



**Speakers for Schools: Curriculum and Assessment Review**  
**Submission to Call for Evidence**

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment and qualifications pathways

**11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?**

The review outlines one of its purposes as ensuring a curriculum that prepares all students for life and work. To achieve this, careers education must become a statutory entitlement for every young person by reinstating it in the National Curriculum, as it was removed in 2012. Careers education should be embedded within, and explicitly integrated throughout, the curriculum, with high-quality work experience as a key component.

We are concerned that work experience, of which two weeks has been committed to by the Government, has been excluded from the scope of the review. The omission of work experience overlooks an important aspect of what should be included to fulfil the review's purpose. For the education system to best prepare young people for the modern and future job markets, ensuring they leave school with the knowledge and skills needed for employment, work experience must be embedded within careers education, which should be explicitly integrated throughout the curriculum. This is distinct from careers guidance, which should accompany careers education, as an essential part of an education that truly prepares young people for employment (OECD, 2024). Our impact data and research show that this is especially crucial for less advantaged young people, who benefit the most from work experience (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024).

Another area for improvement is a more explicit focus on skills within the curriculum. There needs to be a clear framework for applying knowledge through the practice of essential life and work skills (e.g., communication, problem-solving, teamwork), as well as subject-specific skills (e.g., analysis, evaluation). This focus on skills must be balanced alongside the delivery of subject knowledge. Knowledge should be applied through explicit skills learning and practice.

A further area to target is ensuring that each subject has clear, explicit links to careers, with the curriculum integrating real-world career contexts to promote meaningful engagement in learning. Throughout the key stages, but particularly in key stages 3, 4 and 5, students should learn about the application of subject knowledge and skills in various modern industries, with different career pathways presented. Work experience should be an integral part of this learning, offered as an entitlement for all students.

Educators within our network and members of our Youth Council strongly support the recommendations outlined above:

‘Learning having a link to careers motivates students hugely but there is currently no agreed framework’ so the offer is dependent on the institution or teacher. ‘Every topic needs a link to careers and learning must be relevant to engage learners and make the learning useful beyond passing exams’. (FE College Lecturer, East Midlands)

The curriculum should have, ‘Clear links to careers and learning should have meaning attached to it so we understand the significance of what we are learning... and not just that we are getting a GCSE from it’. (Ryan, 17, South West)

While many schools work hard to deliver high-quality career provision, educators currently must rely on existing resources to incorporate it into the curriculum, resulting in inconsistent delivery and unequal access. Students from affluent families or those with university-educated parents have a significant advantage in understanding how the education and careers systems work, and how to navigate them (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). By embedding careers education within the curriculum, all young people will receive a minimum standard of careers learning, which they are entitled to in a curriculum designed to prepare them for life and work.

### References

**OECD** (2024), *Challenging Social Inequality Through Career Guidance: Insights from International Data and Practice*  
[https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/challenging-social-inequality-through-career-guidance\\_619667e2-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/challenging-social-inequality-through-career-guidance_619667e2-en)

**Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation** (2024) *Assumed Knowledge – A Hidden Barrier to Social Mobility*  
<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SfS-Assumed-Knowledge-Report-Findings.pdf>  
<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Things-worth-knowing-Oct-2024.pdf>

### Section 3: Social Justice and Inclusion

**12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?**

There exists a disadvantage gap of knowledge of the education and careers systems. Currently, young people from affluent families or with university-educated parents are at a distinct advantage in understanding how the education and careers systems operate and how to navigate them (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). This issue is particularly pressing, as the gap in university participation between disadvantaged students and their peers is now at a record high (GOV.UK, 2024). The playing field of access to top universities, training courses and careers is

not levelled by the current curriculum and does not do enough to break down barriers of opportunity for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

## References

**Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation (2024)** *Assumed Knowledge – A Hidden Barrier to Social Mobility*

<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SfS-Assumed-Knowledge-Report-Findings.pdf>

