

ROCKET SCIENCE

Raising Aspirations

Final report for West Yorkshire Violence
Reduction Unit

March 2022

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Executive summary

Background

Rocket Science was commissioned by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in November 2021 to understand how the aspirations of young people could be raised and how to improve their educational attainment to support their longer-term employment and training prospects across key transition points in their education journey. The overarching research questions underpinning this research were:

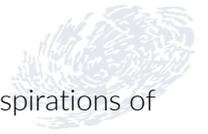
- What is the current state of aspirations and attainment in West Yorkshire?
- What risk factors and barriers to aspirational development are there?
- What interventions are effective at raising aspirations?

Method

- An extensive evidence review to understand the wider context around aspirations
- A review of six different interventions with a focus on building aspirations in children and young people
- Workshops with youth practitioners
- Focus groups with young people in schools
- Interviews with teachers or school staff
- Online surveys for young people, practitioners, parent and carers

Key findings

- Our evidence review showed that there is a correlation between aspiration and educational attainment and increasing aspirations to increase attainment is generally accepted as an effective tool, although there is little robust evidence to prove causation does occur.
- The term ‘raising aspirations’ assumes young people do not have aspirations, but our research showed the vast majority of young people we talked to in West Yorkshire do have positive aspirations. These predominantly focus on particular career routes, but also include goals related to education and lifestyle. Our case studies revealed that engaging with local employers and understanding local labour market needs is critical to ensuring young people are able to realise their aspirations to move into work.



- Several groups and organisations provide opportunities and activities to realise the aspirations of young people in West Yorkshire. These groups, including case study participants Career Ready, VIY and Street League, provide both soft and hard skill development opportunities for disadvantaged young people and have supported many participants into education and employment opportunities.
- Our evidence review revealed a link between exclusions and suspension on attainment and on life chances. In West Yorkshire, Bradford and Wakefield District record much higher exclusion and suspension statistics than other districts which has been raised as a concern by stakeholders and young people. Bradford and Wakefield recorded suspension rates of 4.8% and 8.5% respectively, and permanent exclusion rates of 0.06% and 0.10% respectively. Across the region 3,210 16- and 17-year-olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET), while 416 are in pupil referral units.
- The focus on academic performance in education has been highlighted by young people, practitioners, stakeholders and intervention providers as a key reason behind disengagement, suspension and exclusions. Anecdotally this has been attributed to the ‘academisation’ of schools, particularly secondary schools, alongside the difference in experience for children who need support or are at risk of being excluded as they transition from primary to secondary school at Year 7.
- Where an academic route is not suitable for a young person there has to be better access to and support for vocational routes. This is seen as fundamental to prevent disengagement, support reengagement in education and ensure vulnerable young people are able to improve their life chances by developing a pathway to employment. A lack of accessible work experience and apprenticeship opportunities in West Yorkshire is holding back development pathways for this group.
- A lack of confidence was the most-cited factor causing disengagement from education. Given the second-most cited factor is a lack of interest in what is being taught, and with anecdotal evidence that focus on academia is also driving disengagement, it could be that this lack of confidence is being driven by pressure to perform academically when vocational routes are more beneficial for some individuals.
- The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) varies across the region, with Leeds (7.9%) being well above the national average (5.5%), but Calderdale falling well below (3.9%).
- Young people and practitioners feel the curriculum is in parts irrelevant and outdated, and more could be done to bring it in line with modern employment trends. Young people highlighted a lack of interest in the current curriculum as another crucial factor leading to their disengagement.
- Unsurprisingly the lack of transport in rural areas acts as a barrier to aspirations and attainment. Parts of West Yorkshire are not well connected, this is particularly the case for young people who wish to



take part in extra-curricular activities or events, which are a valuable tool in raising aspirations. However the area's transport provider Arriva¹ has recently announced additional cuts to services in West Yorkshire which will further exacerbate these barriers. The learning from our case study interviews highlighted that paying for transport is key to helping young people engage. The increase in energy and fuel prices alongside the cost-of-living crisis will undoubtedly have an impact on delivery costs as well as on affordability.

- Our review showed that parents have the greatest influence on their children's aspirations. Nearly a quarter of young people told us they 'almost always' talk to parents about their aspirations compared to 16% saying the same with friends and just 3% with teachers. Our evidence review showed that a parent's educational background correlates with their child's future education and evidence that parents' own perceptions and knowledge of education and employment routes can be biased or limited, which can negatively impact on the aspirations of their children.
- Positive role models for young people can also be important to raising aspirations. These role models are individuals which support and encourage young people to realise their aspirations either by helping build skills directly or providing insight into what employment or education paths are possible. While parents are one possible group of role models, others include youth workers or mentors.
- The evidence shows that career guidance provision in schools is effective for older age groups, but could be made more accessible to younger age groups through better framing and improved availability.

Recommendations

At a strategic level use the unit's influence

- with key stakeholders in the region to campaign for a reduction in school suspensions and exclusions as these are key contributing factors to reducing opportunities for the most vulnerable young people
- with WYCA and local authorities to explore tangible opportunities and pathways for NEET and PRU young people in the region for training and employment and find ways to communicate these better to both families and young people - potentially through training, easy to access insight and targeted support. This should be supplemented by a focus on enabling or realising aspirations for young people and support programmes that use a strengths-based enabling and empowering approach

¹ [Anger as West Yorkshire buses slashed just weeks after last round of timetable cuts \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uk/anger-as-west-yorkshire-buses-slashed-just-weeks-after-last-round-of-timetable-cuts)

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- o to provide evidence of the longer-term impact on lack of and cost of transport in excluding young people from opportunities to education, activities and realising their aspirations

At a funding level

- Focus investment on supporting those most vulnerable to or who are already NEET and use any funding to build upon existing good practice in the region either by scaling up or improving access by providing it in accessible places
- Invest in projects that provide support to both parents and young people to enable positive engagement and aspiration within the family working with other funders
- Ensure that programmes support the transport costs of young people so that they can access services easily and freely.



1. Introduction

1.1 Methodology

This research was undertaken in two phases. The first phase focused on desk-based research to produce an evidence and best practice review and inform our consultation during the second phase with key stakeholders, including young people, parents/carers, teachers and other youth practitioners.

Data and evidence review

Rocket Science reviewed evidence from the Idox Knowledge Exchange database, Google Scholar, and third sector and government websites. The search terms were based around the research questions and sub-questions (shown in the evidence review) and were wide ranging.

Where initial evidence gaps emerged, these were supplemented with additional searches focused on that knowledge area, and questions pertaining to these gaps were built into the subsequent consultation topic guides and surveys.

Inclusion criteria were that sources should, where possible, be from a UK perspective and from the past five years. Where insufficient sources met this criteria, additional information was included from comparable contexts.

Our review highlighted several areas of intervention to support aspirations which informed the selection of case studies as part of our review into best practice.

Best practice case studies

Rocket Science carried out desk research and interviews with 6 organisations or programmes which provide aspirational activities for young people, some of which already operate within the West Yorkshire:

- **Career Ready** – which has a focus on deepening young people’s relationship with employers through targeted work experience, mentoring and support
- **Commando Joe’s** – this uses a character education model to develop the social and emotional behaviours needed for successful lives in children and young people



- **Reach Foundation** – a generational, whole family and place-based intervention developing aspirations for families and their children through a school and community hub model
- **Stepping Stones** – a programme developed to support the transitions of children with Special Educational Needs as they move from Year 6 to Year 7 through peer mentoring and support from Year 10 pupils
- **Street League** – an organisation that uses sport as a means to engage young people at risk of NEET into employment
- **Volunteer It Yourself (VIY)** – a 12- week volunteering training programme that exposes young people to skills within construction trades with skilled mentors to refurbish and revitalise community spaces

Consultation

We conducted fieldwork with 3 schools, 1 youth club, including 41 young people aged 12-16, 7 teachers or school staff, and 5 local authority stakeholders. [Table 1](#) shows a breakdown of the numbers consulted in schools. We also interviewed 3 mental health practitioners who specialise in youth work and ran a workshop with 6 youth practitioners ([Table 2](#)). We also spoke to 5 local authority stakeholders across one workshop and one interview ([Table 3](#)). Finally, we conducted surveys with parents/carers, young people, and youth practitioners ([Table 4](#)). These surveys were incentivised with a chance to win a £20 voucher upon completion.

Table 1 Young people consulted for this research, by group, age and gender

School/group	Session age group	No. Male	No. Female	Total	No. staff/ teachers
Youth Club	Age 13 and 16	4	1	5	
Secondary (academy)	Y7/8s	2	2	4	
	Y9/10s	4	3	7	
	Y12s	2	0	2	
School total		12	6	18	3
Secondary	Y7 (age 12)	2	0	2	
	Y8 (age 12/13)	3	0	3	
	Y10 (age 14/15)	4	2	6	
School total		9	2	11	3
	Age 14/15	3	1	4	



Alternate provision school	Y10s	2	0	2	
	Age 15/16	4	2	6	
School total		9	3	12	1
Overall total		30	11	41	7

Table 2 Consultation with youth practitioners

Consultation type	Number of practitioners
Interviews	3
Workshop	6

Table 3 Consultation with stakeholders

Survey	Number of stakeholders
Interviews	1
Workshops	4

Table 4 Survey responses (including partial/incomplete responses)

Survey	Respondents
Parents/carers	34
Practitioners	70
Young people	215

Consultation with young people focused particularly on secondary school age groups for two reasons. Firstly evidence review findings highlighted that aspirations do not start forming until around this age. Secondly, young people at this age are more likely to have awareness of which future employment and education paths are possible to them.

Focus group and interview transcripts were then tabulated by research question topic, allowing comparison between young people, school staff, youth practitioner and stakeholder responses on common areas of interest. The survey results were analysed using Excel. Some free text responses were coded according to common themes that emerged.



1.2 Outputs

The research has resulted in the following outputs

- An evidence review of themes and factors influencing aspirations in young people (Appendix 3)
- Six case study reports on organisations or programmes operating in England which provide aspirational activities for young people (Appendix 2)
- This summary report which is set out as follows:
 - **Section 2** looks at defining aspirations and understanding what the aspirations of young people in West Yorkshire are
 - **Section 3** explores how demographic factors, home life, school life, and social life all impact and influence young people's aspirations
 - **Section 4** explores the data on the make-up of West Yorkshire's education system and information relating to attainment, suspensions and exclusions
 - **Section 5** explores current best practice for raising aspirations in the region
 - **Section 6** summarises the key findings from the research and recommends some calls to action for how to support the aspirations of young people in West Yorkshire



2 Understanding aspirations

2.1 What are aspirations?

For the purpose of this research project aspirations were defined as goals or ambitions. The term aspiration is often used when referring to longer-term employment or education goals, but this report also takes into consideration shorter-term ambitions such as those relating to financial resilience or part-time work.

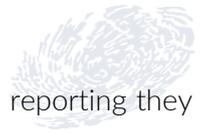
The evidence review highlighted aspirations are moulded by a young person's self-understanding, experience, options, and environment. It found that aspirations do form early but at age 13 generally focus on sport or celebrity before solidifying between the ages of 14 and 15. While the factors which influence aspirations are generally consistent for each individual, their impacts vary. Youth practitioners noted these short-term aspirations form an important part of young people's ambitions, particularly a focus on materialistic achievements due to the significance of their image. Social media, the music scene and films are all significant in influencing the desired image of young people and in turn influence short-term aspirations according to practitioners. They also noted that these short-term aspirations are viewed as more accessible than longer-term aspirations, which in turn guides behaviour.

2.2 The aspirations of young people in West Yorkshire

The evidence review highlighted employment aspirations begin forming around the age of 13 with a focus on celebrity or sport, and solidify into more defined ambitions between the ages of 14 and 15. The ambitions of young people we consulted with in West Yorkshire follow this finding.

Those in Year 7 and Year 8 reported aspirations relating to sports such as football, gymnastics or motorbiking, or those related to school subjects such as woodwork, IT, or art but without a firm career in mind. However this group also recognised there was no pressure to settle on future aspirations at this age, and were happy to put that aside, with one commenting they "*we're not going to think about that until Year 9*". The aspirations of those in Year 9, 10 and 11 were generally more solid, although there were still several who did not know or "*had never thought about it*".

The ambitions of young people surveyed predominantly revolve around careers, with 61% providing a career-orientated goal when asked what their ambitions are. The jobs they aspired to were broad, including those in construction, healthcare, sport, teaching, and the military and emergency services.



Slightly under 30% reported goals related to education, with two-thirds of that group reporting they wanted to attend university. Just under a fifth also reported social or lifestyle goals, such as owning a pair of Levi jeans, running a marathon, or owning a house or car.

Young people engaged during interviews also reported a range of aspirations including education and employment-orientated goals as well as ambitions pertaining to lifestyle. Those interviewed at an Alternative Provision school reported lifestyle and wellbeing ambitions in particular, including *“peace and quiet”*, *“a less stressful life”*, and *“being at peace with myself”*.

Like the younger group, older pupils also did not feel pressured into settling on particular goals and aspirations immediately and highlighted *“there is support available and an answer for everything, and tomorrow is another day”*. Young people at this age acknowledge their aspirations are fluid and accept their preferences could change.

2.3 Short-term aspirations

The evidence review highlighted several short-term aspirations that helped provide building blocks to longer term aspirations. Primarily, there is great desire amongst young people for financial knowledge, with nearly three-quarters of young people reporting they want more financial information taught at school. In particular young people want to learn about mortgages, pensions, credit cards and savings. However one tool linked to better understanding of and access to finances and the world of work, part-time work, is in decline. The rates of 16–17-year-olds in employment has almost halved since 1999, with more young adults in full-time education and less opting to work alongside their studies. *“The death of the part-time job has had massive influence in the last 15 years,”* one case study participant commented.

Youth practitioners in West Yorkshire noted short-term aspirations form an important part of young people’s ambitions, particularly a focus on materialistic achievements due to the significance of their image. Social media, the music scene and films are all significant in influencing the desired image of young people and in turn influence short-term aspirations according to practitioners. They also noted that these short-term aspirations are viewed as more accessible than longer-term aspirations, which in turn guides behaviour. Some also mentioned that some young people had more negative aspirations around criminal behaviour such as dealing drugs as this is a quick route in to getting money for goods they were unlikely to be able to afford such as trainers and gaming equipment.



3. Factors influencing aspirations

3.1 Demographic factors

Place

Rurality and a lack of transport options influence aspirations according to both local stakeholders and organisations which provide interventions in West Yorkshire. Stakeholders in Calderdale highlighted transport to school as an issue with public transport links lacking and relying on parents to transport children to school. This is particularly the case for the local Pupil Referral Unit, based in North Halifax, which represents a long journey for some individuals.

Transport issues stretch from education into employment and skills building opportunities. One case study organisation received eight sign-ups to take part in a skills-building project in Normanton, Wakefield, but two of the eight could not reach the site due to poor transport links. *“There’s an access issue around the district”,* he noted. *“Wakefield is underfunded and siloed in terms of youth provision. There’s a sense of less opportunity both employment-wise and culturally.”*

Another provider noted young people are being put off work due to the lengthy travel. *“If you have lots of opportunities in a logistics hub, how do you get to a warehouse at 7am? The chances of being able to do that at age 17 are nil. It’s tragic we cannot see how much is being wasted. Young people can’t get to where the jobs are.”*

These findings corroborate with evidence review findings that young people in rural areas are more likely to report transport as a barrier to education, which then impacts on their choices when leaving Year 11.

Our conversations with case study organisations revealed that some of them included costs of travel to support young people to get to work but is often dependent on the funding. This support only lasts a few months, and often because providers are a third-sector organisation and are funded to do so. All of the stakeholders we spoke to feel a lack of transport was negatively impacting on social mobility.

The lack of transport also impacts young people’s access to extra-curricular activities and groups, with several reporting they could not join clubs as they had no way of getting there. *“There’s literally nothing [to do],”* one young person said. *“One of my friends plays football but he has to travel to play, but there’s not any football or rugby teams around here so there’s not enough to do without travel options or money.”*



Another individual said although after school clubs were available, his parents could not pick him up and the school were not allowed to drop him home afterwards, so he could not attend.

Access to transport, travel costs and general availability of provision and support in some parts of the region are likely to be negatively impacting on the aspirations of some young people.

Ethnicity

The evidence review highlighted the role of ethnicity as a driver in aspiration, with those from culturally diverse locations likely to have different aspirations to those from white, working-class communities. School staff in West Yorkshire agreed ethnicity is a driver and highlighted those children from ethnic minority backgrounds could be likely to follow particular career paths due to the presence of a family business, pressures to follow specific paths such as medicine or business, and a familial resistance to other career paths. It was also noted that ethnicity played a role when selecting post-16 options, with families from ethnic minority backgrounds wanting to ensure education institutions will be safe for their children.

Practitioners we spoke to felt that some ethnic groups lack aspirations due to a lack of access and exposure. *“Young black men look around and see no opportunities,”* one said.

Research into school attainment and likelihood of attending higher education concluded minority ethnic groups from poorer backgrounds are more likely to have strong family and community norms, values and networks than their white peers. As such they show greater educational resilience and academic self-concept. Other research found occupational goals amongst minority ethnic groups tended to be more ambitious than white peers.

Within West Yorkshire a higher percentage of Asian pupils at state-funded schools achieve 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths than their white or black peers (Chinese pupils report the highest figures, but this cohort is a very small sample).



Table 4 State-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 (%)

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
Asian or Asian British	66.9	73.2	70.8	74.2	76.5	72.3
Black or black British	64.7	84.4	63.9	64	68.1	69
Chinese	90	100	100	93.7	81.5	93
Mixed race	59.6	74.8	64.5	69.1	69.9	67.6
White	61	72.5	72.2	71	73.1	70

Source: Department for Education, Key Stage 4 Performance

The evidence review also found disparity in NEET figures for different ethnic groups across the region.

Table 5 Percent of 16- and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) or not known

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
Asian or Asian British	4.60%	1.70%	2.30%	5.10%	2.60%
Black or black British	4.80%	0.00%	4.90%	4.10%	0.50%
Chinese	5.60%	0.00%	2.00%	3.20%	0.00%
Mixed race	11.00%	4.90%	6.80%	7.50%	4.00%
White	8.00%	3.90%	3.90%	7.20%	4.40%

Source: Department for Education, Labour Force Survey 2021

Ethnicity is a factor in attainment and other characteristics such as resilience which guide aspirations, and some ethnic minority groups are more likely to perform better in these areas than their white peers.

Gender

Findings from the evidence review highlighted differences in aspirations and ambitions between boys and girls. Girls generally aspire to careers dominated by women, and vice versa for boys, while boys are also significantly less likely to aspire to higher education than girls. This split in higher education aspirations is found within all ethnic groups although it is largest amongst white children and smallest amongst Asian children.



Results from the surveys delivered to young people in West Yorkshire also reported some differences in aspirations and ambition. Girls were more likely to report aspirations related to education than boys (35% vs 23%), and less likely to report aspirations related to employment (55% vs 61%). Boys were more likely to say they were very confident or somewhat confident they were able to achieve their goals than girls (86% vs 79%).

A positive primary to secondary school transition is crucial in providing positive and successful experiences of secondary school, and research from the evidence review concluded being female is one factor influencing positive transitions. Across West Yorkshire girls consistently perform better than boys in their GCSEs, as detailed below.

Table 6 State-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 (%)

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
Boys	54.5	65.5	58.6	59.8	60.2	59.72
Girls	60.4	67.3	67.7	66.6	68.6	66.12

Source: Department for Education, Key Stage 4 Performance

Girls are more likely to perform better in West Yorkshire schools and are also more likely to aspire to educational routes than boys.

