

[Home](#) ▾ [Work](#) ▾ [Working, jobs and pensions](#)
▾ [Survey of education professionals: Young people and work report](#)



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Research and analysis

Survey of education professionals: Young people and work report

Published 27 August 2026

Contents

[Executive summary](#)

[Findings](#)

[Barriers to engagement](#)

[Conclusions](#)

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ad hoc research report no. 141.

A report of research carried out by YouGov on behalf of DWP.

Crown copyright 2026.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit the [Open Government Licence](#) or write to:

Information Policy Team

The National Archives
Kew
London TW9 4DU

or email psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, email
socialresearch@dwp.gov.uk .

First published August 2026.

ISBN 978-1-80786-045-5.

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of DWP or any other government department.

Executive summary

Background

This report presents findings from a survey of 1,004 teachers and education professionals. Fieldwork was conducted by YouGov in March 2026.

The research explored education professionals' views on the factors affecting young people's employment, education and training opportunities, and the extent to which the education system prepares young people for future work.

This report has been written by DWP analysts, using the YouGov survey findings.

Methodology

This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 2.5 million plus individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample.

The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. The sample definition could be 'GB adult population' or a subset such as 'GB adult females'.

Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

Key findings

The key findings are:

- education professionals identified a wide range of factors influencing young people's access to employment, training and education, with motivation (67%), work-readiness (66%) and the availability of local opportunities (60%) most mentioned
- confidence (50%), qualifications (44%), job-relevant skills (44%), health (44%) and neurodiversity or learning difficulties (44%), networks (41%) and previous work experience (40%) were also seen as important
- these findings suggest that opportunities are shaped by personal, social and labour market factors, with employability viewed as extending beyond academic attainment
- nearly three quarters (74%) thought there was too much focus on passing exams, 73% felt there was not enough focus on preparing young people for work and employment, and the same proportion felt there was not enough emphasis on soft skills
- many felt that the curriculum could be broadened to include more work-related skills without lowering academic standards (73%)
- findings demonstrated overwhelming support for strengthening careers and vocational provision:
 - almost all (98%) supported careers guidance through schools, colleges and sixth forms
 - support was also high (95%) for alternative pathways for young people who struggle with the current curriculum, indicating a strong appetite for a more diverse education offer that provides multiple routes

- generally, education professionals were concerned about young people's readiness for employment:
 - around two-thirds (66%) believed young people's preparedness for work had declined over the past 5 years, while 60% reported a decline in soft skills over the same period
- low motivation or interest (75%), parental influence (70%), lack of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support (58%), peer influence (57%) and mental health challenges (54%) were commonly identified as barriers to engagement

Findings

Factors influencing young people's opportunities

Motivation, work-readiness skills and local opportunities were seen as key drivers

Education professionals most commonly identified motivation (67%), work-readiness skills such as organisation, time management and teamwork (66%), and the availability of jobs or opportunities in the local area (60%) as factors affecting young people's access to employment, education or training. Confidence was also frequently cited, with half of respondents (50%) identifying it as an important factor that affects young people's access to employment, education or training.

Employability was viewed as extending beyond qualifications alone

Other commonly identified factors affecting young people's access to employment, education or training included qualifications achieved (44%), skills relevant to the job (44%), mental and/or physical health (44%), learning difficulties or neurodiverse conditions (44%), networks and knowing the right people (41%), and previous work experience (40%). These findings suggest that employability is viewed as extending beyond academic attainment.

Nearly all education professionals identified factors affecting opportunities

Additionally, these findings demonstrate that education professionals view young people's opportunities as being shaped by a combination of individual readiness and wider labour market conditions.

Almost all education professionals identified at least one factor affecting young people's opportunities with only 1% saying that nothing in particular affected access to employment, education and training.

Perceptions of curriculum priorities and employability

Many education professionals perceived an overemphasis on exams

A large majority of education professionals (74%) believed there was too much focus on passing exams, while only 19% felt the level of emphasis on exams was about right. At the same time, almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) felt there was not enough focus on preparing young people for work and employment, and an identical proportion (73%) felt there was not enough focus on teaching soft skills for work and employment.

These findings suggest that many education professionals see the current curriculum as overly focused on exams and not focused enough on preparing young people for work. While academic achievement was still valued, respondents felt that employment preparation and soft skills need greater emphasis alongside academic learning.

There was support for broadening the curriculum without reducing academic standards.

Nearly three-quarters of education professionals (73%) agreed that the curriculum could be broadened to include more work-related knowledge and skills without lowering academic standards, while 15% disagreed.

These findings indicate that calls for greater emphasis on employability and workplace skills are not necessarily accompanied by a desire to reduce academic expectations. Rather, many respondents appear to favour a more balanced curriculum that supports both academic achievement and preparation for future employment.

