

Contemporary transitions

Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college

By Anthony Mann, Elnaz T. Kashepakdel, Jordan Rehill and Prue Huddleston



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Summary

This report, published with the kind support of LifeSkills at Barclays, sets out findings from a survey of young British adults aged 19-24. The survey investigates the experiences of these young people as they engage in transitions which take them from education towards the working world. The focus of the report is on work related activities commonly undertaken by schools and colleges to help prepare them for such transitions, specifically focusing on the most common employer engagement in education activities. The report sets out the recollections of these young adults on actions taken by educational institutions to prepare them for the working world; their perceptions of the quality of their experiences; where they feel greater preparation would have been valued; and, using statistical regression analysis, what it was that schools and colleges did which helped with those transitions.

The study follows up on a 2011 survey, also undertaken by YouGov, on behalf of Education and Employers of 1,002 young Britons. Analysis of that data appeared in a series of peer reviewed articles and revealed evidence of wage premiums and reduced incidence of being NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training) related to participation in school-mediated employer engagement activities. Textual analysis of written comments, moreover, provided evidence that the drivers of economic premiums can be related more to developments in cultural and social capital than human capital.

This study was made possible through the generous support of LifeSkills at Barclays.

Context

The background for the current report is an ongoing crisis in the state of school to work transitions in the UK. Young people, collectively, have never left education more highly qualified, with more years of schooling behind them and yet they are facing unprecedented struggles to succeed in the early labour market. Whether measured by the ratio of youth to adult unemployment or comparative earnings, young people are struggling to compete with older workers for economic opportunities. This report considers employer engagement activities which schools and colleges have, over the last decade, been encouraged and, at times, required to offer young people in order to improve their economic prospects.

Methodology

The survey was prepared by the Education and Employers Research team in collaboration with Prue Huddleston, Professor Emeritus at the University of Warwick and undertaken by the YouGov polling firm. Responses came from 1,744 individuals aged between 19 and 24. Fieldwork was undertaken in May 2016. Following advice from YouGov, and as is common practice, data were marginally reweighted to amplify the perspectives of young adults from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Analysis of the data was undertaken using SPSS. In sections 1 to 3 of the report, descriptive and comparative (cross-tabulations) statistics are presented to illustrate variations in experiences by different types of young people with different types of experiences. In section 4 of the report, analysis of economic outcomes (related to NEET status and earnings) is presented. Here, regression analysis is used to ensure that results do not serve as masks for other characteristics, such as social class. This is undertaken by use of a series of control variables (gender, ethnicity, geographic

location, age, highest level of qualification, receipt of Free School Meals, parental education). Full results related to the analysis described in this report are presented in a separate document Kashefpakdel, E. T. 2017. *Contemporary transitions: Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college. Technical Annex*. London: Education and Employers.

Section One: *Young adults' recollection of school and college action to prepare them for the working world*

The study finds that:

- Young adults attending selective and/or fee-paying institutions routinely recall greater levels of school-mediated employer engagement in terms of specific activities
- Young adults in 2016 recall 1.6 school-mediated engagements with employers: 22% greater employer engagement than in 2011
- Former students of independent and grammar schools recall greater levels of engagement than former pupils of comprehensive schools, but the gap is closing
- Disadvantage is associated with lower levels of engagement: former recipients of Free School Meals and children of parents without experience of higher education recall lower levels of engagement
- Young adults from ethnic minorities recall higher levels of engagement than White British peers, but no variation in participation by gender was found
- Variation in experience of employer engagement is heavily related to attainment levels and geographic region

Section Two: *Young adults' perceptions of how well their schools and colleges prepared them for working life*

The study finds that:

- Most young people educated in the state sector think that their schools prepared them poorly for adult working life
- Young adults who experienced greater volume of school-mediated employer engagement feel better prepared for the adult working world
- Most employer engagement was not helpful in making decisions at age 16, unless teenagers recalled 4+ activities
- Most employer engagement was not helpful in applying for university, unless teenagers recalled 4+ activities
- Most employer engagement was not helpful in applying for a full-time job, but participation in 3+ activities made a big difference

Section Three: *Young adults' perceptions on how schools and colleges could have better prepared them for the working world*

The study finds:

- Young adults would have welcomed greater preparation for the working world from their schools and colleges – with greatest demand from young women and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds and greatest demand for practical information and job-finding skills

Section Four: *What schools and colleges did to help young adults succeed in the adult working world*

The study finds:

- Higher volumes of school-mediated employer engagement are associated with reduced incidence of NEET by up to 86%
- Undertaking individual employer engagement activities is associated with reduced incidence of being NEET by up to 81%
- Pre-16 participation in Job shadowing is associated with an adult wage premium of 11%
- Young adults who found their school-mediated employer engagement activities 'helpful in getting a job', earned up to 16.4% more than peers who did not take part in any activities
- Young adults experienced wage premiums linked to individual activities when undertaken within school(s) which they felt had prepared them well for adult life
- Wage premiums of up to £3,500 can be identified linked to teenage participation in school-mediated employer engagement activities

Conclusions: *Implications for policy and practice*

This report presents initial results from a 2016 survey of 1,744 young British adults aged 19-24. Respondents were in the midst of their transitions between youth and adulthood, between full-time education and full labour market participation. The survey explored the extent to which they had engaged with employers as part of their educational experiences; whether they felt these engagements, and wider actions undertaken by schools to prepare them for adult working life, had been useful to them; what more they wished their schools had done; and, whether the interventions they had received had made an actual difference to their adult economic outcomes. Through the use of statistical analysis, insights for policy and practice emerge. These relate to three key themes:

- Quantity matters: greater volume of school-mediated employer engagement is associated with better economic outcomes
- Quality matters: more highly regarded employer engagement is associated with better economic outcomes
- Equity matters: access to school-mediated employer engagement is not fairly distributed

Introduction

There is a paradox facing today's youth as they transition into the adult labour market. Young people leaving education today do so with more years of schooling and better academic qualifications than any preceding generation.

- Between 1989 and 2010, the proportion of teenagers completing compulsory education at age 16 with at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C grew from three in ten to eight in ten (Bolton 2012, 12).
- In the mid-1990s, just one-third of young English people could expect to achieve at least five GCSEs including English and Mathematics at grades A*-C, by the 2010s the proportion has risen to more than half (DfE, 2015).
- Between 1993 and 2011, the proportion of teenagers staying on in education to at least age 17 rose from 58% to 76% (Bolton 2012, 10).
- The proportion of the UK workforce educated to degree level increased from 17% in 1992 to 38% in 2013 (ONS 2013).

And yet...

