

Routes into post-16 education and training: Engagement Findings

March 2025



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1. Engagement Summary

Objectives

1. The engagement programme focused on the following terms of reference in relation to the inquiry:
 - Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options (vocational and academic routes -16, i.e. further education, sixth form, apprenticeships and training, and onward to higher education); and
 - How effective career support is at compulsory school-age.

Methodology

2. The engagement programme provided online surveys (including an easy-read version for young people), for the following audiences:
 - Young people between the ages of 16-20
 - Parents/guardians of young people between the ages of 16-20
3. To complement the survey responses and gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of young people facing additional barriers to education and training, such as those with disabilities or not currently enrolled in mainstream education, the Citizen Engagement Team also conducted face-to-face interviews with the facilitators and young people of an alternative education setting.

Respondents and participants

4. Surveys were shared widely via Committee networks, education contacts and Senedd social media channels, ensuring respondents were from diverse demographics as well as geographical locations across Wales.
5. Given that young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) may take non-traditional routes in education and training, the Citizen Engagement Team held a focus group with young people aged 16-25 to capture their experiences and perspectives.
6. In total, **451 responses** were received through the online surveys:
 - Young People Survey: 311 responses

- Parent and Guardian Survey: 140 responses

Key Findings

- 7.** Responses across both young people and parent surveys suggest that **more personalised, detailed and inclusive support is needed** to help young people make informed decisions about their post-16 options.
- 8.** Both parents and young people expressed dissatisfaction at the **lack of detailed information they received on the range of post-16 options**, especially regarding apprenticeships and vocational college courses. Many respondents across both surveys noted that **school often pushed their sixth-form options** without providing enough information about other opportunities.
- 9.** A need for practical experiences was also highlighted, with better supported **opportunities for work experience**, as well as information regarding how the impact courses such as A Levels or apprenticeships can have on future opportunities in university or employment.
- 10.** Many respondents felt that **ALN support and guidance was insufficient**, that students with learning disabilities were unfairly excluded from opportunities, and that schools and colleges were not proactive in providing tailored support to meet student needs.

Please note that while this survey provides valuable insights into the respondents' perspectives, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not fully represent the population. The data reflects the views and experiences of the individuals who participated in the survey, and variations may exist among different demographic groups or those who did not respond. As with any survey, the results offer a snapshot of the opinions within the sample group, and caution should be exercised when generalising these findings to the broader population.

2. Survey Findings

Respondents: Demographics

11. In the young people’s survey, respondents came from 20 local authorities across Wales. 15 local authorities were identified in the parent/guardian survey.