<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Things-worth-knowing-Oct-2024.pdf>

**GOV.UK (2023)** *Widening Participation in Higher Education*

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

**15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]**

Work experience and careers education are enablers that support better outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people. Our impact data shows that work experience, which offers significant benefits to all young people, is particularly valuable for those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. It supports narrowing the disadvantage gaps in outcomes and opportunities, as young people from more affluent families or with university-educated parents have a greater understanding of education and careers systems (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). This is in urgent need of addressing, given recent figures show that the disadvantage gap for widening participation in Higher Education is the largest on record (GOV.UK, 2024). Work experience increases awareness, knowledge, understanding, and confidence in careers to particularly high levels for pupils eligible for Free School Meals. Therefore, raising the emphasis on careers education throughout the curriculum will ensure that all young people are exposed to valuable work-related experiences while at school. This will help demystify both the further and higher education systems, as well as careers, providing essential insights for all learners.

Improved careers education, including work experience, and the embedding of life and work skills within the curriculum should be allocated sufficient time and resources. To accommodate these essential learnings, we propose reducing some of the heavy content load in the curriculum, allowing more time for careers learning and related skills development. Educators we consulted expressed a strong desire for less content in favour of deeper application of learning to life and work, in order to better prepare young people for life beyond school.

## References

**Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation (2024) *Assumed Knowledge – A Hidden Barrier to Social Mobility***

<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SfS-Assumed-Knowledge-Report-Findings.pdf>

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**GOV.UK (2023) *Widening Participation in Higher Education***

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

#### Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

**18. To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?**

Educators and students alike suggest that removing one topic per subject per year in the secondary curriculum to include an explicit focus on careers within subject topics in both English and maths would be beneficial. This adjustment would allow more time to embed knowledge within skills and connect learning more effectively to life and careers, which would motivate students and better and more equitably prepare them for life beyond school.

English: Our Youth Council members and the educators we consulted expressed that the English curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4, does not adequately prepare learners to apply their skills and knowledge to contexts beyond education and examinations. The connections between the curriculum content and its applications beyond the GCSE syllabus should be explicitly highlighted, so that all teachers can link the skills taught to practical uses in life, further studies, and work. Additionally, some existing content should be removed to make space for English language skills essential for employment. The English curriculum should ensure that secondary-level learners develop abilities in writing, speaking, presenting, communicating, and discussion, aligned with workplace requirements. Both educators and young people emphasised the importance of incorporating skills such as CV writing, job applications, personal statements, virtual and in-person communication skills (both written and spoken), and interview and presentation skills. In a recent survey, young people identified work experience as the most helpful factor in preparing them for future careers, followed by employability support like CV reviews, interview skills, and job applications. Over half (54%) wanted more help with CV and job application writing, while 44% sought more support with interview performance (Speakers for Schools, 2024). An Assistant Head from the North West remarked, 'Much more focus should be on personal presentation, interview techniques, and application forms.' These are essential employability skills that should be a core part of the English curriculum at secondary level.

Maths: For a strong foundation in mathematics, the curriculum should ensure learners are not only taught maths but also explicitly understand the skills they are practising and their relevance to life and various careers. They should be encouraged to ‘think like a mathematician’ and apply maths in a range of real-world contexts. Our Youth Council notes that there is variability in how effectively this is currently done; because it is not part of the statutory curriculum, it relies on individual teachers’ or schools’ approaches. Application of maths skills and careers links should therefore be explicitly included in the curriculum to ensure a high standard for all students. Our Youth Council envisions a maths curriculum that brings skills and knowledge to life and is relevant to the modern world, incorporating financial education, links to physics, engineering, and computing, and applying maths knowledge across industries beyond those traditionally associated with maths.