Growing evidence highlights an unambiguous hostility towards young people within the labour market. The UK ratio of youth to adult unemployment has worsened significantly since the early 1990s when workers under 24 experienced levels of unemployment less than twice the rate of older workers. Youth unemployment rates are now three or four times the levels of their older peers (Lanning and Rudiger 2012, 4; UKCES 2014, 8). In the competition for work, young people are losing out. It is a phenomenon seen with particular clarity in recruitment of English Apprentices. The typical Apprentice is no longer a school or college leaver transitioning into work, but someone in their later twenties (nearly half of Apprentice starts are now over 24) who has commonly worked for their employer for at least a year before beginning the formal training programme (Mann 2016; BIS 2016). Fewer than one-fifth of individuals beginning Apprenticeships now come directly from education (BIS 2016). And when in work, compared to older groups of workers, young people find their earnings squeezed. As the Resolution Foundation has recently shown, whereas in 1990 58% of young people aged 16-20 and 22% of young people aged 21-25 earned Low Pay, by 2015 those proportions had risen to 77% and 40% respectively (Clarke & D'Arcy 2016, 20).¹ In the late 1990s, over-50s earned on average 1.7 times more than young workers under the age of 25. By 2014, the ratio had grown to 2.6 (Kingman & Seager 2014).

It has always been hard being young in the labour market. By definition, they lack the experience of older workers and in every downturn, recruiting freezes disproportionately punish new entrants to the working world. The working world has long been hard for youth but, in spite of our education system producing young people more highly qualified than ever before, over the last generation it has become significantly harder.

¹ The Foundation define Low Pay as gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) below two-thirds of the median. The equivalent to £7.83 an hour in April 2015 (p5)

This evidence of change has led analysts to identify what is an effective penalty for youth in the labour market. While the financial crash of 2008 undoubtedly reduced demand for employment and affected young Britons severely, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) (2014) argued that the emergence of the penalty pre-dated the economic downturn:

youth unemployment has been on the rise since 2005, suggesting that there is a long-term structural cause that goes beyond the current economic situation. The labour market for young people has changed and this change is set to continue (p.5).

And yet...

Surveys of teenagers repeatedly highlight an unabashed confidence in what their futures will hold. A 2015 survey of 3,154 teenagers aged 14 to 19 commissioned by City and Guilds (2016) showed that 54% felt it likely or very likely that they would end up in their job of choice with only 12% thinking that they would not, 70% were confident that they had all the career information they needed to make an informed decision and respondents expected to be earning, on average, more than £40,000 a year by 2025. As earlier research by Education and Employers has shown, the career aspirations of British teenagers have nothing in common with anticipated labour market demand (Mann et al. 2013).

Reviewing academic literature on teenage career aspirations, Louise Archer (2014) detects consistent evidence that British teenagers, regardless of their social backgrounds express high ambition for their futures.

Contrary to assumptions within education policy, existing research evidence suggests that there is no widespread 'poverty of aspirations'. ...but rather the unequal means available to young people to realise these aspirations (p.25)

This report explores the moment when teenagers with high aspirations encounter the realities of the British youth labour market. It sets out the perspectives, experiences and recollections of more than 1,700 young Britons aged between 19 and 24 who in the summer of 2016 responded, through the YouGov polling firm, to questions drafted by the Education and Employers research team in collaboration with Prue Huddleston, Emeritus Professor at the University of Warwick. The study explores the character and implications of actions, primarily related to employer engagement in education, undertaken by schools and colleges with young people aged between 14 and 19 to help prepare them for their adult working lives.

This work followed a comparable survey, undertaken in 2011 also through YouGov, of 1,002 young Britons. Consequently, it allows for comparisons to be made between the experiences of a first cohort who were engaged in secondary education between 2001 and 2011 and a second cohort, the subject of this report, who did so between 2006 and 2016. The two periods cover a dynamic era of government initiatives aimed at improving the employment outcomes of young people. In 2004, following years of experimentation in seeking to enhance the work relevance of secondary education, the Labour government of Tony Blair introduced a statutory requirement for work-related learning codifying a clear expectation that state schools would integrate learning about the world of work into the schooling of 14 to 16 year olds. Simultaneously, government funding supported a national network of Education Business Partnership Organisations which collectively enabled extensive connections with employers, most notably enabling some half million work

experience placements annually.² Analysis of the 2011 YouGov sample has appeared in a number of publications with studies suggesting that policy makers had been right to demand schools to engage with local employers. Findings, set out in a series of academic articles, illustrated statistically significant relationships between participation in employer engagement activities and adult wage premiums and reduced risks of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Moreover, through textual analysis of young adults' statements on the perceived value of employer engagement, conceptual explorations have identified the importance of social and cultural capital accumulations in explaining employment boosts (Mann and Percy 2014; Percy and Mann 2014; Jones et al. 2016).

Within the current report, some comparison will be made between the two samples and analytical approaches first undertaken with the 2011 sample are repeated to ascertain whether positive economic outcomes can again be detected. Since the publication of analyses from the first YouGov sample, evidence of the economic value of careers education, work-related learning and employer engagement in education has grown. A 2016 literature review commissioned by the UK Education Endowment Foundation into the impact of Careers Education reviewed the findings of 27 UK and international investigations into the impact of interventions tested through randomised control trials or quasi-experimental methodological approaches.³ The analysis found that two-thirds of 27 studies considered presented evidence of largely positive economic outcomes for young adults with the remainder offering mixed results (Hughes et al. 2016).

Five years on from 2011, British schooling has changed. In England, the Conservative-Liberal Coalition government led by David Cameron repealed the statutory requirement for work-related learning and axed funding to the national network of Education Business Partnership Organisations arguing, following the 2011 Wolf Report, that work experience should be undertaken primarily by those over the age of 16. The expectation of the Wolf Report was that, young people aged 16 to 19 would undertake placements within a broader range of engagement activities through 16-19 Study Programmes. Described as the Inspiration Agenda, Coalition ministers expected secondary pupils to engage with employers through a range of activities focused around careers activities and the development of employability skills. With the creation of the Careers and Enterprise Company in 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) funded a new national organisation tasked with enabling schools to engage with employers within careers provision.

In reviewing the experiences of young people who came to adulthood between 2010 and 2016, as well as offering comparisons with those young Britons questioned in 2011, the report addresses four specific themes:

Young adults' recollection of school and college action to prepare them for the working world

Young adults' perceptions of how well their schools and colleges prepared them for adult working life

² See: <http://www.educationandemployers.org/research/how-much-does-it-cost-to-engage-employers-in-education/>

³ Careers Education is defined in the review as 'Careers-focused school- or college-mediated provision designed to improve students' education, employment and/or social outcomes' and including such activities as provision of Information, Advice and Guidance and web-based resources as well as programmes of work-related learning and employer engagements such as mentoring, careers fairs, enterprise competitions, job shadowing and work experience placements.