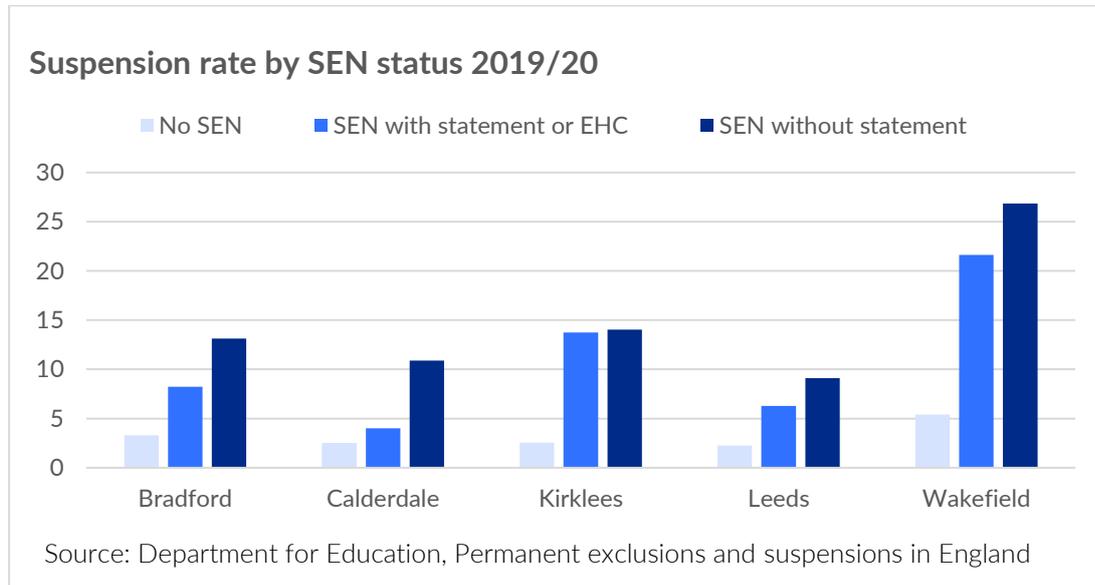
Disability and Special Educational Needs

The evidence review found limited literature on the influence of disabilities and SEN on aspirations, however evidence did conclude that both parents and young people felt the support system within schools needed improving. Other research found disabled students are more likely to experience bullying or exhibit behavioural problems and are less likely to perform as well as their peers because of these.

Across the region, suspension data shows those with SEN are significantly more likely to be suspended than their peers. Those without a statement setting out their educational needs or an Educational, Health and Care (EHC) plan are more likely than those with a statement or EHC to be suspended. More than a quarter of children with SEN and no statement or EHC in Wakefield were suspended in the 2019/20 academic year, more than five times the rate of those with no SEN. SEN pupils with or without a statement were also more than five times more likely to be suspended than non-SEN pupils.



Figure 1 SEN suspension rates



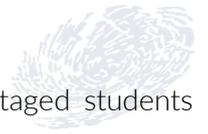
While there is limited evidence on the role disability or SEN has on aspirations this group is less likely to perform as well in school as their peers and more likely to experience suspension and potentially disengage from education.

Deprivation and poverty

The evidence review highlighted an attainment gap between the society’s poorest and those more advantaged, and these socio-economic factors play a role in a young person’s attainment and aspirations. Within West Yorkshire more than three-quarters of non-free school meal (FSM) pupils achieved 9-4 in English and Maths GCSE in 2020/2021 compared to less than half of FSM-eligible pupils.

Table 7 State-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 (%)

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
FSM eligible	45.3	54.6	48.9	48.6	46.3	48.7
Non-FSM	69.4	77.1	78.2	76.8	78.1	75.9
Total	57.4	66.9	63	63.2	64.8	63.1



Research concluded that the pandemic widened the attainment gap with disadvantaged students disproportionately impacted due to a lack of digital infrastructure, less face-to-face time with teachers, a lack of workspace, and a decreased chance of having degree-qualified parents to assist with schoolwork.

The Social Mobility Commission found that within West Yorkshire, both Bradford and Wakefield perform poorly, falling within the bottom quarter of upwardly mobile locations in England, while Leeds also performs poorly for post-school outcomes for poorer young people. On the other hand, Huddersfield and Halifax are two towns that perform relatively well in social mobility despite higher levels of deprivation.

While research shows student finance is not a key factor influencing poorer students' decisions to attend university or not, those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to choose higher education institutions and courses that are less selective than their grades allow in a phenomenon known as 'undermatching'. The reasons for this are inconclusive but are possibly linked to access to information regarding possible routes and a lack of exposure to those who have attended more selective universities.

Socio-economic status correlates with how well pupils perform at school and a pre-existing attainment gap has widened following the pandemic, hindering social mobility. Bradford and Wakefield fall into the bottom quarter of social mobility in England.

3.2 Home life

Parents and role models

The evidence review highlighted the important and key role family, and particularly parents, play in moulding the aspirations of young people, and this influence takes multiple forms. The review found that young people who live in a workless household are more likely to spend time out of work as an adult, and that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to have lower aspirations due to a lack of exposure to different career and education options.



Table 8 Conversations about aspirations

Who young people 'almost always' talk about their goals and ambitions with	
Parents & family	24%
Friends	16%
Teachers	3%

Interviews with young people in West Yorkshire also highlighted the influence family has. Several young people reported wanting to follow careers their parents, particularly what their fathers, do, while another highlighted that they saw GCSE's as non-essential as *"none of [my] family have got [them]"*. Young people also said they talk with parents and family about their goals and ambitions a lot, with slightly less than quarter reporting they talk about this 'almost always'. These conversations could be formative in guiding the development of young people's aspirations. The importance of these conversations was underlined by one young person stating that often *"if someone says to you, 'what do you want to do when you get older?', they stop listening half way through."*

One individual repeatedly mentioned wanting to race motorbikes or work as a motorbike mechanic because his father had one before going to prison and mentioned he had sought out mechanic qualifications. Despite being currently in prison, his father still wielded considerable influence, with the young person mentioning *"[He] knows I want to race, but says I have to do well in school, or no one will want to sponsor me."*

School staff also highlighted the role of family. One staff member commented that an issue schools face is a lack of role models for young people within their homelife. Local practitioners agreed and said parents need to be supported to help develop their children's aspirations, and that schools should be considering how best to engage with them.

Case Study - The Reach Foundation in Feltham, London, operates a school and has seen success in engaging parents by approaching them from their sister-organisation, a community hub, instead. *"If parents had a poor experience of school, they are hesitant to engage with schools again. If a child misbehaves and the parents are pulled in, the interaction they would have with a teacher is vastly different to the interaction they would have with a family support worker."*



Practitioners also noted that role models do not need to be confined to family members and said successful role models in their own organisations included charity staff, other young people, and older professionals. *“Much of our success is built on positive role modelling,”* one practitioner said. *“We have inspirational 18,19-, and 20-year-olds that deliver training. That age gap makes them relatable, and it doesn’t feel like teacher.”* Other practitioners felt that some teacher-pupil relationships are not effective from a role model perspective.

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are another aspect of a young person’s life that can impact aspirations. The evidence review highlighted UK and international evidence that multiple ACEs impact on educational, employment and income outcomes, and that verbal abuse impacts language abilities and household adversity impacts future household incomes.

Young people talk to parents about their aspirations more than friends or teachers and a parent’s career or perceptions of their child’s future greatly influences their child’s aspirations. Parents who are uninformed or disengaged from work can negatively influence aspirations.

3.3 Education

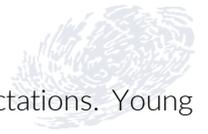
Education performance

The makeup of education structures varies across West Yorkshire’s five districts. The evidence review highlighted the proportionally high number of academies in Wakefield and Bradford, compared to lower numbers in Leeds and Kirklees. Likewise education performance also varied. Bradford scored the highest for percentage of students not achieving 9-4 in GCSE Maths and English at age 16 (48.9%), while Calderdale scored the lowest (37.3%).

Wakefield reported the highest rates in the region for both suspensions (8.5%) and permanent exclusions (0.10%) in the academic year 2019/20, the most recent data available. Given evidence review findings that only 1% of excluded children achieve five A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including Maths and English, it is crucial that exclusions are tackled.

NEET rates also vary across the region. Leeds (7.9%) and Bradford (6.6%) are the two districts which report NEET rates higher than the national average (5.5%), while Calderdale (3.9%) falls far below. Total numbers of NEET are also recorded below.

Our evidence review showed the correlation between becoming NEET, the role of aspirations and the impact of being NEET in realising a young person’s life chances. One report identified that young men



were twice as likely to become NEET if they had mismatched or educational expectations. Young women with misaligned ambitions were three times as likely to become NEET and males and females were three times more likely to become NEET if they had uncertain aspirations.

Table 9 Total number of NEETs and PRU pupils

District	Total number of 16- & 17-year-olds (2021)	Total number of pupils in pupil referral units (2021)
Bradford	960	97
Calderdale	190	57
Kirklees	430	42
Leeds	1,300	8
Wakefield	330	212
West Yorkshire	3,210	416

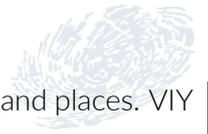
Academic versus vocational

School subjects and courses broadly fall into two camps, academic and vocational. Academic courses generally teach theory and include subjects such as English, geography or maths, while vocational courses focus on practical skills and include those such as carpentry, cooking and photography.

Findings from the evidence review highlighted a focus on academic performance is damaging and leaves some young people feeling unequipped to succeed in life upon leaving school. This is especially the case for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have less access to support at home.

Stakeholders and practitioners in West Yorkshire felt schools in the region, particularly academies, focus more on academic success rather than vocational courses and agreed with evidence review findings that this focus was limiting the aspirations of certain groups. *“For kids who aren’t academic [the curriculum] doesn’t suit their skillset, so they get distracted, get labelled naughty, and then get put in isolation,”* one practitioner commented. Without access to vocational courses, pupils with less-academic skillsets are not being provided with the tools to realise their aspirations.

Case study – Volunteer IT Yourself (VIY) provides vocational work experience opportunities for excluded, disengaged or unemployed 16–24-year-olds. Their mentor-led projects provide young



people an opportunity to learn and apply construction skills while fixing up local spaces and places. VIY can award City & Guild Entry Level 3 qualifications, opening up educational and employment routes to those who take part.

Apprenticeships are an example of vocational education which provide pathways to employment for those unable or wish to follow an academic route. However, apprenticeships are in decline and the evidence review found that apprenticeship starts in the Yorkshire and Humber region fell by 20% in 2019/20 without factoring in the impact of the pandemic on apprenticeships.

Local stakeholders felt the desire to chase academic success was driven by a focus on school league tables and a preference for English Baccalaureate because of this. One also described the idea of replacing 30% of sub-level 2 qualification with T-Levels as 'terrifying'. He said, "*the system dictates that young people would have to go through the academic route for level 3 qualifications and above.... It's a massive gap and a massive oversight.*"

One case study participant said T-Levels in their current format were ineffective at raising aspirations as they focussed on workplace learning without understanding the local employer footprint, which makes them less desirable. "*Non-academic pathways should be as valuable [as academic pathways], but can you progress financially as fast as someone who has been to university? Unless you make the financial reward pathways the same, you won't get there,*" he said.

Several practitioners felt a 'talent management' approach to harnessing the interest and skills of young people by having a mixed vocational and academic offer would be more beneficial and said that schools should follow in the steps of some community organisations by offering more relatable courses such as beauty and care, musical engineering, or car mechanics. "*With a big rethink we may be able to realise the ambition of talented young people,*" one said.

School staff highlighted several aspects of the curriculum they thought helped develop aspirations, particularly PSHE and art lessons, and that most lessons touched on the topic of aspirations even if not tackling it directly. Teachers also highlighted the one-to-one career support available to Year 11s as beneficial.

However young people felt differently about school curriculum and its relevance to their ambitions. Several young people did not see the value of learning how to calculate a triangle's area, for example, and felt that generally students do not go on to use what they learned at school. More than three-



quarters of young people surveyed said a lack of interest in what is being taught led to disengagement from school, the second-most common answer after lack of confidence. Once disengaged young people are at greater risk of becoming NEET, so ensuring engagement with the school offering is critical to protecting future pathways.

Young people also felt school standards were set too high, and that it was unfair to be expected to remember what was taught several weeks or months ago. Practitioners agreed with this sentiment. *“The curriculum gears to a narrow perception of intelligence,”* one said. *“It’s a bit of a memory game.”*

Practitioners also felt curriculum subjects and how they are assessed needed updating. They felt subjects could better reflect modern tools such as social media or coding, or weave in modern trends such as gaming into the curriculum. They also felt the curriculum could do more to foster other characteristics such as entrepreneurship or leadership skills.

Character education is one tool for developing soft and personal skills in young people to help them make good decisions and choices while improving outcomes. However, character education is non-statutory and only a small percentage of schools deliver character education.

Case Study – Commando Joe’s provides highly adaptable character education courses within primary, secondary, and SEN schools. The aim of their programmes is to improve young people’s resilience, empathy, self-awareness, positivity, communication and teamwork, and does so by providing classes alongside physical, military-style exercises and drills. The programme has led to improvements in engagement and attainment amongst participants.

The evidence review highlighted a further way to update curriculum is to include elements such as career guidance to support the aspirational development of young people. Examples include building in one-to-one career support sessions or partnering with local employers to provide workplace education opportunities.

However, there was also a feeling shared by both young people and practitioners that the curriculum could be too easy in some cases. Practitioners felt that by making it too easy it increased the likelihood young people would disengage, which in turn damages their attainment and aspirations.

This sentiment was echoed by young people in an alternative provision school. *“Kids at these schools don’t get GCSEs, they get you to do spelling tests”*, one said. *“They teach us f*** all,”* another commented.



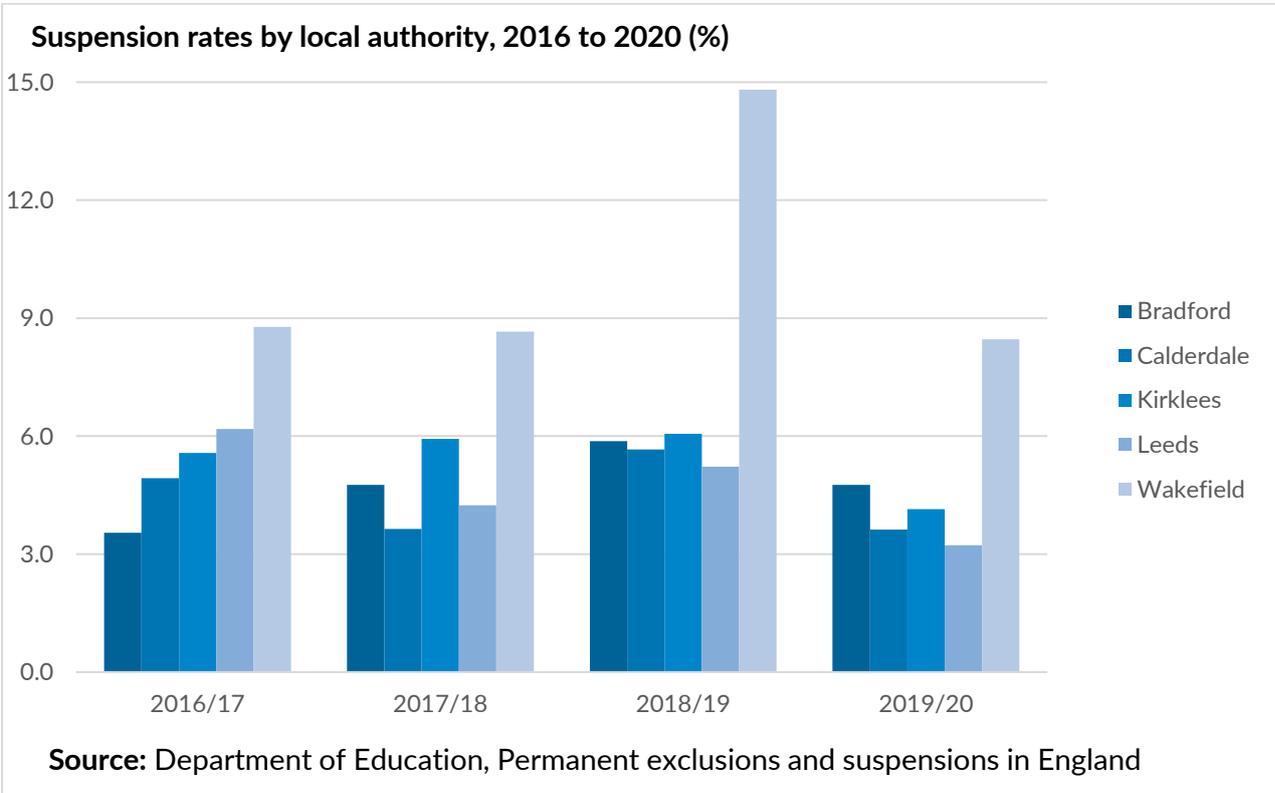
“they say it’s because we don’t do the work but what they teach us is stuff we learnt in Year 5. Give us some actual work that is going to actually teach us something.”

Disinterest in the curriculum is a key driver in disengagement and a focus on academic over vocational abilities could be leaving a substantial number of pupils in West Yorkshire without the tools to realise their aspirations.

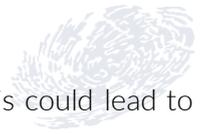
Discipline within schools

Suspension and exclusion statistics show that while the region aligns with national averages, several districts surpass these averages. This disengagement from school could seriously hamper aspirations, and one intervention provider felt it was vital that schools be obligated to get every pupil through the education system. Feedback from pupils in West Yorkshire indicates they are not supported in handling their disruptive behaviour, while practitioners, stakeholders, and case study organisations suggest exclusions could be down to two reasons including a lack of tolerance or support for disruptive behaviour and a focus on academic performance outlined above.

Figure 2 Suspension rates in West Yorkshire



Several young people said when they have been angry in class, they are not given the time or support to cool down. One mentioned they have been sent out of class to calm down, but then is sent straight



back to the lesson before completing cooling off. It is likely that instances such as this could lead to further disruption.

Another commented he has a safe spot where he can go to cool down, but while teachers are walking past they 'have a go' at him and tell him he's taking advantage of it. This highlights the need for a whole-school approach to tackling disruptive behaviour, which could increase levels of engagement by making pupils feel more supported during periods of anger or frustration and prevent them being excluded.

Practitioners said schools are not supported to deal with disruptive pupils, meaning that when pupils are put into isolation all learning comes to a halt as there are no staff to support them. Local stakeholders agreed and said that schools have requested behavioural services which councils are unable to provide, meaning that the work is often falling onto Children and Adults Mental Health Services (CAMHS). *"We try and support schools but ultimately some schools are not inclusive, meaning we have a cohort of children moving school to school"*, one stakeholder noted.

Stakeholders and case study organisations felt the focus on academic performance amongst some academies and academy trusts was also driving exclusions. They believe these schools are 'cutting out' students who are not hitting targets. They stressed this needs to change and instead schools should be held to account to get all students through and could offer flexible timetables or vocational courses to help those who are not performing rather than removing them from classes. *"Permanent exclusions should not be allowed,"* one provider commented.

A lack of support for those removed from lessons can trigger further disengagement from education and lead to exclusions, which greatly damages a young person's chances of realising their aspirations

Transitions

The evidence review highlighted the importance of a positive transition to ensuring continued engagement at school, and that the development of a sense of school belonging is important in ensuring pupils remain motivated and engaged after moving to secondary school from Year 6 to 7.

The review found young people experience a range of emotions during transition and require support from staff to handle these. A whole-school approach to managing transitions would be beneficial. During our consultation one Year 7 pupil highlighted their own difficulties with the experience. *"It's hard because we've come from a tiny primary school to this big school,"* they said. *"There was less people there, the classes were small but here when you go to the corridor to move classes you can't move. I've got*



anger issues and I go mad when everyone's around me because it's a small space, so we'd rather be late than get caught up in that."

The evidence review highlighted a successful secondary school transition hinges on children's psychological adjustment, self-control, and learning motivation. As there is no distinct group which is more vulnerable to more transitions and instead a range of risk and protective factors influence transitions, research concluded a whole-school approach is necessary to provide individual and bespoke support.

Case Study – Stepping Stones Schools in London with a free school meals (FSM) rate of 60% or more can apply to the Greater London Authority's Stepping Stones programme. This programme focuses on supporting vulnerable young people in their transition from primary to secondary school by providing a series of activities including a peer mentoring programme matching Year 7 students with Year 10 mentors. Schools on the programme reported increases in academic progress, behaviour, attendance and core subject performance. Positive outcomes were recorded for both Year 7 mentees and Year 10 mentors.

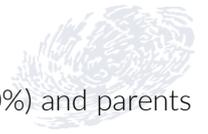
There is also a belief that it is important to engage parents and family members in transitions. *"I think the biggest thing is an education piece to parents and the family as a whole"*, one case study participant said. *"During some of these transitions the family don't take ownership. The moment you explain choices to a family and make them think about what options their children have really great things start to happen."*

The evidence review highlighted the need for greater information around GCSE selections, and this is a point where parents could also be further involved. However, during our consultation teachers also felt Year 8 was a difficult transition point in itself, with one describing it as the *'lost year'* between starting school and selecting GCSEs. *"The current Year 8s are testing the boundaries,"* another teacher said. *"We are seeing academic disagreement and refusal to comply."*

Transitions greatly influence future engagement at school and in education so supporting vulnerable young people through these transitions is vital for their long-term aspirations

Confidence

Keeping young people engaged at school is critical to developing their aspirations, and confidence and self-esteem play a vital role in that. Survey results suggest a lack of confidence is one the biggest causes



of young people disengaging from school. More young people (79%), practitioners (80%) and parents (71%) reported a lack of confidence as a factor leading to disengagement than any other factor.

