

Parental Engagement Research – Executive Summary

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

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Background and methodology

A mixed qualitative and quantitative approach was required to delve into the experiences and needs of parents and carers in the Cheshire & Warrington 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 (FSM)**.

The first two listening groups were solely FSM, however, there was an overall challenge engaging FSM especially in the high deprivation areas, so the study was widened to include all Cheshire & Warrington.
The sample of FSM in the online survey was 21 – 13%, which is lower than the FSM % across Cheshire & Warrington



3 x Listening groups

2 x groups in-person (Warrington and Crewe) and 1 x online via Zoom (wider Cheshire region) with parents of children aged 11-16 eligible for free school meals and a mix of SEND



164 x Online survey responses

10-minute online survey sent out to parents of children aged 11-16 via the schools across Cheshire & Warrington

**full sample breakdown can be provided*

Key Learnings





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. Better signposting and improved communications between parents and schools can raise awareness of future choices.



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?

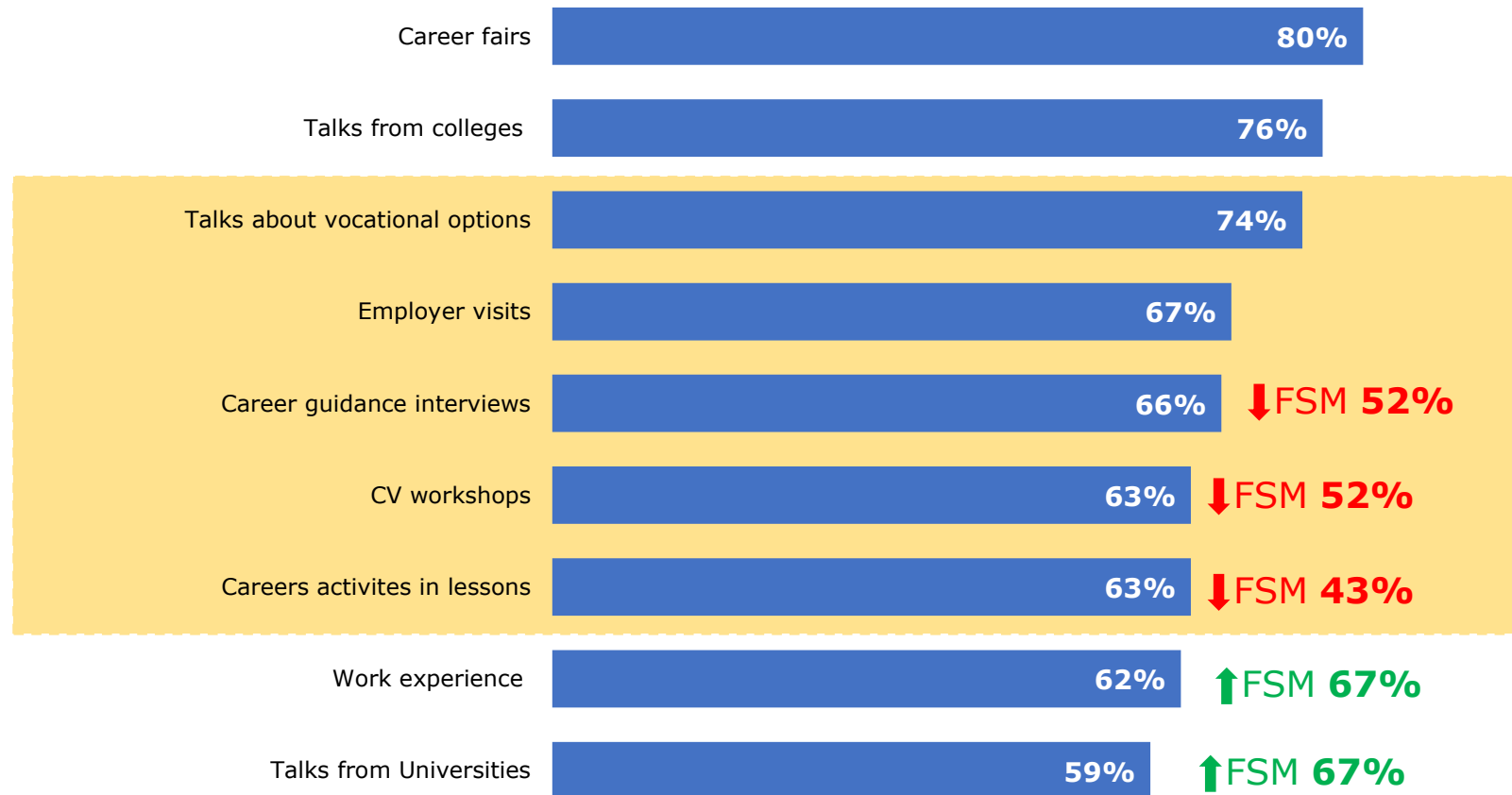
C6. Does your school(s) have a dedicated careers person who can help young people with their future career and education choices?