Young adults' perceptions on how schools and colleges could have better prepared them for the working world

What schools did to help young adults succeed in the adult working world

In addressing these questions, a number of recurring themes and questions emerge. How does socio-economic background, whether captured through school type attended or parental background, shape experiences and perspectives? Does gender, ethnicity, geographic location or academic achievement make a difference to results? By using statistical analysis, this study is able to take account of those elements of social background which commonly drive inequalities in the world of work. In so doing, it allows us to isolate specific interventions in the lives of young people provided by their schools and colleges to ask the question: did they make a difference to adult lives?

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Methodology

Constructing the sample

This report considers the responses of 1,755 individuals who completed a survey created by the Education and Employers Research team working with Professor Prue Huddleston administered through the polling firm, YouGov. The fieldwork was undertaken in May 2016. Respondents were drawn from the YouGov panel consisting of many tens of thousands of individuals. Respondents were drawn equally from the genders and, reflecting population figures, the three nations composing Great Britain and nine English regions. Similar numbers of respondents were sampled in each year band across the ages from 19 to 24. Following initial analysis which identified a lower than expected pattern of attendance at Further Education Colleges and higher levels of attendance at grammar schools between the ages of 14 and 19, the data were marginally reweighted by YouGov to amplify the perspectives of young adults from more disadvantaged backgrounds as these were understood to be under-represented within the sample. Tables A1 to A10 in the Technical Annex present a series of tables which describe the characteristics of the sample.

As a sample selected to provide insights into the transitions of young adults from full-time education into the labour market, two descriptive statistics are particularly relevant: the earnings of young adults when in full-time employment and the current activity within education or employment of all respondents. Data are used within the analysis presented in section four of this report which explores whether recalled participation in different types of school-mediated activities can be related to either reduced likelihood of respondents stating that they were NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and or higher average earnings. Responses were offered by 461 individuals indicating their annual gross salary, before taxation or any other deduction, across a range from less than £10,000 to more than £30,000 (See Technical Annex Table A10 for full details). All 1,755 respondents reported on their current economic activity with results summarised below (Table 1) and in full detail in the Technical Annex (Table A7).

Table 1. Current economic activity of respondents

Current Economic activity	Percent of sample
I'm in full-time education	37%
I'm in full-time education and also doing a part-time job at least a few hours every week	12%
I'm in full-time work and doing an apprenticeship	2%
I'm in full-time work (any other job)	27%
I'm doing one or more part-time jobs	8%
I'm not in education, employment or training	8%
I'm doing something else	7%
Total (Number = 1,755)	101% ⁴

⁴ Due to rounding, total percentage exceeds 100%.

As well as completing answers on a survey which allows for quantified statistical analysis, a number of open, write-in questions were asked enabling textual analysis which will be presented in subsequent publications.

Control variables

In analyses of this type, it is important that data are gathered concerning those elements of young people's lives which might be driving their educational and employment outcomes as young adults. As well as their age, gender and ethnicity, the survey collected information on the highest level of qualification possessed by respondents (summarised in Table 2 below), the type of school or college they attended between the ages of 14 and 16 and, if relevant, between 16 and 19 (see Technical Annex Table A1 and A2), whether the respondent recalled receiving Free School Meals at any point in their education and whether their parents or carers had attended university. Nineteen percent of the sample stated that they had received Free School Meals and just over half of the respondents reported that neither of their parents or carers had attended university (Technical Annex Tables A3 and A4). Such control variables are essential within statistical regressions. They allow analysts to ensure that any relationships found, for example, between participation in a particular type of activity and an economic outcome, cannot be dismissed as a mask for social privilege or a comparable indicator of advantage.

Table 2. Respondents – by highest level of qualification achieved at the time of the survey.
Aggregated by qualification level

Highest qualification achieved	Percent of sample
Up to Level 1 (less than 5 GCSEs equivalence)	5%
Up to Level 2 (equivalent of 5 GCSEs)	7%
Up to Level 3 (equivalent of two 'A' levels)	50%
Up to Level 4 (equivalent of undergraduate degree)	34%
Up to Level 5 (equivalent of postgraduate qualification)	5%
Total (Number = 1,755)	101% ⁵

Analysis

Data were exported into SPSS – a statistical programme which produces descriptive statistics and cross tabulations as well as regression models which estimate effect sizes. In section one of the report, averages are drawn from cross tabulated descriptive statistics to present variations in levels of participation in school-mediated teenage engagement with employments. In the following section, cross tabulations present different sets of data to shed light on differences. In the absence of statistical regression which takes account of the primary social and demographic factors which might drive patterns of experience (e.g. region), the results are best viewed as snapshots providing insights into patterns of engagement. In section three, a series of descriptive statistics presents the perspectives of young adults, desegregated by a range of characteristics, on where they wished they had had greater input from their schools and colleges. Finally, in section four, use is made of control variables within regression analysis to explore relationships between engagement in school-mediated activities and adult economic outcomes.

⁵ Due to rounding, total percentage exceeds 100%.

Technical annex

Full results from descriptive statistics and statistical regressions are set out in a separate document:
Kashefpakdel, E. T. 2017. *Contemporary transitions: Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college. Technical Annex*. London: Education and Employers.

One: Young adults' recollection of school and college action to prepare them for the working world

The survey began by asking respondents to describe the types of employer engagement activities in which they took part whilst in secondary education between the ages of 14 and 19. Respondents were asked about a range of activities commonly arranged by schools and colleges alongside participation in paid part-time employment during full-time secondary education which represents an alternative teenage taste of the working world.

Table 3. Respondent recollection of participation in selected teenage engagements with employers

	Percentage undertaking at 14-16	Percentage undertaking at 16-19
Work experience	74%	25%
Job shadowing	9%	8%
Enterprise competitions	10%	6%
Mentoring	2%	4%
Career advice with employers	19%	16%
Part-time employment	18%	39%

Young adults attending selective and/or fee-paying institutions routinely recall greater levels of school-mediated employer engagement in terms of specific activities

Disaggregated by the type of school or college attended, consistent variations are detectable. With the exception of work experience, higher proportions of young people attending Grammar and Independent schools routinely engaged in selected activities with employers through their schools at 14-16 than peers who attended non-selective state schools (Table 4). A similar pattern is witnessed in Table 5 which looks at patterns of engagement cross tabulated against school or college type attended at post-16. It is commonly young people who attended selective and/or fee-paying institutions who recall the greatest volumes of school-mediated engagement.

Table 4. Respondent recollection of participation in selected engagements with employers at ages 14-16 by school type attended at 14-16

	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent
Work experience	77%	79%	52%
Job shadowing	7%	14%	19%
Enterprise competitions	9%	14%	11%
Mentoring	2%	2%	4%
Career advice with employers	18%	27%	22%
Part-time employment	19%	22%	14%

Table 5. Respondent recollection of participation in selected engagements with employers at ages 16-19 by school/college type attended at 16-19

	Comprehensive	Grammar	Sixth Form College	Further Education College	Independent
Work experience	24%	40%	23%	18%	45%
Job shadowing	7%	14%	7%	5%	18%
Enterprise competitions	5%	12%	3%	5%	8%
Mentoring	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%
Career advice with employers	17%	23%	16%	8%	21%
Part-time employment	41%	47%	40%	39%	33%

A key finding from the 2011 survey was that the volume of encounters that teenagers recalled with employers could be positively associated with better employment outcomes as young adults. Studies demonstrated relationships with higher earnings, reduced incidence of being NEET and greater confidence in career progression linked to the volume of school-mediated teenage employer engagements (Mann and Percy 2014; Percy and Mann 2014).