“The kids would rather fail rather than try hard and risk still failing,” one school staff member said. *“They really need to learn to try hard and then risk still failing.”* One young person felt this lack of confidence not only affected a young person’s effort in school, but also their career choices. *“People get a basic s*** job that’s a safe chance and they don’t want to take the risk in case they fail,”* they said.

Young people not only lack confidence in themselves, but in some cases also the school system. This was particularly the case for those interviewed at the Alternative Provision school and is driven by a lack of faith in the curriculum and the level of support they receive. *“I don’t trust school,”* one young person said. *“Every school I’ve been to has f***** me over.”*

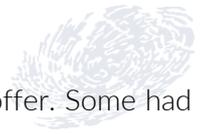
If pupils do not feel confident in their ability to succeed at school, they are much more likely to disengage. Ensuring curriculum is well-matched to skills and providing support is vital to the development of positive aspirations in young people.

3.4 Social life, friends and peers

The social lives of young people can be influential on their attainment and aspirations, with research highlighted in the literature review showing that extra-curricular activities can help develop skills and improve educational outcomes. Youth clubs are particularly powerful and are adept at improving young people’s perception of their future and their ability to challenge bad influences.

Case study – Street League provides skills development and work experience opportunities for NEET young people, with their programmes centred around sport sessions to maintain engagement and promote wellbeing. Their 12–15-week sessions include daily sessions combining sport and employability sessions and the organisation partners with employers to provide work experience opportunities upon completing a course.

Practitioners in West Yorkshire agreed that extra-curricular activities and exposing young people to a variety of different experiences are effective at raising aspirations. One organisation said they partner with cultural institutions to offer free entry to events, activities or exhibitions to young people who normally would not be able to access them and in doing so positively influenced their aspirations.



However young people in the area said they generally did not engage with the local offer. Some had visited clubs or groups that had since closed or were aware of clubs but just did not attend them. There was a feeling they were more aimed at younger children and not suitable for those who are older. Some mentioned they previously took part in sports clubs, but that left them feeling tired at school or got bored of them, so they stopped going.

Young people at the alternative provision school noted that older individuals involved in criminality also influenced the outcomes and ambitions of young people. One young person mentioned they likely would have got involved in trouble anyway, but that older individuals sped up the process and meant they were more involved than they would be otherwise. Another young person mentioned the older individuals end up in prison because they are *'not smart and get caught'*, but he would not. More than 50% of young people surveyed also said that peer influence was a factor leading to young people disengaging from education, training, or work opportunities.

Practitioners noted they see the influence these criminal elements have over the young people they work with. One noted they had a student working in animal care who had seen an Instagram post about making money and responded to it, which resulted in the individual receiving drugs to sell and ending up in drug debt. Any interventions aimed at raising aspirations needs to take into account the appeal of earning quick money and the influence short-term materialistic aspirations can have on decision making.

While extra-curricular activities are vital in providing new experiences and helping mould positive aspirations there is both a lack of access to motivation to attend such activities in West Yorkshire.

3.5 Summary

In summary there are several barriers influencing the young people in West Yorkshire's development of positive aspirations:

Location and access to transport is absolutely crucial to ensuring young people are able to attend clubs, events and activities which can build positive aspirations. While an extra-curricular offer does exist within West Yorkshire, without a means to get there it is impossible to assess how effective these are for the young people that cannot attend them. Given the importance of role models, which can also be found within these clubs and organisations, the impact a lack of transport has is two-fold.



Ensuring parents provide positive influences on their children's aspirations is vital, not least because children talk with their parents about their aspirations than any other group. Parents' influence can be conscious and unconscious, with their own education and career backgrounds dictating their own opinions and preferences for their children's paths. Parents must be engaged with their child's education and have full understanding of what potential education and employment routes their children can take to guarantee as their child also understands the full range of options open to them.

Finally schools must also be as accommodating as possible to make sure children remain engaged with their education and develop positive aspirations. Seemingly irrelevant and outdated curriculums and those which focus on academic performance can leave some young people disinterested in their studies, while a lack of support in understanding and tackling disruptive behaviours and the reasons behind it can lead to further disruption and eventually disengagement. This is on top of becoming NEET and/or moving into criminal behaviour which we know can have a long-term scarring on adulthood, health and economic wellbeing.

Bradford

School types

Academy	46.1%
Community	24.4%

Suspensions & exclusions

Suspensions	4.8%
Exclusions	0.06%

GCSEs & NEET

NEET	6.6%
Not achieving 9-4	
GCSE English & Maths	48.9%

Leeds

School types

Academy	28.0%
Community	30.4%

Suspensions & exclusions

Suspensions	3.2%
Exclusions	0.01%

GCSEs & NEET

NEET	7.9%
Not achieving 9-4	
GCSE English & Maths	44.5%

Calderdale

School types

Academy	34.4%
Community	30.5%

Suspensions & exclusions

Suspensions	3.6%
Exclusions	0.07%

GCSEs & NEET

NEET	4.1%
Not achieving 9-4	
GCSE English & Maths	42.3%

Wakefield

School types

Academy	48.1%
Community	23.5%

Suspensions & exclusions

Suspensions	8.5%
Exclusions	0.1%

GCSEs & NEET

NEET	4.4%
Not achieving 9-4	
GCSE English & Maths	40.6%

Kirklees

School types

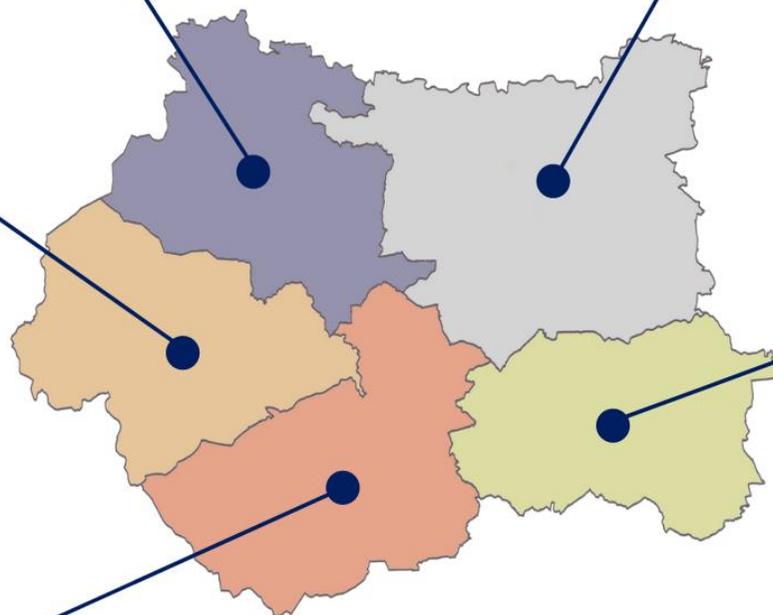
Academy	27.9%
Community	34.0%

Suspensions & exclusions

Suspensions	4.1%
Exclusions	0.08%

GCSEs & NEET

NEET	4.1%
Not achieving 9-4	
GCSE English & Maths	42.3%



Data	Year
School types	2020/21
Suspensions & exclusions	2019/20
NEET	2020/21
Not achieving 9-4 GCSE English & Maths	2019/20



4. Best practice for raising aspirations

Based on our analysis of the evidence and conversations with organisations that took part in our case study review the following sets out what works in support young people with their aspirations.

4.1 Work experience

Work experience and internships can be a powerful tool for raising aspirations, and the evidence review highlighted the All in Edinburgh programme in Scotland which supports disabled individuals into employment and supported internships for those aged 16-24 with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Several of West Yorkshire's districts offer supported internships for those with SEN through the Project Search model by providing coaching, different work experience opportunities, and then support to look for paid work. *"It's been really inspirational,"* one stakeholder said. *"For those with autism needs, for example, employment routes are minimal, but job coaches can break through that."* In Kirklees, of the ten individuals that joined the programme, 100% achieved a job at the end of it.

Stakeholders agreed that providing inclusive opportunities for all was vital, and that it is "important to include those who are not typically included in aspirational programmes". However they also agreed that it was critical to be focusing on skills that employers want and broader skills such as resilience, life skills, and preparation for adulthood.

Case study – Career Ready provides employability skills and work experience opportunities by developing three-partnerships in local areas between itself, schools, and employers. Employers are involved by providing workplace visits, industry insights, or work experience opportunities. Students are also supported by mentors.

One issue raised was getting employability provision off the ground, with stakeholders lamenting that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Department for Education (DfE) move *'glacially slow'*, and do not have *'the most consultative relationship'*. Stakeholders felt off the back of the devolution of skills funding the combined authority and ESFA could be co-commissioning internships and work experience opportunities, as well as the likes of youth clubs and free transport networks.



Other stakeholders agreed and felt the VRU could help with fragmentation and help individual authorities cultivate their local offerings. Those in Calderdale mentioned the convening power could be quite strong in helping build employability support based on the district's micro-economy.

4.2 Supporting schools & education

Stakeholders also reported success in supporting schools and the education of young people. Authorities highlighted the key role some individuals have, such as head of children's services, in delivering learning, building aspirations, and developing communities. Kirklees council provide a universal offer for vulnerable children with schools add on to, but also reported the vast majority of schools also buy in extra provision.

Councils have also rolled out programmes to support the aspirational development of young people. The Maths Mates and Reading Friends programmes in Kirklees are coordinated by the council and train volunteers of all ages, including post-16 young people, to help primary children develop aspirations through maths and English skills development.

Local authorities are also working to develop teaching staff to raise the aspirations of their pupils. One authority highlighted in particular the external provider **Primary Engineer**, which was commissioned over three years to train primary school teachers to bring science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) into the classroom. They said the programme had been particularly affective at raising the STEM aspirations of girls.

However stakeholders did feel more could be done. They highlighted staff training for teachers to help them champion their pupil's passions would be effective, and small group training could be built in at the end of the school day. *"We are helping raise attainment but there's not much point without support to realise those aspirations,"* one stakeholder said.

Kirklees Council received funding from the Youth Futures Foundation to develop the School Transition and Reach Service (STARS), a structured intensive family and community-based intervention which supports children and their families who are likely to struggle with transitions. STARS provides support to improve the resilience and self-esteem of children identified as being at risk of child exploitation as well as increasing community engagement and their ability to manage emotions. *"It's had such an impact*



that we've continued to invest in it," one stakeholder said. "It's been really crucial in areas where gang related incidents are high. It enables young people to be well engaged in secondary school."

However stakeholders also complained that transitions are managed differently school to school, meaning some children are well supported during transitions while others are not. *"It would be great if the VRU could come up with a best practice model," one stakeholder said. "In particular we need to know how children were managed in primary schools."*

Stakeholders felt positive transitions are now more important due to the impact of Covid-19, with many young people entering into primary school or secondary school with reduced or limited experience of mixing with other children. They said it is important to think further than just term-time Monday to Friday engagement, and instead need to approach transitions in a holistic way which also involves communities.

They also felt tutoring is critical to raising aspirations. *"Tutoring when it's done well can work incredibly, it's over and above the work schools do," one stakeholder said. "It can help the most vulnerable achieve qualifications and should not just be for middle class kids."* One stakeholder felt that providing tutors to every child that would benefit from one would be the best use of any available funding.

"An absolute priority is ensuring equality is there," he said. "The real worry is for people who end up with no qualifications at all. Support for all can't be working if you've got a chunk of people in their 20s with no qualification."

Stakeholders in Calderdale hold a regular meeting to track every vulnerable child in the district work to coordinate provision to ensure support is in place. They felt the development of such a model rolled out across West Yorkshire would be extremely beneficial.

4.3 Career guidance

Local authority stakeholders believe that while more could be offered, the quality and universality of career support within schools is generally particularly good, highlighting the Level 6 qualified careers advisors embedded within schools. However, they did mention that one-to-one in-person support is crucial to their effectiveness, with the online offer not as effective. They also mentioned that the careers support for vulnerable young people, identified using Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) and Risk



of Drop Out Indicator (RODI) tools, had been impacted slightly by Covid-19 but was still proving effective.

Evidence review findings also highlighted the importance of career guidance within schools and found its application improved retention rates, academic performance, post-16 transitions, and longer-term life and career success. The review highlighted the importance of career-related learning (CRL) as well as career guidance, and that beginning CRL as early as primary school can increase awareness of different pathways for pupils while building confidence. CRL activities include aspiration days, workplace visits, curriculum-linked activities, and guest speakers.

Teachers largely agreed that the career support provision was effective. *“We equip them really well careers-wise,”* one staff member said. *“[The career support staff] go above and beyond to make sure they’ve got all the tools they need to achieve.”* The staff member also highlighted the role form tutors play as well as the one-to-one support available to Year 11s.

However, there was a feeling amongst some young people that career support in Year 11 was too late, and some students wanted support earlier. For example, the individual who wanted to work with motorbikes found an external motorbike engineering qualification but as he was not yet in Year 11 the schools were unable to support him to apply for it. Engaging younger students to follow interests and qualifications related to those interests could be crucial to developing and realising aspirations.

A small portion of parents and carers also felt more career support is needed, and just over a quarter of those surveyed believe there currently is not enough. They reported career guidance sessions which involved parents as well as pupils would be beneficial, as would opening access to career guidance at an earlier age. The evidence review found that programmes which better equip schools to provide career guidance information to parents leave parents more informed. Children of parents who take part in these programmes also benefit by finding conversations with their parents useful and feeling motivated to conduct their own career-related research.

While 80% of parents and carers surveyed felt aware of the education, training and career opportunities available to their children, the majority also felt there was not enough information and advice on potential educational and employment routes for both their children and themselves. *“I understand it just fine as I do my research and I’m targeted by mailing lists, my children however don’t have anything careers related orientated at school to my knowledge,”* one parent commented. Parents reported



wanting more information from schools directly as well as signposting to other information sources, and several said more in-person, one to one meetings with education staff would be helpful.

4.4 Summary

With parents acting as such as key enabler for the development of positive aspirations, engaging them with their child's education and employment options is crucial. The impact of Covid-19 meant in-person parent and teacher interactions reduced significantly, but with England moving out of the pandemic it is critical that parents are re-engaged and provided the information and knowledge they need to support their children's education and employment choices.

Collaborating with local authorities to identify and provide targeted support to vulnerable young people can ensure those most at need are provided the tools to continue to grow and develop. Understanding the provision of support across the region and ensuring access to these provisions is critical to aspirational development. There is a host of opportunities and organisations working in the region to raise aspirations, but as mentioned in previous sections access to these is limited by poor public transport networks. Improving transport networks and greater collaboration between local authorities, schools, third-sector organisations and local employers can help grow the current offer, not least by creating clearer paths to work experience opportunities.



5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Summary of key findings

A summary of the key findings from this research are:

- There is a correlation between aspiration and attainment and increasing aspirations to increase attainment is generally accepted as an effective tool, although there is little robust evidence to prove causation does occur
- Exclusions and suspension impact attainment, and the Bradford and Wakefield districts record much higher exclusion and suspension statistics than other districts
- A focus on academic performance is highlighted by young people, practitioners, stakeholders and intervention providers as a key reason behind disengagement, suspension and exclusions. Greater access to and support for vocational routes is fundamental to developing aspirations and ensuring engagement
- A lack of confidence was the most-cited factor causing disengagement from education
- Young people and practitioners feel the curriculum is in parts irrelevant and outdated, and more could be done to bring it in line with modern employment trends. Young people highlighted a lack of interest in the current curriculum as another crucial factor leading to disengagement
- As well as raising aspirations, it is crucial to provide young people with the tools to realise aspirations. Engaging with local employers and understanding local labour market needs is critical to ensuring young people are able to move into work
- Lack of transport in rural areas acts as a barrier to aspirations and attainment, and parts of West Yorkshire suffer this issue. This is particularly the case for young people who wish to take part in extra-curricular activities or events, which are a crucial tool in raising aspirations. Local intervention providers have had to overcome this barrier by paying for private transport
- Parents are key to the development of aspirations. Surveyed young people say they talk to parents about their aspirations more than teachers or friends, but parents' own perceptions and knowledge of education and employment routes can be biased or limited, negatively impacting the aspirations of their children
- As well as parents, positive role models are also key. However, the teacher-pupil relationship is not optimal for providing role models, and with access to other groups and clubs limited by poor transport links there is a lack of access to role models in the West Yorkshire region
- Career guidance provision in schools is effective for older age groups, but could be made more accessible to younger age groups through better framing and improved availability



5.2 Future directions to raise aspirations

The makeup of West Yorkshire's demographic and education profile means there is no 'one size fits all' approach to raising the aspirations of the region's young people. However, ensuring continued engagement with the school system while providing access to resources, and activities outside of school-time while not only build on aspirations already in-place, but also give young people the tools to both **raise** and **realise** their aspirations.

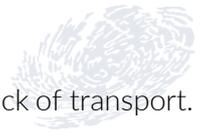
Core to this is engaging with parents. The research shows that young people talk about their aspirations with their parents more than they do with teachers or friends, and the careers and experiences of parents can influence what paths their children take. Re-engaging parents who have become disconnected from their child's education is crucial to improving the ambitions and goals of children with the lowest aspirations. Some parents signalled they desired greater engagement from schools but community-based approaches could also be influential, for example using family support workers to re-integrate parents into their local community which in turn re-engages them with the school system.

Ensuring young people's engagement at school is also critical to raising aspirations, but school exclusions and suspensions can severely damage their engagement. In West Yorkshire these suspensions appear to be driven by two main factors:

- A lack of capacity to provide behavioural support in schools
- A focus on academic performance, meaning those who do not perform academically well disengage from lessons and then begin disrupting classes due to boredom

Ensuring the curriculum is inclusive and accessible to all skill levels and strengths can reduce disruption, while guaranteeing a whole-school approach to tackling behavioural issues can also help disruptive children stay engaged. Similarly supporting transitions is also key, particularly Year 6 to Year 7 and GCSE selection. Greater communication between primary and secondary schools can ensure the right support is in place for vulnerable children, while Year 8 and Year 9 students could benefit from greater detail and support in their GCSE selections.

Practitioners and case study organisations highlighted activities, clubs and events outside of school as powerful tools for raising the aspirations of young people. While a number of organisations and schools in the area offer a range of services, including sports, social action, volunteering, and the arts, not all young people in the area take these up. Some are uninterested in the offer, suggesting these could be



framed better, but more importantly some simply are not able to access them due to a lack of transport. Collaborating with local schools and authorities to improve transport options for young people would improve access and therefore aspirations.

Ensuring there are clear employment routes after leaving education is key, so it is important to understand local labour market needs, ensure these are being met, and convene with local authorities and employers to ensure employment routes are accessible. Transport can be a crucial barrier particularly for those going into a first role with limited spending power and no access to private transport.

5.3 Calls to action

The research has highlighted various options and ideas for supporting the aspirations of young people in the region. The challenge is that this is a complex area, with many stakeholders, projects, funding and policies involved. Recommendations or calls to action have to be within the control and influence of the VRU and to focus on where interventions or policies are likely to have the greatest impact. We suggest the following:

- The rate of exclusions in the region is higher in some places than others. We know the effect of exclusions has on attainment and aspirations and the risk of becoming NEET. Whilst not within the remit of the VRU, the unit could use its influence to persuade the WYCA to work at a strategic level to better understand the factors behind exclusions and to consider using a campaign such as a 'no exclusion zone' across the region. This could be used as a lever to drive change in schools and to provide a collective call of action to ensure that suspension and exclusion is an absolute last resort.
- There are existing examples of projects and interventions that are working well in the region such as VIY, Career Ready and Street League. There will be others. The VRU could use its funding to amplify existing work by extending it to other places as well as target specific groups of young people that are likely to be most at risk of moving from NEET into crime. This would ensure that good practice is continued and scaled and those that would have the least access to opportunity would be targeted and supported.
- Any projects that the VRU is funding or will fund in the future needs to ensure that access to costs for transport is included in the value of the grant. Transport both access to and cost is a significant barrier for young people to access support and activities. It could also use its influence



within the WYCA for better transport in isolated places, particularly in advocating for better funding or additional funding to support young people access services and support.

- By focusing on those most at risk of NEET and the more vulnerable, the unit could work with WYCA and local partners to explore improved vocational pathways and provision for young people. Using local labour market intelligence and skills ambitions for the region it could help 'join the dots' for local providers, colleges and careers advisors to better target information, support and action about careers and aspirations to both families and young people that are trapped in workless homes and communities. This could be direct or by building the skills and expertise through family outreach workers, teachers, community leaders and other types of provision.
- Finally there is an important consideration about messaging. Practitioners told us that young people do have aspirations and that the term 'raising aspirations' assumes that young people do not. We think the terminology should be about enabling or realising aspirations and that it is important to use a strengths-based, talent management approach to working with vulnerable children and young people.



