



Workforce ready:
Supporting young
people with the
employability skills
that businesses need
for growth

 **BARCLAYS** | LifeSkills

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Barclays' Group Policy Development team creates public policy thought leadership content on behalf of Barclays. Our work draws on the bank's expertise, data and insights, and is intended to inform the design and application of public policy solutions in response to pressing economic and societal challenges.

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Executive summary

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has stated that growth in the UK is the number one mission of this government. Yet businesses tell us that difficulties in hiring an appropriately skilled workforce are hampering their ability to grow. This report focuses on how to develop the core, transferable employability skills of young people. It makes specific recommendations to government that we believe would improve the work-readiness of school leavers, helping to accelerate the closing of the skills gap and support businesses in their quest for talent. Empowering individuals to develop their aspirations and skills is not only essential for their personal advancement, but also for the growth of our economy and businesses.

Barclays banks over a million UK businesses and our conversations with clients across the nation tell us that recruiting and retaining people – and dealing with the ongoing skills shortage – continue to be major challenges, preventing them from unlocking their potential. They see developing talent as a top priority for growth.

Meanwhile, youth unemployment rates in the UK have been too high for too long. A desire to play our part to address the root cause led us to develop the Barclays LifeSkills programme 12 years ago, which has since helped millions of young people to develop the core skills that businesses are looking for. As a result, we have seen what works, as well as seen the challenges that educators face when it comes to preparing young people for the workplace with these vital skills so that they are ready to move from education into the workplace.

By 'employability skills' we do not mean technical skills or academic qualifications, but core, essential and transferable skills such as communication, problem solving, creativity, resilience, adaptability, proactivity, leadership, networking, enterprise and money skills. Employers and teachers see these non-technical skills as equally or more important than academic qualifications. They are vital in preparing the UK workforce for a world of work where, due to the speed of change, particularly with digital/AI developments, we are unable to predict what the jobs of the future will look like and what technical skills will be needed.

In this critical context, the need to build a skilled workforce is more pressing than ever.

By sharing our expertise and knowledge, we believe that we are in a unique position to make recommendations on how government, business and education can work collaboratively to tackle the skills gap.

We believe that evolution in education policy is going to be vital. More needs to be done to support young people whilst they are in education to provide businesses with access to a wider pool of fresh, work-ready employees, laying the foundation to help drive growth for businesses and the economy as a whole.

With the government currently conducting reviews into education skills policies and the industrial strategy also recognising the importance of people and skills in creating a pro-business environment in the UK, this report makes recommendations on the systemic, realistic and workable changes needed in national education and skills policy to change the way key employability skills are recognised and taught in schools.

Executive summary: the challenges

Drawing on years of extensive, quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the Barclays LifeSkills programme, our experience with educators and learners, insights from our corporate and business clients, new Barclays research with employers, and desk research, we have identified the challenges and barriers affecting young people's employability as well as factors that support its development:

1. Challenges and barriers encountered:

- Students lack opportunities to develop employability skills and to practise and apply them in different contexts.
- There is a lack of understanding about the value of employability skills in the workplace.
- Students struggle to engage with and relate to employability learning.
- Young people who are disadvantaged need additional support.

2. Practices that help to address these barriers:

- Teaching about employability skills, providing multiple opportunities to practise them and helping students see how they can be applied in the world of work.
- Including the employer voice and insights to ensure clarity about the value of employability skills in the workplace.
- Making employability learning relevant and engaging.
- Ensuring that intensive and tailored support for disadvantaged young people has an employability focus and recognises and builds on an individual's strengths.

3. Implementation insights that work for schools:

- A focus on the quality and depth of learning within each employability teaching and learning opportunity.
- Progressive employability skills development, done in a systematic and joined-up way.
- Adopting a whole-school approach.
- Appropriate support for disadvantaged students to help boost their employability.

Executive summary: recommendations

To effect the necessary change to improve the employability skills and potential of young people, this paper outlines five recommendations for government:

Recommendation 1

Skills England should consult openly with employers and relevant organisations in the development of the standardised skills taxonomy and ensure that business needs and comprehensive definitions of employability skills are adequately reflected.

Recommendation 2

Through the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the government should explicitly introduce employability skills within each relevant curriculum area across Key Stages 3 to 5, aligned to the taxonomy created by Skills England. Multiple opportunities should be provided to students to recognise, practise and demonstrate these skills and provide context as to why these skills are vital for their futures and careers.

Recommendation 3

The new Ofsted education inspection framework should have an explicit focus on work readiness and employability skills development when assessing an institution's provision and its capability to support young people's personal development, paying particular attention to support for disadvantaged learners.

Recommendation 4

The government should use the review of the education leadership National Professional Qualification frameworks as an opportunity to help aspiring and existing education leaders learn how to create a whole school focus on developing young people's employability skills while also providing a framework to support young people who are disadvantaged.

Recommendation 5

Include employability skills within the definition of educational outcomes as part of the guidance on pupil premium funding, with the aim to ensure that disadvantaged young people are appropriately supported.

Gap analysis and research question

The problem

UK growth is the number one mission of this government, yet businesses are struggling to hire skilled labour which is negatively affecting their ability to grow. Despite improvements in the provision of careers support in England, real challenges remain and less than a third of employers feel that 17–18 year-olds are prepared for the world of work.

The challenge for businesses

Barclays banks over a million UK businesses and our conversations with clients across the country tell us that recruiting and retaining people – and dealing with the ongoing skills shortage – continue to be major challenges, which limits their ability to adapt and grow. Developing talent is seen as a top priority for growth. Corporate Outlook (Barclays, 2025) ¹

According to data from the Barclays Business Prosperity Index, **83% of employers** say that difficulties around hiring skilled labour are negatively affecting their business' ability to grow, with 17% explicitly highlighting the availability of skills (or lack of it) as one of the greatest barriers to growth for their business in the next year. Almost a fifth (18%) name access to skilled labour amongst the key issues their organisation is currently facing and a third (31%) want to engage

with wider talent pools.² In this context, it's hardly surprising that increasing training and development of existing staff emerged as the top area where businesses are planning to invest in next 12 months; at the same time the data indicated that opportunities for this were considerably smaller for some, for example micro businesses, as well as highlighting some regional disparities when it comes to investing in upskilling existing staff.³

A third of businesses (32%) also feel that 17–18 year old school leavers are not prepared for the world of work. This rises to 43% for further education students and 55% for graduates. Across all these groups, employers mentioned a lack of work experience (cited by 77% of employers), poor work attitude (67%) and a lack of employability skills (60%).⁴

¹ Corporate Outlook (Barclays, 2025) <https://www.barclayscorporate.com/insights/2025-outlook/corporate-outlook/>

² The Barclays Business Prosperity Index, Q4 2024. The survey component is conducted in partnership with Opinium using a sample of 1,000 UK business decision-makers responsible for their company's growth targets or company's performance (including 200 micro businesses with 0-9 FTE; 200 small businesses with 10-49 FTE; 200 medium businesses with 50-249 FTE; and 400 large businesses with 250+ FTE). Results are unweighted. The Q4 2024 survey was in field from 15th-29th January 2025. Data is weighted.

