

# Supporting the future of young people with career decisions

An in-depth study with parents & carers across the Cheshire & Warrington sub-region, to better understand what gaps exist in careers education to inform future support

**Prepared by:**

Andrew Wiseman, Strategy Director

Chloe Stephenson, Senior Research Executive

# Agenda

- Introduction to the research
- Barriers to engagement
- Support needs
  - Collective responsibility
  - Child-centric
  - Conversation





# Introduction to the research

A mixed qualitative and quantitative approach was required to delve into the experiences and needs of parents and carers in the Cheshire region, with a focus on **3 priority areas** where engagement is lowest and deprivation is highest – **Crewe, Ellesmere Port & Warrington**  
– with a focus on the needs of parents/carers with children aged 11-16 who are eligible for free school meals.



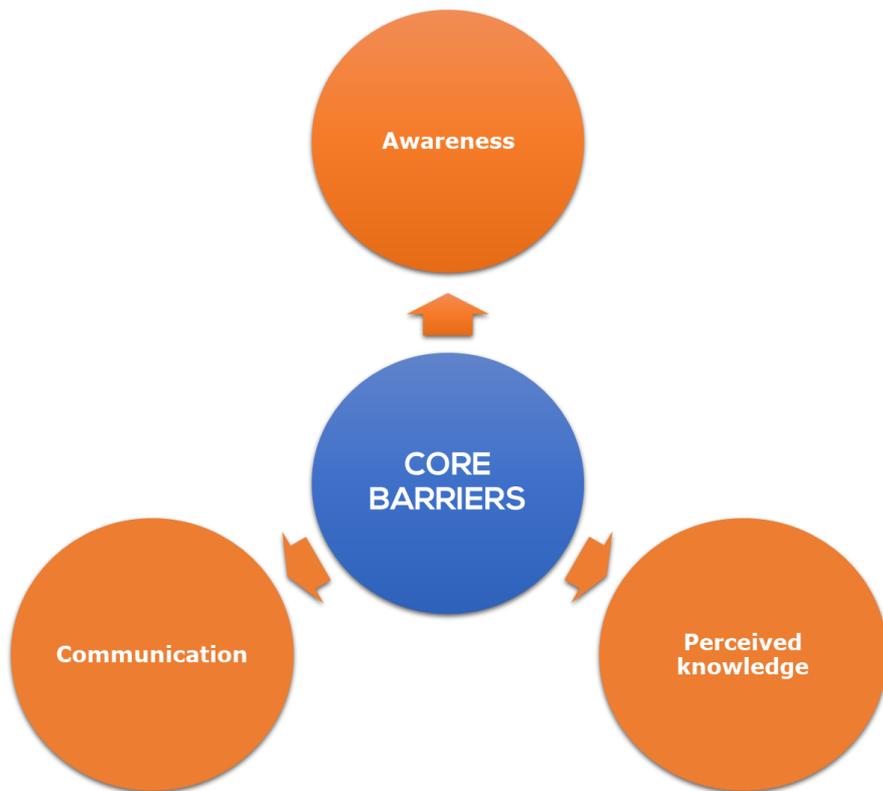
3 x Listening groups



164 x Online survey responses



# Understanding the barriers to parental engagement and access to careers support services



# Awareness





## Awareness of careers options and support services is the first hurdle

Most parents just don't know where to start when it comes to helping their children with next steps.



Over **40%** of parents say they **know little or nothing** about their child's **future career and education options**



Over half of parents (**53%**) don't know where to look for **careers or education support for their child at school**



Two-thirds of parents (**66%**) do not have or are not aware of a **dedicated careers person** in school that can help



Although parents are familiar with traditional routes (e.g., college, Uni), many parents (**72%**) want more information around **alternative, non-traditional next steps** (e.g., T-Levels, degree apprenticeships)

Base: 164 parents.

C1. How much do you know about next steps, future careers, and education choices for your child once they leave school?

D4. Thinking about the support available at your own school(s), which of the following would be a barrier for you?

C6. Does your school(s) have a dedicated careers person who can help young people with their future career and education choices?

C12. What information about future careers and education choices for your child do you need?



# Careers activities and events in school aren't reaching parents

Parents aren't aware of the extent of existing careers activities and support that are currently available in schools – only the 'traditional' routes (i.e., work experience) are familiar – from when they were younger at school.

## AWARE OF



**Careers fairs**



**Work experience**



**Employer visits and talks**



**Careers Guidance Interviews**



**Job boards / bulletins in schools**



**Labour Market Information**



**Careers activities in lessons**

**Familiar** amongst *majority* of parents from own experience and children

**Familiar** amongst *some* parents – only a handful access career interviews

**Unfamiliar** amongst most - not seen or heard of such activities

Whilst parents do engage with traditional careers services in schools, they acknowledge that times have changed and more guidance is needed

“We don't know where to go or who to go to for support. To decide the rest of your life on a single careers fair, in high school, without any support from the parents at the time as well... I think that's a bit out of order to ask them to do that. No parent actually really knows what to get or how to guide their child in a world that is different to it was when we were first looking for careers guidance.”

*Female, 45-54, Crewe*

# Communication





# Ineffective communication stands in the way of parental engagement

Parents want greater involvement and interaction with schools. There's a feeling that current comms are lacking in the information that parents want to hear – particularly around performance, careers guidance and next steps.



## Comms and updates on careers services are lacking

Parents say they rarely receive comms about upcoming careers services, activities and events – hence why awareness of such services and events is low! Regular communications about careers opportunities and services (e.g., dedicated careers lead, careers fairs, employer visit days) across a mix of channels is needed to boost engagement with careers services and events.



## Shift to online has left parents feeling alienated

Everything is now online on 'Zoom' – from parents evenings to work experience opportunities - and there's a feeling that some parents and children have been left behind. What feels like a 'hangover' from COVID should now shift back to in-person interactions between parents and schools to improve engagement.



## Parents want tailored updates on their child's progress

Parents want to know more about their child's strengths outside of the curriculum. A tailored, personalised approach can cater to creative, 'non-academic' talents and skills outside of traditional education skills. Parents can apply this knowledge to helping their children figure out their own unique career paths and next steps – feedback at parents evening is a good first step!