Young adults in 2016 recall 1.6 school-mediated engagements with employers: 22% greater employer engagement than in 2011

In the 2016 survey, a question from the 2011 survey was repeated. It explored how many times young people recalled school-mediated engagements with employers.

Between the ages of 14 and 19, did your school or college ever arrange for you to take part in any activities which involved employers/local business people? E.g. work experience, mentoring, enterprise competitions, careers advice, CV or interview workshops, workplace visits. If so, on how many different occasions (more or less) did it happen?

The results, set out in Table 6, illustrate a 22% increase in the average number of interactions recalled by young people between the two surveys.⁶

Table 6. Respondent recollection of participation in school-mediated employer engagement activities, 2011 and 2016

	Percent in 2011	Percent in 2016
Never	28.6	19.0
Once	37.6	36.3
Twice	17.1	23.1
Three times	7.7	8.7
Four or more times	9.0	12.9
Average number	1.31	1.60

Through a series of cross tabulations of data, it is possible to identify patterns in the character of engagement with employers reported by the young adults.

Former students of independent and grammar schools recall greater levels of engagement than former pupils of comprehensive schools, but the gap is closing

As set out in Table A11 in the Technical Annex and summarised at Table 7 below, in 2011 young adults who attended non-selective comprehensive schools between the ages of 14 and 16 recalled, on average, 1.23 engagements with employers through their schools, 23% fewer engagements than former pupils of independent schools. Five years on, the numbers of recalled engagements of former pupils of comprehensive, independent and grammar schools had all increased with the gap between former comprehensive and independent school pupils closing to 13%. The biggest leap in participation between the two surveys was seen in the engagements of former grammar school pupils, increasing by 39% to become the highest level of all groups reaching nearly two recalled engagements, on average, by 2016. The gap between students attending selective and non-selective state schools has widened from 12% in 2011 to 25% in 2016.

Table 7. Average number of recalled employer engagements by school type attended, 2011 and 2016

	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent
Average number of recalled activities 2016	1.54	1.92	1.74
Average number of recalled activities 2011	1.23	1.38	1.51

⁶ Variation between levels of participation as denoted by number of activities recalled is calculated by calculating the difference between the numbers given and then presenting that variation as a percentage of the lower number.

Disadvantage is associated with lower levels of engagement: former recipients of Free School Meals and children of parents without experience of higher education recall lower levels of engagement

In the 2016 survey a series of questions was asked about the backgrounds of the young adults. Cross-tabulating the levels of recalled participation in employer engagement activities and recalled receipt of Free School Meals at any point during schooling (an indicator of childhood poverty) shows a 9% variation in average engagement levels with young adults from wealthier backgrounds recalling a higher average level of engagement whilst in full-time secondary education. Whereas the average young adult recalled 1.6 engagements, young adults who had received Free School Meals remembered 1.5 occasions on which they were connected with employers through their secondary schools (see Table A12).

A similar pattern is revealed when comparing young adults' recollections of employer engagement activities and the educational status of their parents. Highest parental educational achievement is a widely used indicator for the social background of young people, with parental experience of higher education serving as an indicator for middle class or higher social status. Respondents whose parents were without university experience recalled 1.55 engagements as opposed to 1.71 for the offspring of graduates. Again, a variation is observed with a 10% higher level of average engagement observed (see Table A13).

Young adults from ethnic minorities recall higher levels of engagement than White British peers, but no variation in participation by gender was found

The survey also revealed that when young adults of White British ethnicity were compared with all other ethnic groups, it was the latter group which recalled a higher average level of engagement at 1.7 engagements, 8% greater than their White British peers (see Table A14). The survey found no meaningful variation in terms of participation by gender (Table A15).

Variation in experience of employer engagement is heavily related to attainment levels and geographic region

One of the most significant patterns in experience identified in the 2016 sample was in the relationship between highest level of qualification and volume of recalled employer engagement. As set out in Table A16 in the Technical Annex, young adults possessing two or more A levels (or equivalent) and higher qualifications recalled significantly greater numbers of engagements with employers than peers whose highest level of qualification was at GCSE level (or equivalent) or lower. Of all subcategories of respondents, it is the young adults in the survey whose highest qualification failed to reach Level 1 who recall the very lowest levels of employer engagement from their school days – at an average of just 0.7 engagements. Their peers who achieved five GCSEs or Level 2 as a highest qualification reported marginally higher engagement, recalling an average of 1.1 activities. By contrast, those who stayed on and achieved two or more A levels or a university qualification (Levels 3 to 5) recalled between 1.6 and 1.8 engagements. While such results can be explained, in part, by the likely failure of the first two groups holding qualifications at Level 1 and 2 to stay on in education after the age of 16 and so missing out on opportunities to take part in activities post-16 with employers, the strong indication remains that lower achieving children of poorer backgrounds have systematically accessed lower levels of school-mediated employer engagements than their more advantaged peers. This impression is reinforced when looking at regional variations in levels of recalled engagement (see Table 8 below and Table A17 in the Technical Annex). The variation in levels of activity by region is considerable with the highest performing regions performing 22%

better than Scotland and the North East where young adults recalled the lowest number of interactions with employers through their secondary schools and colleges.

Table 8. Average number of recalled employer engagements by geographic region, 2016

Rank	Region	Average number of engagements
1	South East	1.77
=2	East Midlands	1.76
=2	West Midlands	1.76
4	London	1.62
5	Wales	1.58
6	Yorkshire and the Humber	1.57
=7	East of England	1.56
=7	North West	1.56
9	South West	1.52
10	North East	1.46
11	Scotland	1.45

Two: Young adults’ perceptions of how well their schools and colleges prepared them for working life

A series of questions explored the perceptions of the 1,755 young adults questioned in 2016 about how well their schools had prepared them for adult working life. Young adults were asked for their opinions on how well schools and colleges had prepared them in general, but also to judge the helpfulness, in particular, of the employer engagement activities which they had undertaken through their educational institutions. In following these lines of questioning, the research team explored whether relationships could be detected between such attitudes and the volume of an individual’s engagement with employers, further testing insights from the 2011 data. Regression analysis of that survey demonstrated that higher volumes of employer engagement in education could be related to better economic outcomes and that participation in employer engagement activities could serve particularly to influence the attitudes and assumptions of young people (Mann and Percy 2014; Jones et al. 2015). Secondly, the approach allowed a further assessment to be made of the insight from the work of Kashefpakdel and Percy (2016) that young people’s contemporary perceptions of the helpfulness of their school-mediated employer engagements has a significant influence on the scale of economic benefits gained in adulthood. Kashefpakdel and Percy found that teenagers who agreed that career talks with people from outside school were *very helpful* went on to gain significantly higher wage premiums as young adults at age 26 than their peers. This analysis, effectively exploring the impacts of quality and quantity in employer engagement, is picked up in section four of the report below.

