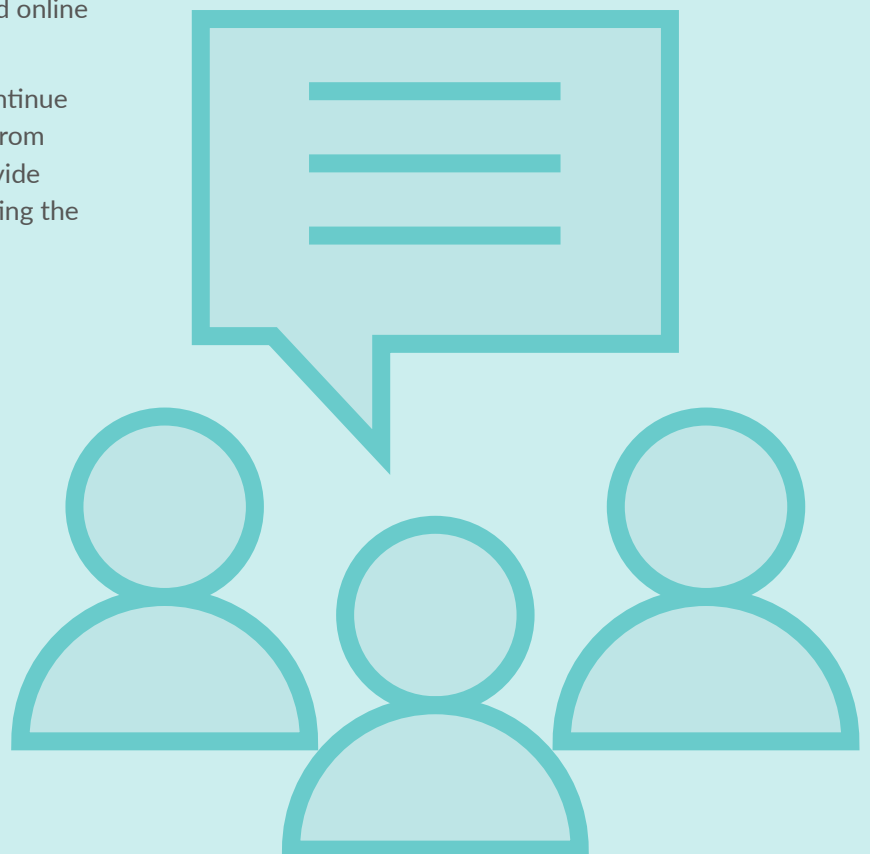
Nearly eight in ten employers taking part in the study carried out live interactions (such as talks, workshops, discussions or lessons) with young people during the last year. Half that number, four in ten employers, were able to do in-person engagement with young people during the last year.

Other forms of online engagement with young people also emerged. A quarter of employers designed online experiences for young people which didn't include live engagement with an employee. For example some employers designed online workplace experience programmes which included tasks to complete, virtual tours to complete and video content to watch.

A third of employers also mixed in-person and online delivery when they were able to.

Workplace experiences were less likely to continue during the pandemic, reflecting the findings from schools and colleges.¹ One-third did not provide workplace experiences over the past year, citing the challenges of the pandemic.

“The COVID response had a significant impact on organisational ability to engage with such activities”.



¹The Careers & Enterprise Company (2021). Trends in Careers Education 2021.

Blended models of in person and virtual engagement look set to continue

Employers taking part in this study believed that a hybrid model of in person and virtual employer engagement would continue in the future.

Eight in ten employers believe they will interact with students virtually, for example with career talks, beaming into assemblies or joining discussions with students.

Just over half believe that some form of virtual delivery will help them to give students experiences of their workplace in the future.

Employers cited many different reasons for why they wanted to continue with a blend of virtual and face to face student engagement.

Nine in ten employers cited convenience, flexibility, time efficiency, as well as the wider geographic reach that a blend of virtual and in person engagement enabled.

“Hopefully, COVID restrictions will cease ... and we can have students back on site for 1-2 weeks instead of a virtual 2 day session.”

Over six in ten employers stated that they were better able to target specific schools or students with online engagement, and just under half cited the reduced costs of virtual delivery as a benefit.

Around a quarter of employers also noted that they experience better engagement from students when working online with them, while just over two in ten employers noted they wanted to capitalise on the investments they made to enable online delivery.

In the year ahead nearly eight in ten employers expected to increase the number of experiences of the workplace they offered to students.

Employers supporting learning about labour market information in various ways (N=79)