Zephaniah, 18, from the North West, noted that students often, ‘Don’t know why the maths learning is useful for life after the exam.’ An Assistant Head from the North West added that the maths curriculum should include more on life skills, money and finances, and applications to various work roles. Educators suggested that maths throughout the curriculum should be more applicable to real-life skills, like what is offered in the optional AS level ‘Core Maths’ and ‘Functional Skills’ programmes, where maths knowledge is grounded in real-life contexts. Such applied and contextual approaches should be used more extensively across secondary-level maths.

## References


**Speakers for Schools** (2024 forthcoming) *Tracking Aspirations*

## Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

### **26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?**

We know that a substantial proportion of young people have a limited understanding of potential career opportunities within specific industries. At the same time, employers are increasingly concerned about the future talent pipeline. Embedding careers education—of which work experience should be a key part—alongside careers advice and guidance, is a tangible way to better support young people in acquiring the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life, and work. Many schools are working hard to embed the Gatsby Benchmarks, with staff linking their teaching to the world of work. Done well, careers education can improve overall educational performance. However, educators often cite a need for more resources and curriculum time to better prepare students for life beyond school. The curriculum should set out a statutory standard that ensures greater equality of provision for all students, regardless of where they go to school, helping achieve the goal of better preparing them for life and work.

Within the curriculum, the teaching of essential skills must be explicitly named and made statutory across subjects, so that all learners are taught the necessary skills for life and work, with



opportunities to practise and apply them. Our research shows that young people want more support and guidance on explicit aspects of career preparation: 31% want more support in understanding how employers recruit, 29% want to learn more about the skills and qualifications required for jobs, and over a quarter ask for better guidance on how to enter industries they are unfamiliar with or start a business (Speakers for Schools, 2024).

Principally, this can be achieved by restoring careers education within the curriculum. A Careers Lead from the North West comments, 'The lack of a framework that all staff have to follow makes careers education much harder.' There should be clear links to careers education and skills in every subject. As one educator notes, 'This motivates students hugely; learning must be relevant to engage learners and make it useful beyond passing exams.' Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, which embeds careers education within its framework, offers valuable examples of how to feasibly integrate careers education into the curriculum. Additionally, a secondary teacher from South England highlights the need for enhanced careers education within the curriculum, saying, 'Including information about various industries and career paths would help students make more informed decisions.' The inclusion of careers education within the curriculum could also help build stronger connections with industries, providing more real-world learning opportunities, such as project-based learning. Examples of such learning can be seen in schools like Studio Schools, where learning is integrated with skills through projects and work-based experiences.

For education to properly prepare young people for life and work, as Zephaniah, 18, from the North West, says, 'Teachers should know how their subject is relevant and can be applied in jobs we might want.' Effective careers education requires supporting teachers in implementing it meaningfully.

This can be achieved feasibly and with consideration for workload, through methods such as:

- **Restoring the statutory duty to provide careers education** within the secondary curriculum (as in Scotland, where the Career Education Standard is delivered through the Curriculum for Excellence).
- **Explicitly articulating careers education within subject curricula** for different topics.
- **Reducing high-volume knowledge content** in each subject to create space for applying knowledge through explicit skills practice.
- **Explicitly referencing and practising work- and life-related skills** in the curriculum across all subjects, such as project management, collaboration, self-management, and team leadership (e.g., the Studio Schools approach).
- **Teaching specific employability knowledge and skills** as part of the English and Maths curriculum (e.g., the 'Mathematics for Work and Life' topic, with a focus on applied mathematics and analysis skills, as seen in Scotland).
- **Increasing representation of diverse, inspirational people and career pathways.**
- **Providing more metacognition opportunities** for students to reflect on their skills, strengths, and learning opportunities within each subject.