³ Ibid

⁴ Employer views on skills policy in the UK (CIPD, 2022)

An improving careers system

More positively, a recent Ofsted review of careers education found that 'most schools, further education and skills providers demonstrated a commitment to providing effective careers guidance' and that 'the negative impact of the pandemic on careers guidance has begun to dissipate'.⁵

In 2024, the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) reported that the Gatsby Benchmarks, which are adopted by government as defining good career guidance, were well embedded across secondary schools and colleges in England, with an average of **5.8 out of 8 benchmarks being met** – rising from an average of 1.3 in 2014.^{6, 7, 8} Importantly, the performance of schools with the most economically disadvantaged students matched that of mainstream schools as a whole.⁹

Another CEC report, published in 2024, stated that there are more than 3,000 trained Careers Leaders in the system and **92% of schools** and colleges have engaged with their regional careers hubs, which support schools and colleges to develop their careers programmes.¹⁰

Recent CEC reports into school students' career readiness also highlight that a greater focus on careers across the system can lead to better student outcomes, for example:^{11, 12, 13, 14}

- There is an increase in young people's perceived career readiness as they progress through school, with 49% of them reporting being career ready in Year 7 and 68% in Year 11.
- There is evidence that meeting all the Gatsby Benchmarks can help compensate for a deprived background: careers readiness scores for students in receipt of free school meals (a standard measure of deprivation) were better in institutions that met all the benchmarks.
- Students from schools that meet all the Gatsby Benchmarks were less likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEETs) than students from schools that did not meet all the benchmarks.¹⁵

⁵ Independent review of careers guidance in schools and further education and skills providers (Ofsted, 2023)

⁶ The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) were set up by government in 2015 and are the national body for careers education in England. They support schools and colleges with their careers provision.

⁷ The Gatsby Benchmarks are eight benchmarks of good careers guidance.

⁸ Insight briefing: Gatsby Benchmark results for 2023/24 (CEC, 2024)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Careers Education 2022–23: now and next: an analysis of careers education in England and what this means for students, educators, employers and society (CEC, 2024)

¹¹ School students' career readiness is defined by the CEC as their awareness of the labour market, their understanding of education and employment pathways and confidence in their transition skills

¹² Careers Education in England 2023/24 (CEC, 2025)

¹³ Insight briefing: student career readiness in 2023/24 (CEC, 2024)

¹⁴ Ready for the Future: a review of Careers Education in England 2021/22 (CEC, 2022)

¹⁵ NEETs refers to young people aged 16–24 years old who are Not in Education, Employment or Training

Despite these improvements real challenges remain

Young people are more likely to be unemployed than any other age group (14.6% of 18–24 year-olds vs 4% for the working-age population as a whole) with large regional disparities.^{16, 17} The proportion of young people who are NEET has been above 10% since it was first measured in 2002 and in October to December 2024 was at **13.4%**.¹⁸

Multiple sources highlight the limitations of the current English secondary curriculum in preparing young people for employment, with the amount of content and the lack of explicit reference to skills frequently cited.¹⁹

This is consistent with the experience of young people aged between 11–30 year olds, with only around **a third (34%)** feeling their school supported them to develop their employability skills.²⁰ As a result, only a minority (39%) of young people in education demonstrate belief in their skills and just over **a third (36%)** say they understand what skills employers are looking for. In research commissioned to inform the current Curriculum Review, 36% of parents of Key Stage 4 students and 32% of Key Stage 4 learners would like more time spent developing employment and interview skills.^{21, 22}



¹⁶ Labour market data (ONS, 2025)

¹⁷ Regional labour market: estimates of employment by age (ONS, 2025)

¹⁸ Young people not in education, employment or training (ONS, 2025)

¹⁹ Including: Joint dialogue: how are schools developing real employability skills (Edge, 2018), Skills for every Young Person (House of Lords youth unemployment committee, 2022) and Learning and skills for economic recovery, social cohesion and a more equal Britain (Council of Skill Advisors Report, 2022)

²⁰ Youth voice census 2024 (Youth Employment UK, 2024) – survey with 5,182 11–18 year olds

²¹ Key Stage 4 students are year groups 10–11.

²² Curriculum and Assessment Review: interim report (Curriculum and Assessment Review, 2025)

Employability skills

Employability skills are crucial in preparing the UK for a world of work where, due to the speed of change, we are unable to accurately predict what the jobs of the future will look like and what technical skills will be needed.

These non-technical skills are seen as equally or more important than academic qualifications by employers (94%) and teachers (96%).^{23,24} They are the ones that humans are best at – they cannot be replicated by technology and will become even more valuable in the future.

However, there is no common definition of technical skills, and no framework defining which core skills are the most important and transferable between professions and industries. The terms 'employability skills', 'core skills' and 'essential skills' are often used interchangeably, with no consistency in the underlying definitions.

Barclays LifeSkills' definition of the term 'employability skills', draws on definitions from the World Economic Forum and Skills Builder Partnership, and include:

Communication

Leadership

Proactivity

Problem solving

Creativity

Adaptability

Resilience

Networking

Enterprise

Money skills

Formal education plays an even more important role in helping young people who are disadvantaged to develop their skills and prepare for the workplace as they have fewer opportunities to develop these skills through extra-curricular activities.²⁵

²³ Life Lessons (The Sutton Trust, 2024)

²⁴ Employers refers to a YouGov survey of 1,133 of senior business decision makers. Survey results in Life Lessons Report (The Sutton Trust, 2024)

²⁵ An unequal playing field: extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2019)



Disadvantaged students are defined by Ofsted's school inspection handbook as being students:²⁶

- With special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- Who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection.
- Receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker.
- Who otherwise meet a school's criteria for pupil premium funding,²⁷ including:
 - Pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last 6 years, also known as 'Ever 6 FSM'.
 - Looked-after children or previously looked-after children.*
 - Children who left care through adoption or another formal route.