Most young people educated in the state sector think that their schools prepared them poorly for adult working life

Respondents to the survey were asked “Looking back, how well do you feel that your school/college prepared you for adult working life?” As set out in Table A18 in the Technical Annex, the majority of all respondents (53%) felt that they had been poorly prepared as did 56% of participants who attended non-selective state schools between the ages of 14 and 16. Former pupils, however, attending both grammar schools and fee-paying schools at the same ages countered the trend with small majorities (58% and 61% respectively) reporting that they felt well prepared for adult working life. Only one young adult in twenty-five who attended a non-selective state school felt that they had been very well prepared by their secondary schooling for adult working life. One in eight felt that their school had prepared them very poorly.

Similar results are observed when a comparison is made of young adults' perceptions of how well their educational institutions had prepared them for adult working life by attendance at different types of school and college at age 16-19 (See Table A19). Across the sample, 52% of respondents argued that they had been poorly prepared. As set out in Table 9 below, the average hides some significant variations. Whereas seventy per cent of former pupils of Independent schools felt that they had been well prepared, only 41% of peers who attended Further Education Colleges felt the same way.

Table 9. Respondent perception of how well schools and colleges had prepared them for adult working life by school/college type attended at age 16-19

School or college type attended at 16-19	<i>"Looking back, how well do you feel that your school/college prepared you for adult working life?"</i>	
	Very well / Quite well	Very poorly / quite poorly
Non-selective state school, i.e. comprehensive school	49%	51%
Grammar / selective state school	60%	40%
Sixth Form College	43%	57%
Further Education College	41%	59%
Independent school / fee paying school or college	70%	31%

Young adults who experienced greater volume of school-mediated employer engagement feel better prepared for adult working life

A comparison of the perceptions of young adults about how well they felt their secondary schools and colleges had prepared them for the adult working world and the volume of school-mediated employer engagement activities which they recalled highlights a consistent pattern. As set out in Table 10 below and in Table A20 in the Technical Annex, whereas approximately two-thirds of young adults who recalled zero or one engagements felt poorly prepared by their schools, the proportions are reversed when considering respondents who recalled three and four or more interactions with employers with two-thirds arguing that they had been well prepared by their schools. Whilst some of the pattern detected here will potentially reflect the fact that the former students of grammar and independent schools recalled, on average, higher volumes of employer engagements and felt more positive about their schooling, the limited number of such respondents means that this alone cannot explain the strength of the pattern observed.

Table 10. Respondent perception of how well schools/colleges had prepared them for adult working life by volume of employer engagement activities recalled

	<i>“Looking back, how well do you feel that your school/college prepared you for adult working life?”</i>	
<i>“Between the ages of 14 and 19, did your school or college ever arrange for you to take part in any activities which involved employers/local business people? E.g. work experience, mentoring, enterprise competitions, careers advice, CV or interview workshops, workplace visits. If so, on how many different occasions (more or less) did it happen?”</i>	Very well / Quite well	Very poorly / quite poorly
Never	34%	66%
Once	40%	60%
Twice	52%	48%
Three times	65%	35%
Four times or more	68%	32%

The helpfulness of school- and college-mediated employer engagement activities

Respondents were also asked to judge, from the perspective of young adulthood, whether the employer engagement activities in which they had taken part through their schools and colleges had proved to be useful in three of the key landmarks of the school to work transition journey: decision-making at 16, and, if applicable, getting into a university and getting a job. The results illustrate a widespread feeling that activities had been often relatively unhelpful, particularly for the former students of non-selective state schools. However, attitudes again are seen to change in relation to the volume of employer engagement activities recalled. Consistently, young adults recalling higher volumes of engagements found the activities undertaken to have proved to have been more helpful to them.

Most employer engagement wasn't helpful in making decisions at age 16 unless teenagers recalled 4+ activities

One of the most common uses of employer engagement in British education is to help young people come to informed decisions about their choices at age 16, the end point of compulsory full-time education in the UK.⁷ Across the sample, only 31% of respondents felt the employer engagement activities which they had undertaken through school to have been helpful in making decisions (See Table A21). Again, variation is detected by the type of school attended, but on this occasion it is less pronounced – with 29% of respondents who attended comprehensive schools at 14-16 finding whatever engagement they had had to have been helpful in decision making compared to 34% of peers who attended grammar schools and 43% who had attended fee-paying schools. However,

⁷ With the Raising of the Participation Age, it is now a requirement that young people in England engage in some form of full-time education/training, or work with training until the age of 18.

when considered against volume of employer engagement activities recalled (Table A22), a significant variation is detected. Those young people who found their employer engagement helpful took part, on average in 40% more activities than those who found them unhelpful (1.48 engagements against 1.06). Whereas one-quarter, or fewer, respondents who took part in just one employer engagement between the ages of 14 and 19 through school found the engagement to be helpful, the proportion rises to half for those who took part in three or more activities.

Table 11. Respondent perception on helpfulness of school-mediated employer engagements in decision-making at 16 by volume of employer engagement at 14-19

	<i>“Thinking about what you chose to do after Year 11/S4 (e.g. whether to stay on, what and where to study, whether to try and get a job), was the involvement which you had previously had with employers of any help to you in your decision-making?”</i>	
<i>“Between the ages of 14 and 19, did your school or college ever arrange for you to take part in any activities which involved employers/local business people? E.g. work experience, mentoring, enterprise competitions, careers advice, CV or interview workshops, workplace visits. If so, on how many different occasions (more or less) did it happen?”</i>	Very helpful / Fairly helpful	Not very helpful / Not at all helpful
Once	25%	75%
Twice	31%	69%
Three times	49%	51%
Four times or more	51%	49%

Most employer engagement was not helpful in applying for university unless teenagers recalled 4+ activities

A slightly higher proportion of all respondents (who had actually applied for university at some point) reported that the employer engagement which they had experienced at school or college had proved to be helpful within an application (See Tables A23 and A24). Again, respondents varied by the type of educational institution they had attended as teenagers, ranging from 31% of former Further Education College students arguing that their engagement had been useful to 38% of peers who attended comprehensive schools and 39% alumni of Independent schools at ages 16-19 agreeing. Again, when considered against the volume of recalled school-mediated engagements, a clear pattern is observable. The more activities a young person recalled, the more helpful they felt their employer engagement had been. Those who found activities helpful had undertaken an average of 1.99 activities, 31% more than the 1.52 engagements recalled by peers who had found the activities unhelpful in university applications (See Table A25).