To support educators:

- **The National Curriculum should include clear, explicit links** to careers and skills across all subjects.
- **Reducing content volume** to ensure teachers have the time and space to embed skills alongside knowledge and deliver careers education within the curriculum.
- **Providing frameworks and high-quality resources** to support teachers in connecting their subject to the world of work. For example, Oak Academy offers a significant database of resources for the entire curriculum, demonstrating a central resource available that can support educators. This could be expanded to provide materials linking the curriculum to careers. Similarly, there could be a provision of up-to-date lesson inserts for teachers (as done in Scotland's 'My World of Work' programme).
- **Making use of existing resources** that link curriculum content to careers, provided by industry experts, to support schools.
- **Establishing local careers forums** (connecting industry, colleges, and schools) to share expertise, enhance CPD, ask questions, and exchange resources.
- **Utilising the expertise and programmes** provided by specialist organisations (e.g., Speakers for Schools).
- **Promoting the use of 'career champions'** within subjects to further educators' professional development, upskill staff, and support colleagues in developing and disseminating expertise related to the modern workforce within their subject areas.

## References

**Speakers for Schools** (2024 forthcoming) *Tracking Aspirations*

### **27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?**

The 16-19 qualification pathways must embed a careers focus within all options to support sustained transitions into employment, further study, or training. All post-16 learners should have clear, explicit links—regardless of the pathway they are undertaking—showing how the knowledge and skills they are acquiring connect to careers and enhance their employability. They should also be given the opportunity to reflect on their skills, interests, motivations, and talents, empowering them to take an active role in shaping the next steps of their education, training, or employment journey. Work experience should be a key component of their careers education, complimented by careers guidance.

Our research shows that almost twice as many young people want more support in entering unfamiliar industries compared to those seeking assistance with university applications (Speakers for Schools, 2024a). Our Youth Council members have remarked that while the current curriculum

does much to prepare students who wish to pursue Higher Education, other pathways still lack the same level of esteem and attention. Young people feel they do not receive the same level of support in accessing the knowledge and skills needed for non-Higher Education pathways and employment overall. Furthermore, our research highlights significant disadvantage gaps in knowledge of the education system (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). Young people also have unequal access to the insights, information, and support that play a crucial role in determining whether talented individuals apply to top universities (Speakers for Schools, 2024b).

An FE College Lecturer from the East Midlands notes that much of the careers education provided is outdated because it relies on individual teachers to keep the content current, without a national framework to support them. Educators stress the need for up-to-date careers information to ensure they are properly preparing young people for the modern workforce. In Scotland, where careers education is embedded in the Curriculum for Excellence, regularly updated ‘subject inserts’ are available for teachers. These resources help educators integrate current careers information into their subject teaching, providing a feasible model for ensuring staff have access to up-to-date knowledge.

## References

**Speakers for Schools** (2024a forthcoming) *Tracking Aspirations*

**Speakers for Schools** (2024b) *Double Disadvantage: Does the decline in quality work experience impact state school students’ access to Russell Group universities?*

<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Double-Disadvantage-Report-FINAL-2302.pdf>

**Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation** (2024) *Assumed Knowledge – A Hidden Barrier to Social Mobility*


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## Section 6: A broad and balance curriculum

### **29. To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?**

The current curriculum is heavily focused on knowledge development, with a core emphasis on English, maths, and science. While these subjects are crucial, the curriculum needs greater ambition to nurture a growth mindset, curiosity, creativity, resilience, and the broader skills every young person needs to thrive in this ever-changing world.



A Careers Advisor at a school in the North West notes that the curriculum often allows schools to remove options for a broad and balanced education, particularly for those students who are ‘lower-attaining’ in the core subjects, in order to focus on improving their performance in those areas. This reduces their opportunity to engage in subjects where they might thrive and can diminish their overall educational engagement. She expressed concern that by removing other options for these learners, it can result in, ‘Cutting down opportunities, prospects, and career choices in Year 9.’ For young people to discover their skills, interests, talents, and passions, they must be exposed to a broad range of subjects in secondary school.

**30. To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?**

A broad 16-19 curriculum must ensure that explicit careers knowledge and skills are embedded within all pathways, including work experience, and complemented by essential careers guidance. A broad curriculum at this stage would ensure that learning is applied and linked to pathways in higher education, life skills, and work, supporting sustained transitions into further education, training, or employment.