## Parents evenings can be a force for good (engagement)

Parents evenings feel like a one-sided conversation and don't offer much guidance for parents to *apply* the feedback about their child's performance to next steps - i.e., more of 'what do they excel in and what career paths does that open?' is needed. There's an opportunity to bring in dedicated careers leads or advisors to parents evenings or other interactions to help parents piece together the insights.

There's a feeling that communication is passive and falls heavily on parents...

“I have eight different school apps that I run just to keep on top of all the updates. Every single service communicating with the school, the Council, it's across a myriad of apps. There is no universal service. I've got ClassCharts, I've got Waterfall where you can upload photos, I've got Arbor, that's a payment system as well. And then on top of that, we've got TimeTables Rockstar. I feel like you need your own data allowance just to keep on top of communication with the school.”

*Female, 35-44, Crewe*

# Perceived knowledge





# Perceptions of next steps for their children are limited

Parents aren't aware of the vast amount of opportunities available to children today **outside** of the conventional routes.



## Employment

Full-time, part-time,  
conventional 9-5,  
shift work



## College

Sixth-Form,  
A-Levels,  
BTECs



## Apprenticeships

Traditional trade,  
conventional work  
experience (e.g.,  
builder, local garage)



## University

Degree,  
PhD



## But what about?

Arts, creative, sports,  
journalism, freelance, degree  
apprenticeships, T-Levels...

**Non-academic,  
unconventional routes**

% aware (ALL)	93%	89%	72%	60%
% aware (FSM)	86%*	38%*	33%*	33%*

**Traditional, conventional education and career paths are engrained into parents and children, whereas alternative routes (e.g., T-Levels, degree apprenticeships) are less familiar. Helping parents understand what options are available can help children to understand and choose their own path.**

Breaking generational cycles of what the 'traditional' career route looks like after school is key to educating children about their future choices...



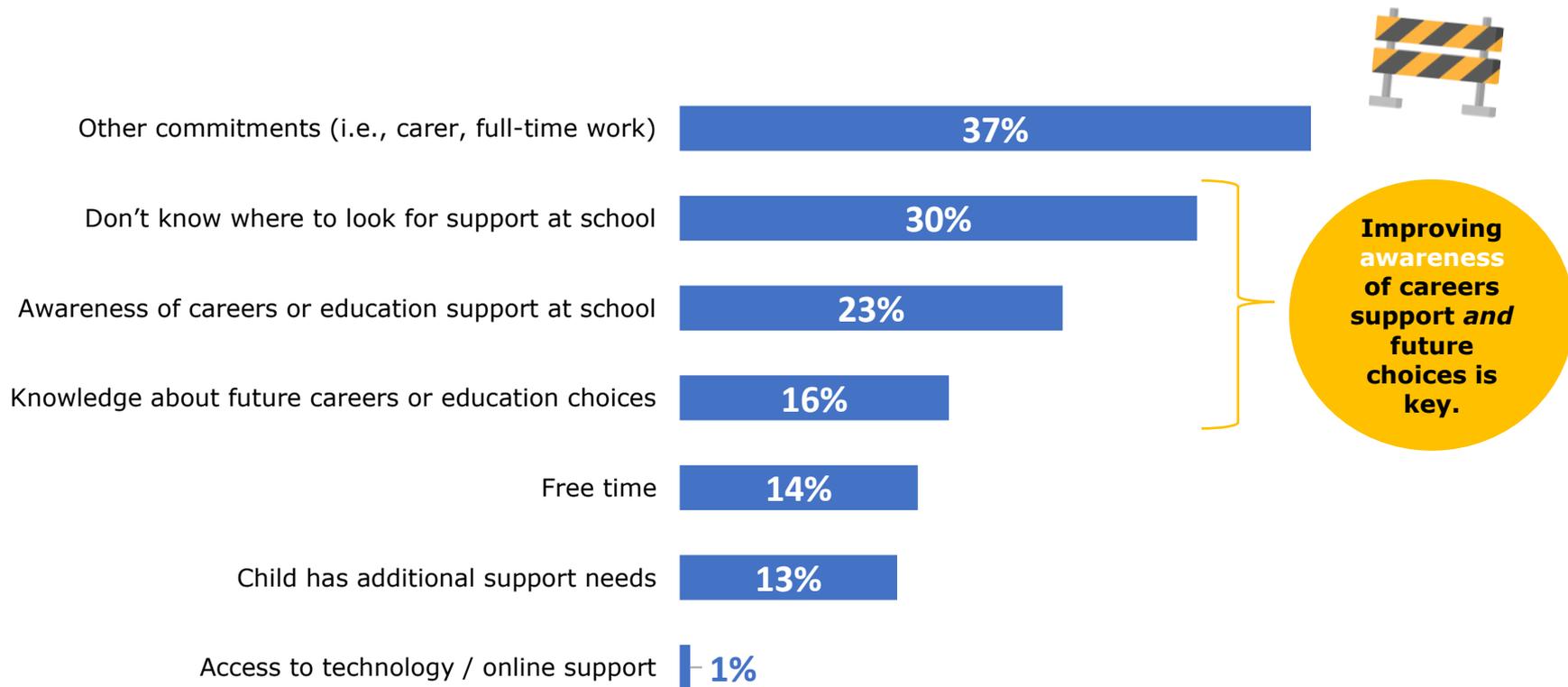
“I think it depends as well on your own family of their experiences of education as well. And I'm a firm believer that you can have lifelong education, you don't have to be 20. You don't have to go from A Levels to uni, you can take time out, you can do a degree at any time in your life. I think we have this conditioned view of what education is, how it should be, and what you need to get out of it in order to get where you need to be.”

*Female, 45-54, Warrington*



## Overcoming other barriers to parental engagement

Whilst some external factors play a part in poor parental engagement, awareness and knowledge of future career options and support services are driving factors that schools can help overcome.



Base: 164 parents.