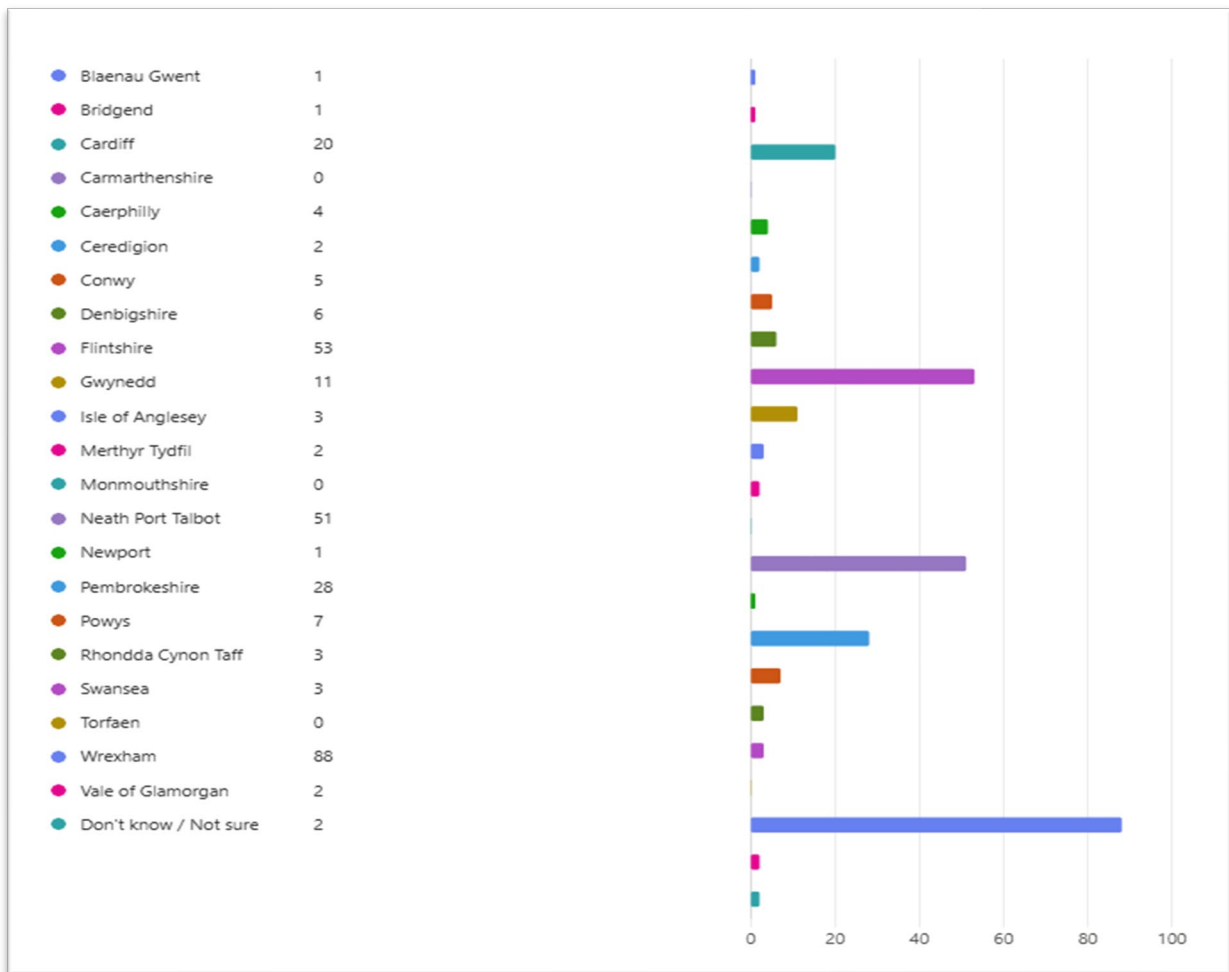


Figure 1: Young People Survey

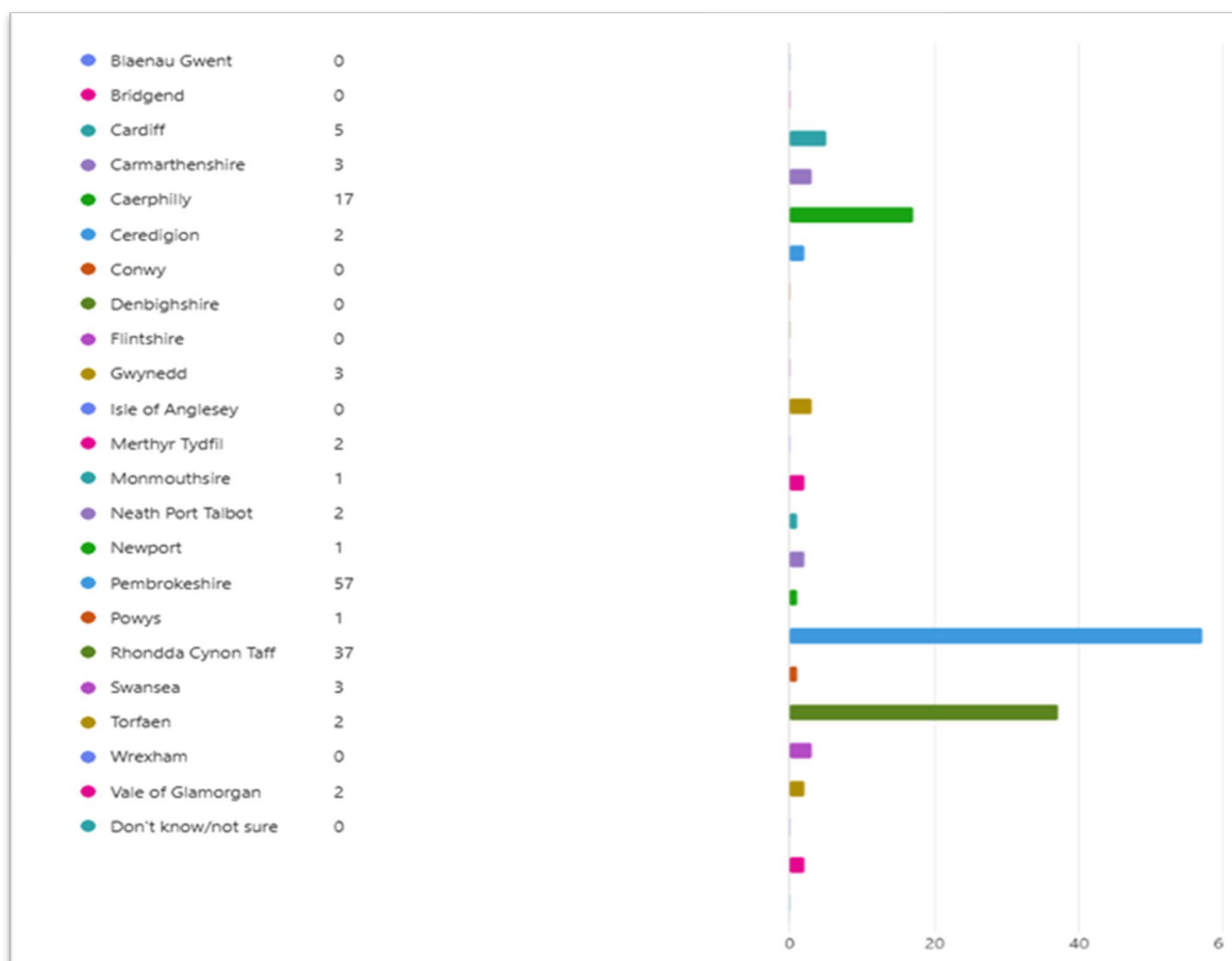


Figure 2: Parent/Guardian Survey

12. Of the 295 young people who answered this question, 62% were enrolled in a practical course, while 32% were studying A Levels at school or college. 5% were in paid employment and 9% were neither in education, employment or training (NEET).

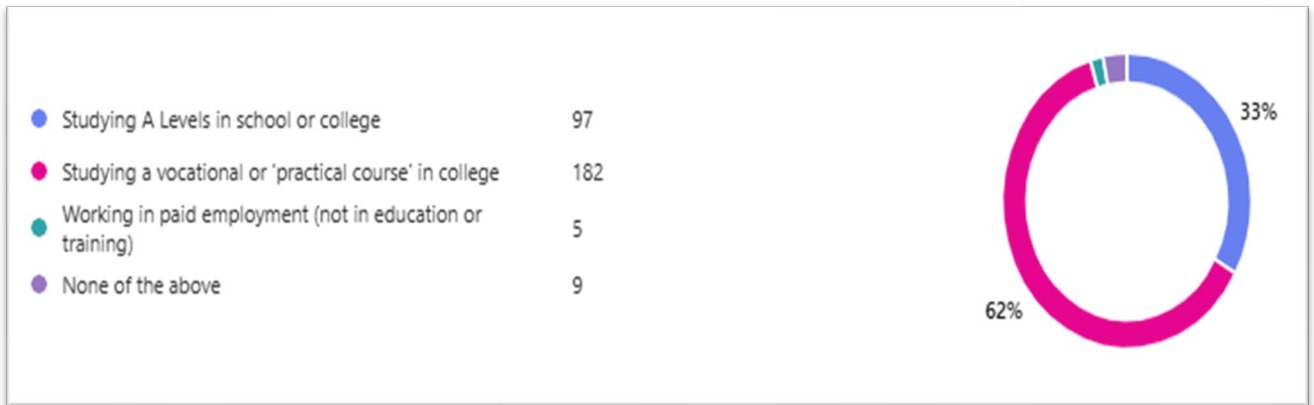


Figure 3: Young People Survey

13. Of the 140 respondents who answered this question in the parent/guardian survey, 70% were from those whose children were studying vocational courses in college, while 24% reported their child was studying A Level qualifications.

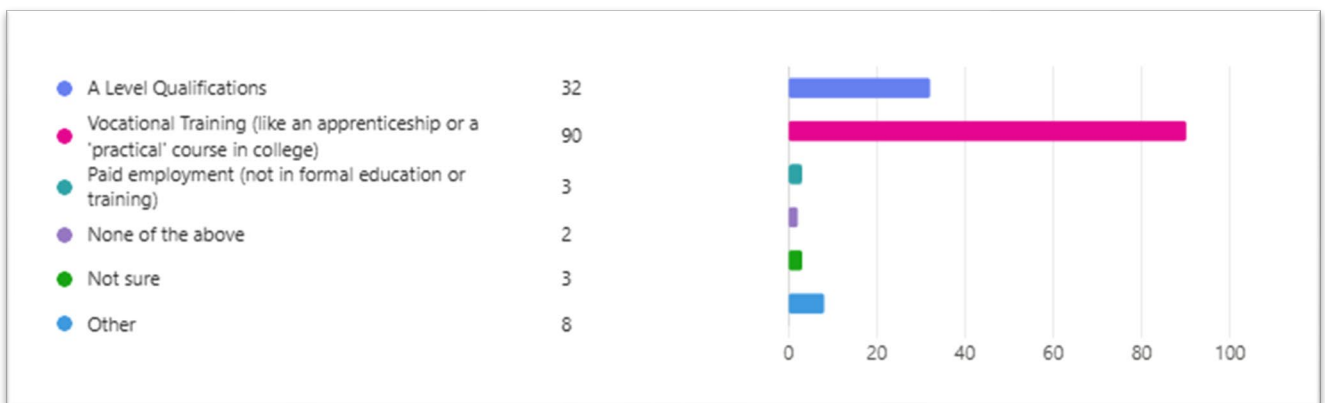


Figure 4: Parent/Guardian Survey

Survey findings

Reasons for not pursuing education or training after Year 11

14. Respondents across both surveys shared various reasons why they or their children had chosen to not pursue formal education and training after 16. These included **negative experiences with school** or **dislike of traditional education pathways**. Some felt that schools were more inclined to help academically focused young people and there weren't always options to meet young people's diverse needs.

Young People Survey

“College was horrible- like school.”

“After year 11 I went into a hair apprenticeship role in a salon which didn't work out, I then went into college which wasn't for me and now happily working in a recruitment agency completing an NVQ with Educ8.”

Parent/Guardian Survey

“He has decided not to continue in school or college because, sadly, he hates school. He feels it is only for the academically inclined and not for the kids who can't sit still or quietly for 6 hours a day. The school has failed my son.”

“There was nothing suitable that met their needs. College wasn't suitable and it was that or nothing till 19 and they can access social services provision.”

15. Financial pressures were also given by one respondent as a reason that their child chose not to pursue further education or training.

“Money. You cannot drive own/run a vehicle or save for a house whilst in college or a level in school. Vocational qualifications don't progress you in life. Work, and gain experience with a company you want a career in is the way forward - and you can earn.”

(Parent/Guardian Survey)

Key influences on post-year 11 choices

16. Over 50% of respondents across both surveys stated that they or their child had a clear idea in mind about what path they were taking after year 11 with schools, colleges and Careers Wales also having a significant influence on their choices. Of the 295 young people who responded to this question, **52% stated that they already knew what they wanted to do after compulsory education** and 26% of them made decisions based on information they were provided by

schools, colleges and Careers Wales. 18% of young people stated that they were not sure what had influenced their choices.

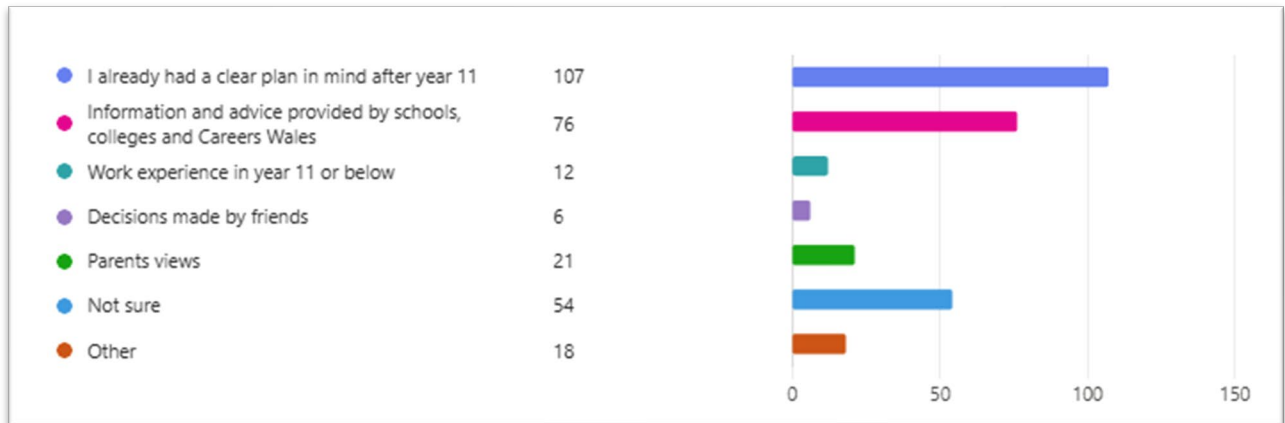


Figure 5: Young People Survey

17. Of the 125 respondents who answered this question in the parent/guardian survey, 51% stated that their child already knew what path to take post-16, with 18% of parents/guardians stating that it was information provided by, schools, colleges, and Careers Wales that had the biggest influence on their young person's choices