A Business Tutor from the North West emphasizes that there must be a focus on, ‘Essential soft skills, oracy, and digital skills in every course, because this is what employers want. All students should develop key employability and life skills—such as teamwork, leadership, and communication—just as they do in the International Baccalaureate and Welsh Baccalaureate.’

**31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?**

Young people tell us they are unsatisfied with the current secondary school curriculum’s scope for learners to develop creative skills and access creative subjects. They would like to see more variety and depth of creative learning in Key Stages 3 and 4. With evidence from The Sutton Trust (2024) showing that younger adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are four times less likely to work in creative industries compared to their more affluent peers, the curriculum must ensure that all learners have fair access to creative subjects and opportunities to develop creative skills in order to narrow the disadvantage and opportunity gaps.

Nell, from the West Midlands, believes there is a ‘lack of emphasis on the arts in the curriculum,’ and as a result, it can be difficult to pursue the arts in school due to the prestige and preference given to traditional subjects such as History and Geography. Our Youth Council tells us there is, ‘Not enough encouragement for the arts and creative subjects... [it is] more difficult to enter arts industries in the future because you are less prepared for it.’ Furthermore, Zoe, 17, from the South West, comments that many schools offer a limited range of creative subjects, and the availability of these subjects can change frequently. She asserts that specific creative subjects are often replaced or rotated too frequently within schools. Moreover, some schools offer a narrow range of choices,

with creative subjects often grouped into ‘free choice’ options, where students have limited opportunities to pursue them. They feel that schools are pressured to ‘drop’ creative subjects from their curriculum because these subjects are not given the same priority as English and STEM subjects.

A Careers Lead from the North West shares that her school does not offer what she considers ‘key’ creative subjects, such as drama and dance, which she believes would engage learners and improve their educational experience and outcomes. She also notes that arts and creative subjects are typically placed under ‘free choice,’ where students can select only one creative subject. This is despite many students aspiring to enter creative industries, who would benefit from being able to pursue more creative options at GCSE to develop the skills and qualifications needed for a creative pathway. A teacher from South England remarks that creative subjects can enhance the overall quality of education and engage students more fully in the school day. They teach vital skills such as, ‘Thinking outside the box and developing innovative solutions to problems.’ A Business Tutor from the North West advocates for more flexibility for students, saying, ‘Students need to find a passion and motivation for learning... more schools should be able to offer creative subjects like DT, photography, media studies, theatre studies, and illustration. This is where lots of students thrive.’

#### References:

The Sutton Trust (2024) A Class Act: Social Mobility and the Creative Industries  
<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A-Class-Act.pdf>

#### Key Stage 4 Technical Awards

### **33. To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?**

A curriculum that adequately prepares all young people for life and work must offer options that support the needs, talents, and aspirations of all learners. These options should be of high quality and open opportunities for their future. As Zoe, 17, from the South West, asserts, ‘Schools have to work for everyone,’ and provide options that allow all students to succeed.

Educators consulted widely support high-quality courses that enable young people to thrive, particularly vocational courses for those whose talents flourish in applied qualifications such as BTECs. However, some raised concerns that vocational Key Stage 4 pathways can lead to ‘closed doors’ for students because these pathways are not held in the same esteem as GCSE qualifications. They believe this is highly damaging for students’ futures, especially for learners who already face inequalities, such as those with specific Special Educational Needs.

The benefits of vocational and applied qualifications, as reported by educators, include greater development of practical skills, increased motivation for learning, deeper exploration of careers and industries, and a better understanding of personal interests and strengths. Vocational qualifications also respond to diverse learning and engagement styles, support stronger pathways to Further

Education and employment, and increase employability for students at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) post-16.