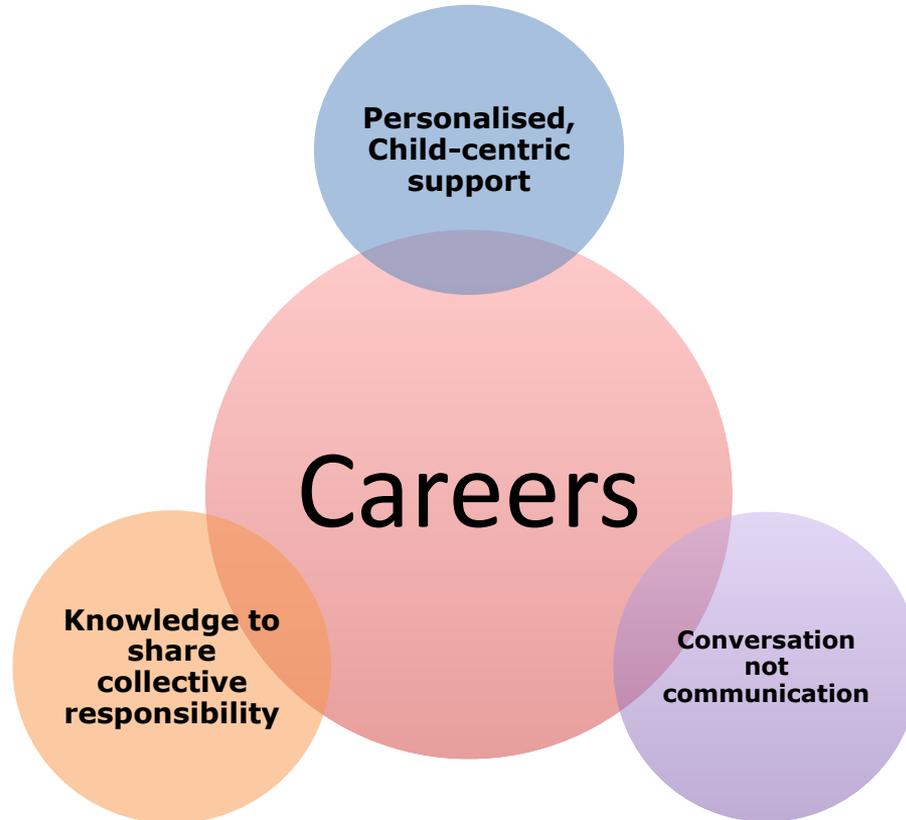
D4. Thinking about the support available at your own school(s), which of the following would be a barrier for you?

# Support needs





# The research uncovered 3 core principles to providing better careers provisions in schools





# Conversation





# Considerations



## Thrivers

*(parents and/or employers)*

Engaged, passionate, child focused, knowledgeable/curious and driven to fact find, supportive, social capital, aspirational, proactive



## Survivors

*(parents)*

Neutral, time poor, overwhelmed, reactive, lack capacity to engage with additional opportunities, functional day to day focus.



## Disconnected

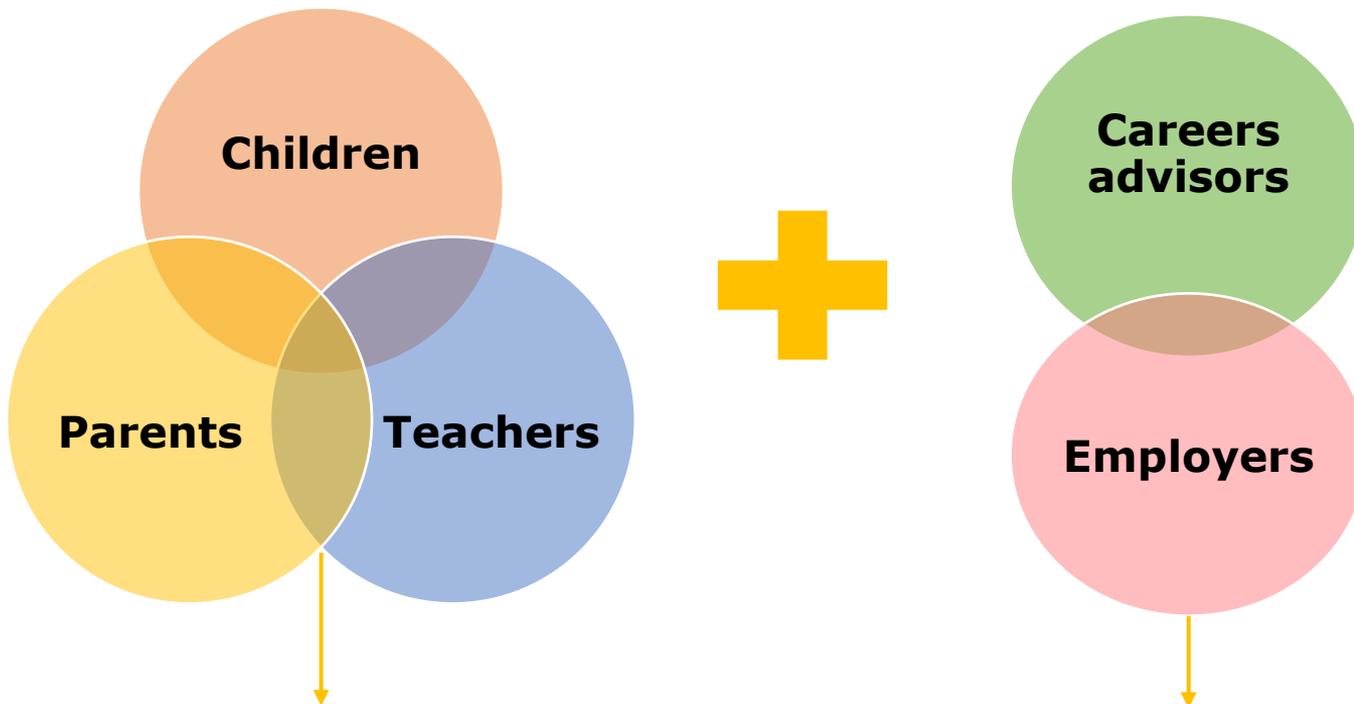
*(parents)*

Disconnected, overwhelmed, unsupportive, reactive, lack of knowledge, disadvantaged (not all), frustrated, uninspiring / not aspirational, little or no social capital/network



## Conversation goes beyond communications

Communications from school must go beyond one-sided interactions and shift to a more interactive conversation between parents, teachers and children to fully understand next steps.