This is important as not only are young people who think ahead about their future career while still in formal education more likely to gain employment, but those with higher levels of employability skills also benefit from higher wages.^{28, 29}

²⁶ School inspection handbook (Ofsted, 2024)

²⁷ pupil premium funding is provided to state-funded primary and secondary schools in England to help improve educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people aged between 5–16 years old, who are known as 'Ever 6 FSM'. The funding is also intended to provide additional support for looked after children and young people.

²⁸ Indicators of teenage career readiness: an analysis of longitudinal data from 8 countries (OECD, 2021)

²⁹ Essential Skills Tracker 2023. (Skills Builder Partnership, 2024)

Education policy

The question of how changes in education policy for England could help improve the employability potential of young people and secure their place in the workforce is timely as:

- There is a Curriculum and Assessment Review underway that is looking at how the English schools curriculum raises standards and prepares young people for life and working, including providing them with the opportunity to learn skills such as creative, digital and oracy skills. The Review is due to publish its final report in Autumn 2025 (following an interim report in March 2025).
- Skills England is newly established and, during 2025, is looking at what steps need to be taken to address skills shortages.
- In 2025, Ofsted has been consulting on a new education inspection framework which will have greater focus on pupil outcomes to drive higher standards.
- The Department for Education is undertaking a formal review in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation, of the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), which are designed to support the professional development of leaders and teachers. An expert steering group has been appointed and a wide range of stakeholders will also be engaged.

Over the last 12 years Barclays has acquired a wealth of knowledge, expertise and insights through delivering Barclays LifeSkills in over 94% of UK secondary schools and supporting young people to develop the employability skills they need for work (see About LifeSkills box).³⁰ We therefore set out to draw on this expertise to explore what education policy changes are needed to help young people secure their place in the workforce through the teaching of employability skills in schools and colleges in England.



³⁰ Barclays LifeSkills participation data

About Barclays LifeSkills

Designed for all ages, from children and young people aged 5+ through to adults and families, LifeSkills has supported millions of participants and placed thousands into work through collaboration with the education sector, respected charities, and the business community.³¹ The programme has also supported some of the UK's most underserved and underrepresented communities to tackle barriers they face getting into, progressing and staying in work.

Over the last twelve years we have learnt a great deal through independent research and evaluation and by measuring impact. LifeSkills has been used in over 94% of secondary schools across the UK with almost 9 in 10 young people who have used the resources saying that they have improved their employability skills and knowledge, confidence and motivation and taken action towards getting a job.

Barclays LifeSkills is centred around the core transferable skills needed for work such as communication, problem solving, creativity, resilience, adaptability, proactivity, leadership, networking, enterprise, CV writing, interview and money skills.

For children and young people in primary, secondary or further education, there are over 150 hours of free, curriculum-linked, lesson plans and interactive tools for educators to use in the classroom with their students.³² We also partner with charities across the UK to deliver facilitated LifeSkills workshops to support young people from areas of socio-economic deprivation and those on free school meals.³³ In addition, we have been providing more intensive programmes of support to groups of students, for example young carers.

Young adults are supported through tailored training with charity partners to develop the skills, connections and opportunities to help them get into work. This helps participants who have the aptitude and attitude needed but face challenges such as a lack of experience, confidence, qualifications, or have care responsibilities or disabilities. They are connected to employers in different industries who are actively recruiting for motivated and skilled workers.³⁴

<https://barclayslifeskills.com/>

³¹ See e.g. Barclays PLC, Annual Report 2024, p.32. Available at: <https://home.barclays/content/dam/home-barclays/documents/investor-relations/reports-and-events/annual-reports/2024/Barclays-PLC-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>

³² LifeSkills resources are aimed at primary and secondary school aged children (5–18) as well as young people up to the age of 25.

³³ Eligibility for free school meals in the past 6 years (referred to as 'Ever 6 FSM') was used as the main measure of socio-economic disadvantage within the programme. In some cases, school teachers' knowledge of specific students was used to identify young people whose families were not formally claiming free school meals but were known to their school to be negatively affected by socio-economic disadvantage.

³⁴ Barclays support for communities; <https://home.barclays/sustainability/supporting-our-communities/lifeskills>

Methodology

What is needed to support young people to develop the employability skills that businesses need for growth?

To answer this question, we examined three sources of Barclays LifeSkills evidence:

Source 1

We work alongside over a million UK businesses. From these partnerships, we collate a range of data and insights, giving us a bird's eye view of the performance and future growth opportunities of UK businesses. The Barclays Business Prosperity Index brings together our proprietary data with survey research collated by Opinium and economic modelling by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr), to create a unique indicator for current business performance and future.

We also commissioned quantitative research among employers to feed into the results section of this paper. 611 employers from a range of different sectors were polled by the panel provider Dynata in November 2024.³⁵ They were asked how easy it was to find potential employees and young people with different employability skills,³⁶ during the recruitment process. Employers also answered questions on what guidance they and their staff needed to help schools prepare young people for the workplace.

Source 2

Over 12 years of quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered through annual impact evaluation of Barclays LifeSkills with educators and learners. Each year, around 600 educators and 800 learners take part. The annual quantitative datasets are complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews with around 25–30 educators, most of them secondary school teachers and leaders, and approximately 15–25 learners each year.

We used this evidence to identify challenges and barriers affecting young people's employability as well as factors that support its development. We also reviewed different approaches to developing employability, adopted by educators involved in our research over the years, to identify which were particularly effective and how they had been implemented.

³⁵ All respondents had at least some responsibility for recruitment.

³⁶ Employability skills asked about in the survey were: adaptability, communication, creativity, leadership, proactivity, problem solving and resilience.



Source 3

Evidence gathered through the research and evaluation work carried out as part of the delivery of intensive programmes of Barclays LifeSkills support to groups of disadvantaged young people (2017–2024). The evidence-set included detailed records for virtually all 500+ young people who took part. Between 2017–2021, the programme’s evidence set also included records of young people from the same schools but not involved in the LifeSkills programme, acting as the control group. These records comprised student and teacher accounts, independent observations, skills assessments and progress and performance data. Over the years, alongside determining the impact and effectiveness of the programme, our research examined what might stop young people from achieving their full potential and how interventions which use LifeSkills resources and involve Barclays employees as mentors for young people can help overcome this.

