

School, college, and student perspectives on information shared about educational pathways: Gatsby Benchmark 7



GATSBY

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Contents

1. Executive summary	5
2. Introduction	10
2.1 Background and context	10
2.2 Aim and objectives	11
2.3 Methodology.....	12
2.4 Overview of respondent profile.....	14
3. Educational pathways	17
3.1 Qualifications offered	17
3.2 Which educational pathways are discussed with students?	18
3.3 Students' understanding of educational pathways	21
3.4 How often are educational pathways discussed and information provided?	22
4. Designing and evaluating college interactions with school students	27
4.1 How colleges design their interactions with schools	27
4.2 How schools design their interactions for students	30
4.3 Schools' perceptions of the information available	31
4.4 Students' preferences and perceptions.....	32
4.5 Differing approaches for specific student cohorts.....	35
5. Satisfaction, quality, and perceived barriers	38
5.1 Satisfaction with information provided	38
5.2 Satisfaction and quality of interactions	41
5.3 Satisfaction with information provided to students.....	45
5.4 Barriers.....	45
6. Strengthening interactions and support	50
6.1 How interactions may be strengthened	50
6.2 Wider support required	51
7. Changes arising due to Covid-19	56
7.1 Frequency of information provision	56
7.2 Adapting approaches	58
7.3 Impact for students.....	59
8. Conclusions	60

List of Figures

Figure 1 Inter-relationships of respondent groups and 'directions' of research questions	13
Figure 2 Qualifications offered by responding institutions, by type of institution.....	17
Figure 3 Will your institution offer T-levels in the future?	18
Figure 4 Proportion of students' with very good, or good, understanding of educational pathways – by type of institution	21
Figure 5 Proportion of students noting which options are discussed on a weekly or monthly basis – by age	23
Figure 6 Views on frequency with which information was provided by colleges pre-Covid-19.....	24
Figure 7 Views on frequency with which information was provided by universities pre-Covid-19	25
Figure 8 Who inputs into college design of student interactions.....	28
Figure 9 How colleges evaluate impact of school engagement	29
Figure 10 How students would prefer to receive information	32
Figure 11 Whether advice provided by schools/colleges differs by cohort	35
Figure 12 Schools' satisfaction with information provided to their own students	38
Figure 13 Students' satisfaction with information provided	39
Figure 14 Students' satisfaction with level of frequency of ways information is provided.....	40
Figure 15 Colleges' perceptions of schools' awareness of full range of courses they offer	41
Figure 16 Colleges' perceptions of schools' awareness of full range of courses they offer – by type of provision available.....	42
Figure 17 Schools' (top) and colleges' (bottom) perceptions of mutual engagement	44
Figure 18 Schools' perceived barriers to engaging with colleges.....	46
Figure 19 Colleges' perceived barriers to engaging with school students.....	47
Figure 20 School suggestions for college actions to increase student awareness of options.....	52
Figure 21 Help colleges require to increase information offered to schools	53
Figure 22 Views on change in frequency with which information is provided by colleges post-Covid-19.....	56
Figure 23 Views on change in frequency with which information is provided by universities post-Covid-19	57

List of Tables

Table 1 How well institutions feel options are described and communicated to students	19
Table 2 Best methods for designing student interactions and deciding what information to provide.....	27
Table 3 Factors which influence schools' engagement with colleges	30
Table 4 Schools' perceptions of range and quality of information available.....	31
Table 5 Students' perceptions of information sources' trustworthiness	33
Table 6 Students' perceptions of usefulness of types of information when considering options	34
Table 7 Colleges' satisfaction with aspects of interactions with schools	43

1. Executive summary

Background and research aim

1. Ensuring individuals have access to high-quality information, advice, and guidance (IAG) is essential to enable them to make well-informed decisions related to education and careers. The importance of such IAG was recently highlighted by the Department for Education in the Skills for Jobs White Paper (January 2021):

“Clear outcomes-focused careers information is fundamental to the success of our reforms. We need impartial, lifelong careers advice and guidance available to people when they need it, regardless of age, circumstance, or background.”