Sharing early careers employment opportunities with schools and colleges

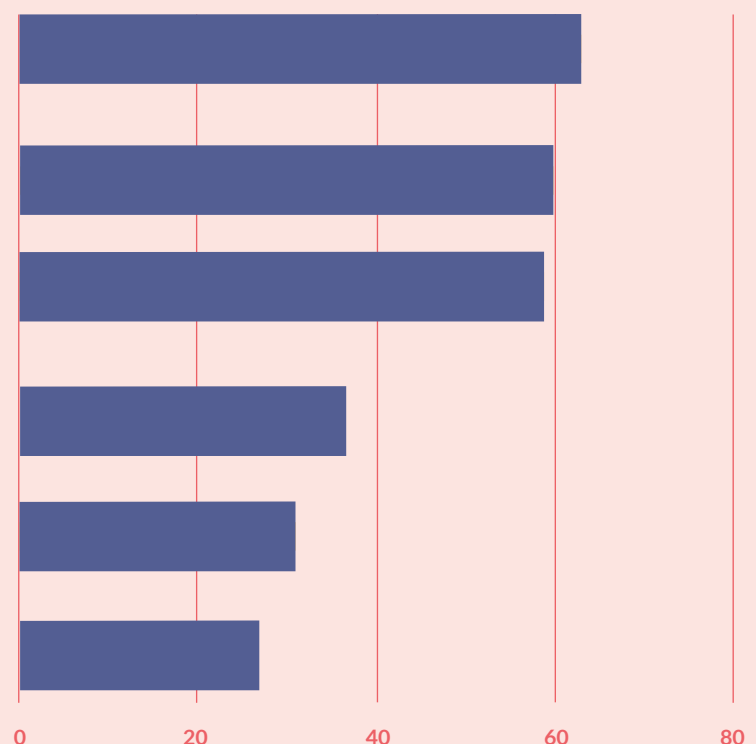
Providing schools and colleges with information about entry requirements or progression

Bringing talks to life with examples of diverse pathways and opportunities

Increasing the understanding of teachers and Careers Leaders about the labour market

Sharing insights into trends in the labour market

Encouraging and supporting young people to do their own research about the labour market



Number of respondents

Insight 3

Employers are influencing the careers education system locally as well as nationally

In addition to working directly with young people, employers across the country also worked together to improve the careers education system nationally and in the communities where they are based. This included working strategically with schools to design their careers programmes, working with Careers Hubs to influence practice regionally, and working on a national basis to influence careers education provision.

Employers are working with schools and colleges strategically to design their careers programmes

In addition to direct to student work, employers taking part in this research were increasingly working with schools and colleges to influence how they designed and delivered careers education programmes.

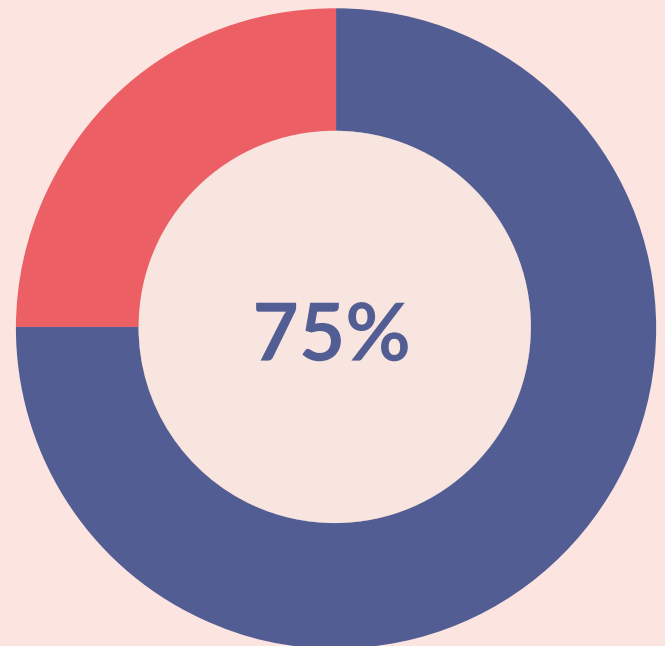
Three quarters of employers had staff who were Enterprise Advisers, volunteers from business who provide pro-bono consultancy to schools and colleges to design their careers education programmes, advising Careers Leaders, headteachers and governors about what a business-focused careers education programme looks like.

Six in ten employers actively encouraged their staff to become Enterprise Advisers last year, and this expects to rise to three quarters of employers promoting this role to their staff in the year ahead.

Two in ten employers encouraged their staff members to join a local school or college as a governor, and a third of employers partnered their staff members with school and college staff to act as mentors.

Training was another way in which employers strategically improved careers education provision. Around half of employers, for example, worked with schools and colleges to increase Careers Leaders understanding of the labour market.

34 out of 45 employers said they work with their Careers Hub or Local Enterprise Partnership to identify local needs to support how they target their work.



Employers help to strengthen the wider careers education system

Six in ten employers believe that careers education has improved in recent years, and the same proportion note that it is easier to work with schools and colleges now compared to a few years ago.

Three quarters of employers were working with Careers Hubs and bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships to identify local needs and target the work they do with schools and colleges.

A third of employers became more involved in the work of their local Careers Hubs in the last year, expanding the work they did across a region to influence change in careers education practice. Over half of employers planned to increase this work in the next academic year.

Nearly eight in ten employers worked with other organisations and encouraged them to provide careers activities. Two in ten did this by encouraging their clients and customers, a third did this through their supply chains and half lobbied other organisations through local business networks.

Many employers who work on careers education also actively support the skills agenda locally. Over a third of employers take part in business groups to influence the local skills agenda and two in ten sit on Skills Advisory Panels.

“Working so close with the Careers Hubs makes our engagement so much easier, its focused and targeted.”

How to get involved

Engage directly with young people

'Give an hour' is a great way to make a difference and ignite your team. Volunteer in schools and colleges to deliver careers activities or host an inspiring experience at your workplace.

Become an Enterprise Adviser

Partner with an individual school or college and use your business experience and networks to help them develop a strong careers programme.

Join a local Cornerstone Employer group

Work with a network of schools, colleges and employers in a Career Hub to help improve careers education.

Contact the Business Partnerships team for more information:

businesspartnerships@careersandenterprise.co.uk