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

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'



Parents are the least aware of yet most interested in these particular careers support services

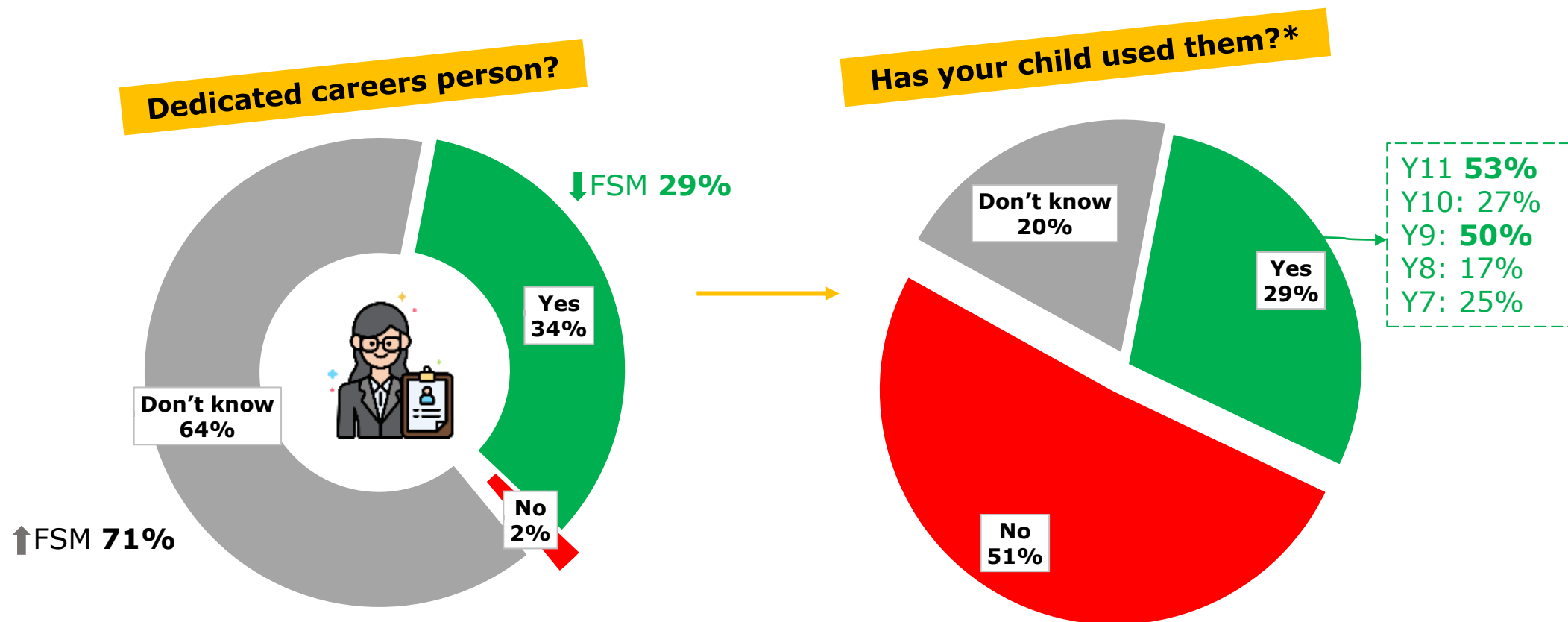
Base: Total 164 parents / *FSM (Caution: small base size - 21)

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



Awareness of and perception of engagement with dedicated careers people is low

More communications around dedicated careers people in schools is needed to raise awareness of the service. Amongst those whose children do have access to a careers person at school, half haven't used them.