**34. To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?**

Any vocational or applied qualifications offered at Key Stage 4 should lead to more opportunities for young people undertaking them, and should not be viewed as inferior in esteem by employers or Further or Higher Education institutions.

A Business Tutor from the North West comments that the BTEC Business course involves a significant amount of work from students but feels it is not given enough recognition by Higher Education institutions, given the level of achievement required to pass. Furthermore, the lack of equally esteemed alternative qualifications to GCSEs in some areas is seen by some educators as detrimental to student engagement and motivation, particularly for learners for whom academically focused GCSEs do not enable them to reach their full potential. With such a diverse range of students, they argue, the curriculum should not assume all learners excel in the same type of qualification pathway. They emphasise that without vocational options, some students would disengage from education, which can be highly damaging to their future prospects.

A Teacher from the South expresses that, 'Vocational qualifications provide hands-on experience and practical skills that are directly applicable to various careers, making students more job-ready.' Educators also tell us that there should be a wider range of vocational options at the GCSE level, as many schools currently only offer GCSEs, and that a rebalancing of the parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications is necessary.

Educators assert that changes and additional support will be needed for the workforce to deliver a wider variety of courses. However, they believe that if the review is serious about improving educational engagement and outcomes, this must be addressed. Educators suggest feasible ways to support this, including strengthening partnerships with local businesses and industries to provide more real-world learning opportunities, integrating robust career guidance alongside vocational courses to help students understand the potential pathways available to them, and ensuring that vocational qualifications are recognised and valued equally to academic qualifications. This can help change perceptions and encourage more students to consider vocational pathways, which may, in turn, increase both their academic attainment and employability by engaging them more effectively in secondary education.

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

**49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?**

To improve learners' understanding of how different programmes and qualifications will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships), and/or further technical study, embedded careers education—with work experience as a key component—is essential.

There are significant and impactful disadvantage gaps in young people's knowledge of the education system and careers. Our recent research helps explain why young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, despite having similar grades to their more privileged peers, often do less well in higher education and the job market (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). Furthermore, our research on the decline in work experience and state school students' access to Russell Group universities shows that unequal access to information, insights, and support plays a crucial role in determining whether a talented young person will apply to a top university (Speakers for Schools, 2024). This threatens equality of opportunity because some groups benefit from access to information that helps them 'get ahead' in education and employment - information they often receive outside formal education. This issue is particularly pressing; recent statistics published by the Department for Education in October 2024 reveal the largest gap on record between disadvantaged students and their peers in terms of university participation (GOV.UK, 2024).

The problem, however, is fixable. Careers education, as an entitlement for all students and embedded within the curriculum, should be a core element of an education system committed to equality of opportunity, particularly for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Alongside this, meaningful, high-quality work experience, mentoring programmes, careers advisors in every school, and inspirational talks from industry professionals are tangible ways to improve learners' understanding of how different programmes and qualifications will prepare them for university, other higher education pathways, and employment. These measures will also help reduce the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

Our Youth Council members express that the curriculum and schools focus heavily on preparing students for Higher Education; those aiming for university are often better prepared for that pathway. However, our research and feedback from young people reveal that there remains a significant disparity in the quality of guidance and advice about university (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). For young people aspiring to non-HE pathways, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of alternative routes, such as apprenticeships. These pathways are often presented as less prestigious, which makes them less attractive to students, their families, and schools.

Zephaniah, 18, from the North West, advocates for students to be, 'Made aware of different pathways much earlier on. We are told too late. We should be introduced to all the pathways at a younger age, so we know about T-Levels and other options earlier.' He adds, 'Perceptions and stereotypes around the lack of esteem for some courses need to change, so that we and our parents understand the value of alternatives.'

An FE College Lecturer from the East Midlands asserts that students, 'Need early conversations, well before Year 9. There should be guidance and discussions about the jobs out there in Key Stage

3, to learn about different industries and pathways.’ Educators also expressed a desire for more diverse success stories and up-to-date resources for teaching about different routes and pathways. They argued that such resources are necessary to break down assumptions about specific types of pathways, such as apprenticeships or entry-level jobs.