Table 12. Respondent (who had applied for university) perception on helpfulness of school-mediated employer engagements in applying to university by volume of employer engagement at 14-19

	<i>“Thinking about when you applied to university, was the involvement that you had with employers whilst at school or college helpful to you?”</i>	
<i>“Between the ages of 14 and 19, did your school or college ever arrange for you to take part in any activities which involved employers/local business people? E.g. work experience, mentoring, enterprise competitions, careers advice, CV or interview workshops, workplace visits. If so, on how many different occasions (more or less) did it happen?”</i>	Yes	No
Once	33%	67%
Twice	38%	62%
Three times	47%	53%
Four times or more	53%	48%

Most employer engagement was not helpful in applying for a full-time job, but participation in 3+ activities made a big difference

Perhaps surprisingly, given the fact that employer engagement activities are often presented within education as approaches to improve the employability of young people, just 27% of respondents (who had ever applied for a full-time job) agreed that the engagement which they had experienced had been helpful to them when applying for jobs. Again, experiences varied with fewer than a quarter of the former pupils of comprehensive schools at 14-16 agreeing that their experiences had been useful in contrast to more than one-third of young adults who had attended grammar schools or independent schools at the same age (see Table A26). Considered against the volume of school-mediated employer engagement (Table A27 and Table 13 below) a pattern emerges. Young people who participated in high volumes of activities stand out as being much more likely to agree that their employer engagement had proved helpful to them in applying for a full-time job. The typical young adult who found, with hindsight, that their employer engagement had proved helpful experienced 31% more activities than peers who, looking back, felt that their experience had not been helpful. When asked what it was about the employer engagement that was helpful, respondents focused on practical issues –gaining something useful to include in an UCAS application or in a job application; valuing improvements to their soft and recruitment skills.

Table 13. Respondent (who had applied for a full-time job) perception on helpfulness of school-mediated employer engagements in applying for a full-time job by volume of employer engagement at 14-19

	<i>“Was the involvement that you had with employers whilst at school or college helpful to you when applying for a job(s)?”</i>	
<i>“Between the ages of 14 and 19, did your school or college ever arrange for you to take part in any activities which involved employers/local business people? E.g. work experience, mentoring, enterprise competitions, careers advice, CV or interview workshops, workplace visits. If so, on how many different occasions (more or less) did it happen?”</i>	Yes	No
Once	21%	79%
Twice	32%	68%
Three times	42%	58%
Four times or more	48%	52%

Three: Young adults' perceptions on how schools and colleges could have better prepared them for the working world

The survey respondents were asked: "Given what you know now, would you have welcomed more help in any of the following areas while at school/college?" They were offered a range of potential answers (see Tables A28-A32) for full details) covering areas of knowledge about the labour market, the transition from education, and skills of value in the labour market and beyond school.

Young adults would have welcomed greater preparation for the working world from their schools and colleges – with greatest demand from young women and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds and greatest demand for practical information and job-finding skills

The results, set out in Table 14 below, illustrate consistently high levels of demand from young adults for greater support from their schools and colleges in transitioning into the labour market. Across a range of categories of young adult, majorities expressed the desire for having received greater insight into how the tax and benefits system works, greater attention to recruitment skills (creating a CV, performing well at interview, how to find a job, how employers recruit) and how to manage money once in employment. Looking across the clustered respondents in Table 14, demand for school/college provision is greatest from young women, the former pupils of non-selective state schools, young adults from more disadvantaged backgrounds and of white British ethnicity. Significant proportions of young adults (one quarter or more) would have welcomed more help into all but two of the fourteen options offered. It is not possible to comment, from the data, on how great the desire being expressed by young adults for greater help was: whether answers reflect the wish for modest or considerably greater amounts of provision. The results, however, leave the impression of a generation of young people who are both concerned about their capacity to compete in the struggle for work (recruitment skills) but who show a serious desire for information to make better strategic decisions to influence their long term working careers (*"How the world of work is changing and which skills are likely to be demanded in future"* *"How to find out what different jobs require in terms of skills, attitudes and qualifications"*).

Table 14. Respondent views on areas where they would have welcomed more help from their schools/colleges in transitioning to the adult working world

<i>Given what you know now, would you have welcomed more help in any of the following areas while at school/college?</i>	All	Male	Female	Non-selective State	Independent School	Free School Meals	Parent with no degree	Ethnic minority	White British
How to create a good CV, or write a good application	60%	57%	64%	63%	44%	58%	64%	50%	63%
How to perform well at interview	60%	56%	65%	63%	48%	61%	65%	51%	63%
How the tax/benefit systems work	59%	53%	65%	61%	54%	53%	60%	51%	61%
How employers actually recruit	56%	53%	59%	58%	49%	49%	59%	46%	58%
How to manage money once you had income	55%	48%	63%	58%	46%	52%	59%	48%	57%
How the world of work is changing and which skills are likely to be demanded in future	49%	47%	51%	50%	45%	46%	51%	42%	51%
How to find a job	48%	43%	53%	50%	40%	47%	51%	45%	49%
How to find out what different jobs require in terms of skills, attitudes and qualifications	47%	43%	51%	49%	39%	49%	51%	41%	48%
How job centres and employment agencies work	36%	32%	40%	38%	29%	35%	37%	31%	37%
How to run your own enterprise/business	36%	36%	35%	36%	33%	33%	37%	36%	36%
How to get a part-time job whilst still at school or college	34%	32%	37%	35%	27%	36%	36%	36%	34%
How to get into University	27%	26%	30%	30%	13%	30%	31%	30%	27%
How to get an Apprenticeship	24%	23%	24%	25%	17%	25%	26%	24%	24%
How common it is to do a job which people of your gender don't normally do	21%	16%	25%	22%	15%	18%	22%	23%	21%

Four: *What schools and colleges did to help young adults succeed in the adult working world*

Analysis of the 2011 dataset revealed evidence of improvements in adult economic outcomes being related to teenage participation in employer engagement activities. Regression analysis undertaken by economist Chris Percy, statistically significant positive relationships were found between the volume of school-mediated employer engagement recalled by young adults and both their NEET status and earnings when in full-time employment. Across a scale of 0 to 4+ interactions with employers, each engagement was associated with an earnings premium of 4.5% so that the young Briton who recalled four or more activities was seen to earn, on average, 18% more than a comparable peer who had no such interaction (Mann and Percy 2014). The analysis also found that respondents recalling greater incidence of employer engagements between the ages of 14 and 19 were significantly less likely to be NEET on the day of the survey and were more confident about their career prospects, agreeing that whatever it was that they were doing when surveyed was helpful to their career ambitions (Percy and Mann 2014).