Conversation is a **two (or three) way affair** while communication can be a one way affair. Bring those conversations **in-school and offline** to bridge the communication gap between parents and schools.

Start the conversation on careers **earlier**. Bring **career experts** into those conversations to gauge a better understanding of children's aspirations over time

## Creating a network of support for children to have conversations about careers with their teachers, parents and career leads in school



“More access to one-on-one time for the kids with someone who actually has a record of what the child has been interested in, so it's not just coming to every meeting fresh. They have a bit of continuity in the approach and also, possibly having a bit more of a three way conversation with perhaps the careers, the child and the parents. Everyone's involved in the conversation. Because obviously, parents have a big role to play at home in supporting their kids to find something that they're interested in or possibly could do.”

*Male, 55-64, Handbridge*

Involve parents in conversations around careers provision in schools and ensure that no one gets left behind. Collaborate and cocreate in partnership.



“The main stumbling block is the communication from schools to parents. There’s a lot that just doesn't get said, because you don't have the interaction with schools like we used to. I think, face-to-face contact with schools is very important. And I think parents have missed out on a lot in the last two or three years. And children as well. They've lost a lot.”

*Female, 35-44, Ellesmere Port*



# Child-centric





## Putting children (and parents) back at the centre

Child-centric support allows parents to have an input in what careers services best serve their children.



**Personalisation** – parents want input in conversations and plans surrounding careers provisions at school for their children to know that their child's individual needs are taken into consideration. More in-person opportunities to **cocreate and communicate** with parents not only builds rapport, but reassures parents that support services are created with their children's needs in mind.



**Exposure** – parents are pushing for more exposure to a greater range of education and career opportunities for their children. **Allowing parents to be involved with careers activities and event** (both input and attendance) can not only increase parental engagement but equip them with knowledge and tools first-hand to enable them to better support their children with next steps.



**Feedback** – parents want feedback on their child's progress, performance and interests to enable them to have better conversations around next steps. Having **dedicated careers advisors** to integrate feedback from teachers and employers (e.g., in career guidance interviews, at parents evening) can give parents and their children a **tailored, personalised careers plan**

Parents want to be brought into the careers conversations, with tailored feedback at parents evenings that is central to their child



“We had our parents evening, and we literally get five minutes. That for me isn't enough because I have questions I want to ask. There isn't enough of our input. I want to be able to talk about my son and ask them questions, so that it helps me at home when doing homework, or if he's got a problem. But you literally get five minutes. It's all been on Zoom again, and as soon as that five minutes goes, click, they're gone.”

*Female, 35-44, Crewe*



# Collective responsibility

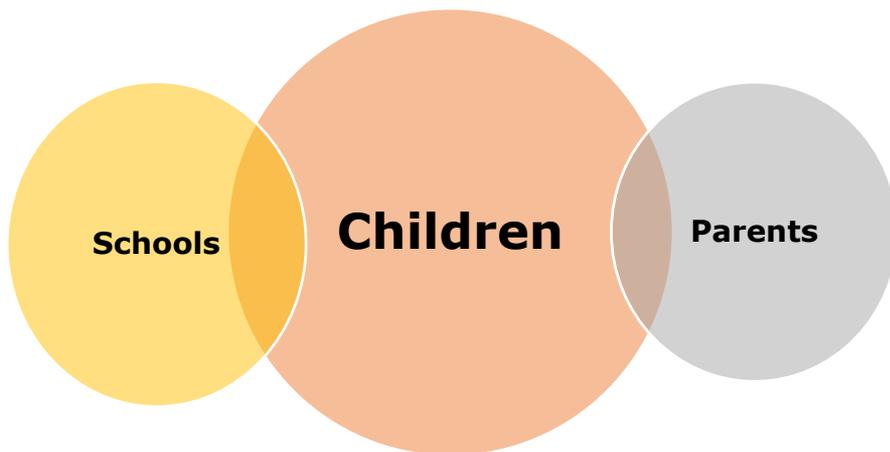
PASSION LED US HERE





## We have a collective responsibility for children's future careers

Ultimately, children are responsible for their own future careers and education choices – but it's our responsibility as caregivers and education providers to help them get there.



**Schools (teachers & career advisors)** are responsible for raising awareness of careers provisions, and equipping parents with the knowledge of future choices to provide them with the tools and information to better support children with their next steps.

**Children** are responsible for following up on their future careers and education choices, and taking the next steps based on the new-found knowledge of options and support available to them (from parents & schools).

Once equipped with the knowledge and tools, **parents** are responsible for supporting children (practically and emotionally) with their future education and career choices, and opening up the conversation.



**Note:** thrivers, survivors, and disconnected parents will have differing levels of contact and support needs from school.