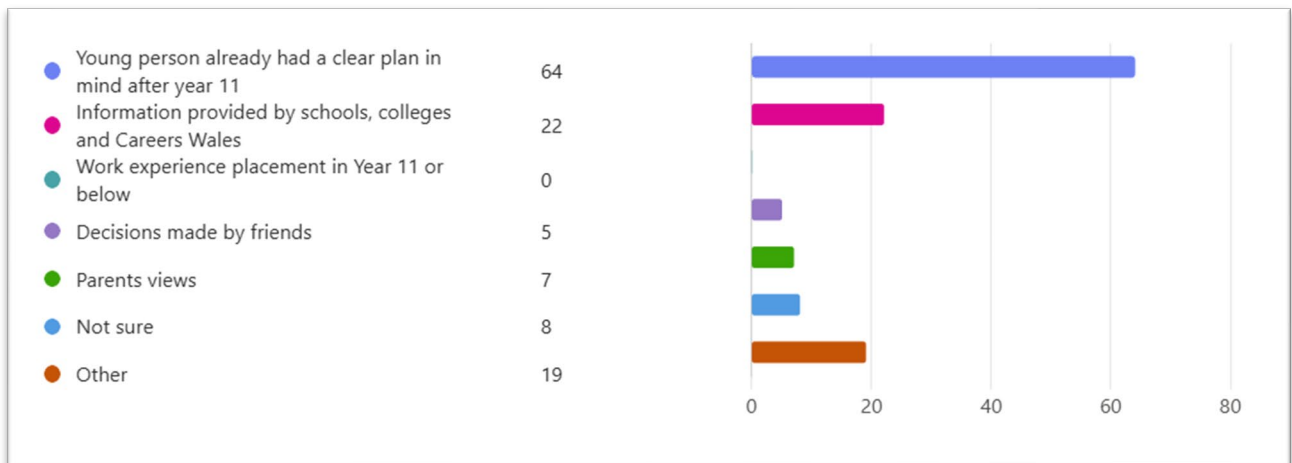


Figure 6: Parent/Guardian Survey

Confidence in understanding post-16 education and training options in your area

18. Parents/guardians and young people showed similar levels of confidence in understanding what options are available to young people in their area.

19. Of the 295 respondents to this question, over two-thirds (68%) expressed at least some confidence in understanding post-16 education and training options, 40% described themselves as 'fairly confident' and 28% as 'somewhat confident'. However, only 13% felt 'very confident'. At the other end of the scale, 15% reported low confidence, with 10% saying they were 'slightly confident' and 5% 'not confident at all'. This suggests that while general awareness exists, a significant portion of young people still lack strong confidence in navigating their options.

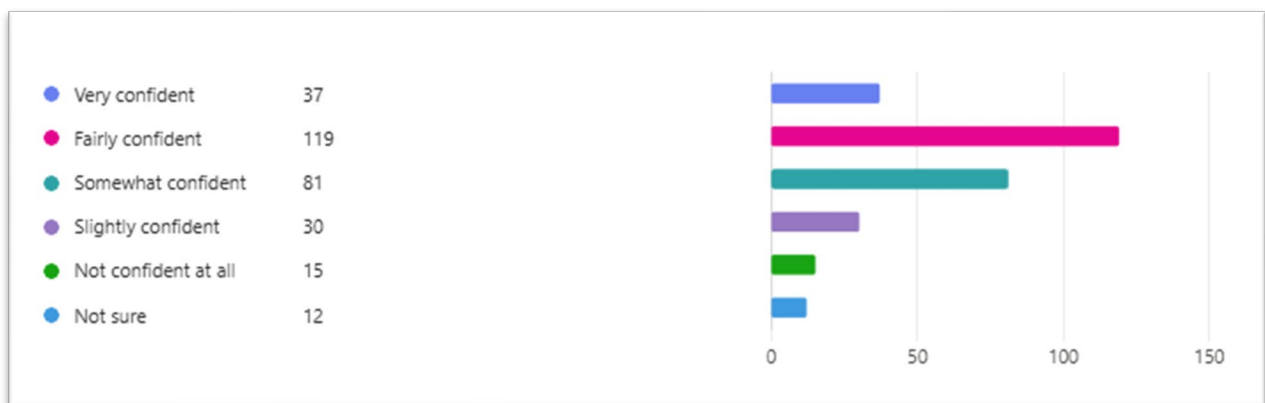


Figure 7: Young People Survey

20. Many parents and guardians lack strong confidence in understanding post-16 options. Of the 140 respondents who answered this question in the parent/guardian survey, 29% described themselves as 'somewhat confident', 24% said they were 'not very confident' and 22% described themselves as 'fairly confident'. 14% of respondents said they were 'not confident at all', whilst 9% would say they were 'very confident'.

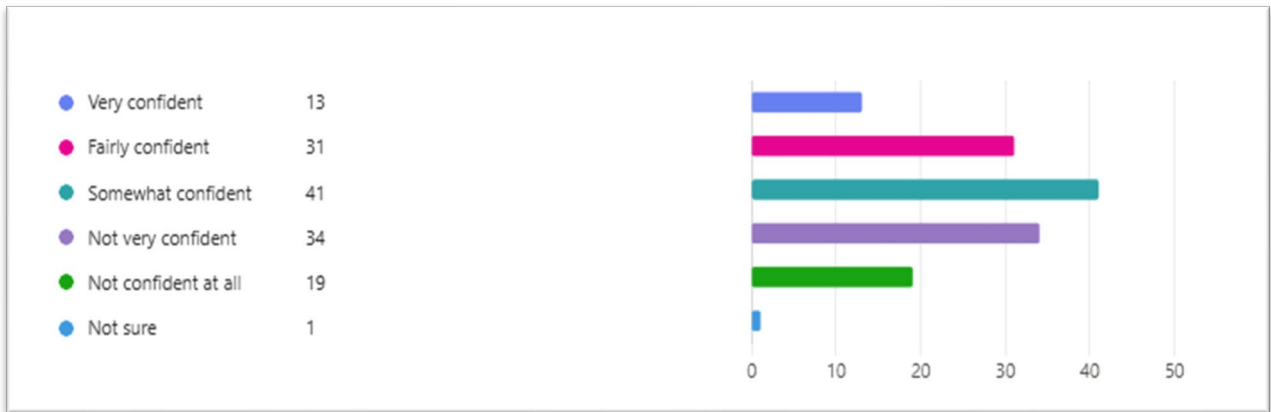


Figure 8: Parent/Guardian Survey

21. Many parents/guardians expressed a desire for better communication and collaboration between schools, colleges, students, parents and local authorities around what post-16 options are available to young people in their area.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“Any information would have been greatly appreciated”

“Clear and proactive help from the school, education authorities, councils etc. in advising parents and pupils in a timely manner as to what avenues are available and how to access them.”

“No effective means of child/parent/advice channel to follow. I believe all 3 parties need to do it in collaboration.”

“More help with my sons after Year 11. We was left to get on with it.”

Age at which post-Year 11 options were first introduced

22. Most young people only began receiving advice about post-16 options in the later years of secondary school. Of the 311 respondents who answered this question in the young people survey, 33% stated that it was in Year 10 they started receiving information regarding their options post-16. 29% of respondents indicated that they began receiving advice and information in Year 11. 7.8% of overall respondents to this question stated that they had received no

information.

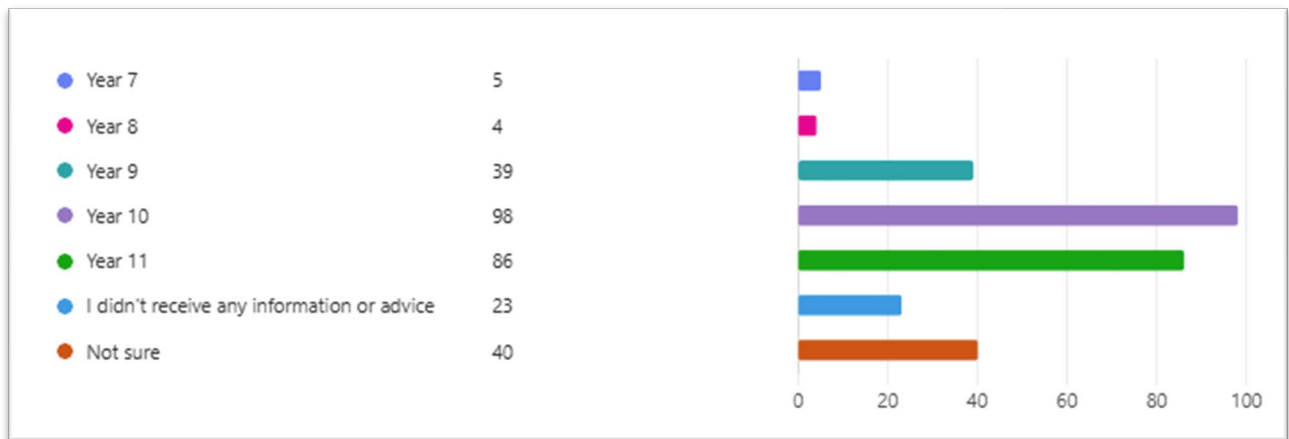


Figure 9: Young People Survey

23. This data is supported by the comments from young people, with many suggesting that such discussions should have started earlier, and been ongoing throughout Year 11.