In 2016, two new publications provided further evidence of economic outcomes being related to school-mediated career-focused interventions. Kashefpakdel and Percy analysed data from the British Cohort Study, a dataset containing extensive details of thousands of individuals born in 1970 who were studied from birth through to adulthood over a series of surveys completed by themselves and their parents. The analysis explored the relationship between teenagers receiving career talks from people from outside school at ages 14 to 16 and earnings at age 26. Making use of a much richer set of control variables than Mann and Percy, the analysis found statistically significant evidence of wage premiums in adulthood. The scale of premiums varied depending on teenage circumstances with the highest returns (1.6% per career talk) found when individuals participated in career talks at 14-15 which were felt by the teenage respondents at the time to have been 'very helpful'. These studies suggest that both quality and quantity are factors in determining the economic impacts of teenage employer engagement in education. They also suggest that wage premiums can be considerable, an insight which is offered some validation by a second 2016 publication. *Careers education: an international literature review* (Hughes et al. 2016) was commissioned by the Department for Education-funded Education Endowment Foundation to review studies using experimental and quasi-experimental approaches, including Randomised Controlled Trials and longitudinal analyses, exploring the impact of 'Careers-focused school- or college-mediated provision designed to improve students' education, employment and/or social outcomes.' The report included a review of studies investigating both educational and economic

outcomes related to interventions which included both employer engagement activities as well as careers guidance interventions. Two-third of the 27 studies reviewed (67%) provided evidence of positive economic outcomes; one-third found evidence to be mixed with no distinct patterns in terms of outcomes. No study found evidence that participation in a careers education intervention could be linked to poorer adult economic outcomes. The scale of the adult wage premiums detected was often in excess of 10% (Hughes et al. 2016, 29-36).

In the analyses that follow, data are interrogated in order to see if similar relationships can be identified for the 2016 sample of young adults, exploring specifically how outcomes relate to the quantity (volume of employer engagement) and its perceived quality (helpfulness). Statistical regression was again used to ensure that any similar findings could not be attributed to a young person's characteristics which might routinely influence better earnings or employment prospects. Such control variables used in the 2016 study mirrored those used in analysis of the 2011 sample (Ethnicity; Gender; Age; Region; Highest level of qualification; School type attended) and additionally made use of two further indicators of family background (receipt of Free School Meals; whether one or more parent was educated to degree level).

Higher volumes of school-mediated employer engagement are associated with reduced incidence of NEET by up to 86%

Regression analysis found a statistically significant relationship between recalled participation in school-mediated employer engagement activities and whether respondents were NEET on the day of the survey: the higher the volume of engagement, the lower the likelihood of being NEET on the day of the survey (see Table A33 for full results). The analysis found that young people who:

- Undertook one activity were 44% less likely compared with those who did zero activities
- Undertook two activities were 56% less likely compared with those who did zero activities
- Undertook three activities were 85% less likely compared with those who did zero activities
- Undertook four activities were 86% less likely compared with those who did zero activities

Respondents recalling three or more school-mediated activities with employers between the ages of 14 and 19 were nearly twice more likely to be in education, employment or training than their comparable peers who recalled no such interactions.

Undertaking individual employer engagement activities is associated with reduced incidence of being NEET by up to 81%

Using regression analysis, it is possible to identify relationships between respondents who declared themselves NEET and their teenage participation across four employer engagement activities. As set out in Table 15 below (see Tables A34-A39 for fuller detail), young adults who recalled taking part in career talks, enterprise competitions and work experience with employers at both pre and post-16 were significantly less likely to be NEET than comparable peers who had missed out on the activities whilst in school.

Table 15. Incidence of NEET by participation in employer engagement activities (regression analysis)

At 14-16...	
Career talks with employers	81% less likely to be NEET than peers who did not do the activity (Table A36)
Enterprise competition with employers	75% less likely to be NEET than peers who did not do the activity (Table A35)
Work experience	45% less likely to be NEET than peers who did not do the activity (Table A34)
At 16-19...	
Career talks with employers	78% less likely to be NEET than peers who did not do the activity (Table A39)
Enterprise competition with employers	80% less likely to be NEET than peers who did not do the activity (Table A38)
Work experience	44% less likely to be NEET than peers who did not do the activity (Table A37)

Pre-16 participation in Job shadowing is associated with an adult wage premium of 11%

Nine per cent of the sampled recalled participation in job shadowing at 14-16 and, with control variables taken in account, statistical regression revealed that these respondents earned, when in full-time employment, 11% more than comparable peers. For full analysis, see Table A40 in the Technical Annex.

Young adults who found their school-mediated employer engagement activities ‘helpful in getting a job’, earned up to 16.4% more than peers who did not take part in any activities

As described in Tables A41 and A42 in Technical Annex, where young adults agreed that they had found their school-mediated employer engagement activities to have been helpful to them ‘in getting a job’, regression analysis shows that their instincts were correct. For each school-mediated employer engagement activity undertaken between the ages of 14 and 19, young adults could expect to earn between 3.7% and 4.1% more than peers who recalled no such experience. A young adult recalling four or more activities could expect to earn 16.4% more than their less fortunate peers, a premium comparable to that identified in the 2011 study. In that study, premiums were detected, if with a weaker set of control variable, regardless of whether the young adult had testified if the experience was helpful or not. The variation in the level of impact – between 3.7% and 4.1% - is explained by the fact that two regressions were undertaken, the first making use of school type attended at 14 to 16 (which gave the premium of 3.7%) and the second which made use of school or college type attended at 16 to 19 (4.1%). Where young adults argued that their teenage employer engagement activities had been helpful in applications to university, the premium was significantly higher reaching 22% (5.5% for each recalled activity on the scale of 1 to 4+) based on regressions against school or college type attended at 16-19 (Table A43). It is not known whether premiums would continue to grow, and if so whether at a comparable pace, with greater numbers of teenage employer engagement activities.

Young adults experienced wage premiums linked to individual activities undertaken within school(s) which they felt had prepared them well for adult life

The survey included a number of tests of the perceived quality of school experiences relevant to preparation for the working world. As seen above, three questions asked respondents to reflect on the specific value of employer engagement activities in enabling progression through, and transition from, education. A fourth question asked, more generally, whether the young adults felt that their school and/or college had prepared them well for adult working life. In answering this broader question, a deeper insight is offered into the breadth of a young person's educational experience beyond employer engagement. In answering, respondents can be expected to reflect views on the curriculum, approaches to teaching and learning, the availability of Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance. Regression analysis found that the delivery of specific activities within such a context (i.e., where respondents found their schools to have prepared them well) was also linked with full-time earnings premiums at age 19-24 on three occasions.