For this paper, we examined the programme’s evidence-set to identify what learning experiences should be put in place and how they should be configured to help boost disadvantaged young people’s employability whilst also helping them achieve other important outcomes, such as confidence or motivation to work hard in their studies or training.

Results

The results from our research and findings can be broken down into three main categories:

1. The challenges and barriers negatively affecting young people's employability

2. The practices seen in education that are most effective in overcoming these barriers

3. Insights showing how successful practices are implemented

Within each category, we also separately consider the needs of disadvantaged young people, to clarify the additional support they require to successfully move into the workplace and how that can be put in place.

1. Challenges and barriers

Analysis of our evidence indicates that the following factors hinder the development of young people's employability.

Students lack opportunities to develop employability skills and practice and apply them in different contexts.

Although virtually all schools noted the importance of skills such as teamwork, communication and problem solving, far fewer settings provided opportunities to learn, practise and improve these skills, so that they can successfully apply them in the workplace.

Although there are distinct commonalities, the specific list of skills being highlighted or taught to students differs from school to school.

The research evidence reveals that young people often struggle to appreciate that these skills are transferable and can be applied in different contexts. This is often clearly visible when students attempt to create their first CV or prepare for a job interview during their careers or PSHE sessions. 'I have no skills to put onto my CV' is a common comment heard by teachers of these sessions, despite numerous references to skills during subject lessons.

Barclays LifeSkills commissioned research among employers in November 2024 to understand which specific skills young people were felt to be lacking. The results were as follows:

- Employers reported it being harder to find candidates with the skills they most need amongst young people 16–24 years old. Fewer than half said it is easy to find young people with problem solving (41%), communication (48%) and adaptability (46%) skills. Not surprisingly, given their lack of experience in the workplace, only 26% of employers said it is easy to find young people with leadership skills.
- Although creativity was not rated as being as important as the skills mentioned above, it is a skill that employers said is easier to find in young people. 59% said it was easy to find in young people compared with 50% when asked about job candidates of all ages.

A lack of understanding about the value of employability skills in the workplace

Our research highlighted that young people are often unclear about the value of skills, such as teamwork and communication, in the workplace. This can have several implications. We found that young people who weren't achieving well academically and weren't able to recognise and value the skills they learnt elsewhere (e.g. when playing sports or helping at home) often became convinced that they had nothing to offer, leading to disengagement, disruptive behaviour and low self-esteem. In some cases, young people saw no point in working on improving their skills because they believed these skills only mattered in school, not in their future. Others prioritised only their academic studies, convinced that this would ensure success in the workplace. Our evidence set contains numerous observations and teacher reports of students struggling in mock or real job interviews because they could not talk about their skills and what they could bring to the workplace, sometimes instead explaining how bad their skills were and not showing any interest in improving them.

Students struggle to engage with and relate to employability learning

Some young people, particularly younger students, thought that preparing for the workplace was something they wouldn't need to do for many years. Others struggled to engage with employability teaching and learning because they couldn't see the relevance to them personally. A focus on listening rather than active learning can also put many students off. This was often particularly problematic during activities such as large assemblies featuring employer talks. A perceived lack of authenticity when young people hear about the workplace from their teachers also led some students to dismiss important learning inputs.

In addition, young people who are disadvantaged often lack confidence and self-esteem. This can be down to challenges that they are experiencing in their lives, as well as previous negative experiences of education. In many cases, this low self-worth was apparent in young people's future plans and aspirations, which were low or non-existent. It also made it hard for them to engage in their learning.

"We [work with] the most vulnerable, difficult-to-engage learners... [Some] have not been in school for a long time, they might have been in care, they might have left care, they might be in poverty. This is quite a deprived area, there's a lot of benefit culture here, there's a lot of crime. We work with a lot of young people that have been involved in crime... We also deal with a lot of young people that have parents who may have never worked, they might have had addiction issues. Sometimes we've had teen mums. So, very, very broad."

Employability Tutor, post-16 Education Training and Skills Programme.

2. Practices that address these barriers

Our analysis identified specific teaching and learning practices that helped to overcome the above challenges and barriers:

Teaching about employability skills, providing multiple opportunities to practise them and helping students see how they can be applied in the world of work

Effective employability programmes explicitly introduced skills, such as teamwork, problem solving and adaptability, as new knowledge, and provided multiple opportunities for students to practise and improve them. These skills were an ongoing theme, referred to consistently by everyone working with students across subjects. Young people were helped to recognise their skills when they used them in different contexts, to connect those instances, to notice improvements in how they applied them, while always making a clear link with the world of work.

Including the employer voice and insights to ensure clarity about the value of employability skills in the workplace

When teaching students about what employers look for and the value of employability skills in the workplace, authenticity was highly important. Even though students had sometimes heard the same point multiple times from their teachers, 'the penny dropped' for many only when they heard it from employers

– either through direct interaction or via learning resources produced by employers, such as Barclays LifeSkills. The use of specific examples from multiple contexts was important in ensuring that young people grasped the importance of skills in any workplace.

Making employability learning relevant and engaging

Activities that helped young people reflect on their own skills and recognise their strengths proved highly successful in securing initial engagement with employability learning.

Numerous educators also reported that money skills sessions, in which students looked at budgeting and the income needed for their desired lifestyle, prompted young people to think seriously about careers and employability. This was particularly important in areas with high levels of intergenerational unemployment or where young people had few strong role models around them.

Practice needs to go further, however, to ensure consistent engagement. All opportunities to develop employability skills needed to be consistently monitored for their quality and ability to engage students. This included briefing employers about how to ensure that any experiences or encounters engaged participants and supported their active learning.

Young people who are often disadvantaged need additional support. Educators who successfully engaged these groups of young people adopted the following practices:

Identifying each young person's strengths was often the first step. Alongside an assessment of each young person's specific needs to understand their individual barriers, this data was used to gradually build up their sense of self-worth, while working on their employability.

- 1. More intensive support** was provided, sometimes in terms of frequency of inputs, but also in terms of the staff to student ratio. Small group and one-to-one approaches were essential to ensure effectiveness.
- 2. All learning was highly personalised** to ensure relevance and to provide the correct level of challenge and support for each young person.
- 3. Programmes were holistic and comprehensive**, embedded within a 'whole person' support approach.