Support for careers guidance and alternative pathways

Careers guidance received strong support from education professionals

Providing careers guidance through schools, sixth forms and colleges was a view shared by many education professionals, with 98% supporting this approach.

Education professionals supported greater access to vocational and alternative pathways

Support was also high for broadening the educational offer through more applied and vocational routes, with 92% supporting greater access to applied or vocational pathways before the age of 16.

In addition, 95% supported alternative pathways targeted at young people who struggle with the current curriculum. These findings indicate widespread support for a more diverse education system that strengthens careers guidance and offers multiple routes to success, including applied, vocational and alternative pathways that better reflect young people's different interests, strengths and learning needs.

Perceptions of young people's work readiness and soft skills

Most education professionals perceived a decline in young people's readiness for work

Education professionals were much more likely to perceive a decline than an improvement in young people's work-related capabilities over the past 5 years. Around two-thirds (66%) felt that young people's preparedness for work had weakened, compared with just 4% who believed it had strengthened.

Concerns about soft skills were more evident than concerns about technical skills

Similar patterns were seen for soft skills, where 60% reported a decline and only 5% reported an improvement over the past 5 years. Perceptions were less negative for technical skills and qualifications, although respondents were still more likely to say these had weakened (38%) than strengthened (16%). These findings suggest that education professionals are particularly concerned about young people's readiness for employment and the development of soft skills.

Barriers to engagement

Low motivation and parental influence were viewed as the main barriers to engagement

Education professionals identified a range of barriers to engagement in education before age 16, 75% of education professionals thought low motivation or interest was the main barrier to engagement and 70% said it was parental influence.

Barriers to engagement extend across educational, social and wellbeing factors

Additionally, 58% said lack of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support, with 57% saying peer influence in the classroom were also barriers to engagement. Mental health challenges were identified as a barrier to engagement by 54%. This demonstrates that education professionals perceived a combination of individual, family, educational and wellbeing-related factors as possible barriers to engagement, rather than a single issue.

Careers support in schools

Most aspects of careers support were viewed positively by secondary school teachers

Most secondary school teachers reported that their school was effective at providing careers-related support. More than 8 in 10 (83%) said their school was effective at providing information on post-16 options, while 79% said their school was effective at providing career advice. A similar proportion (78%) reported that their school was effective at offering extra-curricular activities that support personal development. Most aspects of careers support were viewed positively, however perceptions of work experience were notably weaker than for careers advice, post-16 information and extra-curricular opportunities.

Work experience provision was viewed less positively than other forms of careers support

Perceptions were less positive regarding the provision of good quality work experience. While around two-thirds of respondents (62%) considered their school effective in this area, almost 3 in 10 (29%) said their school was not effective, and a further 9% reported that their school did not offer good quality work experience.

These findings suggest that careers information, advice and personal development opportunities were widely established within secondary schools. However, compared with other aspects of careers-related support, the provision of high-quality work experience was viewed less positively, highlighting potential challenges in

ensuring consistent access to meaningful workplace experiences for all pupils.

Regional availability of employment opportunities

Perceptions of employment opportunities varied across regions

Availability of jobs was commonly identified as a factor affecting young people's opportunities, but perceptions varied by region. Education professionals from Yorkshire and the Humber and Wales were more likely to identify this barrier, while those in the North East and North West were slightly less likely than average to do so.

Transport barriers were more pronounced in some regions than others

Perceptions of transport as barriers to employment opportunities also varied by region. Transport was selected by 29% of education professionals overall, rising to 41% in the South West and falling to 20% in London.

Opportunities for employment, education or training and free school meals

Confidence and work-readiness skills were more commonly identified in schools with higher free school meal eligibility

In schools with higher levels of free school meal eligibility, work-readiness skills (75%), motivation (66%) and confidence (59%) were among the factors most identified as affecting young people's opportunities. Confidence was cited more frequently among education professionals overall (50%), while qualifications were cited slightly less frequently (40% compared with 44% overall).

Conclusions

Education professionals consistently highlighted the importance of motivation, work-readiness skills and confidence in shaping young people's opportunities, alongside wider factors such as local job availability, health and prior experience. Across the findings, there was a clear view that employability depends on a broad range of personal, educational and labour market factors rather than academic attainment

alone.

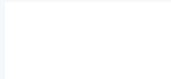
Findings outlined that education professionals were concerned that the current education system places too much emphasis on exams and not enough on preparing young people for employment. At the same time, there was strong support for careers guidance, vocational routes and alternative pathways, alongside a widespread belief that young people's work readiness has declined in recent years.

The findings suggest strong support among education professionals for a broader approach to educational success that combines academic achievement with preparation for work and future life.

[↑ Back to top](#)

Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey \(opens in a new tab\)](#).



Services and information

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

Government activity

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#)

[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)

[Government Digital Service](#)

OGI

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



[© Crown copyright](#)