“So you show them the **nonlinear ways to a career path**. So like myself, I started at a Boots chemist when I was 15, then I worked at the opticians and the opticians actually paid for me to do my degree, my optics degree, without going to uni in the **traditional way.**”

*Female, 35-44, Warrington*



- 

**It's our collective responsibility to help children decide their own future** by providing the means to doing so. Catering to each child's unique and individual needs is a big task – but, simply acknowledging that each child is unique in their learning styles, skills and interests and in turn, their future decisions is a big step. Equipping children with the knowledge of all future careers and education paths (outside of the conventional routes), whilst providing the relevant support to get there can create a sense of personalised, child-centric careers support in schools.
- 

**Bridging the information gap between schools, parents and children is key.** Information (or rather, the lack of) is the biggest barrier to accessing careers support in schools. To help parents help children take the next step, more information and exposure to all potential career paths (traditional and alternative) and support available is required. Starting the conversation earlier before it's decision time allows children and their parents to make better, well-informed decisions about their future paths.
- 

**Streamline communications into one system** (whether that be an app or other platform) for parents to connect with teachers and schools, allowing for more collaboration and conversations between all parties. Comms should be child-centric with updates on child's progress, performance and insights that can help parents have better careers conversations.
- 

**Parents evenings are a good 'in' for opening up child-centric conversations** with parents. At present, such evenings feel one-sided and don't offer much guidance for parents to *apply* the feedback about their child's performance to next steps - i.e., 'what do they excel in and what career paths does that open?'. There's potential to bring in dedicated careers leads and employers at parents evenings to help parents integrate and apply this feedback to their child's future education and career choices.
- 

**Getting back on the ground with parents and shifting conversations back face-to-face** in schools not only avoids digital exclusion but creates a greater sense of collaboration and partnership amongst parents. The focus on online post-COVID has left parents (and children) feeling alienated. What feels like a 'hangover' from COVID should now shift back to in-person interactions between parents and schools to improve engagement, giving parents the opportunity to cocreate careers provisions with schools.

Thank you.

Any questions?



## There's a disconnect between what parents know and what they want

At present, the careers support services that parents expect to see aren't top of mind. More awareness and improving communications around such services can boost parental engagement with careers support.

### 'MUST-HAVES'



Base: 164 parents

D8. Which of the following support services do you think are a 'must-have', a 'nice-to-have' and 'less important'?



## Parents want more immersive, interactive careers provision

Given awareness of current careers services is low, educating parents and children about the extent of support available, and expanding the range of services to meet a wider range of needs can help to increase engagement.



"A lot of primary schools and secondary schools have **links with local industries**. I think schools should really tap into those industries and take the kids around the different industries. During the summer, **offer work placements** for a week or so to give them a feel for the work environment and get them doing different things."

*Male, 55-64, Handbridge*

"Schools take kids out into these **retreats** for two or three days, and they do different stuff like climbing trees and that sort of thing. But you can do the same thing for **industries**, you take them out for two or three days, **take them into different industries**, take them into the hospitals, car showrooms or something and supermarkets, just show them what's out there and give them ideas to motivate them in some way."

*Male, 45-54, Crewe*



## Bridging the information gap between parents and children is key

To help parents help children take the next step, more information and exposure to all potential career paths (traditional and alternative) is required. Parents only know what they've been taught previously.

Share knowledge about:

- ? **Options** – all (traditional and alternative) careers, education, and vocational next steps that are available today
- ? **Child's performance** – to understand what they're good at, what they like to inform future conversations and ideas
- ? **Next steps** – step-by-step information and signposting where to find out about future options
- ? **Funding** – for educational options (i.e., Uni), more information on how/where to get funding

"I think we're now in a society where **a job for life doesn't exist anymore.**"

*Female, 35-44, Warrington*



“

*At least he's got **a job for life**  
Get born, get schooled  
Get job, get car  
Pay tax and find a wife*

”

---

*Heavyweight Champion of the World - Reverend and the Makers*



# Parental engagement with schools is a one-sided interaction

Although the majority of parents receive communications from school via apps, email and letters home, the onus is on the parents to follow up and actively *engage* with schools – creating the first hurdle to engagement.



## Emails

*School updates, events,  
Activities, notices*

85%



- ✓ Key channel for parents to stay up-to-date
- ✓ Opportunities to get involved with schools
- x Checking emails frequently
- x Less personal, blanket messaging



## Apps

*e.g., Schudio, ClassCharts,  
Waterfall, Arbor, TimesTables*

34%



- ✓ Checking updates, easy uploads
- x Not accessible for all
- x Too many apps – overwhelming
- x Busy parents to keep on top of



## Letters

*Child's progress, school  
updates, notices, events*

22%



- ✓ More tailored updates on child
- x Letters notoriously lost on the way home
- x Not all parents receive letters from school

**More direct conversations between schools, teachers and parents is needed to bridge the gap... more on that later!**



## Engagement with careers services also relies on better communication

Many parents feel that support is lacking in terms of where to start when it comes to next steps for their children. There's a feeling that current services they access need to involve parents more to better support their children.

### What future careers and education services do parents currently access?

**Careers fairs**



- ✓ Perceived to be a good 'starting point'
- x Children / parents need more follow-up support

**Parents evenings**



- x Not perceived to be for careers / 'next steps'
- x Not enough time to discuss next steps

**Open days**



- x More in-school education talks
- x Wider variety of education options covered (e.g. T-Levels)

**Work experience**



- x Hiatus on work experience since COVID
- x Online / virtual opportunities aren't valuable



**Traditional routes/services** that are already 'mainstream' knowledge from when parents were younger. Many parents **aren't aware of support that exists for next steps outside of these.**



## Perceived knowledge is a barrier to taking the next step

Parents' knowledge of future careers and education choices for their children is limited. For many, such conversations with their children are based off their own early experience of careers and education choices.

The majority of parents *do* talk to their children about careers regularly, but advice and guidance is **limited** and typically centres on asking the child...

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

This feels like a **big ask** of young children!

- Hard for young people to know - overwhelming
- Aren't aware of all their options
- Don't know how to get there - the next step
- Unaware that it can change throughout their life



“I asked my son, ‘**what do you want to do?**’ And he started off saying to be a **scientist**, then he said he wouldn't mind being a scientist or a **fireman**. And all of a sudden, a **YouTuber** came into it. And now he's on a bit of a standstill but he's learning to cook, Doug used to be a **chef**, and I used to cook as well. And Dad's **an electrician**. And I was trying to go into **the health service**, you know, but ‘**what would you like to do?**’... We're still working on it. It's a work in progress.”

*Female, 35-44, Crew*

As a result, many parents lean on their network of family and friends for support with their child's next steps as they don't know where else to go



“Support from family and friends. And parental support once you find a group of parents. We started Monday club where we go to each other's house for tea on a Monday with each of our three families, and we do it every Monday night. It started off a group of mums of disabled kids and kids with special needs just to get together over a coffee because they just want to support each other.”