Table 16. Wage premiums linked to activities where respondents felt that schools had prepared them well for adult working life (regression analysis)

Activity	Wage premium (full-time earnings at 19-24)
Enterprise competition with employee volunteers undertaken at ages 14-16	11% more than comparable peers who did not take part in the activity (Table A44)
Business Mentoring undertaken at ages 14-16	19% more than comparable peers who did not take part in the activity (Table A45)
Business Mentoring undertaken at ages 16-19	18% more than comparable peers who did not take part in the activity (Table A46)

Wage premiums of up to £3,500 can be identified linked to teenage participation in school-mediated employer engagement activities

Respondents in full-time employment reported an average gross salary of £15,813. Regression analysis identified a range of wage premiums expressed in percentage terms. By relating these to the average salaries reported, it is possible to describe premiums in cash terms. As set out in Table 17 below, premiums range from £585 (the average premium related to participation in a single recalled employer engagement activity where respondents found school-mediated engagement with employers to have been useful in getting a job) to £3,476 (the average premium related to participation in four or more recalled employer engagement activities where respondents found school-mediated engagement with employers to have been generally useful in getting into university).

Table 17. Wage premiums expressed in cash terms

<i>Employer engagement activity</i>	Premium (expressed in percentage terms)	Premium (expressed in cash terms)
Job Shadowing at 14-16	11%	£1,739
Volume of engagements where engagement in general found to be useful in getting a job – <i>one engagement</i> (school type control, 14-16)	3.7%	£585
Volume of engagements where engagement in general found to be useful in getting a job – <i>four plus engagements</i> (school type control, 14-16)	14.8%	£2,340
Volume of engagements where engagement in general found to be useful in getting a job – <i>one engagement</i> (school type control, 16-19)	4.1%	£648
Volume of engagements where engagement in general found to be useful in getting a job – <i>four plus engagements</i> (school type control, 16-19)	16.4%	£2,592
Volume of engagements where engagement in general found to be useful in getting into university – <i>one engagement</i> (school type control, 16-19)	5.5%	£869
Volume of engagements where engagement in general found to be useful in getting into university – <i>four plus engagements</i> (school type control, 16-19)	22%	£3,476
Enterprise competition at 14-16 where respondent felt school had prepared them well for adult working life	11%	£1,739
Mentoring at 14-16 where respondent felt school had prepared them well for adult working life	19%	£3,004
Mentoring at 16-19 where respondent felt school had prepared them well for adult working life	18%	£2,846

Conclusions: *Implications for policy and practice*

This report presents initial results from a 2016 survey of 1,744 young British adults aged 19-24. Respondents were in the midst of transitions between youth and adulthood, between full-time education and full labour market participation. The survey explored the extent to which they had engaged with employers as part of their educational experiences; whether they felt these engagements, and wider actions undertaken by schools to prepare them for adult working life, had been useful to them; what more they wished their schools had done; and, whether the interventions they had received had made an actual difference to their adult economic outcomes. Through the use of statistical analysis, insights for policy and practice emerge. These relate to three key themes: quantity of employer engagement; its quality as perceived by young people; and, equity in access.

Quantity matters: greater volume of school-mediated employer engagement is associated with better economic outcomes

Building on previous analyses, the report concludes by demonstrating relationships between the number of school-mediated teenage engagements with employers recalled by young adults and significantly reduced incidence of being NEET. The finding is consistent with analyses set out earlier which show consistently strong relationships between taking part in high volume of engagements with employers and the belief that schools had done a good job in preparing teenagers for adult working life, providing them with experiences of genuine utility for later life. The findings support the view that in terms of employer engagement, greater engagement leads to better outcomes. It provides a perspective of employer engagement which is consistent with insights from Social Capital theory: that in each employer engagement activity, young people have opportunities to gain knowledge and skills about, and of relevance to, the labour market which can be new and useful to them (Mann and Dawson 2014; Mann and Percy 2014; Stanley and Mann 2014; Jones et al. 2015; Raffo 2006).

The analysis presented here finds evidence of improved economic outcomes related to each of the different employer engagement activities tested for: work experience, job shadowing, enterprise competitions and mentoring. The strongest results are found with regard to job shadowing undertaken at 14-16 which is linked to premiums of 11% in full-time earnings. The activity was undertaken by fewer than 10% of respondents and it is a further insight from this work that young people in general are engaging with employers insufficiently. Engagement levels have increased since 2011, but only marginally and the typical young adult recalled fewer than two engagements. The findings presented here demonstrate that schools and colleges should aim to double their interventions and engage students with four or more interactions as a minimum. There can be some confidence that greater engagements will be welcomed by young people. In section three of this report, evidence is presented of substantial demand from young adults for greater school activity aimed at improving preparation for the working world.

Quality matters: more highly regarded employer engagement is associated with better economic outcomes

One of the aims of this analysis was to test the insight, provided by Kashefpakdel and Percy (2016), that student perceptions of the quality of the provision they encounter are important - and that greater economic outcomes will be related to more positive views of teenage experiences. In this survey, respondents were asked to look back on their school-mediated provision and assess whether, with hindsight, the activities which they had undertaken had proved to be helpful to them in making decisions at 16; in getting into university; or, in getting a job. In addition, they were asked whether they felt that their school(s) and/or college(s) had, in general terms, prepared them well for adult working life. Analysis presented here shows a consistent relationship between higher regard for school-mediated provision and adult economic outcomes. It suggests that the instincts of young adults were right: that the schools had prepared them better than comparator peers. Wage premiums in excess of 20% are found linked to higher volumes of employer engagement activities described, in general terms, as having been helpful. There is a relationship, moreover, between quantity and quality. It is young people who recalled higher levels of teenage engagements (3 or more) who hold a higher regard for the quality of the preparation they received from their schools for adult working life. The finding is consistent with Kashefpakdel and Percy (2016) who used the British Cohort Study to demonstrate that those teenagers who found their career talks with people from outside school to be very helpful (and so gained the highest wage premiums at age 26) had taken part in a significantly higher volume of career talks than peers who had not found them helpful.

Equity matters: access to school-mediated employer engagement is not fairly distributed

This new analysis began with a review of the volume of employer engagement activities recalled by young adults. It is patterned by disadvantage. Young adults who had experienced the greatest volume of school-mediated employer engagement activities came, on average, from more privileged backgrounds: from Independent schools, grammar schools, holding higher levels of qualification. At the opposite end of the spectrum were respondents who had received Free School Meals, whose parents had not attended university and whose highest qualifications were GCSEs (or equivalent) or lower. Arguably those with greatest need for employer engagement within education commonly received it least. Certainly, it is young people from such backgrounds, as well as young women, who expressed, in greatest numbers, the desire that their schools had offered more preparatory activities for the workplace: developing recruitment skills, helping to understand the modern workplace and how to manage financially.

Next steps

The 2016 dataset provides a rich resource. In further work, analysis will be undertaken of written comments exploring what it was about employer engagement experiences which young people most valued from the perspective of young adulthood.

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