Young People Survey

"Tell the year 11 more before leaving school"

"Better advice about what was available"

"More in depth explanations of what is available to do after school"

"Having it (advice and information) early on and not mid yr11"

24. A significant number of parents only received information about post-16 options late, or not at all. Of the 140 respondents who answered this question in the parent/guardian survey, 25% stated that it was in Year 11 they began receiving information. 21% of those who answered said it was in Year 10 and 14% began receiving information in Year 9. Smaller percentages of respondents to this

question received information in Year 8 (2%) and Year 7 (1%). 19% of respondents to this question had received no advice at all.

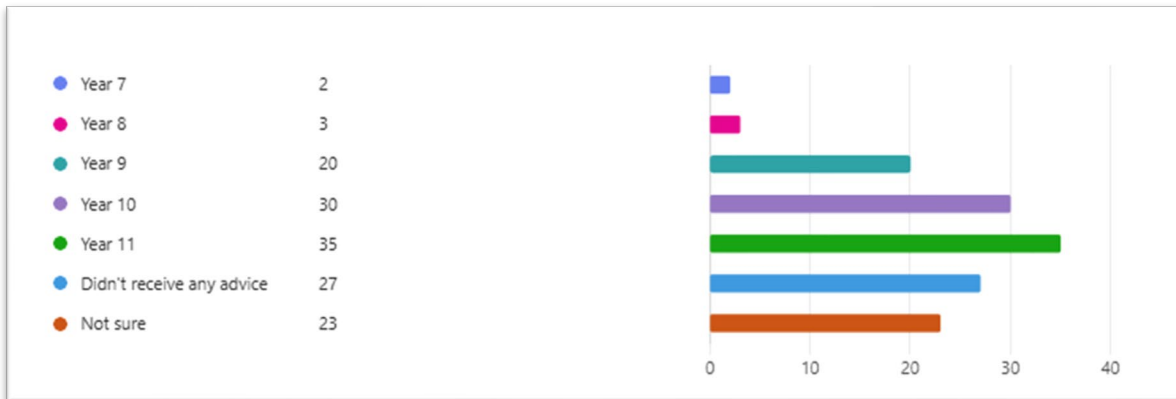


Figure 10: Parent/Guardian Survey

Main sources of information and advice on post-year 11 options

25. Across both surveys this question provided respondents with the ability to choose more than one option as to where they got the most information. Responses indicate that schools play a central role in guiding young people on post-16 options, but families and colleges are also key influencers.

26. Of the 311 respondents who answered this question in the young person's survey, the most frequent response was that schools provided the most information and advice (31%), closely followed by parents (20%) and colleges (21%). 13% of answers included Careers Wales and 7% also sought advice from friends.

27. 2% of respondents to this question also stated that it was their 'own research' which provided them with information.

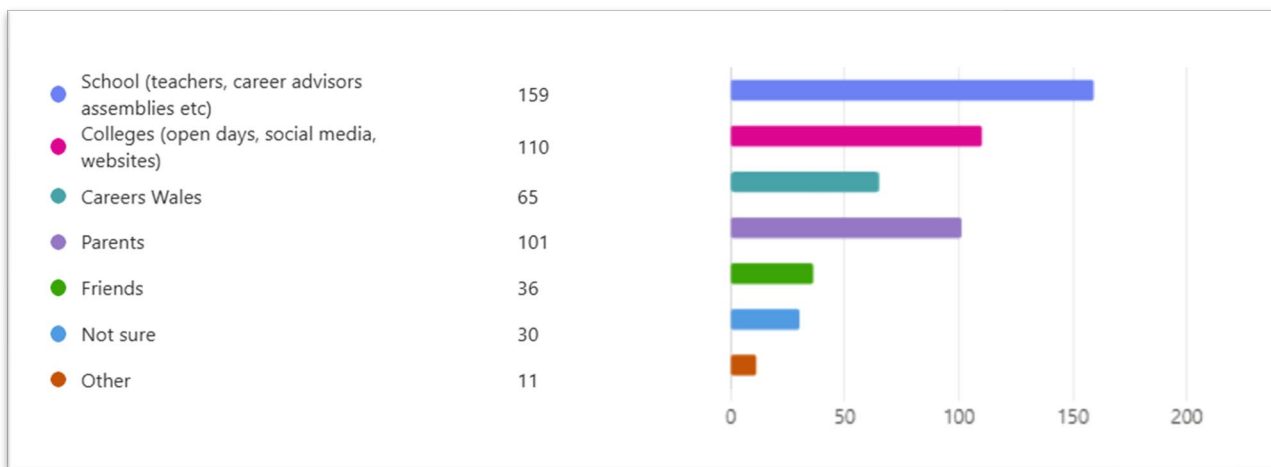


Figure 11: Young People Survey

28. 90 respondents answered this question within the parent and guardian's survey. 'School' was the most frequently selected answer from respondents who answered this question (37%). This was followed by 'colleges' (29%) and 'Careers Wales' (16%). 14% of the respondents to this question chose the option of 'other' giving a range of responses which included conducting their own research and gaining advice from a social worker. One respondent stated that 'Gwynedd Youth Service' provided them with advice.

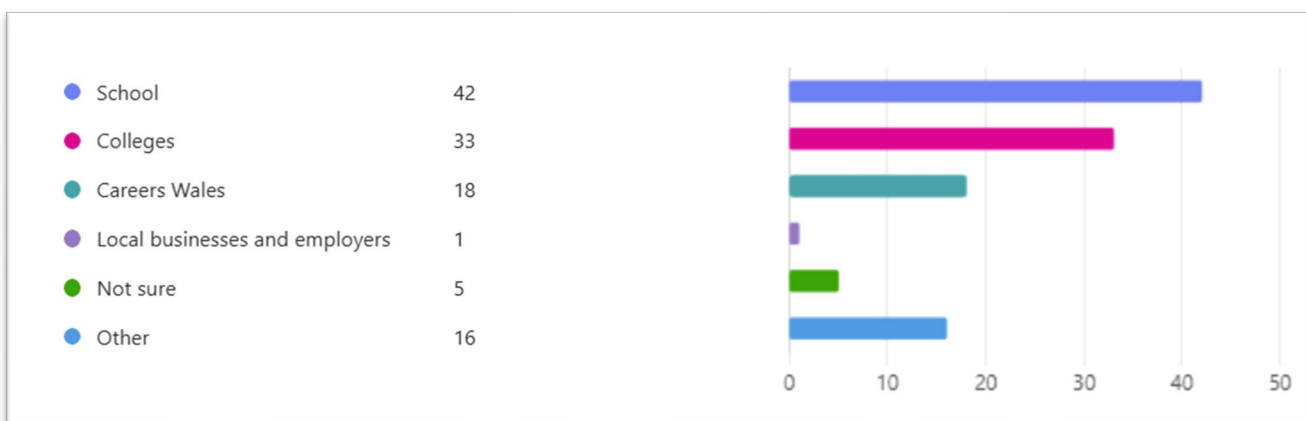


Figure 12: Parent/Guardian Survey

29. Survey responses suggested that despite the fact it is schools providing respondents with the most information, young people and parents/guardians showed a desire for more well-rounded advice that wasn't influenced by their academic priorities or assumptions about student abilities.

Young People Survey:

“Unbiased advice (just because I was doing well in maths didn't mean I would be good at in the long run, I spoke about the career choices I liked (humanities) and I was steered towards finance.”

“More information outside of just continuing A Levels. In year 11 it is very much pushed upon students to continue studying by carrying out their A Levels. There was very minimal discussion and information available about the various other options available.”

“Talks about basic studies and a levels like english, maths, science etc. I wanted to hear about the courses and options colleges offer but since my school had a sixth form within it they tried to influence us to go there.”