*Female, 35-44, Warrington*



## Shifting to parent-teacher partnerships

Facilitating positive partnerships between parents, teachers and careers leads in school can lead to greater parental engagement in career provisions.



Previous research has also shown that working together in partnership with parents to **co-create** provision in schools helps improve overall parent/carer confidence, satisfaction and engagement.

Five key areas to consider:

1. **Keep parents/carers informed** about upcoming and current careers provision in schools and update on child's performance
2. **Ensure parents/carers know how to contact key staff** – raise awareness of dedicated careers leads in school and put parents and children in touch
3. **Provide honest communication** – be transparent on support and careers provision available to parents/carers
4. **Listen carefully** to parents/ carers and give them time to explain and discuss their concerns and support needs
5. **Try to avoid any uncertainty / misinterpretation** - receiving clear information in frequent comms around careers services and events is best and prevents misinformation



# Applying the Gatsby benchmarks

How schools can apply our core principles to the benchmark for providing world class careers provisions in schools.

**Collective responsibility**

1 A stable careers programme

**Conversation**

- 2 Learning from careers and labour market information
- 4 Linking curriculum learning to careers
- 5 Encounters with employers and employees
- 7 Encounters with further and higher education

**Child-centric**

- 3 Addressing the needs of each student
- 6 Experiences of workplaces
- 8 Personal guidance



# Collective Responsibility (noun)



**Collective:** of or *shared* by every member of a group.

**Responsibility:** something that is your *job or duty* to deal with.

# Child-centric (adj.)



*designed to develop the **individual and social qualities of a student** rather than provide a generalized information or training by way of prescribed subject matter.*



# Conversation

*(noun)*

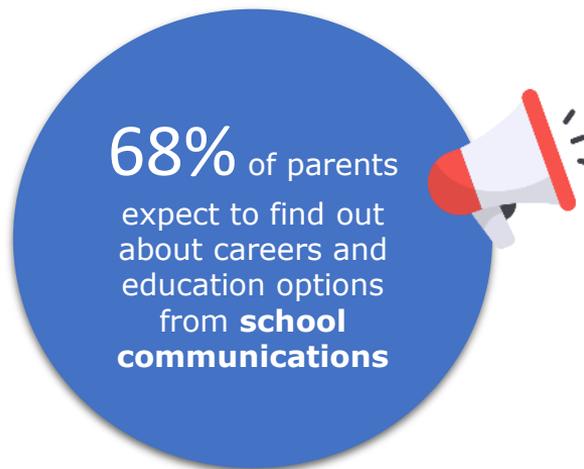
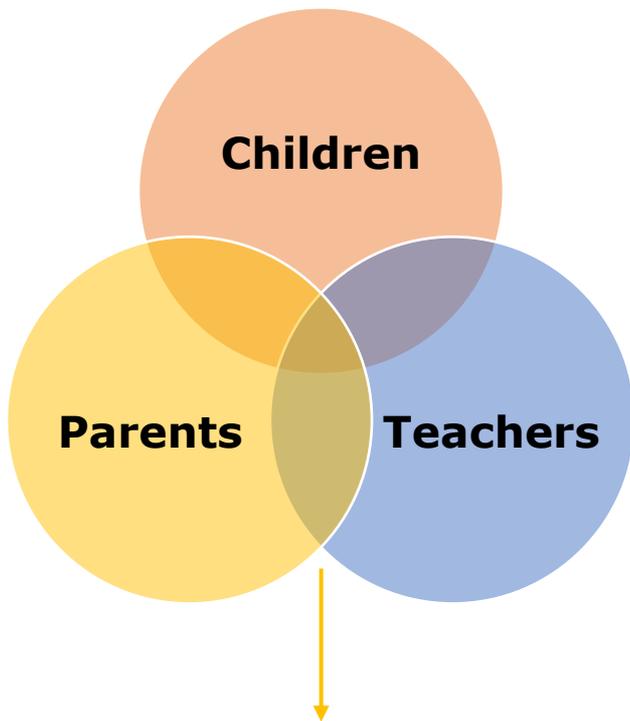


*a talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, **questions are asked and answered**, or **news and information is exchanged**.*



## Conversation goes beyond communications

Communications from school must go beyond one-sided interactions and shift to a more interactive conversation between parents, teachers and children to fully understand next steps.