Inevitably, providing this degree of support placed demands on staff and was dependent on additional resourcing.



3. Implementation insights

We found that opportunities for employability teaching already exist in most schools but that these tend to be disjointed, do not build progressively on each other, and are sometimes wasted due to students' lack of engagement.

By connecting all lessons and other experiences and making sure each opportunity really counts, some schools are making a real difference to their students' employability.

Successful implementation strategies required:

A focus on the quality and depth of learning within each employability teaching and learning opportunity

Many schools found that ensuring employability learning is relevant for students makes a big difference to their levels of engagement. Typically, this was achieved by helping young people notice what they are good at and the skills they have that employers would value.



"We are helping them identify their skills and qualities, when previously they felt that they had none. Helping them to create positive CVs focusing on what they were working towards now, rather than the little achievement they had previously. Helping them identify positive experiences to discuss at interview."

FE College tutor and lecturer, working with 16–18 year olds.

87% of students and 96% of teachers that used Barclays LifeSkills reported an improvement in student's awareness of their own strengths and skills.³⁷

Using good teaching and learning resources enabled schools to ensure engaging, high-quality sessions, including where they were delivered by non-specialists.³⁸

"[As a result of using Barclays LifeSkills resources], student engagement is enhanced."

Careers and senior leader, Secondary school.

³⁷ LifeSkills learner and educator surveys 2024. Bases: 865 and 572 respectively.

³⁸ In the context of this paper, by 'non-specialists' we mean teachers who deliver employability, careers or other aspects of personal development when this is not their subject specialism.

“We changed the structure of PSHE. We used to deliver it ourselves [as PSHE teachers] and... we were all experts. We had to change it from one hour a week to two 30-minute sessions delivered by tutors [who might be Maths, Technology, or Music teachers]. So, we used Barclays LifeSkills quite a lot to build our resources. The lesson delivery has been very good. [We regularly monitor that]: we’ve just had a deep dive by the leadership team on the delivery of PSHE. We have work samples once every two weeks.”

**Head of Humanities,
Secondary School.**

When it comes to involving non-specialists, schools that focused on quality of all inputs also tended to apply that to employers that supported their careers programme as well. This helped ensure employer inputs were engaging and worthwhile for students. For example, in some cases, schools co-designed with employers any sessions or workshops they delivered in their school.

According to the employer poll, commissioned by Barclays LifeSkills:

- The vast majority (92%) would welcome guidance on how to engage and work with educators to help students to prepare for the world of work, and over a third (37%) would appreciate being able to draw on further support, e.g. through training.
- In terms of the content of such guidance, just over a half of employers (52%) thought that having clarity about what activities work best when supporting young people would be most useful, followed by helping them understand how they can run an effective careers activity in schools (33%) and ensure students are engaged during their sessions (29%).

Other examples of focusing on quality and making every employability learning opportunity impactful included helping students prepare for and reflect on their engagement with employers. This was done by using the relevant Barclays LifeSkills resources and, as case study A illustrates, this made a considerable difference to student outcomes.

Case study A: The importance of preparing for work experience

School A is an 11–18-year olds school in the South East of England.

All students in the school do two weeks of work experience: one week in Year 10 and one in Year 12. The school supports its students to prepare. The process has two elements to it – each student securing a placement that is right for them and preparing for their week in the workplace.

“For us, [preparation] is really important because we expect our students to find their own placements. We equip them from the start, we talk about what sort of place would you like to work in. So, it’s trying to get them to really consider it, to make it a valuable experience because the more we prepare them, the more useful the experience is going to be. Then, we talk about how to apply because they need to know how to apply for work experience. That’s really key. So, do you write a letter, do you email, do you make a phone call? What happens when they don’t respond? We do an awful lot of work behind the scenes in preparing them for finding a placement in the first place.”

Careers and Aspirations Lead

Once young people secure their placements, they are supported to make sure they have a positive experience. As well as helping them think through the practical details (travel, being on time, dress code, lunch) the school helps its students to learn about workplace behaviours and employer expectations. Staff use the Barclays LifeSkills Work Experience booklets to support their students during this stage, as well as to help students reflect on their placements after they return to school.

“When they come back, we bring them into a two-hour session where they reflect on their work experience. Which bits of their work experience did they enjoy, which bits did they not enjoy? How does that then reflect in their future? If they enjoyed being outside, then they might want a job outside. If they hated it, they want an inside job.

“[For us, a good work experience placement for each student] comes from starting early and preparing them for the application, then preparing them for the experience and then picking it up afterwards.”

Careers and Aspirations Lead

Progressive employability skills development, done in a systematic and joined-up way

86% of students and 93% of teachers that used Barclays LifeSkills reported a greater understanding of transferable skills, including how to use and further develop them.³⁹

Successful schools not only introduced employability skills to students, often as soon as they joined, they planned young people's employability learning in a way that connected all opportunities and ensured that learning was progressive and spanned students' entire school journey. They used learning opportunities within PSHE lessons, in subject lessons, tutor time and during trips and events. By focusing on skills, those needed now, and, in the future, they connected personal development and careers education and pooled resources. In many cases, this single aim reflected the school's mission and its vision for students beyond school.

Where practice was particularly advanced, schools' personal development and employability programmes focused on progressive skills learning; covered multiple areas of content such as careers education and personal finance and used frameworks and tools such as the Skills Builder Partnership, Career Development Institute's (CDI) Career Development Framework or the Careers and Enterprise Company's (CEC) Future Skills Questionnaire to measure changes in skills and/or career readiness.

Staff (typically senior leaders) needed skills and expertise to maximise all existing opportunities to develop students' skills and employability, and ensure they were connected and reinforced through a progressive programme of study.

A whole-school approach

Adopting a whole-school approach created the right level of staffing and time for students to develop skills, and ensured a clear focus on, and prioritisation of, skills by staff and students.

Using Barclays LifeSkills teaching and learning resources made it possible to deliver high quality employability learning at scale. As the resources are designed to be used by any educator, including non-specialists, they enabled most teachers in these schools to be involved in developing young people's employability, often without additional continuous professional development (CPD) inputs.