Appendix 1 – Research Tools

Research questions

The current state of aspirations and attainment

- What is the structure of primary and secondary school institutions in West Yorkshire?
- How many children are becoming NEET in West Yorkshire and at what point?
 - How does this differ in different demographic groups?
- How has Covid-19 impacted the number of children becoming NEET?
- What are attainment rates in West Yorkshire?
 - How do these differ in different demographic groups?
 - How do these differ across West Yorkshire?
- What are the exclusion rates in West Yorkshire, and how do these differ by areas and demographic group?
- How do levels of aspirations differ for different demographic groups?
- Which transition points are the most challenging and why?
- What is the link between aspirations, attainment, and employment?

Risk factors and barriers

- How do demographic factors such as location, gender, ethnicity, special educational need, or disability influence transition points and aspirations?
- How do social factors such as home life, school life & peer groups influence transition points and aspirations?
- How does trauma and adversity influence transition points and aspirations?
- What barriers to educational attainment and employment do children in KS4 and KS5 face?
 - How does this differ by age group and transition point?
- What other barriers are there to aspirations and educational attainment?
- What other factors influence aspirations and attainment?
- Do different demographic groups have differing levels of aspirations and attainment in West Yorkshire. If so, why?

Interventions for raising aspirations

- What is best practice for raising aspirations?
- How are teachers, schools and local authorities working to increase attainment and raise aspirations?



- How are third-sector organisations working to raise aspirations?
- What support are individuals or organisations delivering interventions provided?
- What collaboration could help and is helping to increase attainment?
- What interventions are most effective at raising aspirations?
- Does accessibility of interventions vary for different demographic groups?
- What interventions are currently in place in West Yorkshire?
 - How effective are these?

Topic guides and consultation material

Young people consultation

- How positive do you feel about your future options and choices [activity: sliding scale 1 = “I can do anything I set my mind to” to 5 = “Even if I know what I want to do, it’s never going to happen”].
- What sort of things do you aspire to? (jobs, hobbies, holidays, things you want to buy, personal goals etc)
- Who do you talk to about your future options? Friends, family, teachers, youth workers, official career advisor?
- What kind of support do you have for your choices, about school/work or other ambitions
 - inside school?
 - outside school?
- Do you feel like there are lots of options for you for what exams you do,?
- Are there lots of options for what other training you do?
- Are there options for what job you might want to get?
- Do you feel like it's a problem if you don't know what you want to do?



What are your goals and aspirations?

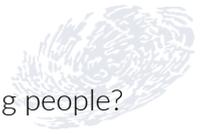
How positive do you feel about your future options and choices?

I can do anything I set my mind to 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 **Even if I know what I want to do, it's never going to happen**

Explain your answer:

Stakeholder consultation

- How is education structured in the local authority (e.g. academies, state schools etc.)?
- What are the key issues in schools in the LA?
 - What groups and demographics face the most challenges?
- What career support & career education provision is available for young people?



- What transition support and aspirational development provision is available for young people?
 - What best practice is there?
 - What do you think could help support transitions which isn't in place already?
- What could be done to help raise aspirations?
- What would you like to see the VRU do?
 - Is there something that could be done at a bespoke level?

School staff consultation

- Amongst the young people you work with, do they believe that they will be able to achieve their goals? (These goals could be education/career-related or related to other aspects of their lives)
- Do you feel they get the support they need on their aspirations?
 - Who do they go to for support on this?
- What can trigger disengagement? Which transition points are most important?

Youth practitioner consultation

- What is the nature of the support you provide to young people and what are the demographics of the young people with whom you work?
- What are the main challenges experienced by the young people in terms of developing aspirations?
- What impact does school structure specifically have, and how do suspensions and exclusions impact aspirations? What can cause young people to disengage from school?
- What is the impact of transitions (primary to secondary, secondary onwards), and how does this impact differ by group?
- What experiences of higher/ further education or employment do the young people you work with have?
- How do young people experience GCSE selection and how can they be supported during this?
- How could young people lacking aspirations best be supported to develop those aspirations?
- How could aspirational initiatives be made more accessible to young people?

Appendix 2 – Case studies

Career Ready

Website:	Career Ready	Geographical reach:	Nationwide
Org size:	~200 employees	Theme of work:	Work experience
Scale of work:	Works with 400 schools across the UK		

Background to Career Ready

Career Ready was founded in 2002 with the aim of increasing social mobility by providing employability skills and work experience opportunities to disadvantaged young people. The organisation works in the most disadvantaged areas in the UK, prioritising areas, schools, colleges, and young people who need support the most.

The Career Ready model is based on a set of programmatic, rather than one-off, interventions which involve a three-way partnership between Career Ready, schools, and local employers. The aim is to generate longitudinal, measurable impact, which Career Ready does not feel is as possible with one-off interventions. This is achieved through programmes which run over multiple months.

Career Ready’s programmes

The organisation has three core programmes with increasing levels of intensity. These are:

- Career Starter: This light-touch approach provides schools with a set of free resources which can be delivered to students across all secondary and sixth form year groups. Resources include assemblies, tutorials, and subject-specific activities.
- Career Builder: This programme works with volunteer employer who provide industry insights, workplace visits, and masterclasses. The programme is delivered to small groups across all year groups, although masterclass topics differ by year group.
- Career Ready: This programme is delivered to young people in Year 12 and 13 to support them in their transition into work. This 12-month programme pairs individual students with mentors, with workplace visits and masterclasses also provided. Career Ready also aspires to provide each young person with a four-week paid internship, although this is not always possible.



The aim of these programmes is to give young people the skills and insight to make more informed decisions about their futures and show them which career pathways exist after school. Career Ready highlighted the power of bringing young people into working environments to open their eyes to the depth and breadth of opportunities, which has aspirational impacts.

Once funding has been received Career Ready typically works by sending a regional manager to an area to map local challenges and opportunities and build relationships with schools and employers, followed by the planning and organisation of insight days, masterclasses, and paid internships.

Outcomes

Career Ready has 400 school and college partnerships across the UK, and throughout 2020 delivered 174,000 interventions, with 98% of students progressing into sustained education or employment (76% into education, 11% into apprenticeships, and 11% into employment). The organisation was able to shift its model during the pandemic, moving to mainly virtual delivery. During this time, 1,600 students attended employer-led skills masterclasses, and 83% of students said Career Ready's virtual Skills Fest had guided their planning. The organisation's work sits alongside the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#), with seven of the eight benchmarks delivered through their resources.

More than 100 employers delivered virtual events during lockdown, and 75% of employers said they would hire their Career Ready intern if they had the opportunity to do so.

Potential for West Yorkshire

Career Ready already operates in the region and has a local advisory board in Leeds. The organisation said its operations are ready to be scaled up and new projects can build on its work with the schools it is already in as well as collaborating with new schools. The programme would be beneficial for students who are not aiming to pursue Higher Education but are lacking work experience opportunities to move into full-time employment. Funding would provide Career Ready with the means to hire new regional managers and build up its work in other geographic areas, creating opportunities for those in more rural areas who struggle with access to work experience opportunities.



The organisation could also build on its existing corporate partnerships in the area, and by partnering with local employers it could address skills shortages and generate a new pool of potential employees.



Commando Joe's

Website:	Commando Joe's	Geographical reach:	Nationwide
Org size:	~35 employees	Theme of work:	Character education
Scale of work:	Works with ~100 schools across the UK		

Background to Commando Joe's

Commando Joe's was established in 2009 with the aim of providing character education to disadvantaged young people and helping them improve their education and life outcomes. The organisation worked with the Wise Owl Trust, a multi-academy trust, to design its RESPECT framework which focuses on improving young people's resilience, empathy, self-awareness, positivity, excellence, communication, and teamwork.

The organisation works with primary schools, secondary schools, and Special Educational Need (SEN) schools to deliver programmes based on the RESPECT framework. Programmes are school-led and adaptable to individual needs and requirements.

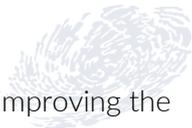
The Jubilee Centre, a national character education research centre, has linked character education with social mobility. Its research highlights that improvement in moral, civic, performance, and intellectual virtues are linked with greater social mobility.

The Commando Joe's offer

Programmes are highly adaptable and flexible, but the organisation has four core offers which are incorporated alongside physical activity, these are:

- An instructor and role model to support the whole-school approach and programme delivery
- Bespoke staff training
- Activity equipment and resources
- Online teacher/ parents' portal, with access to assessment tools

Some of the programmes offered include:

- 
- An early years and primary school character education programme focused on improving the RESPECT attributes. This is delivered by Commando Joe's or by school staff who have been trained by the organisation
 - Staff team-building days focused on leadership, communication, teamwork, and self-development
 - Secondary school programmes aimed at improving leadership, communication, teamwork, and self-development amongst students
 - A programme supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school
 - A programme supporting children with challenging behaviour

Outcomes

Commando Joe's reviews termly performance at each school and reports that 75% of students who access its programmes see an increase in all RESPECT traits, with significant improvement made over the course of three terms, while 91% see an increase in at least one trait after just one term.

An independent evaluation conducted by Swansea University found that the programme led to significant improvements in educational engagement and attainment as well as beneficial changes in both positive social and problem behaviours. These changes were associated with the impact of positive role models provided by instructors and the autonomous and structured delivery. The study found there was no difference between genders regarding impact.

Potential for West Yorkshire

Given the model's highly adaptable structure it would be relatively easy to apply to primary and secondary schools across the region which differ in social, demographic, and academic traits, meaning the VRU could roll out delivery to schools which needed the most support in a timely fashion. The programme would benefit those from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing new experiences and would benefit those who struggle academically by giving them experiences of success in non-academic formats. This could potentially improve engagement in school for those students with a history of suspension and exclusion.

The organisation has three packages which range from £2,000-£3,000 per year per school, with the more expensive packages including continued professional development days and resources for families in addition to school activities.



Reach Foundation

Website:	Reach Foundation	Geographical reach:	Community-based
Org size:	~100 employees	Theme of work:	Whole-school model
Scale of work:	Works with schools, early years settings, & groups in Feltham		

Background to Reach Foundation

The Reach Foundation, a charity in Feltham, London, has developed a cradle-to-career model which comprises Reach Children’s Hub and Reach Academy Feltham, and supports babies, children, young people and families in the area. The idea behind the model is to provide deeper, more wide-ranging support than a school can provide, under the principle that “an excellent education at an inclusive school is necessary but not sufficient for young people to enjoy lives of choice and opportunity”.

The Children’s Hub was established in 2016 and its work is based on four outcomes. These are:

- For children to be safe and well supported
- For children to be healthy - physically, mentally and emotionally
- For children to achieve well academically
- For children to develop strong relationships and networks

The Reach Foundation is inspired by the cradle-to-career model, pioneered by the Harlem Children’s Zone. The Academy is an all-through school serving pupils aged 2-18, while the Hub provides community and student support beyond the school gate. There are various workstreams spanning the cradle-to-career spectrum aiming to shift outcomes for all age groups in the long-term.

What the Hub does

The Hub’s Early Years workforce involves information and resource sharing to shift mindsets about what works for children. It provides continued professional development opportunities for early years practitioners and an Early Years Foundation Degree in partnership with Kingston University.

A second workstream is the Hub’s NEET prevention work, which employs both preventative and reactive strategies, focusing on those aged 11-25. This work includes the school starting Key Stage 3 a year early, in Year 6, to support the transition to secondary school. Young people are also provided



guidance on post-16 routes including apprenticeships and Higher Education. Activities helping the transition to employment include CV and cover letter workshops, and work fairs. The Hub engages with pupils at risk of becoming NEET and, alongside the school, works closely with their families.

Engaging parents is a key tenet of the Reach model, particularly training and upskilling parents to get them working within the local community, creating a network of adults engaged with the community and the Hub simultaneously. The Hub's Training Circle schemes provides unemployed parents with a £2,000 employment grant to get them back to work while providing peer and mental health support.

The Hub is developing partnerships and convening a range of stakeholders to change the way the local system works for children and their families. Partners include Cisco to provide training and create sustainable job opportunities, social organisations such as Citizens UK to support families in the area, and Kingston University to deliver higher education opportunities.

Outcomes

There is evidence that the Hub's approach is succeeding in improving outcomes for babies, children and young people in Feltham and evaluation involves tracking incremental changes over time. The hub has identified three mechanisms as crucial to developing parents' confidence, mood, knowledge and capabilities, which indirectly influence positive child development:

- Highly skilled early years professionals
- Time and patience needed to create long-lasting relationships
- Flexibility and diversity in the groups and activities on offer

Case studies highlight positive changes from engaging with Hub activities and there is evidence this is translating into improvements in their child's school attendance, attainment, and attitude

Potential for West Yorkshire

A model like Reach Hub could prove successful as an approach targeted at specific West Yorkshire locations. The VRU's connections to schools, councils and businesses can help convene partnerships to provide support for young people in the area to raise their aspirations. A Hub-like model could also support local organisations increase their reach and impact. The Hub's outreach workers models build relationships with disengaged students and their families which is different to that of a teacher-student relationship and have a positive influence on the region's school exclusion rates.

Stepping Stones

Website:	Stepping Stones	Geographical reach:	London
Organisation size:	5 GLA staff plus coordinators within each school	Theme of work:	Peer mentoring
Scale of work:	15 schools across London		

Background to Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones was designed in 2016 and aims to support vulnerable young people in their transition from primary to secondary school. It focuses on supporting and improving pupil attainment, behaviour, and attendance by supporting pupils who experience uncertainty, risk, and anxiety around transition and by utilising peer mentoring alongside a range of activities.

The programme was piloted in the 2016/17 academic year across three schools and was then scaled up in 2018. London borough schools with a borough-wide free school meals (FSM) rate of 60% or more can apply for up to £50,000 to deliver the programme. Fifteen schools from ten boroughs were selected for the 2018-2020 programme. As part of the Mayor of London's New Deal for Young People the programme is being rolled out again between 2021 and 2023. It is funded by the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit.

The Stepping Stones programme

The Stepping Stones programme has six core activities. These are:

- **Engagement days with primary schools:** liaising with primary school teachers, Year 6 pupils, and parents, to understand pupil needs and identify those who may benefit from the programme.
- **Summer school:** running activities during a two-week summer school to help immerse selected incoming Year 7 pupils in the secondary school environment before term begins.
- **Stepping Stones lessons:** key learning sessions for selected Year 7 pupils, helping develop their confidence and ability to deal with different social and academic situations.
- **Peer mentoring:** training Year 10 pupils to support selected Year 7 pupils via weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions.
- **Community mentoring:** adult mentors provide peer mentoring and programme lessons support.

- 
- **Aspirational and career-based activities:** working with external organisations to inspire selected Year 7 pupils about different careers and future goals.

Peer mentoring, the summer schools and the Stepping Stones lessons are identified as the activities most likely to have the biggest impact on students, however schools are encouraged to tailor the activities to specific contexts and needs. Details on the benefits and learnings of different activities learnings are provided to schools within a toolkit, along with guidance on how to run sessions. Scale also varies by school, with some recruiting hundreds of students and other recruiting far less.

Outcomes

[The programme has reportedly led to increases in academic progress, behaviour, attendance, and core subject performance.](#) Some academic improvements were not sustained once the programme ended in Year 8 however, suggesting further support is needed for those exiting the programme.

Exclusions amongst Stepping Stones pupils fell by 1.1% compared to historical comparison groups, driven by improvements among SEN pupils. The summer school improved the self-confidence of socially anxious, shy or quieter pupils, while young people who struggled to control their behaviour saw improved self-awareness and maturity.

Schools reported a 5.5% increase in the attendance of Stepping Stones pupils compared to historical comparison groups. The summer school was seen as a tool to alleviate fears about secondary school, thus supporting early attendance.

Potential for West Yorkshire

The delivery of a youth peer mentoring programme such as Stepping Stones would allow the VRU to work with schools to target pupils at-risk of developing poor aspirations. Year 10 peer mentors benefit particularly from aspirational growth, and the programme can help develop a sense of responsibility and maturity. A youth peer mentoring programme could also help bring down exclusions, as seen in the Stepping Stones programme. The programme would support the transition into secondary school, improving engagement, and improve employability outcomes for Year 10 mentors.

Economic analysis of the Stepping Stones programme puts its cost at £365 per pupil.



Street League

Website:	Street League	Geographical reach:	Nationwide
Organisation size:	~180 employees	Theme of work:	Employability skills
Scale of work:	2,400 young people started programmes over 12 months		

Background to Street League

Street League is a sport for good organisation that was founded in 2003 and has the goal of supporting young people into employment. The organisation works with young people aged 14-30 from the UK's most disadvantaged communities. Its programmes combine sports with skills development and work experience opportunities, using the sport aspect to maintain engagement.

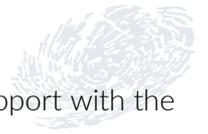
Street League predominantly work with young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), but also do some work with those who are pre-NEET. Barriers such as a lack of work experience, a lack of qualifications, and financial barriers to transport hold back the young people Street League works with, and the organisation helps these young people overcome these.

What Street League does

Street League has three core workstreams, these are:

- Employability support to those who are NEET
- Working with schools to help students transition to employment
- Working with employers to design and offer Modern Apprenticeships

The employability support programmes are 12-to-15-week courses that build employability sessions around daily sport and fitness activities. These activities include skills development in subjects including English and Maths, one to one career advice support, job application assistance, qualification opportunities, and work experience opportunities. Street League works with corporate partners like DHL and Sky Betting and Gaming (SBG) to provide 100 hours of paid work experience and covers transport costs associated with the programme. Street League's one-year aftercare service also covers initial transport costs associated with a new job. Several young people who partook in the six-month SBG placement were kept on afterwards by the company.



Street League partners with schools to identify pupils who could most benefit from support with the transition out of school and into work, further education, or training. The organisation provides careers advice and guidance, employability workshops, and assistance with UCAS forms and CVs, centred around sports-based engagement. Street League has partnered with Woman Win and Standard Chartered to deliver the Goal education programme, which supports girls aged 12-18.

Street League operates a team dedicated to selecting and securing new corporate partners. The organisation is selective in ensuring partners align with its mission and can provide young people with work experience. Street League’s model of engaging young people, providing them with qualifications, and moving them into work is easily understood, and the organisation has success in selling this vision to partners and securing work placement opportunities from them.

Outcomes

Across a 12-month period between 2020 and 2021, 2,444 young people started a Street League programme, and 1,132 young people progressed into jobs, education or further training during the same time period. A further 154 young people sustained employment for at least 6 months. The two largest employment sectors for those who progressed into work were hospitality and warehouse work, followed by sports, construction, and retail. Of those who participated in programmes more than a quarter were from the 10% most deprived areas in the UK.

Potential for West Yorkshire

Street League currently works in West Yorkshire and has previously worked directly with the VRU. It works with several schools and academy groups and could expand its network and extend its reach with young people in West Yorkshire who are disengaged with the education system and lacking employment experience. This would be particularly beneficial for older children with histories of exclusion or suspension.

Street League’s previous work with the VRU includes street sport sessions which combine violence reduction strategies, community engagement and a first taste of Street League. In West Yorkshire Street League ran a programme in which young people took part in knife crime awareness sessions, street football activities and soft skill employability sessions. Street League could continue this work, tying in aspiration development with crime-reduction strategies.



Volunteer It Yourself (VIY)

Website:	VIY	Geographical reach:	Nationwide
Organisation size:	~25 employees	Theme of work:	Work experience
Scale of work:	~1,500 young people participating per year		

Background

Volunteer It Yourself (VIY) started in 2011 as a single project in South London, fixing up a local community centre. It has since become a national not-for-profit community interest company and provides excluded, disengaged and unemployed young people aged 14-24 with work experience by fixing up and improving local spaces and places. The VIY North office, located in Leeds, was opened in 2020.

The VIY Model

VIY's social mission focuses on creating impact in three key areas:

- Help transform and secure local community spaces and places
- Boost young people's skills and confidence and help them progress into employment
- Encourage and enable volunteering, mentoring and skills-sharing

VIY works with local stakeholders including companies, authorities, and youth organisations to identify small-scale community-based construction projects and recruits young people to work on these projects alongside mentors. This also gives young people a stake in their community and generates community cohesion. Project sites include community centres, social housing, and sports clubs. Projects include refurbishing kitchens or bathrooms and renovating activity or event spaces.

VIY targets young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. These individuals can obtain entry-level qualifications via City & Guild Entry Level 3 qualifications, which VIY can award as a formal City & Guild training provider. VIY also acts as a gateway skills unit and opens up educational or employment routes while generating momentum and aspirations to follow these routes. Many of these routes are unlocked via VIY's partners such as Travis Perkins, Toolstation, Dulux who wish to attract young and diverse talent into their organisations.