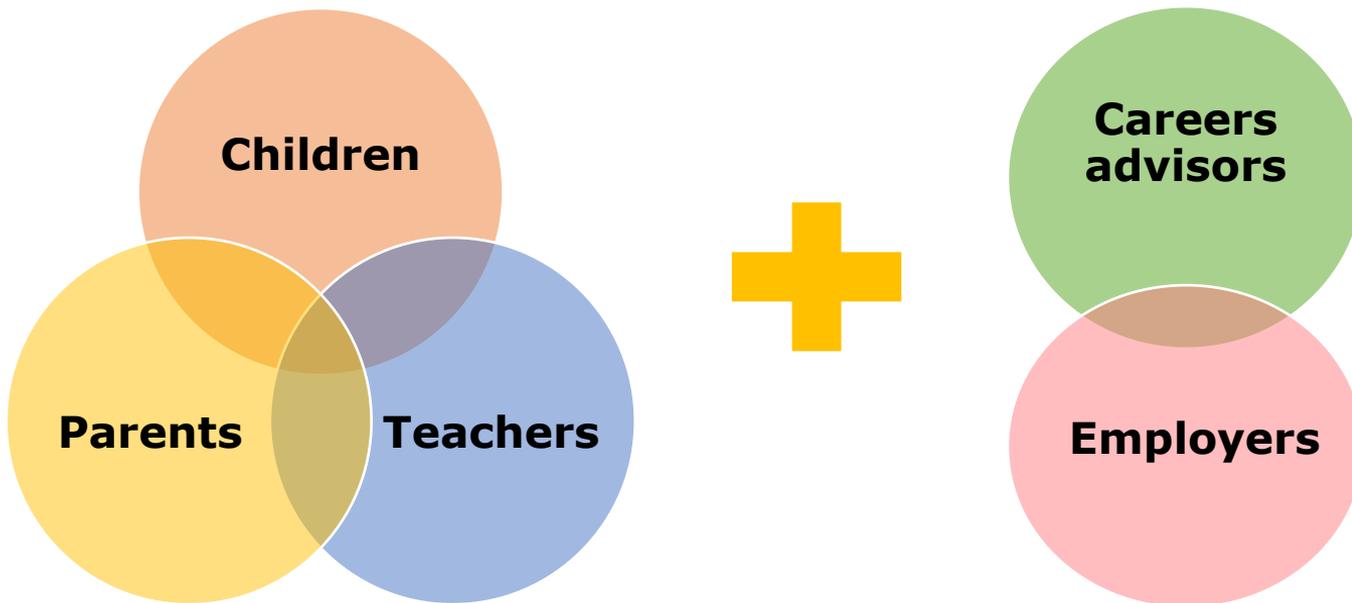


Conversation is a **two (or three) way affair** while communication can be a one way affair. Bringing those conversations **in-school and offline** can avoid digital exclusion and bridge the communication gap between parents and schools.



## Start the conversation on careers earlier

Bring career experts (internal careers advisors and external employers) into those conversations earlier to gauge a better understanding of children's aspirations and how they shift over time



Integrating careers advisors at **parents evenings** is a good starting point to bring together conversations between parents, teachers and children to apply feedback and tailor support to each individual child's next steps.



## Putting children back at the heart of their futures

A child-centric approach acknowledges that each child is unique. Building careers provisions and providing tools that allow children to 'pick and choose' based on what they want and what they're good at is key.

"These big companies and small companies need to be brought into schools more. So make the case to see what the kids are like to see that **they don't learn in this factory type way** that society has got. The kids are **unique**, none of them are the same."

*Female, 45-54, Warrington*



"Let's say for the autistic person who doesn't comprehend on paper but can understand physically... there needs to be focus based around what children can really do. It's not thought about what a child is **able to do** and what they **want to do**. That's not made to **connect**."

*Female, 35-44, Crewe*

**The challenge is building a collective careers provision that can be universally applied to schools but that still allows for personalisation, allowing children to tailor support to their individual needs**

## Celebrating not-so-‘soft’ skills in children

By acknowledging that each child is unique, careers provision should celebrate the individual skills and talents outside of traditional academic skills including emotional, interpersonal and creative skills.

Employers are increasingly looking for **‘soft’ skills** (i.e., emotional, interpersonal and creative skills) in a rapidly-evolving modern world

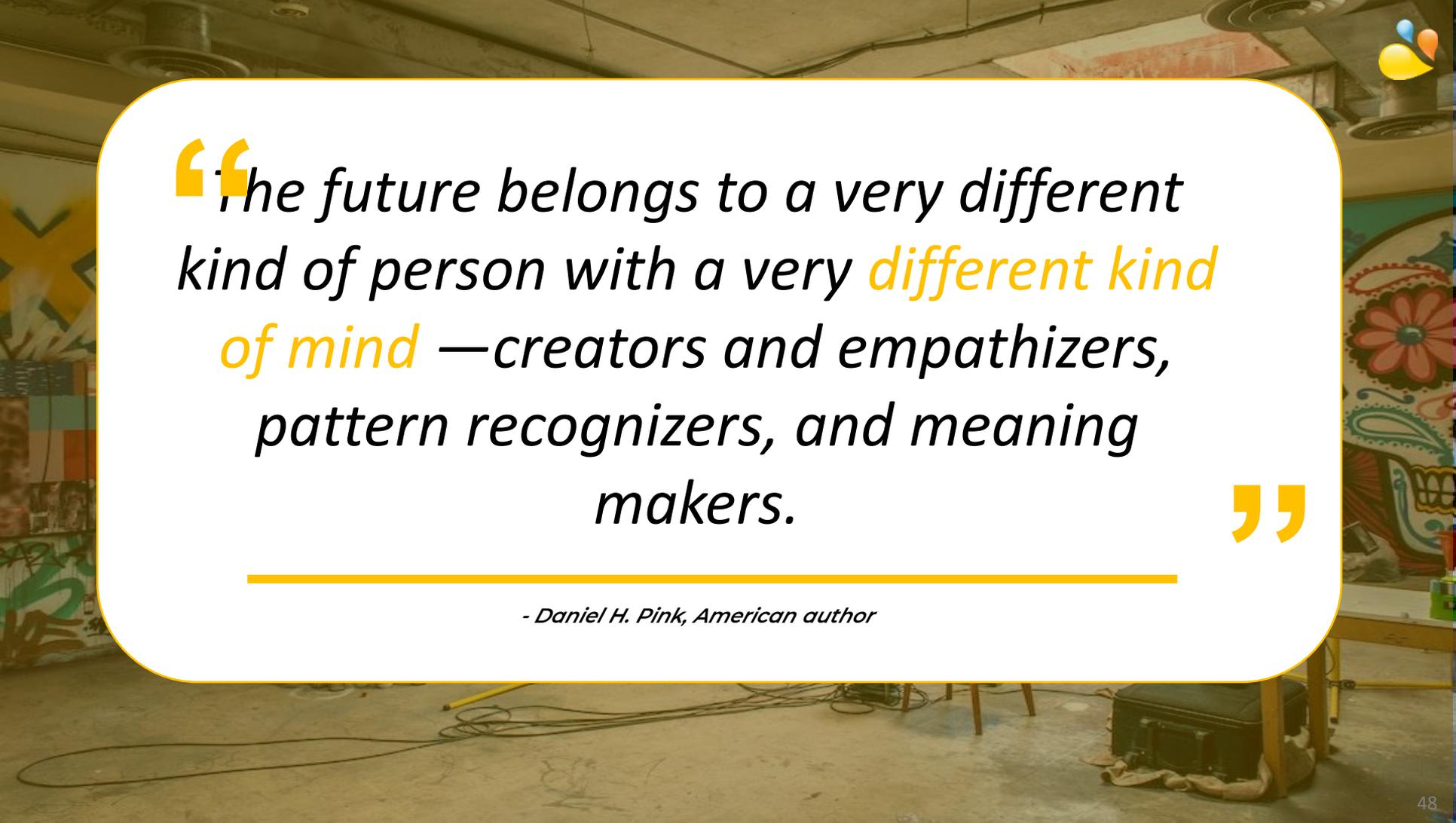
- Open-mindedness
- Risk-taking
- Asking big questions
- Leadership skills
- Team work
- Respect
- Active listening
- Creativity (e.g., artistic, musical, digital)
- Empathy... **to name a few**