“In year 11 so many teachers kept trying to convince me that staying in sixth form instead of going to college would be the better option and constantly put down the idea of college e.g. saying that I'd hate it”

“We were told sixth form was the best option to take”

30. Parents/guardians also expressed concern that schools were prioritising their own interests (i.e. keeping students in sixth form) rather than focusing on the best interest of their children.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“We had no information from school regarding further education options. Except for a date for an open evening in college.”

“School said very about the local college or colleges further afield. Through our own research we found out that other 6 forms and colleges out of area could be an option.....I feel this was just so that school could raise their 6th form intake. The information provided was not in the pupils best interests.”

Satisfaction with the quality of information and advice received

31. While half of children were positive about the information and advice they received, around a quarter were lukewarm and a significant minority were dissatisfied. Of the 295 respondents who answered this question in the young people survey, 34% stated that they were 'slightly satisfied' with the quality of information and advice they received. 27% responded neutrally, neither feeling 'satisfied nor dissatisfied'. 16% of respondents felt 'very satisfied' with the advice and information they received. However, 3% of young people who answered this question felt 'very dissatisfied'.

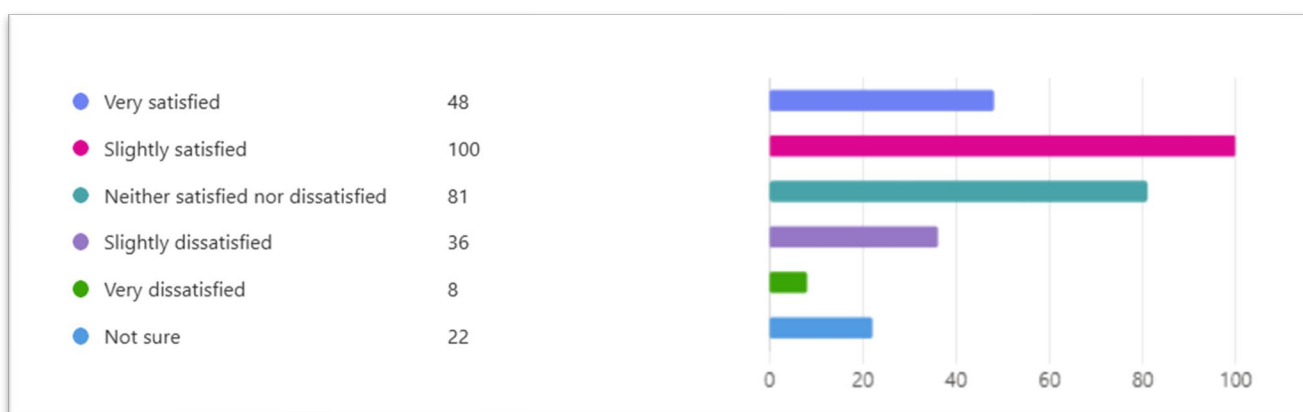


Figure 13: Young People Survey

32. Many young people felt a strong desire for more detailed information provided to them when they started making decisions about their options after Year 11, and many felt they were left to conduct their own research as to what was available.

Young People Survey

"I felt that I independently had to carry out research in order to discover my options when I had made the decision to not sit A Levels"

"I had chosen it myself as I had no help, mostly took advice from careers Wales quizzes"

"I did not know I could resit my core GCSEs at college"

33. Parents were generally more positive than young people about the advice received, but some dissatisfaction remains. Of the 90 respondents who answered this question in the parent/guardian survey, 37% were 'somewhat satisfied' with the advice they received in supporting their child. 30% were 'very satisfied' and 16% were 'somewhat dissatisfied'. 13% of those who answered were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with 3% stating they were 'very dissatisfied'.

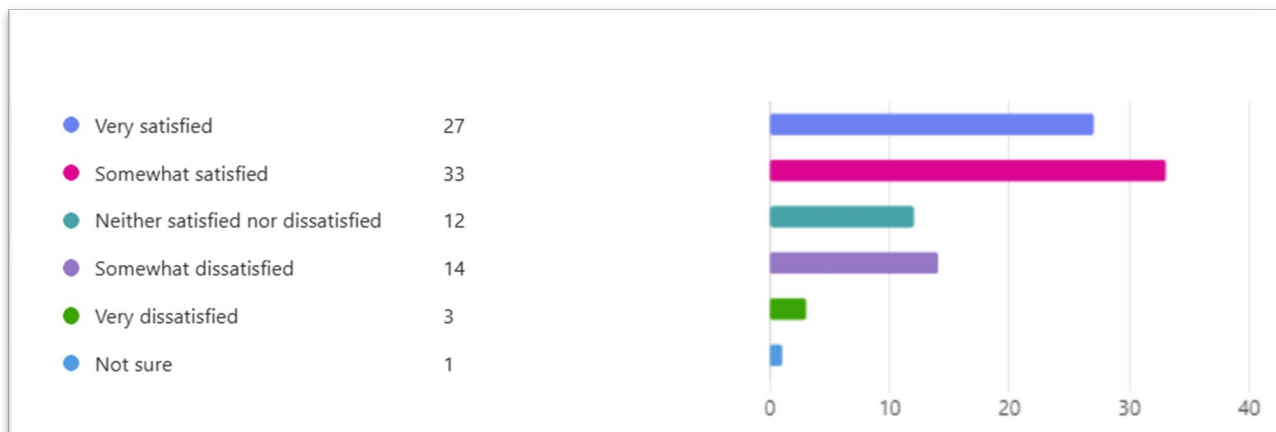


Figure 14: Parent/Guardian Survey

34. Many parents noted that despite receiving some information, they were left unsupported in navigating the often complex information surrounding post-16 qualifications and their implications.

Parent/Guardian Survey

"We have had to look online as to where to go...both my sons 18 and 17 in years have had no guidance at all"

Perceptions of whether enough information was provided about post-Year 11 options

35. While most young people felt adequately informed, a significant minority expressed uncertainty or felt underinformed. Of the 295 respondents who answered this question in the young people survey, 66% felt they had received enough information about their post-16 opportunities. 20% did not feel they had received adequate information and advice, with 15% stating they were not sure if they had received enough information.

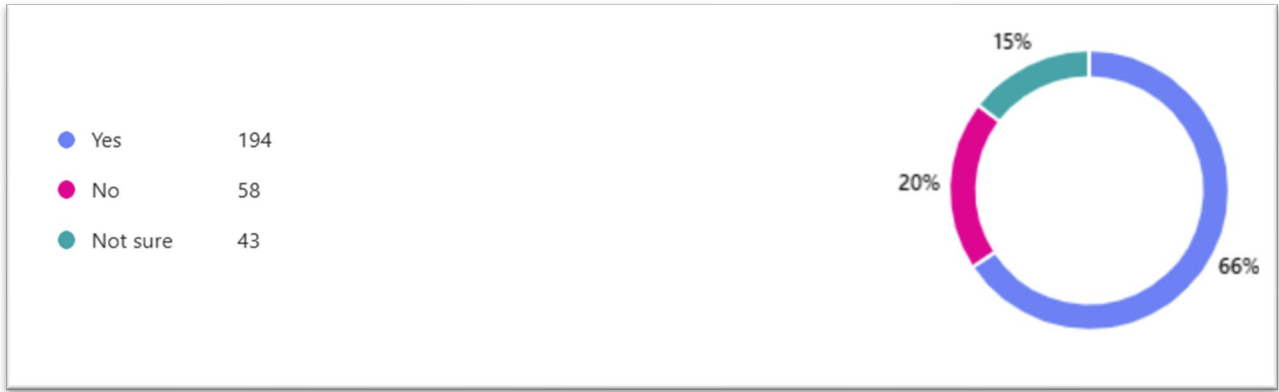


Figure 15: Young People Survey

36. Over half of parents also felt underinformed about post-16 options for their child. Of the 140 respondents who answered this question in the parent/guardian survey, 51% stated they did not receive enough advice and 29% stated that they did. 19% of respondents said that they weren't sure if they had received enough information and advice.