Local youth organisation partners identify young people for projects and leverage their engagement into other aspects of their education. Areas and communities with the highest levels of deprivation, in terms of IMD and skills and employment deprivation, are prioritised for projects. The professional tradespeople who mentor young people on the projects are at the heart of the model and are local to each project. They comprise a mix of paid Regional Lead Mentors and Local Volunteer Mentors.

Outcomes

The organisation has delivered more than 650 facility improvement projects since 2011, more than 50% of which have been in the 30% most deprived communities nationally. Around 14% of the young people involved in these projects have progressed into employment, education or training within three months of finishing on VIY. Anecdotal evidence also points to an increase in the aspirations and engagement of the young people involved. Venues who benefited from VIY projects report increased capacity, new audiences, and a boost to income and sustainability.

VIY has delivered almost 80 projects in Yorkshire & The Humber to date. One example is the renovation of the skatepark at alternative provision school LS-TEN. The young people and education institutes involved flagged life experience, skills qualification and community work motivated those participating. The skate park took on some volunteers as permanent maintenance staff, while others have begun working with the skate park building partner which supported VIY on the project.

Potential for West Yorkshire

VIY could build on its existing work in West Yorkshire and continue developing its delivery partner network. The VRU could work with VIY to connect it with schools and alternative provision and identify young people who would benefit from the programme. VIY has substantial links with corporate partners in the Wakefield district and could build on its work there, benefitting children who are NEET or at-risk of becoming NEET.

VIY noted West Yorkshire's young people face travel challenges when journeying to programme delivery sites due to poor transport links. Funding in this area would allow those in more isolated locations have access to aspirational activities. Transferrable skills learnt during VIY projects could also help address the region's skill shortage in the manufacturing and construction sectors, as highlighted in the Leeds City Region Local Skills Report.



Appendix 3 – Evidence Review

1. Introduction and context

The review

Rocket Science UK was commissioned by West Yorkshire Combined Authority in November 2021 to research into how the aspirations and educational attainment of young people in West Yorkshire can be improved to support their long-term employment and training prospects. The research will explore key transition points in young people's lives; the move from primary school to secondary school, the selection of GCSE subjects in Year 9, and the move into post-16 education or employment.

This evidence review forms part of that research and will review:

- the existing literature on the current state of youth aspirations and attainment in West Yorkshire and the UK,
- what risk factors and barriers influence aspirations and attainment,
- and what type of interventions are currently in place across the UK to help raise aspirations and attainment.

To gather this information Rocket Science reviewed evidence from the Idox Knowledge Exchange database, Google Scholar, and third sector and government websites.

The evidence review is set out as follows:

- **The current state of aspirations and attainment** – this chapter examines how and when aspirations form before going on to detail the current system of education in West Yorkshire by looking at attainment and exclusion data across the region. This chapter also reveals the impact Covid-19 has had on aspirations across the UK.

Barriers and enablers influencing aspirations and attainment – this chapter examines what risk and protective factors present themselves to young people and influence their aspirations and attainment. The chapter begins by looking at what factors influence key transition points before examining what role socioeconomic, geographic, educational and family factors have on aspirational and attainment outcomes.



- **Interventions and best practice for raising aspirations and attainment** – this chapter outlines and reviews school-led, employer-led, and community-led best practice and interventions for raising aspirations and attainment in young people.

2. The current state of aspirations and attainment

Research questions

- What is the structure of primary and secondary school institutions in West Yorkshire?
- How many children are becoming NEET in West Yorkshire and at what point?
 - How does this differ in different demographic groups?
 - How has Covid-19 impacted the number of children becoming NEET?
- What are attainment rates in West Yorkshire?
 - How do these differ in different demographic groups?
 - How do these differ across West Yorkshire?
- What are the exclusion rates in West Yorkshire, and how do these differ by areas and demographic group?
- How do levels of aspirations differ for different demographic groups?
- What is the link between aspirations, attainment, and employment?

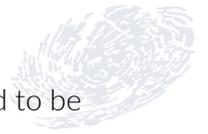
The development of aspirations

Aspirations have been defined as ‘what an individual hopes will happen in the future’, with desires of post-16 education being one potential key indicator ². Although forming early in life, aspirations are modified by a young person’s self-understanding, experiences, options, and environment, with notions of adulthood beginning to solidify at around the age of 14³. At the age of 13 many young people’s aspirations formed around sport or celebrity, but these diminish by the age of 15⁴. Factors

² Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation, 2012, [Link](#)

³ Social Market Foundation, A matter of perspective? 2021, [Link](#)

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations, 2011, [Link](#)



from school, place or family all play a role in forming aspirations, and these factors tend to be consistent even if their impact varies amongst different individuals⁵.

A focus on raising aspirations has been present since the 2000s, first under New Labour and then under Conservative rule, with Prime Minister David Cameron calling for Britain to become an 'Aspiration Nation'. This focus has been on increase the stream of young people attending university, however aspirations encompass much more, including other routes such as further education or apprenticeships, or future careers. Higher education does not bear fruit for some graduates. While only about 5% of graduates are unemployed 15 months after leaving university, nearly a third of those in work are not in occupations classed as 'professional level' in the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification⁶.

The aspirations of young people have changed over time, as shown in an analysis of two different cohorts; one that took their GCSEs in 2005/6 and one that took them in 2014/15⁷. Women, non-white ethnic groups, those from affluent families and those with higher prior attainment in the second cohort were more likely to favour an academic route post-16 than those from the first cohort. Post-18 aspirations changed across the entire second cohort, which showed an increase in the stated likelihood of attending university.

Apprenticeships represent an alternative vocational pathway for young people to support their aspirations, particularly those who would not be able to follow an academic route. But the Apprenticeship system has faced many reforms, with apprenticeship take up steadily declining over time and worsening during the pandemic. In the Yorkshire and Humber region starts declined by 20% in 2019/2020 and the Social Mobility Commission highlighted in their 2020 report⁸ that the 'Apprenticeship system is failing disadvantaged young people'.

Both these findings suggest that the route way for meeting aspirations for disadvantaged young people through further and higher education are both complex and potentially inadequate.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Prospects, What do graduates do? 2020/21, 2021, [Link](#)

⁷ Department for Education, Post-16 Aspirations and Outcomes: Comparison of the LSYPE Cohorts, 2019, [Link](#)

⁸ Social Mobility Commission, Apprenticeships and social mobility, 2020, [Link](#)



The link between aspirations, educational attainment, and employment prospects

A link between aspirations and attainment has been reported many times, and analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England found an association between the aspirations of young people and their educational attainment⁹. However, this association is complex and not necessarily causal, and no study has found that altering aspiration leads to differences in attainment due to a lack of relevant, rigorous intervention evaluations.¹⁰ Instead the literature on the subject is theoretical and poses those interventions seeking to raise aspirations are relevant due to the correlation seen between aspirations and attainment¹¹. Those planning a new intervention should consider implementing such an evaluation to address this research gap.

However, it should also be noted that aspirations can have negative consequences in later life, with gaps between aspirations and achievements shown to impact wellbeing¹². This is particularly the case for gaps between a parent's aspirations for their child, with parental pressure negatively impacting their child's wellbeing. As such it is recommended that any intervention should consider the trade-off between pushing particular aspirations and life-time wellbeing¹³.

Further research into this area suggests the negative consequences are only associated with failing to achieve occupational goals, while failing to achieve educational goals is unlikely to have negative consequences¹⁴. Falling short of occupational goals can lead to less job satisfaction, which in turn can increase stress, anxiety, and poor mental health. Men who do not achieve their occupational goals are also more likely to display depressive symptoms.

The attainment gap is used to measure the educational outcome differences between poorer and more advantaged children. Prior to the pandemic, the attainment gap between UK pupils who have spent 80% of their schooling in poverty and their non-disadvantaged peers was 22.7 months¹⁵, meaning they are almost two years behind. The most advantaged pupils are also more likely to

⁹ Cabinet Office, *Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities*, 2008, [Link](#)

¹⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation*, 2012, [Link](#)

¹¹ Lekfuangfu, W, Odermatt, R, *The role of aspirations in intergenerational mobility and well-being*, 2020, [Link](#)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hardie, J, *The Consequences of Unrealized Occupational Goals in the Transition to Adulthood*, 2014, [Link](#)

¹⁵ Social Mobility Commission, *State of the nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic*, 2021, [Link](#)



pursue higher education, and the pandemic has caused more of this group to turn to higher education, which could have knock-on effects to accessibility for those who are less advantaged.¹⁶

Aspirations for employment are also complicated by the disconnect between which sectors young people wish to work in and what jobs are available, for example five-times as many young people want to work in the arts, creative or sports industry as there are jobs available¹⁷. Poor provision of career's advice exacerbates this disconnect, with those who benefit from careers activities and multiple career influences in secondary education more likely to be better connected to the labour market¹⁸. To reduce this disconnect the charity Education and Employers makes several recommendations, which are listed below. While careers education has become more prominent in school curriculum over the past 12 months there is still a lack of uptake in certain areas – particularly around apprenticeships¹⁹. Efforts to improve career guidance provision within schools have grown in prominence. The eight Gatsby Benchmarks, which will be explored in more detail later in the review, serve as a framework for improving careers guidance within schools and were adopted by education institutions in 2017.

Education and Employer's recommendations to reduce the disconnect between career aspirations and job availability

- Ensure children are exposed to different backgrounds and careers from age 7
- Increase the awareness of availability and competition of careers within the labour market
- Greater support for careers guidance in secondary schools
- More engagement with young people by employers.

Impact of reading age on life outcomes

Reading age correlates with life outcomes, and poor reading ability is predictive of educational attainment across subjects which can in turn impact wider life outcomes²⁰. The impact of poor reading ability is amplified as children move through the school system and greater independent study is required. The relationships with later life outcomes are complex, but some of these outcomes include:

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Education and Employers, *Disconnected: Career aspirations and jobs in the UK, 2020*, [Link](#)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The Careers and Enterprise Company, *2021 Trends in Careers Education, 2021*, [Link](#)

²⁰ LKMco, *The relationship between reading age, education and life outcomes, 2019*, [Link](#)



- More likely to be unemployed
- Tend to earn less and receive fewer training and promotion opportunities
- Experience lower life satisfaction and lower wellbeing.

Therefore ensuring children are given the tools and support to develop their reading ability at a young age is crucial to the development of positive aspirations.

Educational structure and performance in West Yorkshire

There are several differing school types: Academies, community schools, foundation schools, free schools, special schools, and voluntary aided or controlled schools. The structure of each varies, as set out below.

Types of school	
Academy	A state-funded school which is funded by the Department for Education and is run by an academy trust. These trusts, which may be supported by third parties, employ staff and have more control than community schools. For example they do not have to follow national curriculum and can set their own term times.
Community	A state-funded school maintained by the local authority who employs school staff, is responsible for admissions and owns the school's estate.
Foundation and voluntary	A school funded by the local authority but have more freedom than community schools.
Free	A school funded by the government but not run by the local authority. They do not have to follow national curriculum, can set staff pay, and can change term times and length of the school day. Free schools differ from academies by being completely new, rather than converted from a pre-existing local authority-maintained school.
Special	A school that provides education for children with special educational needs or disabilities

The structure of primary and secondary education varies across West Yorkshire, as can be seen in the tables below. Across the whole region academy schools make up nearly 37% of all schools,



making it the most common type of education setting but this varies within each local authority. For example, Leeds is the only authority in which academies make up more than half of all schools (54.2%) while in Kirklees academies make up just over a quarter, with community schools being more common (34%). Leeds also has a much higher percentage of foundation schools (13.4%) compared to other authorities, while Kirklees has a much higher percentage of voluntary controlled schools (14.4%).

School Type	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
Academy school	46.1	34.4	27.9	28.0	48.1	36.9
Community school	24.4	30.5	34.0	30.4	23.4	28.5
Foundation school	3.5	3.1	5.1	13.4		6.3
Free school	4.3	0.8	1.4	3.1		2.4
Further education	0.8	0.8	1.4	0.9	2.6	1.3
Non-maintained special school		0.8	0.5	0.3		0.5
Other independent school	8.7	12.5	7.0	5.6	7.8	8.3
University technical college				0.3		0.3
Voluntary aided school	9.4	11.7	8.4	13.0	6.5	9.8
Voluntary controlled school	2.8	5.5	14.4	5.0	11.7	7.9

Educational attainment, defined as the highest level of qualification an individual has achieved, also varies both across the country and within West Yorkshire. At a national level, 41.3% of 16-year-olds did not achieve a 9-4 or equivalent in Maths and English 2019/20, and in West Yorkshire this is slightly higher²¹. However, within West Yorkshire there is variation, with Bradford performing significantly worse than average and Calderdale performing significantly better.

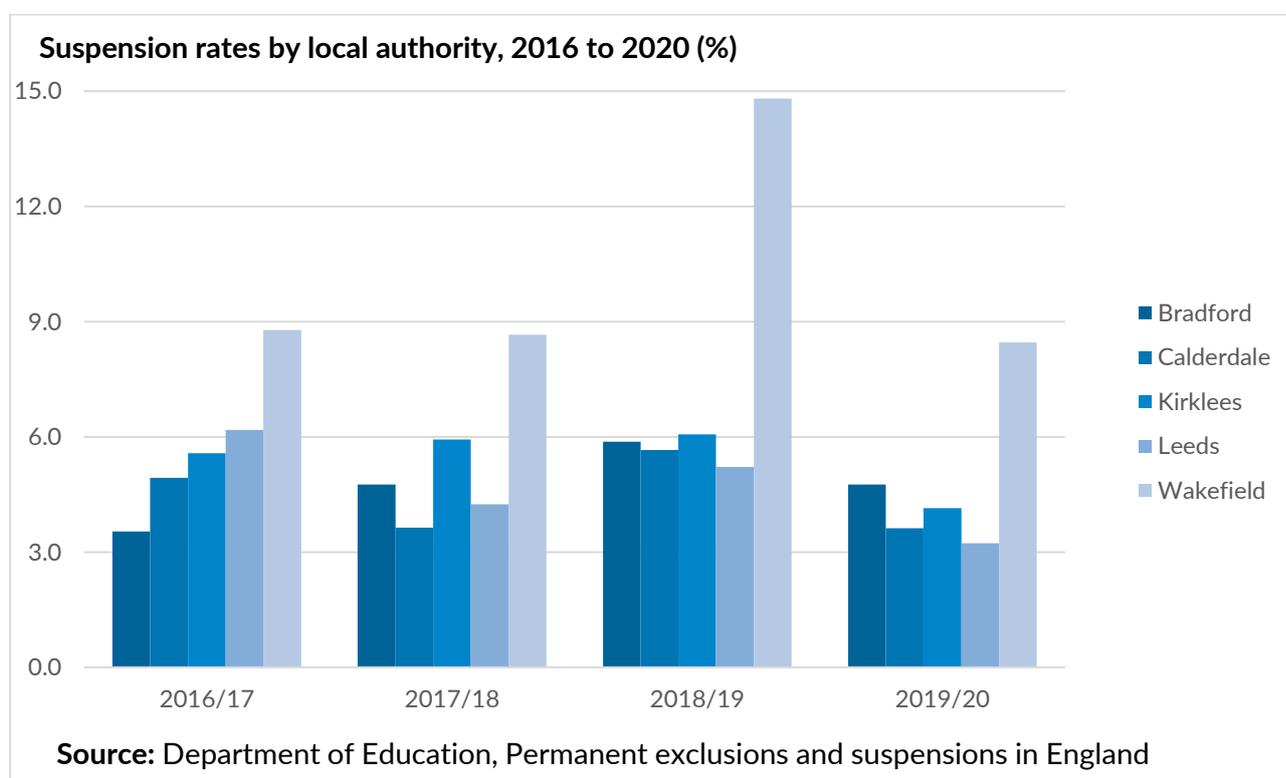
Local Authority	% Not achieving 9-4 GCSE or equivalent in English and Maths at age 16 (2019/20)
Bradford	48.9
Calderdale	37.3
Kirklees	42.3
Leeds	44.5

²¹ Office for National Statistics, Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19, 2021, [Link](#)

Wakefield	40.6
West Yorkshire	42.3
England	41.3

Source: Office for National Statistics, Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19

Suspension rates and permanent exclusion rates also differ across West Yorkshire. Wakefield has a higher percentage of both suspension and permanent exclusion rates, while Leeds has the lowest percentages for both rates.



Permanent exclusion by local authority 2016/17 - 2019/20 (%)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Bradford	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.06
Calderdale	0.10	0.12	0.06	0.07
Kirklees	0.04	0.11	0.10	0.08
Leeds	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01
Wakefield	0.14	0.13	0.16	0.10
West Yorkshire	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.06
England	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.06

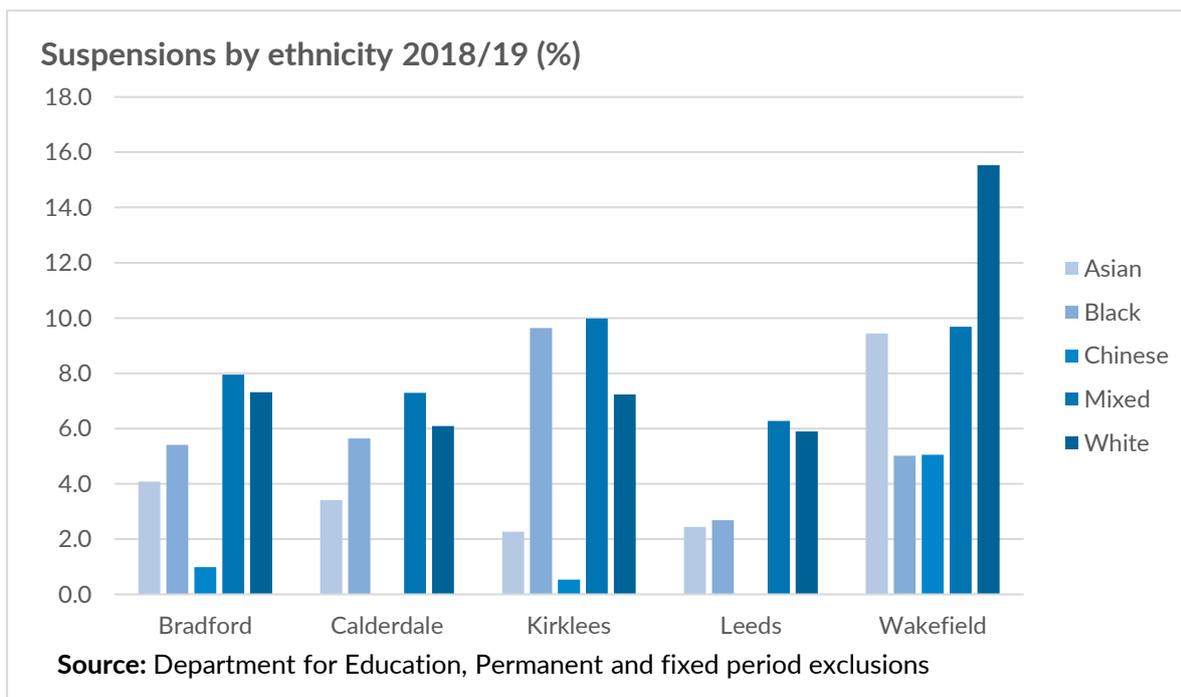


Source: Department for Education, Permanent exclusions, and suspensions in England

Permanent exclusion and suspension rates vary by ethnicity and school stage across West Yorkshire's local authority, as detailed below.

Ethnicity	Permanent exclusions by ethnicity - Total numbers				
	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
Asian	13	5	8	1	1
Black	2	0	2	0	2
Chinese	0	0	0	0	1
Mixed	1	1	13	2	3
White	38	16	47	8	79

Source: Department for Education, Permanent and fixed period exclusions



State funded school exclusion rates by school stage 2019/20 (%)

	Permanent exclusions		Suspensions	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Bradford	0.01	0.1	0.9	10.5
Calderdale	0.02	0.1	1.6	6.2
Kirklees	0.03	0.2	1.2	8.4
Leeds	0	0.02	0.6	7.2



Source: Department for Education, School census

Being excluded can have significant impacts on a young person's outcomes. Only 1% of excluded children achieved five A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Maths²², and excluded children are at greater risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) at ages 16-24 and having criminal convictions²³.

The rate of young people who are NEET or status is not known also varies across West Yorkshire. Leeds has the highest rate in the region and is also well above the national average, while Calderdale has the lowest and is well below the national average. There is also variation by ethnicity, with a higher NEET rate in mixed race and young white people compared to other ethnic minorities.