Base: 164 parents / *55 parents who have a dedicated careers person / *FSM (Caution: small base size – 21) / Y7 (16), Y8 (12), Y9 (6), Y10 (15), Y11 (17)
C6. Does your school(s) have a dedicated careers person who can help young people with their future career and education choices?
C7. Has your child/children used the dedicated careers person for support with their next steps?

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





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)*



T-Levels



University

Degree, PhD

% aware
(ALL)

93%

89%

72%

25%

60%

% aware
(FSM)

86%*

38%*

33%*

14%*

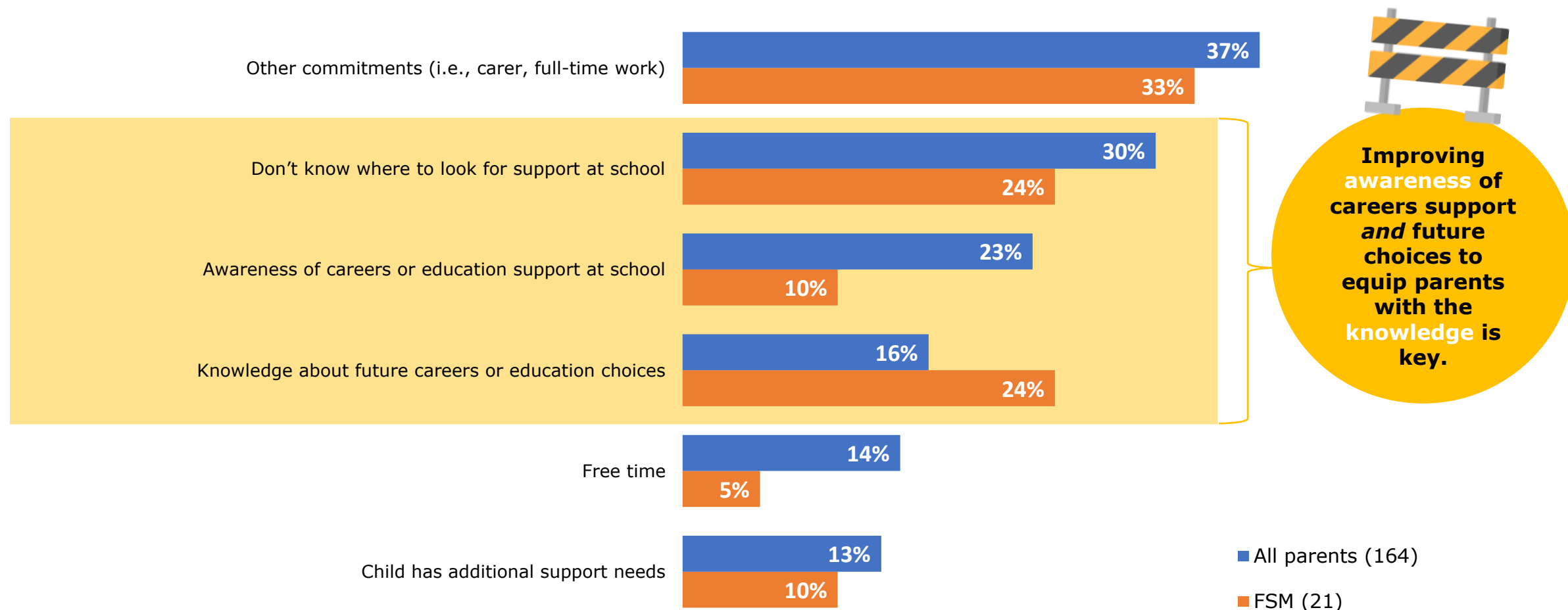
33%*

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.



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.