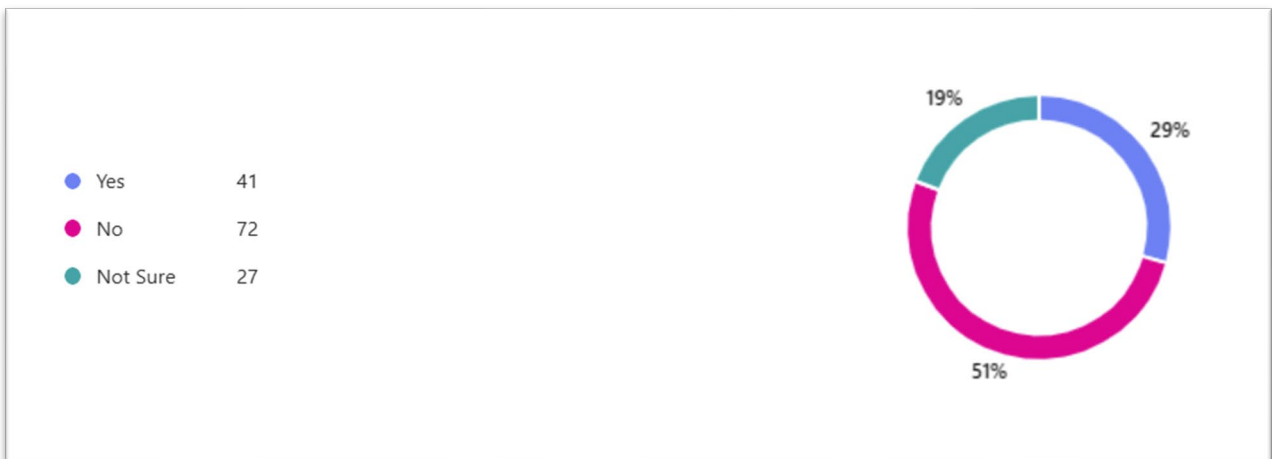


Figure 16: Parent/Guardian Survey

37. Many parents/guardians and young people noted how confusing navigating the guidance provided can be. As a result, young people can miss opportunities and make uninformed decisions.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“Guidance on what options our child has if they don’t stay at school”

“What courses are out there, what options are available”

38. Young people also felt the advice they received was too general and wasn't tailored to their individual interests, abilities, or career goals. Young people shared concerns such as, "They don't know me or what I want to do," highlighting the need for more individualised support. This was also emphasised by the fact many young people felt there was a lack of inclusivity and accessibility for those with additional needs or from EOTAS.

Young People Survey

"I was home-schooled and didn't really receive any advice from anyone straight after year 11."

"I was discriminated against for my additional needs. I wish my options could have been more inclusive"

Further/higher education options

39. Many respondents expressed a lack of information about non-traditional post-16 options such as apprenticeships, vocational courses, and gap year opportunities. Some young people noted that they were only presented with traditional academic options like A-Levels. One respondent said, "[the] Only option was college, sixth form, or jobs."

Young People Survey

"More information about going into a trade or engineering"

"I was not told about any non-mainstream education options, this would have been good to know before attempting a mainstream course fresh from year 11."

"If you wanted to take a gap year, the opportunities available to take during that year, such as internships."

40. Many parents/guardians felt frustration that their children were being pushed towards "conventional", academic routes without being informed of other viable options. Many felt left alone to navigate options and routes into less traditional education opportunities. Many also expressed a need for personalised

guidance to suit the diverse needs of all young people, avoiding one size only approach.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“There was an expectation that my son would go on to do A levels. There wasn’t much information about apprenticeships and if my son hadn’t had his parents support to explore different options he might not have found the course. “

“Not enough advice on apprenticeships when your child is not academically minded.”

We have been lucky in being able to find our own options but the system doesn't have the capacity or capability to be creative about individual solutions.”

“There’s too much emphasis on young people to go onto university after A Levels.”

“There is so much ambiguity about alternatives,”

41. Young people/parents guardians also expressed a desire for more detailed information about college courses and their content. Many young people felt that they had not received enough information about how higher and further education course content could affect future career outcomes.

Young People Survey

“The expectations were quite linear. I wish there had been more explanations on path and what qualifications can help you do what.”

“More information outside of just continuing A Levels. In year 11 it is very much pushed upon students to continue studying by carrying out their A Levels. There was very minimal discussion and information available about the various other options available.”

“It was not clear how much of an impact your A level or Btec choices would have made. For me, I knew what I wanted to do but for a lot of people they did not understand the options and choices they could have after y11.”

"If my qualification levels were good enough to pursue my chosen career"

42. Several young people also expressed a lack of clarity around universities, wishing they had received more detailed guidance on courses and entry requirements.

Young People Survey

"More information about Oxbridge applications and clearer guidance on which universities are best for me."

"I wish I had known to look at Uni courses and what subjects they required. I wish I could've been to taster sessions of subjects I didn't know much about."

"I told them I wanted to go to college and then Uni, they wouldn't talk about Uni except for showing me a few websites but they wouldn't tell me the names of the websites so it didn't help much with Uni."

43. As a result of this lack of clarity, several young people expressed regret about their choices, stating they had a lack of understanding and knowledge about course content, career pathways and what options were available to them.

Young People Survey

"When colleges etc tell us about A levels they do not talk about the impact they have on uni choices etc they think very short term and seemingly for themselves I think we should be educated more on the impacts of our decision of later education for later life"

"Subject content was not explained enough and I now regret one of the subjects I took as it was not explained well enough when applying in year 11"

"I knew what I wanted to do and how my choices would impact my future. But I don't think lots of others understood that for certain courses in uni, you needed to have done certain a levels."

Insufficient career advice

44. Many young people felt they were not adequately prepared to make informed decisions about their future due to a lack of career focused discussions, with some stating they didn't even know what options were available to them until later in their post-16 pathway.

Young People Survey

"There should have been lessons focused on discussing our future choices and options, including what qualifications, experience, and grades we might need to get into university/jobs. Everything I know is due to my own research, which I have no issue with, however I had only really thought about it when I had to and I feel like there should be more support in schools to help students figure out what to do, how they can do it, and set them with a plan which they can follow with an end goal in sight. I think this is especially important to implement in schools located in lower income/deprived areas (mine, for example). Many children who live in poverty, in social housing, with absent parents often lack guidance in terms of careers."

"Career advisors ignored Year 11 students after finding out that they wanted to stay on the school 6th form."

45. Many parents/guardians also felt that career advice and support services were inadequate or underdeveloped in schools and colleges. Some mentioned that their children had never seen a careers advisor or had only received minimal advice, often online, with little follow-up or practical support. Some felt this advice needed to be more timely to allow for more informed decision making.

Parent/Guardian Survey

"School careers service needs to better understand their pupils not just sit them on computer to answer yes/no questions. i feel understanding and talking to pupils will help them recognise their skills/potential and tap into other career pathways. so they can do further research. we had one evening where soemone talked about alevels or colleges courses but there isnt anything to follow this up in a practical way to develop child's interest in certain areas of work. id

have wanted to know more about where i could go to support my child to make an informed decision.”

“Careers advice is so basic and most online, no real help given.”

Disillusionment in the system

46. Parents/guardians emphasised the need for improved support and communication systems that provide clearer information and better assistance. The current shortcomings in these areas have contributed to growing disillusionment with the entire post-16 process.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“My experience supporting a young person after Year 11 in Wales has been extremely challenging due to the lack of accessible and reliable advice. The current system feels fragmented and difficult to navigate, leaving both young people and their families without the necessary guidance to make informed decisions about further education, apprenticeships, or employment opportunities. The lack of clear communication and tailored support can lead to confusion and missed opportunities. Improvements are urgently needed to provide consistent, accessible, and personalised support to ensure young people can successfully transition into their next steps with confidence.”

“Careers Wales are in need of a major overhaul. Personality tests for suitable employment are not helpful and are an out of date measure of skills.”

Information about financial support

47. Some parents/guardians who responded to this question noted the lack of transparency regarding changes to financial support such as EMA or benefits, once their children are over 16 and 18. This has increased pressure on low and single-income families.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“Nothing to advise parents on the financial impact of higher education after the child reaches 16 and 18 (lose benefits, reduction in benefits) very little help for those on lower/modest/one income families.”

“Being a single mother who works 40+ hours a week just to try and keep a roof over his head and food and warmth in the house I am finding it extremely difficult to explain the reasons why his friends get EMA, yet he can't receive it.”

48. Across responses, there is a strong and consistent demand for a more inclusive, diverse, and comprehensive system that offers a variety of pathways, enabling students to explore different career options without encountering unnecessary obstacles

Inadequate work experience opportunities

49. Opportunities to undertake work experience seems to be limited. Of the 295 respondents who answered this question in the young people survey, **only 24%** said they had received an opportunity to undertake work experience. 60% of those who answered said they had not been given an opportunity.