To better support students’ knowledge of pathways, ‘A sharing of expertise is needed,’ one educator noted. ‘Careers forums across the country, where primary, secondary, and further education professionals can share knowledge and best practices, would be invaluable in helping embed careers education into our teaching.’

## References

**GOV.UK** (2023) *Widening Participation in Higher Education*

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education>

**Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation** (2024) *Assumed Knowledge – A Hidden Barrier to Social Mobility*

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## **51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?**

All learners aged 16-19 should receive careers education woven through their chosen courses, have access to meaningful work experience, and benefit from careers guidance and advice provided by a qualified practitioner. It’s important to note that careers guidance here is distinct from the curriculum-embedded careers education we advocate, and is also a crucial component of an education that truly prepares young people for employment (OECD, 2024). Lack of work experience is consistently perceived as a major barrier for young people accessing work, with almost half (47%) believing it will hold them back (Youth Employment UK, 2024). The evidence is clear: work experience offers numerous benefits for young people, including increasing future employability, reducing the likelihood of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), contributing to better academic outcomes, and improving self-esteem, confidence, and emotional development (Speakers for Schools, 2022).

The 16-19 phase is a pivotal moment for young people as they prepare for life and work. The absence of proper careers education, work experience, and guidance can have a significant impact on their future prospects, disproportionately affecting those who are less privileged than their peers (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024). While we strongly advocate for the inclusion of these elements for all learners, it is essential to recognise them as fundamental to social justice, social mobility, and equity.

## References

**OECD** (2024), *Challenging Social Inequality Through Career Guidance: Insights from International Data and Practice*

[https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/challenging-social-inequality-through-career-guidance\\_619667e2-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/challenging-social-inequality-through-career-guidance_619667e2-en)

**Speakers for Schools** (2022) *Work Experience for All*

[https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074\\_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report\\_v1.pdf](https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report_v1.pdf)

**Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation** (2024) *Assumed Knowledge – A Hidden Barrier to Social Mobility*

<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SfS-Assumed-Knowledge-Report-Findings.pdf>

<https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Things-worth-knowing-Oct-2024.pdf>

**Youth Employment UK** (2024) *Youth Voice Census*

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-census/results/>

## Further views

### **54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?**

Work experience, for which the Government has committed two weeks' worth for all young people, has been excluded from the scope of the review. The exclusion of work experience from the review misses an important aspect of what should be included to meet the review's purpose: ensuring that the curriculum equips children and young people to leave compulsory education ready for life and work.

Throughout our submission, we have advocated for the essential restoration of careers education as a curriculum entitlement for all students, integrated throughout the National Curriculum. Additionally, work experience should be embedded within the curriculum as part of a

comprehensive careers education, forming a vital component of the educational offer that young people should receive.

Lack of work experience is consistently cited as a major barrier to young people accessing work, with almost half (47%) believing it will hold them back (Youth Employment UK, 2024). The evidence is clear: work experience offers many benefits, including increased future employability, a reduced likelihood of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), better academic outcomes, and improved self-esteem, confidence, and emotional development (Speakers for Schools, 2022).

Furthermore, the review's Terms of Reference states its goal to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Our recent research shows that these young people benefit the most from work experience (Speakers for Schools and Social Market Foundation, 2024), highlighting how this initiative can help create a fairer education system and provide a tangible solution to closing the disadvantage gap. We cannot leave high-quality careers provision in schools to chance. Young people should be entitled to careers education, including work experience, embedded within the curriculum to ensure they are well-prepared for life beyond compulsory education.

## References

**Speakers for Schools** (2022) *Work Experience for All*

[https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074\\_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report\\_v1.pdf](https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SP-2074_SFS-Work-Experience-For-All-YouGov-Report_v1.pdf)

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