Percent of 16- and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) or not known

Bradford	6.6%
Calderdale	3.9%
Kirklees	4.1%
Leeds	7.9%
Wakefield	4.4%
West Yorkshire	5.4%
England	5.50%

Source: Department for Education, Labour Force Survey 2021

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
White	8.0%	3.9%	3.9%	7.2%	4.4%
Mixed race	11.0%	4.9%	6.8%	7.5%	4.0%
Black or black British	4.8%	0.0%	4.9%	4.1%	0.5%
Asian or Asian British	4.6%	1.7%	2.3%	5.1%	2.6%

²² Department for Education, School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children, 2019, [Link](#)

²³ Obsuth, I, London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): A cluster-randomised controlled trial protocol of an intervention to reduce antisocial behaviour and improve educational/occupational attainment for pupils at risk of school exclusion, 2014, [Link](#)



Chinese	5.6%	0.0%	2.0%	3.2%	0.0%
Other	5.7%	11.3%	6.5%	7.0%	3.4%

Source: Department for Education, NEET and participation

The impact of Covid-19 on aspirations

Our research suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted the aspirations of young people. A 2020 survey by the Prince's Trust indicated 44% of 16–25-year-olds now had lower aspirations due to the pandemic, with 41% saying their future goals now seem impossible to achieve²⁴. Fears about their immediate prospects have also developed, with young people reporting that going to university, becoming an apprentice, or getting a job has become more difficult²⁵. Young people are particularly concerned the pandemic has set them back for life, led them to give up on a dream job, and has impacted their mental health²⁶.

The pandemic has also impacted the career hopes and aspirations of young people. Nearly a third of young people said what career they could pursue had changed due to the pandemic, while just under a quarter said what they wanted to do had changed.²⁷ What young people look for in a job has also changed, with job security, availability, and positive societal difference all becoming more important factors.²⁸

The Government introduced KickStart²⁹ in 2021 to offer direct grants to businesses to take on young people aged 16-24 on Universal Credit to give them work experience, acting as a stepping stone to full time employment. In a review of local authorities' employment and skills responses to the Pandemic, research highlighted local and regional approaches to incentivise employers to offer apprenticeships through top up grants³⁰. Despite national and regional pushes to mitigate the impact

²⁴ The Prince's Trust, The Aspiration Gap, 2020, [Link](#)

²⁵ Engineering UK, Young people and Covid-19: How the pandemic has affected careers experiences and aspirations, 2020, [Link](#)

²⁶ The Prince's Trust, The Aspiration Gap, 2020, [Link](#)

²⁷ Engineering UK, Young people and Covid-19: How the pandemic has affected careers experiences and aspirations, 2020, [Link](#)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Department for Work and Pension, Kickstart scheme for employers, 2021, [Link](#)

³⁰ Local Government Association, Digital service transformation and partnership - Staffordshire County Council, 2021, [Link](#)



of the pandemic on young people's prospects, research conducted by The Institute of Employment Studies and IPPR³¹ published in October 2021 highlighted the:

- increased polarisation between high and low skilled jobs in the youth labour market with more young people in insecure work,
- long term unemployment of young people rising with 170,000 unemployed for more than six months
- falls in employment have impacted the ethnicity employment gap most with employment for young black people falling at four times the rate of that of young white people.

This suggests that those who were most disadvantaged pre-pandemic, are facing increased disadvantage in the labour market as a result. Similarly, the emerging skills gap experienced pre-pandemic has widened, illustrated by a currently tight labour market where vacancies remain high but cannot be filled due to a shortage of skills³².

Engineering UK made a set of recommendations for the UK government to protect and increase the aspirations of young people in light of Covid-19. While these have a STEM career focus, they are also applicable to other sectors. West Yorkshire's 2021 skill report noted shortages in high skilled "STEM professional roles", including engineering roles³³. Engineering UK's recommendations are as follows:

Engineering UK recommendations

- Ensure a continuous review of incentives for employers to provide apprenticeships and work placements
- Further emphasise how STEM careers contribute to society
- Ensure all young people have access to good quality, formal STEM careers advice

Manufacturing is another employment area within West Yorkshire that is suffering a skills shortage. Make UK, a national body representing manufacturers, made the following recommendations to 'reinvent' the manufacturing sector³⁴:

³¹ IES, A Better Future: Transforming jobs and skills for young people post-pandemic, 2021, [Link](#)

³² ONS, Changing trends and recent shortages in the labour market, 2021, [Link](#)

³³ West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Local Skills Report, 2021, [Link](#)

³⁴ Make UK, Reinventing the manufacturing workforce, 2019, [Link](#)



Make UK recommendations

- Cultural barriers in workplaces resisting change need to be tackled from the top
- Agile working needs to be accompanied by agile learning, with lifelong learning and upskilling omnipresent in every business
- Manufacturers should expand the talent pool from which they recruit
- Skills funding should be remapped to encourage employers to adopt agile and diverse working policies and practices.
- The National Retraining Scheme must prioritise workers with existing transferable skills who will be primed to adapt to the digital technologies of the future in sectors
- The Apprenticeship Levy must be reformed to face the future challenges of digitalisation and artificial intelligence

Aspirations by demographic

Research into how aspirations vary by demographic show that there are splits across both gender and ethnicity. For example boys are significantly less likely to aspire to higher education than girls, while white children are also less likely to aspire to higher levels of education compared to ethnic minorities, of which Black-Caribbean hold the highest aspirations³⁵. However, within these ethnic groups there is also variation amongst gender splits, although in all groups boys have lower aspirations. The gender difference is largest amongst white children and smallest amongst Indian children³⁶.

What employment children aspire to also varies by gender and demographic. Employment choices tend to highly gendered, with girls aspiring to careers dominated by women, and vice versa for boys, while occupational aspirations amongst ethnic minorities tended to be more ambitious than white peers³⁷.

Lifestyle aspirations

³⁵ Berrington, A et al, Educational aspirations among UK Young Teenagers: Exploring the role of gender, class and ethnicity, 2016, [Link](#)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Platt, L, The evolution of boys' and girls' occupational aspirations across ethnic groups in the UK, 2018, [Link](#)



As mentioned above, much of the political discourse around aspirations has focussed on longer-term employment and education goals, however young people also hold a number of short and medium-term aspirations.

Part-time work

Part-time work has numerous benefits including improving school-to-work transitions, lowering likelihood of NEET periods, and greater contentment³⁸. At the turn of the millennium just under half of 16–17-year-olds were employed, but that almost halved by 2020, to just over 25%³⁹. This is in-part driven by increases in the numbers of teens staying in full-time education, but there has also been a significant fall in the number of young adults working alongside their studies. Previous research into why Saturday jobs are declining reported a desire to focus on studies but also a lack of suitable jobs and an opposition amongst schools and colleges to their students working⁴⁰.

Despite the reduction in part-time work, ONS data shows the most frequent jobs for 22–29-year-olds have largely remain unchanged. Sale assistance roles along with jobs in teaching, care, sales, and other elementary services have been the top five jobs for this age group since 2011⁴¹. The same research found 16–21-year-olds valued job interest and security far above a high income.

Financial education

While educational aspirations generally focus on achieving certain grades or heading to university, one overlooked area is young people's desire for financial education. Nearly three-quarters of young people said they wanted more financial education in school, despite almost the same amount reporting access to at least some form of school-based financial education already⁴². In particular young people want to learn about mortgages, pensions, credit cards and savings, and that 25% of young people are teaching themselves about personal finance (a 12% rise since last year) is indicative that current school-based education is not satisfying them⁴³.

³⁸ OECD, Dream Jobs, 2018, [Link](#)

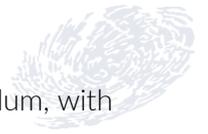
³⁹ Resolution Foundation, Never, Ever, 2020, [Link](#)

⁴⁰ UK Commission for Employment and Skills, The death of the Saturday job, 2015, [Link](#)

⁴¹ ONS, Young people's career aspirations versus reality, 2018, [Link](#)

⁴² The London Institute of Banking & Finance, Young Persons' Money Index 2021-2022, [Link](#)

⁴³ Ibid.



An array of tools does exist for schools to build in financial education into their curriculum, with PHSE lessons a possible avenue for this. The Your Money Matters course was built for those aged 14-16 in England and covers topics including spending and saving, borrowing, debt, insurance, student finance and future planning⁴⁴.

Home ownership

While many young people signal long-term aspirations of homeownership, many see such aspirations as unachievable in the short-term. Interviews with low to middle income earners under the age of 35 reveal a gap between an 'ideal' living situation and what they expect to achieve, with key factors being low earnings, insecure work, lack of family financial support, and in some cases student debt⁴⁵. However, when asked whether they believed they would own a home in the next five years, 18-24-year-olds were more likely to believe they would than other age groups, suggesting there is something of a reality-check as individuals age⁴⁶.

Driving and car ownership

There is limited evidence on aspirations around transport, but one study in Northern Ireland revealed young people still express a desire to learn to drive⁴⁷. Their thoughts on what role a car might play in their future was driven by other aspirations. For example, those who aspired to attend university were less likely to think they would need a car, as did those who thought they would move to a city with reliable public transport links. On the other hand, those who aspired to jobs that involved a driven commute envisioned greater use⁴⁸.

Conclusions

This chapter has set out the complexity of understanding aspirations and the factors that might impact on them at different transition points and for different ages, gender and ethnicity for young people. There is a correlation between aspiration and attainment and increasing aspirations to

⁴⁴ Young Enterprise, Your Money Matters, [Link](#)

⁴⁵ UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, The 'frustrated' housing aspirations of generation rent, 2018, [Link](#)

⁴⁶ Collyer Bristow, Home ownership attitudes and aspirations, 2020, [Link](#)

⁴⁷ Northern Ireland Department for Transport, Understanding the travel aspirations, needs and behaviour of young adults, 2018, [Link](#)

⁴⁸ Ibid.



increase attainment is generally accepted as an effective tool, although there is little robust evidence to prove causation does occur. However there are factors that impact on attainment such as school exclusions and suspensions which are particularly high in the region and in places such as Bradford and Wakefield and the consequence of disengagement with education responsible for high NEET rates for mixed race and young white people in places such as Bradford. The role of further and higher education and vocational education in supporting aspirations is difficult given that transitions into these pathways are not universally available or desired. The pandemic has widened disadvantage amongst young people and potentially on the longer-term prospects of particular groups where employment rates have fallen four times that of the rate of young white people.

The focus of the next phase of the research should look at

- understanding these impacts on the aspirations of young people and in particular in those groups and in those places that have been most adversely affected
- how these groups are supported through the education system and the triggers that might cause them to disengage
- what interventions and support are available to prevent suspension and exclusions and improve attainment rates in the region?

3. Barriers and enablers influencing aspirations and attainment



Research questions

- How do demographic factors such as location, gender, ethnicity, special educational need, or disability influence transition points and aspirations?
- How do social factors such as home life, school life & peer groups influence transition points and aspirations?
 - Which transition points are the most challenging and why?
- How does trauma and adversity influence transition points and aspirations?
- What barriers to educational attainment and employment do children in KS4 and KS5 face?
 - How does this differ by age group and transition point?
- What other barriers are there to aspirations and educational attainment?
- What other factors influence aspirations and attainment?

Transitions

Transitions form important stages of a young person's life when they move from one significant stage or experience to another. These transitions happen throughout a young person's life and could include moving to a new home or care setting, or even just moving from one activity to another. In this evidence review we will be examining three key transition points which influence a young person's aspirations: the transition from primary to secondary school, choosing GCSE subjects, and post-16 transitions.

Year 6 to Year 7 transition

The move from primary to secondary school is an apprehensive moment for many pupils who face entry into a more challenging school setting with different infrastructure, expectations, peers, and teachers. As such it is not unusual for some pupils to experience a drop in grades or attendance, and increased anxiety.

A literature review of primary to secondary transitions concluded there is robust evidence indicating declines in educational outcomes after a pupil moves to secondary school, although the link between this transition and these outcomes are not clear⁴⁹. Motivation, school engagement and attitudes towards some subjects also drop off, and the report concluded that supporting the development of a

⁴⁹ Scottish Government, Primary-Secondary Transitions: A Systematic Literature Review, 2019, [Link](#)



sense of school belonging is important for students. As such the following recommendations were made:

- Scottish Government recommendations to support primary to secondary school transitions**
- Implement planned activities for both primary and secondary school pupils to support development of peer networks
 - Provide opportunities for pupils to build relationships with school staff
 - Ensure continuity of approach across primary and secondary schools by opening communication routes between the two
 - Involve parents in transition planning
 - Tailor transition processes for students with additional support needs

Similarly, a study of around 2,000 pupils moving from primary to secondary found that a successful transition hinged on children’s psychological adjustment difficulties, self-control, and learning motivation⁵⁰. The study concluded that a ‘whole school approach’ to transitioning, which involves strategies for dealing with common concerns paired with individual support for vulnerable pupils. This individual support is important as the study found that there is no distinct group that is especially vulnerable to a poor transition, and it is instead a range of risk and protective factors which increase or decrease the likelihood of a successful transition. Factors linked to a positive transition are detailed below. The study also led to the production of a questionnaire which predicts how well a child will transition⁵¹.

<p>Factors linked to a positive primary-secondary transition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female gender Higher-socioeconomic status Low parent transition concerns High positive life events High learning motivation High self-esteem Low psychological adjustment difficulties 	<p>Aside from personal risk and protective factors, communication between primary and secondary schools was found to be especially important for the transition of children in care. Including secondary school staff at meetings associated with primary school children in care improved their understanding of the child’s strengths and</p>
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⁵⁰ Nuffield Foundation, Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school, 2019, [Link](#)
⁵¹ START questionnaire, [Link](#)



wellbeing needs and helped the secondary schools plan their enrolment⁵².

Research into the emotional challenges children attending special schools face when transitioning from primary school to secondary school, revealed these children need further assistance during this period. Children attending special schools face conflicting emotions when approaching their transition to secondary school, such as nervousness vs excitement and whether leaving primary school is a loss or a progressive step. To help cope with these conflicting emotions school staff reported the need for direct strategies such as move-up days, as well as indirect strategies such as involving transitional support teams⁵³. Balancing feelings of safety, addressing individual vulnerabilities and ensuring that the transition was timed right were also recorded as being important steps.

Subject choices

Analysis of learner journeys in Scotland found that key transition points are subject choices, first destinations on leaving school, and then the path to employment. Students reported choosing subjects as particularly difficult and requested more guidance to help inform their decisions.⁵⁴ The same study also reported that because first destinations after school were largely determined by educational attainment rather than aspirations, learning styles or attributes, some young people chose pathways that were not right for them. As such the following recommendations were made:

Recommendations to ease educational transition points

- More tailored support available to young people to help with subject choices, including consideration of the implications of these
- Expand the range of opportunities available to young people during the senior phase of school to better prepare them for the next stage.

Post-16 transitions

Several factors can leave individuals at risk of disengagement during the post-16 transition including, but not limited to, the following:

⁵² Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland, Improving Transitions to Secondary School for Looked After Children, 2016, [Link](#)

⁵³ University of Exeter, What emotional-centred challenges do children attending special schools face over primary-secondary school transition?, 2021, [Link](#)

⁵⁴ SQW, Young people's experience of education and training from 15-24 years, 2017, [Link](#)



- Looked after children
- Young carers or parents
- Young offenders
- Young people with low attendance
- Young people with physical or mental health problems
- Those from whom English is a second language⁵⁵

The experience of and preparation for education to work transitions varies for differing demographic groups. A national survey found that those from comprehensive schools recall lower levels of school-mediated employer engagement than students from private or grammar schools, as do those who were eligible for free school meals or children of parents without experience of higher education⁵⁶. This is important given that the same survey found that employer engagement helped students feel prepared for the adult world, although at least three or four engagement activities were required for such engagement to be helpful.

Students within alternative provision (AP) schools are disproportionately likely to become NEET post-16. Despite research reporting that dedicated staff support post-16 transition to college are crucial for successful transitions, only half of AP schools employ them, and of those three-quarters are only employed on a part-time basis⁵⁷.

Socio-economic factors

As set out in the previous chapter, there is an attainment gap between the society's poorest and those more advantaged, and socio-economic factors play a role in a young person's attainment and aspirations. The difference in attainment has been widened by the pandemic, with disadvantaged students disproportionately impacted due to a lack of digital infrastructure, less face-to-face time with teachers, a lack of workspace, and a decreased chance of having degree-qualified parents to assist with schoolwork⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Scottish Government, Opportunities for All: Post-16 transitions, 2012, [Link](#)

⁵⁶ Education and Employers, Contemporary transitions Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college, 2017, [Link](#)

⁵⁷ The Centre for Social Justice, Catch them before they fall: What works in supporting vulnerable children to stay in education, 2020, [Link](#)

⁵⁸ Social Mobility Commission, State of the nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic, 2021, [Link](#)



Eligibility for free school meals (FSM) is one indicator for measuring differing socio-economic groups. Data taken from the most recent Key Stage 4 performance within state-funded schools in West Yorkshire shows a disparity in attainment between those FSM-eligible and those who are not.

State-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 (%)

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
FSM eligible	45.3	54.6	48.9	48.6	46.3	48.7
Non-FSM	69.4	77.1	78.2	76.8	78.1	75.9
Total	57.4	66.9	63	63.2	64.8	63.1

Those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds are also less likely to attend higher education, with those in the highest socio-economic quintile group around three times more likely to attend university⁵⁹. However, analysis has shown that these differences can be explained by differences in ethnicity and language status, with all ethnic minority groups more likely to go to university than their white British peers⁶⁰. Research into why this is the case was unable to draw concrete conclusions but accepted that recent immigrants having higher aspirations and expectation for their children is a plausible explanation⁶¹. Other research highlights that minority ethnic groups offset their poorer background through family and community norms, values and networks, and that children from these groups show greater educational resilience and academic self-concept⁶². Below is a breakdown of state-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 in West Yorkshire by gender and ethnicity.

⁵⁹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation, 2015, [Link](#)
⁶⁰ Ibid.
⁶¹ Ibid.
⁶² Berrington, A et al, Educational aspirations among UK Young Teenagers: Exploring the role of gender, class and ethnicity, 2016, [Link](#)

State-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 (%)

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
Asian	66.9	73.2	70.8	74.2	76.5	72.3
Black	64.7	84.4	63.9	64	68.1	69.0
Chinese	90	100	100	93.7	81.5	93.0
Mixed	59.6	74.8	64.5	69.1	69.9	67.6
White	61	72.5	72.2	71	73.1	70.0

Source: Department for Education, Key Stage 4 Performance

State-funded school students achieving 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2020/21 (%)

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
Boys	54.5	65.5	58.6	59.8	60.2	59.72
Girls	60.4	67.3	67.7	66.6	68.6	66.12

Source: Department for Education, Key Stage 4 Performance

However, deprivation does influence which universities and vocational courses young people pursue, with disadvantaged young people more likely to choose higher education institutions and courses that are less selective than their grades allow⁶³. This is known as ‘undermatching’ and decreases the likelihood of achieving a first or a 2:1 while increasing the likelihood of earning less 3.5 years after graduation⁶⁴. Studies have shown students with lower parental wealth and parental education correlate with a higher probability of undermatching, while if a course’s quality is defined by the basis of earning of its graduates, women are likely to undermatch than men⁶⁵.

Research in the US concluded geographical factors, such as living in an urban or non-urban area or proximity to a university, can drive undermatching but research in the UK shows little evidence of

⁶³ Campbell, S et al, Mismatch in higher education: prevalence, drivers and outcomes, 2019, [Link](#)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Wyness, G; Murphy, R, What is the nature and extent of student–university mismatch?, 2020, [Link](#)



this⁶⁶. One possible cause is access to information regarding possible routes, and a lack of exposure to others who had attended university, however this area is lacking is research and without conclusive answers.

Despite those in more deprived communities facing more financial challenges, student finance does not have any influence over aspirations for higher education. A 2021 study exploring young people’s perceptions of student finance found that less affluent young people are not only more well-informed about the costs associated with university but are also more likely to view these costs as worth it and are clearer on what they think they will get out of it⁶⁷.

The Social Mobility Index uses a range of indicators focusing on two types of outcomes, educational attainment and outcomes achieved by adults, to judge the likelihood of a disadvantaged young person doing well as an adult based on where they grow up. The indicators used depend on the age group and are detailed below. Within West Yorkshire both Bradford and Wakefield perform poorly, falling within the bottom quarter of upwardly mobile locations in England⁶⁸. Leeds performs particularly badly for post-school outcomes for poorer young people.