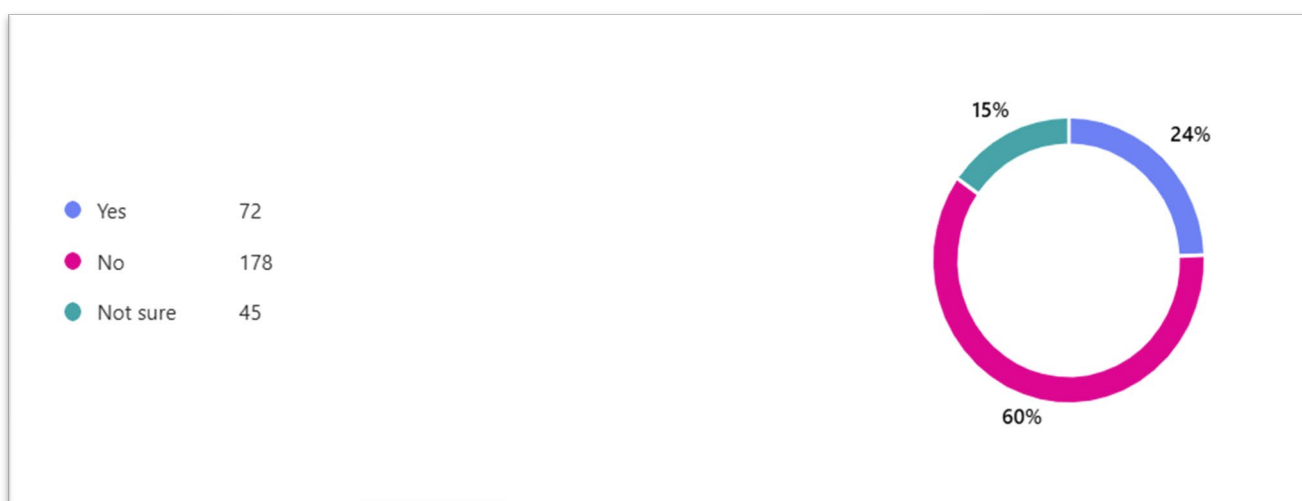


Figure 17: Young People Survey

50. These findings were also reflected in the parent/guardian survey as the majority of parents/guardians (60%) stated that their child had not been offered the opportunity to undertake work experience. 24% said their child had been

offered the opportunity, with 15% stating that they were not sure.

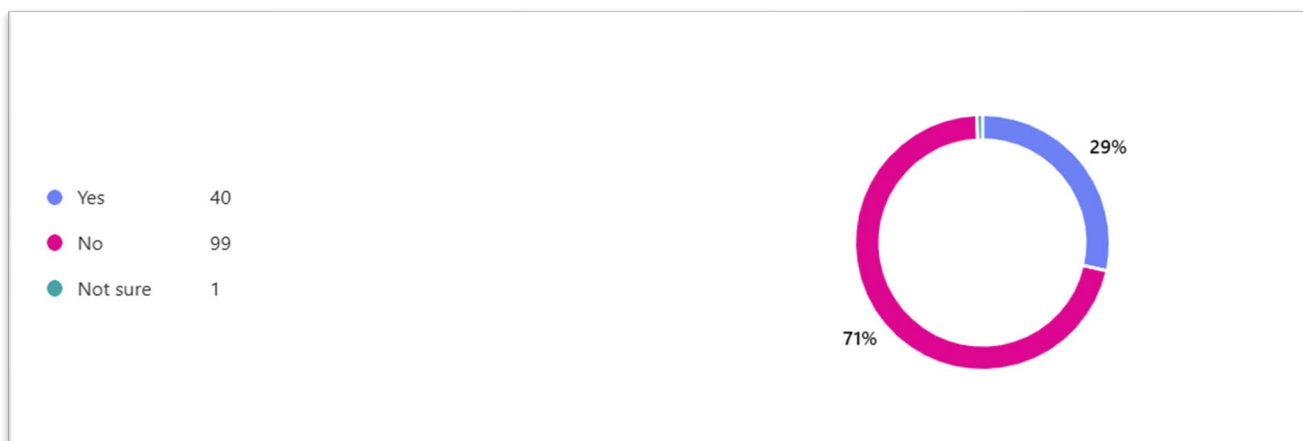


Figure 18: Parent/Guardian Survey

Career insights and influencing decision making

51. The responses from over 300 participants across both surveys suggest that work experience has a positive impact on young people’s ability to make informed choices on their post-year 11 journey, and can give them invaluable insight into the world of work.

52. Many of the young people who had undertaken work experience found it helpful in clarifying their career interests and what future paths to pursue. Many found it useful to gain an insight into the profession, which was helpful in influencing their post-16 decisions. Parents/guardians also reported that their child had found the work experience useful as it helped them “decide on a career path” in giving them an “insight into what career they would like to go into”.

Young People Survey

“it was very usefull because if i didnt have this experience i wouldnt know what to do after year 11”

“I gained a better understanding of the job and this helped me consider future careers I could explore”

“very useful as it guided me in picking the right course for me”

“it helped me decide which course i wanted to do in college”

53. Some respondents appreciated that the experience gave them **practical insights** to professions. For example, one respondent found it interesting to see how things worked “behind the scenes” in the hospitality industry and while another appreciated seeing “other trades on site”.

54. Many **young people who had not undertaken work experience** placements expressed **disappointment** that they had not received this opportunity to obtain experience that aligned with their career interests. Some respondents also noted that undertaking any work experience in a field they were interested in would have influenced them in making better decisions regarding their further/higher education choices and education pathways.

Young People Survey

“Something in the creative industries to understand there were more pathways than universities. “

“I have almost straight As at GCSE level and so thought I had to do A-levels since I had good grades even though I didn't want to do them. I hated doing A levels and failed 2/3 of my subjects. If I had the opportunity to do work placement with animals I would have realised much sooner that this is what I want to do. On this course I am achieving much better grades than last year because now I'm doing something I'm actually passionate about and can see a future in. “

55. Many parents/guardians also expressed a desire for their young people to have had the opportunity to gain experience in a specific career path they are interested in such as sports, law enforcement or I.T. They believe that had they been given work experience in these areas, it would have helped their children make more informed decisions about their future.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“Experience in skilled trade sector , like electrical , plumbing so they could have a taste of what it's like before committing to a course.”

“Shadowing a plumber to check if it was the right career choice”

Lack of support and guidance in arranging work experience

56. Some parents/guardians expressed frustration at having to arrange work experience placement themselves, due to a lack of direction from schools and local authorities. This was particularly felt by the parent/guardian of a young person with additional needs, who was not adequately supported in undertaking a work experience placement, placing additional strain on the family.

Parent/Guardian Survey

"It was up to me to find work experience for my son. The school didn't know how to do it. There was no support to enable him to do it. I found a couple of experiences for him. The first one cancelled due to sickness and the other one was 4 hours of weeding. I had to support him because there was no support from school and because he is disabled he needs support. My father died that week but I still needed to support my son because there was nobody else to do."

"Parents and pupils were expected to source opportunities without assistance and without sufficient notice. My child came to work with me for a few days, just so that he would be able to say he's done it."

"I had to go myself to dog groomers and other animal centres to get the experience and the vocational work placement she needs. Little support from the college. Really poor transition and poor work experience. Very disappointment and had we not been pro active parents she would end up a NEET."

57. Many parents/guardians expressed frustration at schools and colleges for not providing any opportunity at all to undertake work experience. Parents of students who are home schooled also found it difficult to find information regarding possible work experience opportunities

Parent/Guardian Survey

"There has been no mention of work experience at all for my son's year"

"Work experience has never been offered or supported in my child's school."

‘Real world’ experiences

58. Many respondents across both surveys expressed a desire for young people to be given an opportunity to experience the “real world” and to understand what a professional environment is like. Some respondents also noted that work experience provides an opportunity to improve their future employability prospects.

Young People Survey

“I would have just like the opportunity to work.”

“Practical work to see what a full time job is like”

“Any type of work experience would be helpful to anyone, since its hard to get a job without it.”

“Something to give everyone from 16-18 experience with working so it is easier for teenagers to get employed for work as it is hard to get a job without any experience.”

“Even just something small and office based so that you can get used to a work environment.”

“Office work because before coming into an office job i had no clue what it was going to be like at all.”

Parent/Guardian Survey

“Two weeks anywhere, to appreciate the length of a working day.”

“Any. Something to give them an understanding of full time work”

“some working and training experience are very important for them. Because no company will give an inexperienced young man a chance to do work.”

Need for practical, life skills

59. Some respondents called for schools and colleges to include practical life skills in their guidance and advice, such as how to manage finances, get a job or cook.

Young People Survey

“How to live in society. i was taught bisnuss maths and english as mandatory and no optoin for how to get a job set up a bank account how taxes work how to shop affordably or cook. any of these had to come from my parents some of which they wernt sure of.”

“No work experience offered even though promised. No factory visits

Social and interpersonal skills

60. Many young people also expressed a **desire to undertake work experience to build on their social and interpersonal skills**, with some noting that they would appreciate the opportunity to develop their confidence, teamwork communication abilities.

Young People Survey

“I'd have liked the experience to be in a more social setting because I'm not confident socially”

“Any kind of social volunteering work is great experience for anyone and builds on key skills.”

“Any retail work or social care work to develop interpersonal skills”

“to experience being a part of a work environment.”

“I would have liked to take volunteer because it would have increased my confidence before going into work and what the environment would be like.”

“Customer service, it would allow me to socialise and become more outgoing in a working environment setting e up for interviews having less anxiety when going for a better job.”