"As an English teacher, I am a non-specialist when it comes to PSHE. I feel I have to educate myself on such topics as I go along. I am happy to do so, but every teacher who has a form group is also a non-specialist and there is no training for the topics we teach: just resources provided, which very often have to be adapted. This is the reason why I liked the Barclays LifeSkills resources as I felt more confident when delivering the information and assured the information I was sharing was up to date and accurate."

Teacher, Secondary School.

³⁹ LifeSkills learner and educator surveys 2024. Bases: 865 and 572 respectively.

Case study B: Creating a seven-year curriculum for teaching skills and employability

School B is a school for 11–18 year olds in the East Midlands region of England.

The school's employability support for its students is led by one of the assistant principals, responsible for students' personal development. He works closely with the school's Careers Lead.

A couple of years ago, the school updated its approach to supporting students' personal development. The school felt that at the time their PSHE was 'just random lessons pitched here and there'.

The senior leadership team wanted to make sure that there is a clear student learning journey – a seven year curriculum from Year 7 to Year 13 – for personal development, similar to other areas of their curriculum. Employability and careers were viewed an important part of students' personal development.

"Our seven-year curriculum focuses around careers, the world of work, looking at life skills and how we embed that from age eleven all the way up to age eighteen."

Assistant Principal and Personal Development Lead.

The Personal Development Lead planned a scheme of work for the entire school, to make sure that there is progression in learning within sessions delivered to each group over the course of the academic year, but also as students move from Year 7 to Year 13. As well as PSHE lessons, the school uses its 'drop-down days', when students are taken off timetable, to

provide important skills and employability development opportunities for its students. Examples include employer-led workshops. Drop-down days are part of the overall scheme of work.

Most teachers in the school are involved in helping students develop their skills and employability during fortnightly PSHE lessons. To provide enough scaffolding for many colleagues who are not PSHE subject specialists, the Personal Development Lead extensively drew on the LifeSkills teaching and learning resources when redesigning the school's approach to students' personal and employability development. Another reason was trying to ensure that students learn directly from employers wherever possible.

"We've embedded a lot of the Barclays LifeSkills resources into the curriculum, and we've tried to get them in as much as possible to give students real experiences [of the workplace] as opposed to just teachers talking to them."

Assistant Principal and Personal Development Lead.

Within its spiral curriculum,⁴⁰ the school covers the full breadth of employability skills, which are formally introduced to students as they enter the school in Year 7, alongside helping them understand their personal strengths when it comes to employability skills so that any development work can stem from there.

⁴⁰ Spiral curriculum is an approach to teaching within which the core learning content is repeatedly presented to students as they move through school, but with deepening levels of difficulty/increasing complexity, so that new inputs reinforce and build on the previous learning, ensuring progression in knowledge and skill development.

Whole school approach

The direct and ongoing involvement of senior leaders emerged as crucial. In the most successful institutions, a senior leader typically planned a comprehensive programme of study for the entire school and then monitored its quality and impact. Unlike staff responsible for one area of the curriculum or school priority, senior leaders were able to mobilise all curricular, cross-curricular and extra-curricular learning happening in their school, connecting them into a programme of study.

In many cases, the impetus for senior leaders to get directly involved came from Ofsted's demands for greater emphasis on students' personal development since the changes to its inspection framework. In some cases, leaders' involvement was prompted by their clear vision to prepare young people for the future beyond school.

Implementing support for young people who are disadvantaged:

Young people who are disadvantaged or have additional needs may attend either mainstream settings, with or without additional support, or specialist settings where virtually all learners require extra support to help them enter the world of work.

Whatever the setting, the following factors were crucial in implementing employability support.

1. A focus on employability, personal development and preparing young people for the future when shaping their support. This was common practice in many specialist settings but was not always present in mainstream schools. The mainstream settings that did have this focus noted that it had the added advantage of improving students' motivation and engagement.

2. Additional resourcing to fund this level of support. Schools and other mainstream settings needed to identify resources, such as pupil premium funding, to fund additional support for some of their learners.

3. Staff expertise. To be able to engage and effectively support these groups of young people, staff needed:

- The expertise in multiple content areas (e.g. employability, careers, money skills).
- The skills to build rapport with young people, some of whom were disadvantaged, disengaged or had additional support needs.
- The ability to plan learning that is responsive to student engagement, interests and needs yet ensures progression.

Barclays LifeSkills resources enabled these teachers to use their time effectively, by focusing on the personalisation of learning, rather than assembling content and activities from scratch. Staff highlighted the value of using online learning resources to further personalise learning; young people could use them on their own, as part of independent learning or homework.

How intensive support can boost disadvantaged students' employability

Young people who took part in intensive Barclays LifeSkills activities were from disadvantaged backgrounds and were underachieving or lacking confidence. Some had disengaged from learning or had behaviour problems in lessons. Several had additional challenges in their lives. For example, for one cohort,⁴¹ the programme's external evaluation reported that:

- 90% of students who engaged in an intensive programme of support saw improvements in their employability skills (e.g. communication, problem solving), career management skills (e.g. CV and interview skills), and career aspirations. This compared to just 10% of students in the control group who continued accessing their school's standard curriculum and support offer.
- 98% improved their understanding of what employers look for in candidates (compared with just 66% in the control group).⁴²

In addition, evidence across a range of sources, including accounts from educators, indicated that 50% of young people had improved their mindset and attitude as well as their attitude to learning.⁴³

When monitoring outcomes for some of the latest cohorts, the external evaluation also reported improvements to participating students' confidence and self-esteem as well as their mental and emotional wellbeing.

- 75% saw positive changes in their confidence and self-esteem (closer to 90% for the cohorts where this was a particular issue).
- 80% said that taking part in the programme had helped them see that there are things about themselves that they can be proud of.
- 87% said their wellbeing had improved, for example, because of getting better at dealing with changes in their lives (reported by 76%) or developing greater resilience (68%).⁴⁴

⁴¹ The cohort included 49 students from 11 schools across three areas in England (Bradford, Ipswich and Oldham). Detailed evidence records were collected for each of these 49 students. In addition, comparable evidence was collected for 42 students who were part of the control group. These 42 students were from the same schools and fitted the same selection criteria as the participating group. Students were allocated to participating or control groups by the independent evaluator.

⁴² Chrysalis Research (2018) LifeSkills Deep Impact: External Evaluation Report.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Chrysalis Research (2022 and 2023) LifeSkills Intensive Interventions: External Evaluation Reports for the programmes delivered in Bury, Kilmarnock, Taunton Deane and Great Yarmouth.