Social Mobility Index indicators	
Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of nursery education • Early development outcomes
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of primary school • Quality of secondary school • Primary school outcomes • Secondary school outcomes
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of young people dropping out of education and work after GCSEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attained A-Level or equivalent qualification • Progressed to higher education • Progressed to the most selective universities
Adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average income • Prevalence of low pay

⁶⁶ Ibid.
⁶⁷ All-Party Parliamentary University Group, Is university worth it? Young people’s motivations, aspirations and views on student finance, 2021, [Link](#)
⁶⁸ Social Mobility Commission, Social mobility index, 2016, [Link](#)



- Proportion of jobs in managerial and professional occupations
- Housing affordability
- Proportion of families with children who owned their own home

Overall SMI rankings (out of the 324 local authority districts)

	Overall	Early years	School	Youth	Adulthood
Bradford	277	256	310	91	204
Calderdale	96	216	119	83	55
Kirklees	91	124	142	48	210
Leeds	224	206	195	291	105
Wakefield	278	264	235	266	236
York	152	94	222	152	147

Source: Social Mobility Commission, Social Mobility Index (2016)

Cross-referencing this data with the Index of Multiple Deprivation highlights that Huddersfield and Halifax are two towns that perform relatively well in social mobility despite higher levels of deprivation⁶⁹. This data is due to be updated soon and would be worth looking at any differences in rankings once it is published.

Place

Place is also a factor influencing aspirations. The social make-up, culture, history, and experience of places with shared statuses of deprivation vary, and each can influence aspirations in a different way⁷⁰. As such, any schemes that are deployed to raise aspirations must be delivered at a localised and responsive level.

While deprivation itself may not have a causal link to aspirations and attainment, the place a young person grows up in does play a strong role in their lives. Those from culturally diverse locations have different aspirations to those from more white, working-class communities, who are more likely to aspire to blue-collar rather than white-collar jobs⁷¹.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations, 2011, [Link](#)

⁷¹ The Princes Trust, The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations, 2011, [Link](#)



Those living in rural areas experience different barriers to attainment and education than those in urban areas. Young people in rural areas are more likely to report transport as a barrier to education and also face limited school and course choices, which together can impact on their decisions when leaving Year 11⁷². Other factors impacting aspirations include a lack of employment options and a debt-adverse mentality due to low wages in rural areas, meaning young people are less likely to consider higher education and the debts associated with it⁷³.

Education

Educational factors are present across the entire school journey, and a child's experience of education across primary school, secondary school and further education.

Primary education

Primary schools can lay the foundations for a young person's perceptions of education and aspirations for the future, but a 2021 review found the sector to be in a poor state. It is shaped by low pay, instability, and a lack of strategy, which is pushing workers out of the sector and damaging the quality of teaching for young children.⁷⁴ A longitudinal study of Irish schoolchildren, found a correlation between a child's enjoyment of school and attitudes to school subjects at age 9 and their subsequent enjoyment and attitudes at age 13⁷⁵. Ensuring young people have a positive experience of primary school is vital for their future aspirations.

Secondary education

Analysis of 13–15-year-old pupils in London, Nottingham and Glasgow found that while secondary schools do influence aspirations to some degree, they are not critical in doing so. While each location varied slightly, the main influence of schools was its impact on confidence and self-belief regarding ability, but not directly shaping what form young peoples' aspirations took⁷⁶. However, it should be noted that despite being one of the more recent and comprehensive examinations of aspirations in young people, this study is over ten years old, and there is a lack of more recent studies.

⁷² National Foundation for Educational Research, Young People's Aspirations in Rural Areas, 2011, [Link](#)

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Social Mobility Commission, State of the nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic, 2021, [Link](#)

⁷⁵ Smyth, Emer, Off To A Good Start? Primary School Experiences and the Transition to Second-Level Education, 2017, [Link](#)

⁷⁶ The Princes Trust, The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations, 2011, [Link](#)



While schools themselves may not critically impact aspirations, the subjects which pupils take between 14-16 do impact the probability of them staying in education post-16 and their subject choices when they do. Those who take the English Baccalaureate eligible subjects (English, maths, the sciences, geography or history, and a language), are more likely to progress into post-16 education and increase the chances of attending higher education⁷⁷. Meanwhile those who take applied courses (e.g. BTECs or CACHE Diplomas) are more likely to drop out from the educational system⁷⁸.

Further education

Further education is often the last point at which disadvantaged pupils achieve their final education, but the sector is under-resourced and tasked with catching students up with basic academic qualifications while also providing high quality trade-based courses⁷⁹. Research shows that students pursuing further education encounter more challenges, such as a lack of clear structure and poor funding, than more academic routes⁸⁰. As a result of this, students in further education programmes are less likely to secure higher qualifications and critical life skills and face a more challenging labour market⁸¹. Career guidance on further education pathways can help students navigate the confusion and challenges presented at this level, and groups including the Social Mobility Commission and the Education Policy Institute have called for further funding in this area. It is also important that the local economy and employers are part of education pathways in Further Education.

Provision of higher education information

Provision of information about higher education choices appears to act as an enabler for pursuing education post-18. Those who go on to attend university tend to have gathered more information about doing so, as were those who said they were highly likely to do so⁸². The same group were less likely to have sought or come across information on apprenticeships, suggesting this a barrier to pursuing one. The same is said for degree apprenticeships, with a survey of degree apprentices finding that the lack of information about them described as ‘fundamentally limiting factor to

⁷⁷ University College London, Continuing education post-16: does what you study at GCSE matter?, 2017, [Link](#)

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Social Mobility Commission, State of the nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic, 2021, [Link](#)

⁸⁰ Education Policy Institute, Further education pathways: Securing a successful and healthy life after education, 2019, [Link](#)

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Department for Education, Post-16 Aspirations and Outcomes: Comparison of the LSYPE Cohorts, 2019, [Link](#)



motivation and consequent take-up⁸³. This is particularly important given that a quarter of degree apprentices suggested they would not have pursued any other training or qualification if degree apprenticeships were not available⁸⁴.

Educational structure

Analysis of school-level data has shown that the type of school and type of qualification chosen at Key Stage 5 correlates with the likelihood of a student pursuing higher education. For example, students who attend Further Education Colleges are far less likely to pursue higher education compared to peers in other institutions, while those achieving non-A-Level qualifications at KS5 are also less likely to progress academically⁸⁵. This disproportionately impacts disadvantaged pupils, who are more likely to be pursuing these qualifications⁸⁶.

The goals and focuses of education can also impact a young person's aspirations and life outlook. An in-depth study of experiences of the education system in Scotland found that the focus on attainment and qualifications within schools leaves young people feeling like they do not acquire the skills required to succeed in life, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have less access to life skill development opportunities at home⁸⁷.

Family influence

Parents

The parents and family of a child influence the development of their aspirations. Parents are a major influence on their child's career development in particular and exert this influence through behaviour and conditions affecting their child's values, attitudes and self-concepts, and this influence continues even when children become more independent in other parts of their life⁸⁸.

⁸³ Office for Students, Degree Apprenticeships: Motivations Research, 2019, [Link](#)

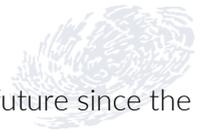
⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ National Institute of Economic and Social Research, Young People's Education Choices And Progression To Higher Education, 2019, [Link](#)

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ SQW, Young people's experience of education and training from 15-24 years, 2017, [Link](#)

⁸⁸ Barnes, S et al, The role of parents and carers in providing careers guidance and how they can be better supported: international evidence report, 2020, [Link](#)



A recent survey revealed that parents are feeling less optimistic about their children's future since the pandemic⁸⁹. The same survey found that parents are feeling less informed about how to help their children make decision and are having fewer conversations with their children about career options.

Whether a parent has a qualification and whether they aspire for their child to attend university both correlate with their child's desire to stay in education after the age of 16, even from the age of 12⁹⁰. The influence parents have must be considered when working with young people, especially when those parents face their own barriers and disadvantages. School staff have noted that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds had lower aspirations, regardless of ability, due to a lack of exposure to different education options⁹¹. For example, an individual who has no close family who have been to university would be less likely to consider it as an option themselves.

There is little evidence supporting the idea of intergenerational worklessness, where multiple generations of families never work. However, those who experience a workless household as a child are significantly more likely to spend more time out of work as an adult⁹². Health factors which constrain access to the labour market play a role in this, as do poor local labour markets. Welfare dependency is not seen as a factor in intergenerational worklessness⁹³.

An evaluation of a 3,500-response survey reported similar findings. More disadvantaged parents are less likely to know what is possible for their children or how to achieve it and are also less likely to know how to support their child's education⁹⁴. The analysis from the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) delivered the following recommendations:

⁸⁹ Gatsby, Parents' engagement in the career guidance of their children, 2020, [Link](#)

⁹⁰ Scottish Government, Life At Age 12, 2019, [Link](#)

⁹¹ National Foundation for Educational Research, Perceptions of higher education and higher and degree apprenticeships, 2019, [Link](#)

⁹² Social Mobility Commission, Social Mobility, the Class Pay Gap and Intergenerational Worklessness: New Insights from The Labour Force Survey, 2017, [Link](#)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Can we put the 'poverty of aspiration' myth to bed now?, 2017, [Link](#)



CRFR recommendations to support aspirations in poorer families

- Support parents and children to understand the opportunities available to them and give them the knowledge necessary to achieve
- Focus on the mechanisms by which aspirations can diminish over time for young people
- Focus on keeping young people's aspirations on track rather than just 'inspiring' them
- Dismantle the local and structural barriers to high aspirations.

Adopted children and care experienced young people

Different family dynamics can also impact aspirations, with the aspirations of adopted children differing from non-adopted peers. When finishing compulsory education, 33% of adopted children showed an intention to seek full-time work compared to 7% of non-adopted children, which could be due to elevated behavioural difficulties in adopted children and their more negative experiences of school⁹⁵. There are also differences in occupational aspirations, with adopted children less likely to want to pursue managerial or professional occupations⁹⁶.

Local authorities have a role to play looking after children in care and ensuring they secure the best possible outcomes. The government has set out several corporate parenting principles for councils to adhere by and these are⁹⁷:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- **to promote high aspirations**, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work

⁹⁵ Brown, A et al, The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK, 2019, [Link](#)

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Department for Education, Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers, 2018, [Link](#)



- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

When applying these principles local authorities are encouraged to consider engaging with education institutions, health services, housing services, immigration services, and the justice system and police services. In terms promoting high aspirations, councils are encouraged to ensure accessibility to recreational activities, promote participation in programmes such as the National Citizen Service, review pathway plans with personal advisers, and offer apprenticeships or traineeships.

The data on the outcomes of care leavers is relatively sparse but there is evidence showing care leavers are over-represented in studies on people in custody, homelessness, and other negative outcomes⁹⁸. Ofsted inspection reports have concluded that the quality of pathway planning for care leavers is not good enough in two-thirds of local authorities inspected, and in around half of those inspected there was not enough support to help care leavers find and sustain education, training, or employment⁹⁹.

Special educational needs and disabilities

There is limited literature on the impact of SEN on a child's aspirations, but those with SEN report feeling frustrated with the lack of right help at school or from other services, which in turn impacts their quality of life¹⁰⁰. Parents of children with SEN say that the support system is bewildering and does not reflect the needs of families, and support needs can be identified late while expectations of children with SEN can be set too low¹⁰¹.

School experiences for children with SEN can be difficult as they attain less well than other children, face a more difficult time due to bullying, and exhibit more behavioural problems¹⁰². Research into the transition to secondary school for children with SEN found that these children had lower ambitions for economically rewarding jobs, and less desire to remain in education or pursue higher education¹⁰³.

⁹⁸ Department for Education, Keep on Caring, 2016, [Link](#)

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Department for Education, Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability, 2011, [Link](#)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² UCL, SEN, school life and future aspirations, 2018, [Link](#)

¹⁰³ Ibid.



Trauma and adverse childhood experiences

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as maltreatment and household adversity, have an increased risk of negative health outcomes, both physical and mental. Those who experience four or more ACEs face a negative impact on educational, employment, and income outcomes¹⁰⁴. There is limited literature on this topic from the UK, but research from the US shows that 45% of men who were maltreated as a child graduate from high school compared to 65% of non-maltreated men. Meanwhile research also shows that verbal abuse contributes to lower language test scores and that household adversity impacts future household income¹⁰⁵.

Conclusions

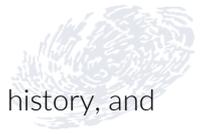
The review has highlighted that risk factors present during transition vary on an individual basis, and while a general approach to supporting transition is beneficial a more targeted support is also required. Primary to secondary transition can be challenging for young children, but there is evidence showing that greater communication and shared preparation between primary and secondary schools can ease the process. It will be important to understand how this transition impacts on different groups. For example special school pupils facing the transition to secondary school benefit from direct strategies, such as move-up days, and indirect strategies, such as support staff.

There is not a great deal of literature on the challenges faced by young people during GCSE selection, but it is acknowledged that there needs to be greater support and guidance during this process, particularly around what impact this can have on their future. West Yorkshire is home to some of the least socially mobile places so it will be important to understand the wider factors impacting on the aspirations, choices and opportunities young people are making during the consultation phase. It will also be helpful to reflect on school-based initiatives to support young people's choices and how these are influenced by access to and quality of careers support.

There is correlation between socioeconomic status and attainment, with those in West Yorkshire eligible for free school meals less likely to achieve 9-5 in GCSE English and Maths. Ethnic minorities are more likely to perform better in GCSE's than white pupils. There is no robust evidence explaining

¹⁰⁴ UCL, The impact of adverse experiences in the home on the health of children and young people, and inequalities in prevalence and effects, 2015, [Link](#)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid



why, but it is hypothesised that cultural norms are at play. The social make-up, culture, history, and experience of place impacts aspirations, and as such interventions must be targeted around sectors and places.

Finally parents play a huge part in the develop of their children's aspirations, understanding how these are influenced within different groups and gender will be important. Particularly for those groups where attainment rates are lower, where FSM is higher and in places where different factors are at play i.e. ethnicity, age and type of education setting.



4. Interventions and best practice for raising aspirations and attainment

Research questions

- What is best practice for raising aspirations?
 - How are teachers, schools and local authorities working to increase attainment and raise aspirations?
 - How are third-sector organisations working to raise aspirations?
- What collaboration could help and is helping to increase attainment?
- What interventions are most effective at raising aspirations?
- Does accessibility of interventions vary for different demographic groups?
- What interventions are currently in place in West Yorkshire?
 - How effective are these?

Career-related learning and guidance within the education system

The government's guidance to schools and colleges around careers guidance sets out their responsibility to provide students with impartial information to set students on pathways to the best possible outcomes and enable them to progress in education and work¹⁰⁶. These pathways include apprenticeships, technical education as well higher education, and schools must allow providers of these pathways access to talk to students. The structure within England includes the schools adhering to the eight Gatsby benchmarks, the Careers and Enterprise Company (a network connecting schools and employers to increase students' exposure to the world of work), and the National Careers Service, which provides free and impartial information on education and work.

Analysis by Gatsby Foundation on the provision of labour market information, which can help inform and guide individuals on their education and career choices, found the offering to be overly complex, hard to navigate, and in need of improvement¹⁰⁷. Despite soft labour market information and local

¹⁰⁶ Department for Education, Careers guidance and access for education and training providers, 2021, [Link](#)

¹⁰⁷ Gatsby, Labour market information and its use to inform career guidance of young people, 2021, [Link](#)



vacancy information registered to be the most wanted by intermediaries working with young people, this information is lacking. Geographical and sectoral information is also in need of improvement. Additionally, information on Local Economic Development and labour market is usually held by local authorities but with many schools operating outside of local authority control such as Academies the links need to be re-established.

Research shows that careers guidance smooths the transition from school to work by enabling young people to make informed decisions. A review of 100 studies on the impact of such guidance found that it improved retention rates, academic performance, ability to make a smooth transition post-16, and longer-term life and career success¹⁰⁸. However, a review of the current provision of careers guidance in schools found that many did not have the appropriate personnel to deliver cohesive, up to date information, and that careers guidance is fragmented and inconsistent¹⁰⁹.

Many secondary school and college students report limited careers support from their schools and colleges, with less than half saying they felt their school or college had spent enough time helping them understand future pathways¹¹⁰.

Gatsby Benchmarks	
Embed stable careers programmes	In 2014 the Gatsby Benchmarks were developed, which set out eight principles to support young people make informed career decisions. A longitudinal evaluation of schools and colleges that implemented the Gatsby Benchmarks found that over four years all kinds of education providers can, and do, meet all eight benchmarks ¹¹¹ . In doing so they can personalise and tailor career guidance programmes, increasing career readiness and raising aspirations of learners. However, as with other evaluations in this area, there is no control group to compare with.
Learn from career and labour market information	
Address the needs of each pupil	
Link curriculum learning to careers	
Provide encounters with employers and employees	
Provide experience of the workplace	
Explain further and higher education options	
Provide personal guidance	

It is noted that literature on career-related learning (CRL) in primary schools and its impacts on outcomes is relatively weak, and more comprehensive research is needed to understand the impacts

¹⁰⁸ Hooley, T et al, Fostering college and career readiness: how career development activities in schools impact on graduation rates and students' life success, 2011, [Link](#)

¹⁰⁹ Ofsted, Going in the right direction?, 2012, [Link](#)

¹¹⁰ Education and Employers, Disconnected: Career aspirations and jobs in the UK, 2020, [Link](#)

¹¹¹ University of Derby, An evaluation of the North East of England pilot of the Gatsby Benchmarks of good career guidance, 2021, [Link](#)



of CRL on different age groups¹¹². Similarly, the importance of engaging parents in careers education and guidance (CEG) is widely acknowledged, but there is little robust evaluation of its effectiveness. However, a review of parent engagement with CEG activities in the UK concluded that schools are achieving parental engagement via the activities detailed below.

Activities achieving parental engagement in careers education and guidance¹¹³

Promoting and communicating CEG activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking parents to contribute to classroom activities • Involving parents in homework activities • Career days
Redesigning existing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitations to their child's personal guidance session • Ensuring careers fairs and open days are held at times when parents can attend
Creating parent-friendly environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast and coffee clubs • Career guidance sessions for parents
Designing new activities that engage the wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the employers' events • Informational events on topics requested by parents, involving local experts
Using technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication technology • Technology to disseminate and enable access to information

At primary school

CRL can begin as early as primary school and includes the likes of aspiration days, workplace visits, curriculum-linked activities, and numeracy and literacy activities. One of the most robust evaluations of such activity is that of the Pathfinder pilot which delivered career-related learning to KS2 students. The programme was found to be “to an encouraging extent effective in terms of meeting its overarching aim of raising pupils’ aspirations and broadening their horizons”¹¹⁴. The programme increased awareness of different future pathways for pupils as well as building confidence and self-esteem. A literature review of primary school CRL corroborated these findings, and concluded CRL is best delivered when:

¹¹² Education and Employers, What works? Career-related learning in primary schools, 2018, [Link](#)

¹¹³ Barnes, S et al, The role of parents and carers in providing careers guidance and how they can be better supported: international evidence report, 2020, [Link](#)

¹¹⁴ Department for Education, Key Stage 2 career-related learning pathfinder evaluation, 2011, [Link](#)



The school has a leadership and senior leadership team committed to embedding career-related learning into the curriculum; activities and programmes are provided from an early age; employers, universities and other external organisations are involved, and best practice contacts are shared between and across local schools¹¹⁵.

The Primary Futures programme is one such CRL approach and leverages an online platform to connect primary school children with volunteers from different careers, who talk to the children about their jobs. The evaluation reported an 11% increase in awareness of possible careers amongst participants and a 9% increase in the belief they could do anything when they grew up¹¹⁶. An interim evaluation of another CRL programme, Our Future, also reported improved aspirations with a measurable increase in pupils agreeing with the statements “People like me can do any job they want when we grow up” and “Science and engineering is not just for rich people”¹¹⁷. However, both these evaluations utilised relatively small samples and neither employed a randomised control trial (RCT) to demonstrate causality, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

At an international level, a Dutch evaluation which did employ a RCT reported similar findings to Primary Futures and Our Future. The study found that those who took part in an entrepreneurial programme in primary school reported increased self-efficacy, need for achievement, risk taking propensity, and analysis skills¹¹⁸. However, despite being one of the more recent RCT evaluations in this area, the study is nearly 10 years old.

At secondary school

Talking Futures is a programme to better inform parents about career and study routes and help them facilitate conversations on these topics with their children. The programme includes content for parents such as a website and home activities, and resources for schools including research summaries, CPD, and activities. This programme is currently being piloted, but interim findings are promising. Three in five parents report being more informed and more likely to talk to their children about career and study options, and more career-orientated activities aimed at parents are being held by pilot institutions¹¹⁹. Young people are also benefiting – 75% have found conversations with their

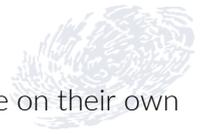
¹¹⁵ Education and Employers, What works? Career-related learning in primary schools, 2018, [Link](#)

¹¹⁶ Education and Employers, Scaling Up: Developing and extending career-related learning in primary schools, 2021, [Link](#)

¹¹⁷ DMH Associates, Our Future Derby: Interim Report, 2020, [Link](#)

¹¹⁸ Huber, L et al, The Effect of Early Entrepreneurship Education: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment, 2012, [Link](#)

¹¹⁹ Gatsby, Talking Futures, 2021, [Link](#)



parents resulting from the programme useful, and these conversations led them to take on their own research. The most successful institutions leveraged the programme by integrating resources into existing events for parents, such as GCSE options evenings, year 7 inductions, or events around transitioning to college.