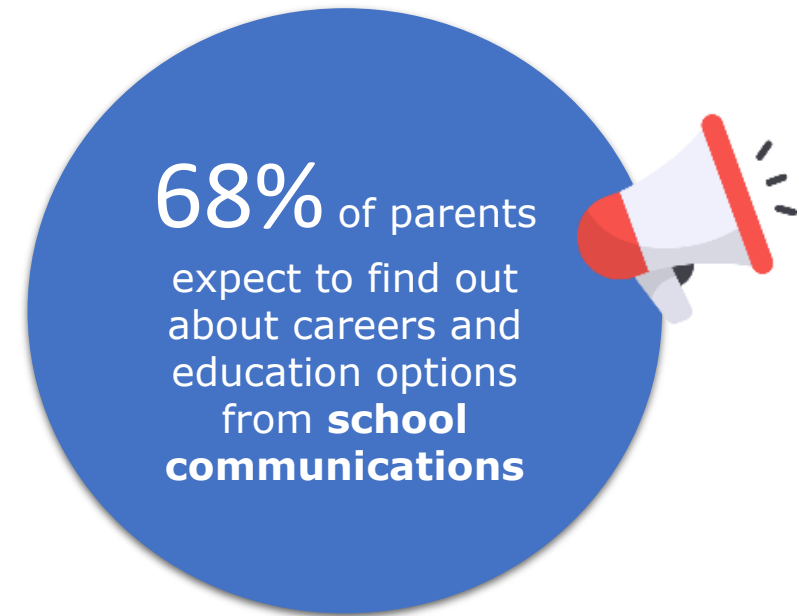
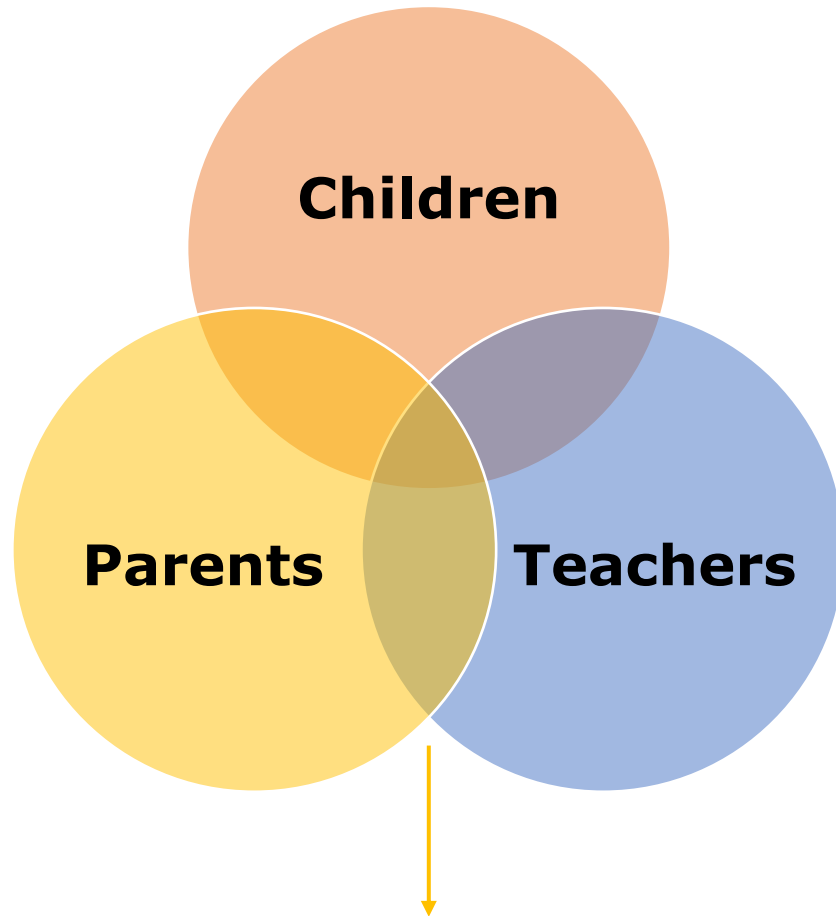
Base: 164 parents / *FSM (Caution: small base sizes) -21. Multiple choice question.

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



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.