“I had one young lady who was actually excluded from college, for quite a long period of time. [I thought she really needed support with her employability, to make sure she gets a job after college]: she was one that didn't dress appropriately, didn't behave appropriately. [Using Barclays LifeSkills] I was able to adapt those resources, print off the slides and give her the activities to do. I was able to give her those resources to complete at home, and because of the structure of each unit she was able to work through it at home without prior explanation. It didn't involve a lot of other work from me, but it did mean that she wasn't missing out on any of the employability work that we would have done with her and then she was able to send the work back into college and I could mark it and give her feedback. Then she did go on to have interviews and to get a job.”

Teacher, special further education college.

“The virtual work placement [Barclays LifeSkills resource] is also very, very interesting. If the student has got social anxiety and they're not really ready for a placement physically, that works. Even dipping their toe in the water in terms of the virtual workplace with the little video is quite interactive, so it walks them through the process.”

Leader of employability programme for 16–25 year olds at risk of becoming NEET, further education college.

In summary our evaluations, insights and experience show that it is vital to:

- Build employability skills into teaching, providing multiple opportunities to practise them and helping students see how they can be applied in the world of work. The key characteristics of schools that really make this work have a focus on the quality and depth of learning within each employability teaching and learning opportunity to ensure:
 - Employability skills development is undertaken in a systematic and joined-up way.
 - A whole school approach, prioritised and drive by the Senior Leadership Team.
 - Intensive support can boost disadvantaged students' employability.
- Include the employer voice in a relevant and engaging way to ensure clarity about the value of employability skills in the workplace and provide more guidance to employers on how to do this.
- Make sure additional and intensive support for disadvantaged young people is focused on employability, recognises and builds on individuals' strengths and learning is personalised.

Public policy recommendations

In this section we outline five recommendations that flow from our evidence and findings. If enacted, these could help to improve the employability skills and potential of young people, providing more meaningful outcomes, by better enabling them to secure their place in the workforce and without placing undue burden on education staff.



A common language for employability skills

Our evidence clearly shows that consistency of language used by teachers and employers, when talking about skills young people need to succeed in the workplace, is important for students to be able to learn and transfer those skills.

There is a clear need for a common language to describe the specific skills that are valued in the workplace. This will help with the signposting, demonstration and assessment of skills, as well as aid activity design.

Creating a standardised skills taxonomy

Skills England is a new organisation that has been set up to 'be the driving force behind a much-needed upskilling of our economy in the coming decades' including to 'understand employers' skills requirements in the short, medium and long term and ensure that provision will meet demand.'⁴⁵

In its first report, published in September 2024, Skills England set out its intention to deliver a standardised skills taxonomy for the UK, building on work previously led by the Unit for Future Skills.⁴⁶

In the report, Skills England examines evidence related to 'essential skills for work' these include skills such as teamworking, creative thinking, leadership, as well as digital literacy, numeracy and writing.⁴⁷

Skills England should fully recognise the role of employability skills, as defined in this paper, in the workplace and economy, alongside the technical skills important for its specific sectors. It should also take into consideration frameworks that already exist and are to some extent already embedded within the education system; examples of such frameworks include the Skills Builder Universal Framework or the CDI's Career Development Framework.

Recommendation 1:

Skills England should consult openly with employers and relevant organisations in the development of the standardised skills taxonomy and ensure that business needs and comprehensive definitions of employability skills are adequately reflected.

⁴⁵ Skills England (2024): driving growth and widening opportunities, p.6. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66ffd4fce84ae1fd8592ee37/Skills_England_Report.pdf

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.60.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.32.

Embedding employability into the curriculum

More than 9 in 10 employers believe employability skills are equally or more important than academic qualifications, yet there is little time currently in the curriculum for employability skills teaching.^{48,49} Our evidence shows that to develop employability skills, young people need to have both explicit teaching of, and frequent opportunities to practise these skills and that this is particularly the case for disadvantaged young people, who are more likely to be lacking opportunities to develop such skills outside school.

We see implicitly that such opportunities do exist, they however need to be formalised and strengthened. For example, many schools are using PSHE lessons to introduce employability skills. Similarly, schools are increasingly attempting to show how skills that are relevant to particular subject areas and are required to be taught, e.g. problem-solving in maths or written and verbal communication in English or citizenship, are also valued in the workplace. This work needs to be systematised and formalised by making relevant changes to the national curriculum, so that sufficient opportunities to learn employability skills are formally provided to all young people.

Curriculum and Assessment Review

The Department for Education ran a call for evidence from September to November 2024 seeking views on potential improvements to the curriculum and assessment system, prior to consulting on specific recommendations.⁵⁰

The Curriculum and Assessment Review provides a unique opportunity to embed a more systematic approach to teaching these skills, by specifying where, in terms of subject areas, and how they can be introduced, practised and assessed in schools.

In the published Aims underlying the Review, the government explicitly stated that one of the purposes of the review is to deliver a curriculum that 'ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and ready for work' and that this 'includes embedding digital, oracy and life skills in their learning'.⁵¹ In its Interim report, the Review highlighted that its consultation evidence shows that young people and their parents argue for a stronger focus within the curriculum on the applied knowledge and skills that will equip them for later life and work.⁵²

Recommendation 2:

Through the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the government should explicitly introduce employability skills within each relevant curriculum area across Key Stages 3 to 5, aligned to the taxonomy created by Skills England. Multiple opportunities should be provided to students to recognise, practise and demonstrate these skills and provide context as to why these skills are vital for their futures and careers.

⁴⁸ Life Lessons (The Sutton Trust, 2017)

⁴⁹ Essential skills tracker 2024 (Skills Builder Partnership and the Edge Foundation, 2024)

⁵⁰ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/curriculum-and-assessment-team/curriculum-and-assessment-review-call-for-evidence/>

⁵¹ Department for Education (2024) Curriculum and Assessment Review: Review Aims, Terms of Reference and Working Principles, p.2. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d196b7d107658faec7e3db/Curriculum_and_assessment_review_-_aims_terms_of_reference_and_working_principles.pdf

⁵² Curriculum and Assessment Review: interim report (Curriculum and Assessment Review, 2025)

A whole-school approach to employability

It is vital to enable teachers and leaders to deliver engaging, high quality and joined up employability learning experiences for students, to make sure that all young people, including those who are disadvantaged, are ready for the world of work. The following three recommendations support this:

The new Ofsted education inspection framework

Our evidence clearly shows the importance and value of senior school leaders taking responsibility for their students' employability skills development and shaping whole-school programmes of learning to support this. Their direct involvement is at least partially prompted by the changes to Ofsted's inspection framework,⁵³ which placed much greater emphasis on students' personal development, with this becoming one of the key parts of any Ofsted inspection.