Employer engagement within schools

Employer engagement within schools can shape outcomes later in life by boosting understanding of careers and raising the aspirations of young people to pursue those careers¹²⁰. Such engagement also stretches further than just raising aspirations, but also provides knowledge and skills needed for work and school to work transitions and enriches education¹²¹.

The ThinkForward programme provides targeted support to 14-year-olds at risk of leaving education and employment by creating a co-developed action plan with the young individual in question and providing employer mentoring activities such as workplace visits, work experience, and CV and interview workshops. The programme is ongoing and currently without a firm evaluation, although 86% of graduated participants were in education, employment or training after six months¹²².

A review of employer engagement activities in Wales sets out the breadth and depth of possible activities which include nation-wide programmes, subject-specific programmes, and local authority-led initiatives. Independent programmes delivered by third or private sector organisations are also present. Examples of these are outlined below:

Employer engagement provision in Wales¹²³

Type	Programme	Activities
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¹²⁰ Education Endowment Foundation, Employer engagement in education: Insights from international evidence for effective practice and future research, 2018, [Link](#)

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² ThinkForward, Annual Review, 2020, [Link](#)

¹²³ Arad Research, Mapping and review of enterprise and employer engagement activity across schools in Wales, 2021, [Link](#)



Nation-wide	Careers Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers fairs • Employer-led webinars • Facilitates communication between employers and schools
	Big Ideas Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops delivered by entrepreneurs
	Business Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing programmes • Presentations and workshops • Interview preparation and presentation training
Regional and local	Activate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career coaching • Work experience
	STEM Gogledd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer presentations • Site visits • Work experience
	Cardiff Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places business representatives on school governing bodies • Work experience • Apprenticeship scheme development • Curriculum support
Third or private sector	Into Film	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training • One to one support
	Young Enterprise Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business start-up and development activities



The review highlighted that there is limited monitoring and evaluation of these programmes but did report that the activities provided developed the aspirations and skills of learners. The report also stressed the importance of providing employment experience at an early stage, and explained employer engagement can support reflection, exploration and dialogue with the world of work. The report highlighted that effective employer engagement activity includes:

Arad Research's summary of effective features of employer engagement:

- Coordination of programme activity across all Key Stages
- A qualified and experienced career leader
- Emphasis on personalised experiences for individual learners
- Clear vision and mutual understanding between partners
- Professional learning opportunities for practitioners



Guest speakers

Career talks provide opportunities to gain career information from trustworthy sources and provide opportunities for networking and in doing so improve students' social capital, which is associated with increased wage premiums in later life¹²⁴.

Guest speakers are one method of employer engagement that benefits from a robust evaluation. A randomised control trial (RCT) investigating the role of career talks in secondary school found that these talks led to improvements in self-confidence, attitudes about the usefulness of school, and confidence in fulfilling their career aspirations¹²⁵. The talks led 20-28% of students questioning their career and education choices, and 7% changing their future plans.

Speakers for Schools is one organisation providing career talks in schools. Their most recent report centres on their work in 2020, which provided school pupils career talks through its Virtual Work Experience programme¹²⁶. The virtual programme meets Gatsby Benchmarks 5 and 6 and has provided early experiences of industries and companies.

4.3 Whole-school approaches

School-led interventions to improve social and emotional skills can play a role in improving the outcomes of young people. There is extensive literature on how skills such as self-control, self-regulation, self-perception and self-awareness can improve adult outcomes such as income and employment. Interventions involving the development of social and emotional skills can begin as early as primary school and continue into secondary school.

Camden STEAM Hub provides support for middle and senior school leaders to design and embed STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) education within the curriculum and develop employer partnerships. The programme includes training modules, one-to-one curriculum design support, and employer partnerships tailored to schools' curriculum outcomes. The STEAM Hub led to a range of positive impacts including influencing curriculum change; furthering schools' progress in achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks; building partnerships between schools and STEAM

¹²⁴ The Careers and Enterprise Company, Effective Careers Interventions for Disadvantaged Young People: Evidence review, 2021, [Link](#)

¹²⁵ Education and Employers, Motivated to achieve: How encounters with the world of work can change attitudes and improve academic attainment, 2019, [Link](#)

¹²⁶ Speakers for Schools, Year in Review 2019/20, 2020, [Link](#)



employers; embedding STEAM in schools' ways of working; improving access to STEAM related advice and information; improving confidence to support pupils; ability to provide a range of activities to pupils; and creating space to think about teaching from different perspectives.

Classroom approaches in primary school

The Zippy's Friends programme is an emotional learning programme for 5–7-year-olds which utilises a series of stories to teach children how to cope with difficulties. The programme is implemented across the globe and has been evaluated multiple times. One RCT evaluation found that programme had a positive effect on the social climate in the classroom, reduced bullying and improved academic skills. The analysis also concluded that the results were not influenced by gender or socioeconomic status¹²⁷. Another RCT found that programme positively impacted the children's social and emotional skills, and reported significant increases in adaptive coping, motivation, and emotional literacy¹²⁸.

Classroom approaches in secondary school

The Becoming A Man (BAM) programme is an intervention which provides secondary school children the opportunity to skip an academic class and instead attend a group session delivering character education, social skills and critical thinking education in the United States. The programme is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy principles, and an RCT evaluation found the intervention increased school engagement while also reducing rates of violence involvement by 44%. Programme participation reduced course failures by around 66% while also increasing rates of being “on track” for graduation¹²⁹. However, there is not yet evidence of the programme's impact in the long-term, so it is unclear whether these effects are long-lasting.

A proposed model for supporting the most academically able disadvantaged pupils is set out by the Department for Education¹³⁰. This model involves identifying such students, committing to their achievement via the likes of CPD for teachers, and then adopting a four-pronged approach. The four strands are detailed below with examples of the type of activities possible. The first prong is

¹²⁷ Holen, S, Implementing a Universal Stress Management Program for Young School Children: Are there Classroom Climate or Academic Effects?, 2012, [Link](#)

¹²⁸ The Trimbos Institute, An evaluation of the Zippy's Friends and Apple's Friends programmes, 2016, [Link](#)

¹²⁹ Cook, P et al, The (Surprising) Efficacy Of Academic And Behavioural Intervention With Disadvantaged Youth: Results From A Randomized Experiment In Chicago, 2014, [Link](#)

¹³⁰ Department for Education, Research to understand successful approaches to supporting the most academically able disadvantaged pupils, 2018, [Link](#)



described as a critical success factor with the intensity of the others depending on the specific risk factors at play for the students in question.

Four activity types to support the most academically able disadvantaged pupils

Academic extension activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly academic mentoring from a senior leader • Advice on GCSE and A-Levels choices informed by the Russell group booklet • A commitment of one after school club a week • Maths, English and Science projects • Visits to gifted and talented conferences
Cultural extension activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School trips within England and abroad • Visits to theatres, art galleries and concerts
Personal development activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment in debating clubs, chess clubs or national competitions • Meet and greet opportunities with local university staff or local businesspeople • Informal mentoring
Address material poverty directly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covering cost of broken essential equipment • Covering cost of MENSA membership • Cover cost of travel to visit university campuses • Cover cost of university entrance exam fees • Cover cost of books

The EXCEL programme, a scheme in the US which guaranteed a scholarship to a sponsoring university and provided enrichment activities through secondary school, was found to be effective in improving aspirations to pursue higher education through evaluation with a control group. While the programme did not have an overall impact on the number of students applying to higher education the evaluation did conclude such a programme could be useful to specific universities to raise their minority enrolment¹³¹.

¹³¹ Bergin, D et al, Effects of a college access program for youth underrepresented in higher education: A randomized experiment, 2007, [Link](#)



4.4 Community interventions

Research from the Social Mobility Commission found extra-curricular activities to be positive and enriching experiences for young people that not only provide positive educational outcomes but also develop skills that are not developed at school¹³². Global research shows that extra-curricular activities can increase achievement in maths, and improve educational expectations, self-esteem, and motivation, however data from the UK in this area is limited. However, there is evidence that accessibility to extra-curricular activity is structured by socioeconomic status, and those from poorer households face participation gaps.

Youth clubs are one way of engaging young people in extra-curricular activities and there is evidence pointing to their effectiveness. A survey of young people attending and not attending youth clubs found that those who did attend youth clubs worry less about their future and were likely to take up volunteering – which can have positive impacts on their future careers¹³³. The Avenues Youth Project, a London youth club, is one such example. The project reported that all of its summer programme participants either sustained or improved their communication skills, while 94% of 13–18-year-olds who visited the project reported feeling able to challenge influences that are bad for them¹³⁴.

The Children’s Social Care Innovation programme was launched by the Department for Education to develop and test methods for supporting vulnerable children and young people and improving their outcomes. The second round ran from 2016 to 2020 and funded 50 projects, which varied in their aims, activities and scope. Despite the variation in projects the programme’s evaluation concluded that good practice with children, young people and families consisted of three core tenets: Relationship-based practices, strength-based approaches, and holistic approaches. These are described in more detail below.

¹³² Social Mobility Commission, An Unequal Playing Field, 2019, [Link](#)

¹³³ Children and Young People Now, Youth clubs key to children’s wellbeing, 2014, [Link](#)

¹³⁴ The Avenues Youth Project, Our Impact, 2020, [Link](#)



Three characteristics present in effective interventions supporting young people and their families¹³⁵

Relationship-based practices	Attempts to build consistent, mutually trusting and respectful relationships between practitioners and young people and their families. These relationships create motivation and opportunity for change.
Strength-based approaches	Recognises individuals as the most important agent in change and works collaboratively with them to agree goals and overcome difficulties.
Holistic approaches	Recognises the context in which individuals and their families are embedded and in doing so supports effective identification of multiple drivers of risk, barriers to positive outcomes, and opportunities for change.

The implementation of Sure Start programmes, which established local centres providing a range of services, provided mixed results. These programmes emphasised community development and provided advice on the likes of parenting, money and employment while reducing hospitalisations of children. The programme was highly valued by parents but did not deliver improvements in development outcomes¹³⁶. The new Family Hubs scheme apply learnings from the Sure Start scheme, but its efficacy is yet to be evaluated.

The charity Career Ready builds networks with employers, educators and volunteers to give disadvantaged young people access to career support and experiences. They run three programmes for differing stages of a young person's life. Career Starter provides curriculum essentials through assembly, tutorial and classroom resources for teachers. The Career Builder programme provides volunteer-led employer engagement opportunities, while the Career Ready programme for post-16 students includes one-to-one mentoring and real experiences of work. Of the young people involved in a Career Ready programme, 98% progressed into sustained education or employment (compared to a national average of 88%), while 70% of students said Career Ready had raised their aspirations¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Department for Education, Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 2 Final Report, 2020, [Link](#)

¹³⁶ Social Mobility Commission, State of the nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic, 2021, [Link](#)

¹³⁷ Career Ready, Impact Report, 2020, [Link](#)



Internships, apprenticeships and work experience

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships, which combine a paid job with on-site and off-site training, can act as a vehicle for social mobility, with research indicating individuals which hold an apprenticeship qualification earn on average 10% more than individuals with same-level qualifications¹³⁸. Unlike universities apprenticeships have no access gaps, with pupils from more deprived backgrounds just as likely to join one than more advantaged peers¹³⁹. However, there is discrepancy within apprenticeships, and more deprived pupils are less represented in Level 4 and 5 apprenticeships, while some technical apprenticeships have a higher representation of more deprived learners.

The majority of apprentices report seeing positive impacts on their career and feeling satisfied, but there is variation around pay, with only around half of Level 2 and 3 apprentices achieving a pay-rise upon course completion. This could be because some apprentices do not provide high return on investment and create new work, and as such it could be beneficial to skew investment in apprenticeships toward those which do.

Despite the benefits associated with apprenticeships there has been a decline in take-up which began prior to Covid-19 and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The reasons behind this fall are complex and due to a range of factors which include¹⁴⁰:

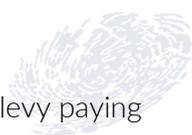
- The addition of an apprenticeship levy which added additional costs for employers in 2017
- The introduction of employer-led standards which impacted employer demands for apprenticeship qualifications
- A 20% off-the-job training requirement which increased the cost and burden of work for employers
- Minimum requirements for English and Maths, creating additional demand on apprentice's working time

To tackle the drop in apprenticeships the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) made 5 recommendations. These are:

¹³⁸ Social Mobility Commission, Apprenticeships and social mobility, 2020, [Link](#)

¹³⁹ QA, The Social Mobility Impact of Apprenticeships, 2019, [Link](#)

¹⁴⁰ NFER, Putting Apprenticeships to Work for Young People, 2021, [Link](#)

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1. Re-design the funding system to support SMEs, who are more likely to be non-levy paying and offer intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, which are typically taken up by more disadvantaged young people
 2. Split apprenticeship funding, and protect funding for 16–18-year-olds to increase take-up in this age range
 3. Launch a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of traineeships, which can prepare young people for apprenticeships
 4. Re-assess the incorporation of English and Maths requirements
 5. Require all employers to advertise apprenticeships on the national Find An Apprenticeship website.

Traineeships

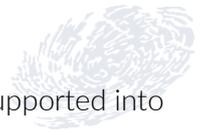
Traineeships were introduced in 2013 and provide young people aged 16-24 with intensive work experience and preparation programmes alongside Maths and English subject support. Unlike apprenticeships, traineeships are learning and skills development courses which last between six weeks and 12 months and do not provide employment. The government invested a further £126m into traineeships in March 2021.

An evaluation of traineeships found around 75% of traineeship graduates moved into a positive destination (such as an apprenticeship or further training) within 12 months of starting the traineeship, with the majority of those moving into further learning¹⁴¹. Results also indicated traineeships increase the probability of moving into an apprenticeship, particularly for those aged 19 or older. There is little data on longer-term outcomes, with effects on employment mixed. However, evaluators noted that minor impact on employment for the younger cohort could be a positive social outcome, as they are instead moving into further learning or apprenticeships.

Work experience and internships

All in Edinburgh is a partnership approach to support employment for disabled individuals in Edinburgh. The programme has ensured there is only one point of entry to local employment services, removing any confusion, and once in the individual is referred to one of four partners. There is a low client to worker ratio of 20:1, meaning workers can provide flexible and individualised

¹⁴¹ Department for Education, Estimating the impact of Traineeships, 2019, [Link](#)



support. Currently of the 600 people who have entered the service, 25% have been supported into employment¹⁴².

Further support for those with SEN or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan comes in the form of supported internships¹⁴³. These study programmes are aimed at young people within this bracket aged 16 to 24 who want to move into employment and need extra support to do so. These structured study programmes are based primarily at an employer and provide these young people with the skills they need to achieve sustainable employment through workplace learning. To achieve positive progression in these internships staff should be trained to negotiate with employers, interns should have low aspirations tackled early in the process, only employers who are likely to be able to offer a job at the end of the process should be selected, and skills related to both the specific job and the wider job market should be taught.

International examples

New York's Young Adult Internship Programme (YAIP) provides subsidised employment for NEET 16–24-year-olds. The year-long programme begins with job-readiness workshops, with participants paid for their attendance. Following these individuals then take part in a three-month paid internship, during which they also attend a weekly five-hour educational workshop. Following the internship providers are expected to help participants secure and maintain an outcome placement for nine months, including unsubsidised employment, education, training, or the military. An RCT evaluation of the programme found a significant increase in employment and earnings over the first year of follow-up¹⁴⁴. However, the programme was not successful in achieving long lasting impact, with participants likely to return to informal or independent work after the follow-up period had ended.

A review of the Brazilian apprenticeship programme found that the programme increased the probability of employment in permanent jobs while decreasing turnover rates¹⁴⁵. The scheme also improved participants' skills, which is important given that the study found that the skill requirements of the apprentices' occupations affected the likelihood of securing a long-term job in the short-term and improved educational attainment in the medium-term.

¹⁴² SCLD, Mapping the Employability Landscape for People with Learning Disabilities in Scotland, 2016, [Link](#)

¹⁴³ Department for Education, Supported internships, 2017, [Link](#)

¹⁴⁴ MDRC, Final Impacts and Costs of New York City's Young Adult Internship Program, 2018, [Link](#)

¹⁴⁵ Corseuil, C et al, Apprenticeship as a stepping stone to better jobs: Evidence from Brazilian matched employer-employee data, 2019, [Link](#)



In the United States the Community Restitution Apprenticeship-Focused Training (CRAFT) programme was implemented to provide high-risk juvenile offenders employment and education opportunities to mitigate the risk of future negative outcomes. The programme utilised a strong network of employers while providing vocational and pre-vocational training, employability skills development, job placement assistance, and job retention services. It used a strength-based approach to build competencies and engage with families, employers, service providers and service systems. An RCT of the programme reported that participants were 1.5 times more likely to be employed in the 30 months following the programme and 2.4 times more likely to be employed within the construction industry (which the programme focused on)¹⁴⁶. However, those who were employed reported similar number of months employed, wage and capacity to achieve employment for at least six months. From an educational perspective, CRAFT participants were almost twice as likely than the control group to attend a secondary school education programme during the follow-up. The evaluators highlighted this method of supported employment as a positive intervention for developing vocational skills while simultaneously providing mental health treatment and concluded that the immediate commencement of job-searching activities upon enrolment and the long-term follow-up support were successful elements of the programme.

New York's Summer Youth Employment Program (SEYP) provides career exploration and paid work experience during the summer for 14–24-year-olds. Participants have the opportunity to develop workplace, social, civic and leadership skills during structured project and work-based opportunities. An RCT of the programme found school attendance of participants increased by 1%, and by 3% for those older than 16¹⁴⁷. The programme increased the likelihood of passing the New York Regents Examinations – state-wide and standardised examinations in core high school subjects.

Social action projects

Social action projects can boost young people's aspirations by increasing their self-confidence and belief. One survey reported 81% of young people participating in social action believed that participation would help them get a job in the future¹⁴⁸, and young people reported increased self-confidence, improved communication skills, and improved teamworking and social skills.

¹⁴⁶ Schaeffer, C, et al, RCT of a Promising Vocational/Employment Program for High-Risk Juvenile Offenders, 2015, [Link](#)

¹⁴⁷ Leos-Urbel, J, What Is a Summer Job Worth? The Impact of Summer Youth Employment on Academic Outcomes, 2014, [Link](#)

¹⁴⁸ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, National Youth Action Survey 2016, [Link](#)



To encourage the take-up of social action projects some organisations have leveraged reward or credit systems. In these systems young people receive credits for time spent on projects which can be redeemed later for the likes of training courses or leisure activities. These projects tend to be small-scale local programmes and as such lack extensive evaluation, however Tempo Time Credits is one such example.

Tempo Time Credits attracts a broad range of volunteers which differs from the make-up of other volunteers. While 62% of volunteers nationally are employed, just over 25% of Tempo volunteers are, and Tempo volunteers are more likely to have a limiting condition¹⁴⁹. Of those who volunteered 89% said they feel more positive about the future and 82% say they know more about community-based services and support. Volunteers also report improved quality of life, more confident, and more empowered.

4.5 Conclusions

There is a range of different practices for helping raise aspirations, each with their own merits and applications. Career-related learning and guidance within the education system provides students with understanding of the different routes they can take post-16, and in doing so can create smoother transitions to higher education or employment. Employer engagement within schools gives pupils a chance to taste the working world for real, providing experiences in the workplace and raising aspirations for certain careers or sectors.

Whole school and whole community approaches provide wrap-around support for students both inside and outside the school gates. Improving the provision of CPD within schools can create better teacher-student experiences and increase student's knowledge of what routes are possible post-16. Extra-curricular activities and youth clubs can motivate students to work harder in school, while also providing work-like experiences. Apprenticeships and work experience interventions can be particularly beneficial for young people who may not normally have access to such opportunities and leveraging local employers to provide these opportunities can help establish a network of organisations while providing sustainable employment opportunities which provide relevant skills for the local labour market.

¹⁴⁹ Tempo, Tempo Time Credits Impact Report 2020-2021, 2021, [Link](#)

Caroline Masundire, Director

Alistair Ross, Consultant

Laura McGinty, Consultant

Niamh Dunne, Consultant

Offices:

London

T: 0207 253 6289

Edinburgh

T: 0131 226 4949

Newcastle

T: 07887 67 34 07

www.rocketsciencelab.co.uk



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