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

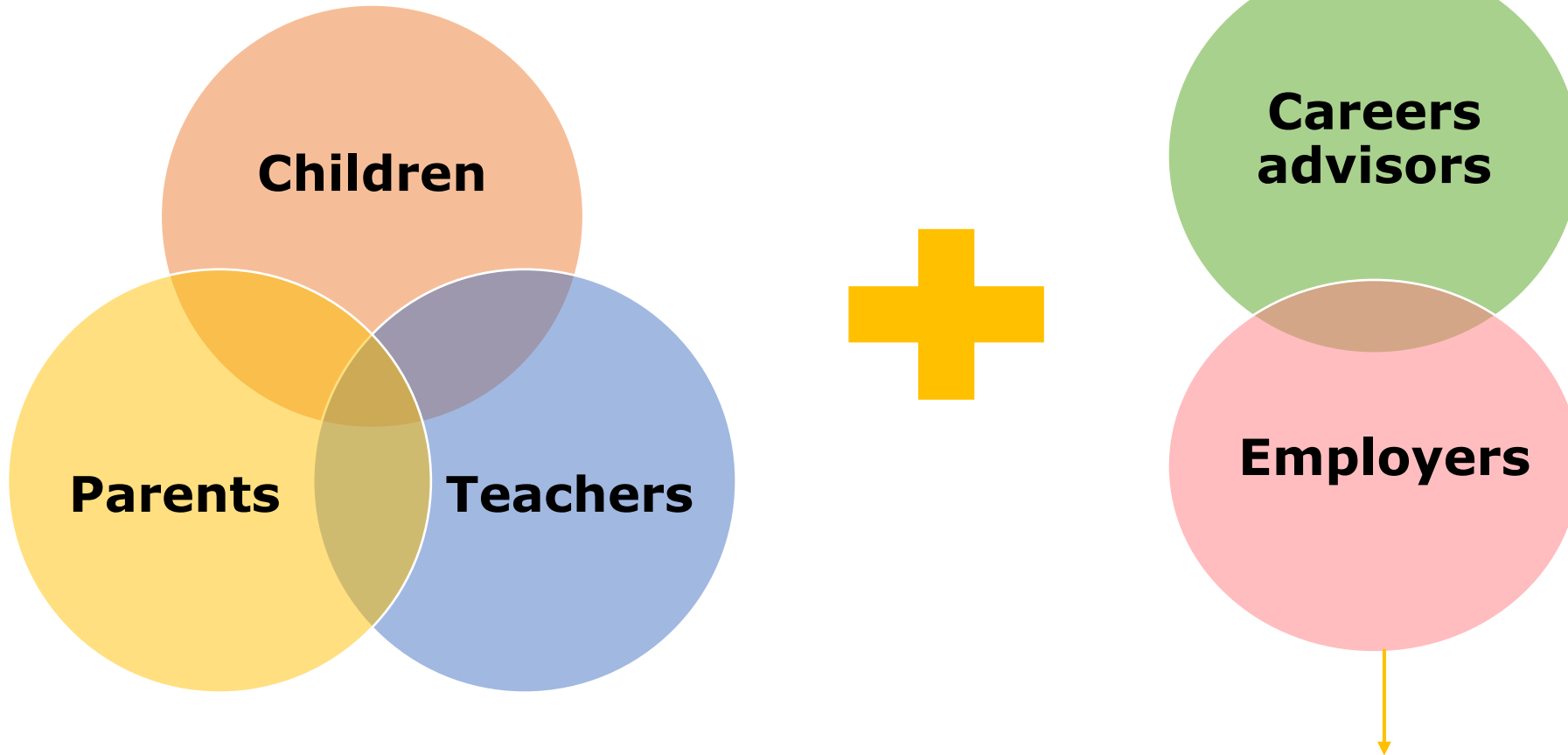


“The main stumbling block is the communication from schools to parents. There’s a lot that just doesn't get said, because you don't have the interaction with schools like we used to. I think, face-to-face contact with schools is very important. And I think parents have missed out on a lot in the last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

Female, 35-44, Ellesmere Port

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.

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



- Lack of awareness around next steps and career support for their children is the first hurdle** to parental engagement and access to careers provisions in schools. Careers support services, activities and events in schools aren't reaching parents. Over half of parents (53%) don't know where to look for careers or education support for their child at school.
- Bridging the information gap between schools, parents and children is key.** Information (or rather, the lack of) is the next 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.
- Parents' perceived knowledge of next steps for their children is limited.** Parents are most aware of conventional employment routes for their children after school and are less aware of alternative routes (e.g., vocational, apprenticeships, University) – creating a careers 'blind spot'. The most disengaged parents aren't aware of what's out there and consequently, feel that they don't 'need to know' or want to know more information about future options outside of conventional employment.
- Shifting from communications to conversations is important.** Current comms from schools feel passive and one-sided to parents. Consequently, parents aren't engaging with us. Reframing *how* we communicate with parents (e.g., channel, language, tone) alongside better signposting to careers support and information can help improve engagement.
- Getting back face-to-face on the ground with parents** 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.
- Parents evenings are a good 'in' for opening up child-centric conversations with parents.** At present, such evenings 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.