Senior leaders wishing to prepare their institutions for this accountability mechanism critically looked at the various teaching and learning opportunities that could be used for personal development (such as mentor or tutor time as well as PSHE lessons) and focused on ensuring that these offered genuinely beneficial, high quality and progressive learning experiences for students, with one of the key foci being young people's employability.

⁵³ First introduced in 2019. Its implementation was affected by the COVID 19 pandemic, during which no Ofsted inspections were taking place.

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/building-a-better-ofsted-the-response-to-the-big-listen>

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsted-big-listen/outcome/hearing-feedback-accepting-criticism-and-building-a-better-ofsted-the-response-to-the-big-listen>

In September 2024, Ofsted announced a consultation in early 2025 on a new education inspection framework (EIF).⁵⁴ The new EIF will 'introduce rubrics that offer clear criteria for inspections and can support leaders to self-evaluate their practice'.⁵⁵

We specifically recommend tightening the following aspects of the Personal Development section of the framework:

- 'Supporting readiness for the next phase of education, training or employment so that pupils are equipped to make the transition successfully, including, for secondary schools, through careers information education, advice and guidance' – explicitly state the importance of work readiness, separating it from readiness for the next stage of education or training. In addition, employability skills development should be referenced alongside careers information, education advice and guidance (CIEAG) as both are important in preparing young people for the world of work.
- 'Promoting equality of opportunity so that all pupils can thrive...' – ensure there is emphasis on providing appropriate support to young people who are disadvantaged, to support their personal development and employability potential.

Recommendation 3:

The new Ofsted education inspection framework should have an explicit focus on work readiness and employability skills development when assessing an institution's provision and its capability to support young people's personal development, paying particular attention to support for disadvantaged learners.

Professional development for senior leaders

Senior leader involvement and expertise is crucial for schools to implement effective and efficient approaches to equipping all young people with the employability skills they need. Within our evidence, such involvement signalled that employability was a priority for the school, particularly for disadvantaged students. It ensured teachers had the necessary support and resources to deliver high quality and in-depth learning experiences, whilst also bringing in external inputs, most notably from employers, to strengthen engagement. By making the most of every existing opportunity and connecting them, leaders were able to achieve more without having to create new opportunities, thus being careful with the curriculum time and using it productively. By taking a whole-school approach, leaders were able to pool together curricular, cross-curricular and extra-curricular learning, creating progressive and joined-up programmes of study for their students, the effectiveness of which they carefully monitored and implemented improvements where needed.

On its own, however, involvement of a single member of the school senior leadership team was not sufficient. They needed support and buy-in from the rest of the leadership team, most notably the headteacher or principal, and governors. Importantly, they needed the skills and expertise to design and implement an effective employability skills development programme in their school.

The national professional qualifications for leaders could be an opportunity to ensure all leaders have such expertise.

Leadership NPQs

Introduced in 2021 with the aim of improving CPD for teachers and leaders, the ten national professional qualifications (NPQ) are the Department for Education-funded professional development courses for teachers and leaders to develop skills, progress careers and improve school outcomes.^{56,57} The qualification courses are underpinned by the NPQ frameworks, which have been developed in collaboration with a wide range of teachers, school leaders, academics and experts; their content and the underpinning evidence had been independently assessed and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Continuing Professional Development

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-professional-qualification-npq-courses>

⁵⁸ See e.g.: National Professional Qualification (NPQ): Headship Framework.

Available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63a1dc9d8fa8f539169b1d74/NPQ_Headship_FINAL_Ref.pdf

Part of the suite, the Leadership NPQs, are designed to enable existing and aspiring senior education professionals to develop knowledge and skills to be outstanding leaders, able to improve institutional and student outcomes. For headteachers and principals, the relevant NPQs reflect the Headteacher Standards,⁵⁹ covering 10 areas of leadership practice, arranged by three interlinked domains: Culture and Ethos, Curriculum and Teaching and Organisational Effectiveness.

In early 2025, the government announced a review of the 10 existing NPQs, including those relating to leadership. The review will be overseen by the expert steering group, with support from the EEF. This presents a unique opportunity to strengthen the focus on embedding employability skills at a whole-school level within the qualifications for existing and aspiring senior leaders.

In addition, the review will focus on teaching and support for young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which creates further opportunities to consider employability of this as well as other groups of disadvantaged young people within Leadership NPQs.

Recommendation 4:

The government should use the review of the education leadership National Professional Qualification framework as an opportunity to help aspiring and existing education leaders learn how to create a whole-school focus on developing young people's employability skills and provide an appropriate framework to support young people who are disadvantaged.

⁵⁹ Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-of-excellence-for-headteachers>

Provision of tailored support to disadvantaged young students

Evidence examined in this paper shows the importance of young people developing strong employability skills as part of their secondary school education. This is particularly true for students who are disadvantaged. The aim of pupil premium funding is to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged 5–16 year olds in state-funded schools in England. Whilst this is not a personal budget for individual pupils and schools do not have to spend pupil premium so that it solely benefits pupils who meet the funding criteria, it is an important mechanism for ensuring that all students from low socio-economic backgrounds have the skills to successfully join the workforce, despite the additional challenges that they face.⁶⁰

When specifying the purpose of the funding, the current government guidance simply refers to ‘educational outcomes’. Whilst some secondary schools choose to direct a proportion of their pupil premium funding into their disadvantaged students’ employability and skills development, there are no explicit references to these as being important educational outcomes within the current guidance for schools.

The government should make explicit references to young people’s employability and work-readiness in its guidance about the purpose of pupil premium funding, so that these are prioritised by schools and local authorities, alongside other important educational outcomes.

Recommendation 5:

Include employability skills within the definition of educational outcomes as part of the guidance on pupil premium funding, with the aim to ensure that disadvantaged young people are appropriately supported.

⁶⁰ Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders (Department for Education, 2025)



Workforce ready: Supporting young people with the employability skills that businesses need for growth.

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