Challenges and barriers

61. Many young people did answer that they were “not sure” or “didn’t know” what they would have liked to have pursued given the opportunity, indicating

that they might need further support and guidance in pursuing available options to them.

62. One respondent expressed frustration at the bureaucracy of health and safety regulations which limit young people's ability to undertake meaningful work experience placements.

"Work experience would be a great idea but health and safety regulations keep big employers from doing so. Work experience was the best way for me when I was growing up to find a path. Young adults today are let down by the system as employers won't bring 15 year old into the workplace due to HS&E regulations and employment laws" Parent/Guardian Survey

Lack of available apprenticeships

63. Parents/guardians noted that even though "employers tend to choose experience over academic qualifications", they were **frustrated at the lack of available trade apprenticeships for their children**. Many parents/guardians noted the difficulty in gaining apprenticeships for their children and how this can affect their future employability.

Parent/Guardian survey

"...more needs to be done to be able to help find apprenticeships for trades such as plumbing. This is not a college problem, it's a problem that needs to be looked at, at a higher level. Currently, apprenticeships are scarce and students are potentially wasting years at college with no route way into their preferred trade. If apprenticeships are not available there should be some other means of getting into the trades that are easily accessible for students."

"More help in gaining an apprenticeship, my son is in his third year of college studying electrical and can't get an apprenticeship, it feels like it's a waste of time, we have contacted so many firms but no one will take him in or give him a chance."

ALN support and provision

Improved ALN specific support and guidance

64. Parents/guardians supporting young people with additional learning needs (ALN) feel their children **are not adequately or fairly supported** in their post-16 journeys. Some reported experiencing “**segregated pathways**” which felt alienating.

65. Responses indicate that parents/guardians also feel ALN pupils are not receiving the necessary support to navigate choices in further education. This has led to frustration with schools and colleges, as they feel their child's needs are not being adequately met. This is supported by responses from young people with additional needs who feel they are not being supported.

Parent/Guardian Survey

“For learners with ALN they need a more strength focused approach as academic attainment may not be the dominant factor in their choices. We didn't know which college was best for ALN and the transition to FE was really poor. We had to organise it ourselves between the ALNCOs and there's no assurance from FE that they can meet needs. There was no trusted adult and no TA. I have had to fight for a conversation overall very poor for a learner who is motivated and has aspirations. Very disappointed with the process. Hear great things from other colleges but our experience was somewhat different.”

“Written into the ALN act is the UN Convention on Rights of Disabled people. In the convention article 24 and general comment 4 it states that disabled children/young people/adults have the right to inclusive education. In there is explains that special schools/courses for certain types of individuals based on their impairment isn't inclusive. When my son was looking at college option there was a heavy sales pitch for ILS course or 6th form in the local Special school - this isn't in line with the UNCRDP. Basically nobody has designed college in that way. We managed to get a place on the only course considered available. More understanding and thought into how to make these courses inclusive and accessible is needed.”

Young People Survey

"I don't know what kind of information I received in year 11 because I didn't speak very well and I didn't understand."

Work experience

66. Parents/guardians of young people with additional learning needs felt let down by the lack of support that catered to the specific needs of their children, which hindered their ability to gain work experience.

"I think they would have liked to experience a real job they would be able to manage. I've found even where schools offer work experience this does not extend to ALN pupils who would need support with them so excuses are made as to why they cannot attend."

Parent/Guardian Survey

Barriers to access and inadequate ALN support

67. Many young people highlighted the impact that the additional barriers they faced, made it very difficult for them to access the right support. As a result, some young people are left feeling excluded or dismissed in their desire to pursue certain post-16 pathways.

Young People Survey

"I had a lot of absences from school due to poor mental health and hospitalisations. Although I was supported thoroughly by the council with my education I wasn't given a lot of information about further education. It was only thanks to my social worker contacting the college for me to discuss my options and support arrangements that I joined college and have been very successful here. More support should be given to students who struggle in the school environment because we are just as intelligent and deserving of further education"

"I wanted to know what I wanted to do since primary and I did ask for advice....because I have difficulties with doing research and also locations. I only got two meetings and I was told that because of my

dyslexia, he doubted I'd get into college, he didn't even know me but assumed I was stupid. I just wish they talked more about Uni because I'm really interested in going but he refused to talk to me about it."

68. Several responses by parents/guardians highlight the need for **personalised, proactive support for students with learning disabilities, mental health issues, or physical disabilities**. There is a call for more tailored, individualised support to help these students transition successfully into post-16 education or work. Many parents feel isolated in their efforts to create their own opportunities for their children, in a system they do not feel has aspirations for young people with additional learning needs.

Parent/Guardian Survey

"It was through my efforts that my child had transitioning support to move from school to college. If a child was not statemented then no extra support was offered. Considering the policy of my local authority is to try and avoid statementing where possible, that meant a lot of kids may not have been offered the support they need to move and remain in further education."

"For ALN learners they need a more bespoke approach and access to ND friendly employment. Improve knowledge of ND and ALN for mainstream learners who have frequently high IQs but may have spiky profiles and flourish in environments that meet their needs. Poor understanding of ND and ALN across all education especially FE and HE. If parents are clueless then how will the young people cope?"

"Since finishing year 11 and attending a pathways course we have seen our child regress mentally which is very upsetting. There should be more available to empower them to achieve and keep learning. Most people with learning needs can greatly benefit from continuing education type environments. Keeping the mind stimulated and surrounded by the real world."

"Schools have low expectations of learning-disabled children. Often those children could do the qualifications if the teachers knew how to teach them. Also, qualifications need to be accessible so that all children can be educated together but perhaps have different levels of achievement within that The ONLY things available for my son

are special schools/ colleges or day services - there is no aspiration within the system for him. By grouping young people together according to ability this excludes a lot of children and young people from reaching their potential. My son really wants a job. He needs money to pay for things that he likes to buy for himself. He cannot engage with his mainstream friends and be included in things they do because he isn't able to have the same experiences as them. He needs to keep active and engaged as he has a progressive genetic condition so activity is really important - also being connected with friends is important outside of college and school but disabled children aren't encouraged to mix with non-disabled young people."

3. Focus group and interview findings within ALN setting

Work experience

69. One participant studying Independent Living Skills at College was able to undertake a pilot scheme where they spent two days a week at a work placement taking care of animals, which they emphasised they really enjoyed. They expressed a preference for practical work placements and hands-on opportunities over being in college. This was because in college they “do the same thing all the time” and hands-on experience provided them with more variety and opportunities.

70. Alternative education facilities, such as the one attended by the group, have supported participants in gaining work experience outside of mainstream routes and avenues. The participants have found this experience helpful in developing their skills such as grounds maintenance, animal care, gardening and farming.

71. None of the participants had received the opportunity to undertake work experience prior to leaving post-compulsory education. One participant said they would have liked the option to gain work experience “on a farm” especially with the “cattle and livestock” as this is a job they wish to undertake in the future.

Career advice

72. One participant said that they only received advice about what to do after school at the “very end” of their education. Another stated that they had received

some meetings with Careers Wales which gave some advice on volunteer opportunities and work experience **but did not provide support in terms of longer term or future employment.**

73. Another participant had **not received any advice** and had **no information** about what options were available to them after they left college.

74. Facilitators of the alternative education setting expressed concern at the lack of opportunities for learners with additional needs, who do not receive any structured support on employment after they finish college. **Many young people with additional needs therefore stay in college until the age of 25 after which they have “nowhere to go.”**

4. Solutions

Information Accessibility

- Data collected from the engagement programme suggests that schools and colleges should provide clear and proactive help in advising parents and young people about available avenues and how to access them. This includes better communication and collaboration between schools, parents and education authorities.

Enhanced career advice

- There is a call for more comprehensive and personalised career advice which caters to the diverse needs of all students, as well as a need for a broader education curriculum.
- Respondents called for career taster sessions and opportunities for students to explore a range of careers before making final decisions.

Apprenticeship and vocational opportunities

- A call was made for improved information and guidance about vocational pathways and apprenticeships, with a focus on schools and colleges offering more support to help students secure apprenticeship placements.
- Ensure schools give unbiased advice about all available options in further education, not just their own sixth form.

Work experience opportunities

- Respondents asked for schools to take more responsibility and provide direction and support in arranging work experience placements to help students feel more informed about suitable post-16. This also includes ensuring disabled students or those with additional barriers to learning are included.

Support for Disabled Learners

- There should be more inclusive pathways for disabled children and young people, ensuring they have access to mainstream society and educational opportunities post-16. This includes better training for staff and more tailored support.

More guidance on flexible, 'non-academic' routes

- Responses echoed previous answers calling for better clarity on vocational courses and opportunities to be provided to those who want to follow non-traditional routes. Again, many young people commented that they were pressurised by schools to stay on in school sixth forms, or pursue university courses, rather than explore other options.