**Celebrating diversity of thought, learning styles, creativity and skills – particularly in supporting children who are neurodiverse and have additional special educational needs – opens up a world of possibilities.**

**“People skills**, these sort of things, they might not be academic, but they might have the best personality. And that's where that **emotional support** comes into it. You know, it's about **celebrating their unique skills.**”

*Female, 45-54, Warrington*



The background of the slide is a photograph of an art studio or workshop. On the left, there's a wall with colorful geometric patterns. On the right, a mural of a colorful flower is visible. The floor is concrete with some cables and equipment scattered around. In the top right corner, there's a small logo consisting of three overlapping circles in blue, yellow, and orange. The quote itself is centered in a white rounded rectangle with a yellow border. The text is in a black, sans-serif font, with the words "different kind of mind" highlighted in yellow. The quote is enclosed in large yellow quotation marks. A horizontal yellow line is positioned below the quote, and the attribution is centered below that line.

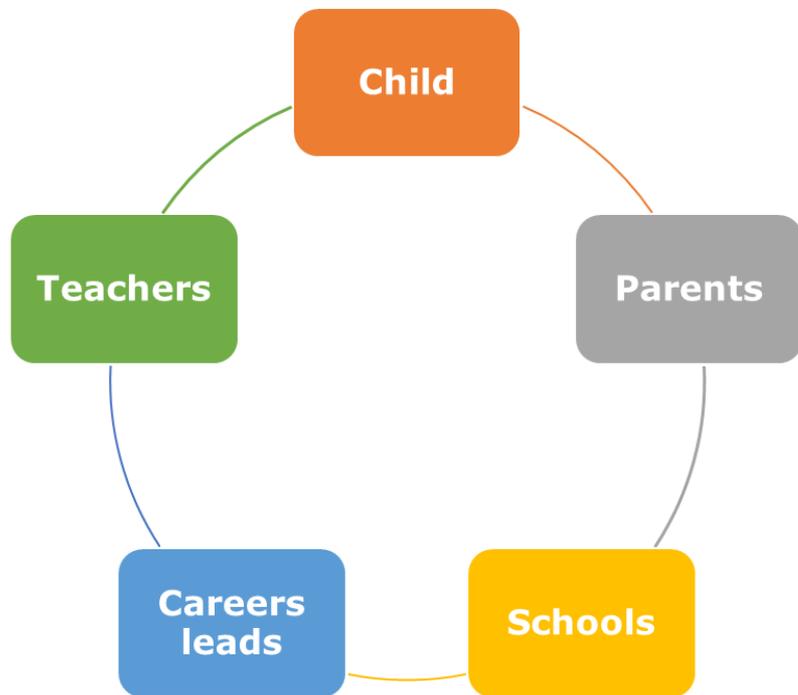
*“The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very **different kind of mind** —creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers.”*

*- Daniel H. Pink, American author*



## We have a collective responsibility for future careers

Ultimately, children are responsible for their own future careers and education choices – but it's our responsibility as caregivers and education providers to help them get there.



We have a **collective responsibility** to provide better careers provisions in schools that ensure young people have the opportunities and resources to choose their future career and education path.

This **overarching** principle encompasses all core principles of what a stable careers programme should look like:

- Collective, collaborate effort
- Child-centric
- Based on conversations with parents / children

Starting the careers conversations earlier gives children a greater chance of knowing what they want from their futures



“I think [careers] is something that could be brought in in younger years. So, maybe they're too young to be making any kind of decisions, but they have a more general awareness of the types of businesses and companies and careers and things in years 7, 8, 9, when they're not actually studying hard for their GCSEs, and things like that. So it's just there in the background a little bit more. So kids get a little bit more awareness of the sort of things that are available.”

*Male, 55-64, Ellesmere Port*

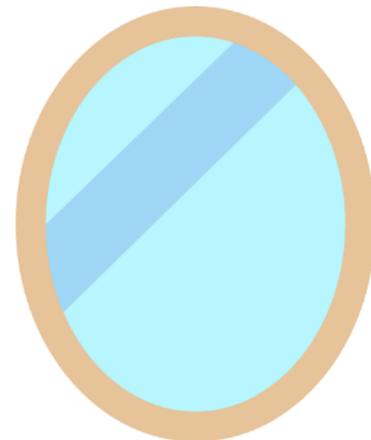


## Social norms put a lot of pressure on career expectations

Children (and parents) are socially conditioned to think that the linear, conventional path after school is to get a degree or get a job. As children mirror their role models, this limits what both parents and children think about next steps after school.

### Breaking boundaries

- **Lay out all options** – release expectations of what a child’s future looks like, allowing careers support to be child-led and tailored to their interests and skills
- **Wildcards!** – Offer *anti-recommendations* based off children’s interests and skills to avoid ‘boxing’ them in to one path and instead, giving them all options
- **‘Quiz’ time** – educational tools such as careers quizzes can help close the gap and align expectations of what children want to do vs. what parents (and teachers) think the child should do and what’s out there (*Note: such tools should be used as a guide only!*)
- **It’s OK to change your mind** – teach children about non-linear, non-traditional future career and education paths. It’s never too late to switch directions.
- **Find out and match** – listening to what children like and what they’re good at can help cater careers provisions to finding the perfect ‘match’ of next steps for that individual



**It’s our collective responsibility to educate people on all future possibilities after school to give children a chance to decide their own futures - *before* social conditioning sets them off down the conventional path.**