2. In the case of young people in particular, schools and colleges play a vital role in providing information about future learning opportunities, including options across different pathways (academic and technical or vocational) and different providers (including schools, colleges, universities, and the workplace). Understanding more about the relationships between schools and colleges as well as independent training providers is a key piece of the puzzle when it comes to considering what works well and what could be done better to ensure young people can make informed decisions about these pathways and providers.
3. In 2014, the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (‘Gatsby’) published the Good Career Guidance report, which identified eight benchmarks to act as a guideline for schools to improve the quality of career guidance on offer to students. These benchmarks have since received endorsement from government through the 2017 Careers Strategy and more recently in the aforementioned Skills for Jobs White Paper.
4. Of particular importance for this research is Benchmark 7, which emphasises engagement between students and providers of further education, higher education and apprenticeships. The benchmark goal is that students fully understand and are comprehensively informed about the full range of potential academic and technical or vocational pathways.
5. It is unclear what barriers to, and opportunities for, engagement between schools and colleges exist, and what lessons can be learned and shared from potential best practices to ensure that the goals of Benchmark 7 can be implemented, or support provided where needed to meet it. Furthermore, it is important that barriers or even perceived biases (if any) of schools towards colleges and training providers are better understood in order to consider/offer options to address them appropriately.
6. The overarching aim of this research is to understand the breadth, quality and frequency of information being provided to school and college students about their onward education options. In particular, the research focusses on the encounters and information received by young people in school about onward options in a college setting. This is widely reported as an area that could be improved, particularly regarding school compliance with the Baker Clause.¹

¹ Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 2019, *The Baker Clause – One Year On*

Methodology

7. The research comprised three core strands:

- A Rapid Evidence Review in Summer 2020
- Survey of careers leaders and advisors in over 200 secondary schools² and over 80 colleges, and a pilot survey with seven independent training providers (ITPs)
- A survey of over 300 school and college students aged 11-19³
- Follow-up depth telephone interviews with these cohorts – 10 schools, 10 colleges, and 30 students.

A Technical Annex accompanies this report with supporting information.

Findings

Educational pathways discussed and presented to students

8. Students note that A-levels and BTECs are the pathways discussed most regularly at their school or college.
9. When careers staff in schools rated, from a range of pathways, how well they believe they describe and communicate educational pathways to students, A-levels, BTECs, and Bachelor's degrees are rated by schools as higher than eight out of ten. Other pathways – especially technical and vocational options – score lower, with apprenticeships the only other option schools score above seven. For qualification options, schools rate these as being less well described and communicated to their students. In contrast, colleges rate schools' ability to describe and communicate qualification options higher than schools rate themselves.
10. Interviews reveal that knowledge and understanding of apprenticeships vary markedly even between college students. Those on more vocational courses tend to have quite detailed knowledge about apprenticeships – including course structure and the fact that apprentices are employed while they study – while those at sixth form colleges (and not on vocational courses) often lack knowledge about apprenticeships.
11. College students interviewed also lack confidence in their knowledge of technical options, with the majority stating they know little or nothing about these options; this finding pervades not just among students studying for A-levels but also those studying technical or vocational courses. In a similar vein, the majority of school students (across all ages) express low levels of confidence discussing the range of technical education options.
12. Students, schools, and colleges broadly agree that information is provided by colleges and universities with approximately equal frequency, with electronic and paper means being most common. Older students (16+), and students at college, report that information is provided on a more regular basis than for younger students (15 and under) and school students, respectively.
13. However, this does not explain the disparity in knowledge and confidence among students and schools. While information about both academic and technical and vocational pathways is

² Referred to as 'schools' henceforth but throughout the report the term schools should be taken as meaning secondary schools unless otherwise stated.

³ Referred to as 'students' henceforth throughout the report unless otherwise stated

provided through a variety of different means (e.g. encounters, electronic and written material), a lack of knowledge and confidence regarding some options (particularly technical education routes) suggests that more needs to be done. Therefore, focusing more time in careers provision on technical options may be valuable.

Designing and evaluating interactions between colleges and schools

14. Colleges with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating typically engage more with parents, school teaching staff, and Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and less so with school careers staff when designing their interactions and engagement with school students. Colleges which 'require improvement' show the reverse, i.e. much lower engagement with wider stakeholders (e.g. parents, school SLT, students.). Input from college marketing and recruitment teams is the most common means through which interactions are designed. Colleges that were interviewed indicate their motivation when designing interactions comes from two clear drivers: the Baker Clause,⁴ and recruitment to increase student numbers at their college.
15. Almost all colleges rated as 'Outstanding' gather feedback from both students and staff following engagements/events, while over half continually engage with schools. Only a minority hold internal debriefs after events.
16. Key factors which influence whether schools will decide to engage with a college include the proximity of the college to the school, the breadth and quality of courses on offer, and clear information about onward progression opportunities. The Ofsted rating of a college is less important.
17. Students interviewed have a middling level of trust in information provided by both universities and colleges, and trust information from colleges to a slightly lesser extent than information from universities. Tied into the previous point, if colleges can provide clear information about onwards course quality and progression opportunities, this approach may lead to more successful engagement with schools and higher levels of trust with students.
18. The most useful types of information that students value being provided with include: the job that they will be able to get with that course or qualification, the career progression possibilities offered by the course or qualification, information on the qualifications required to apply for options, information on the qualification gained on completion, and the reputation of the institution at which students consider studying.
19. In order to understand how to support a change in practice in schools (e.g. delivering information about less commonly discussed pathways, or delivering this by different means), and thus ensuring that young people have an equally good understanding of all education options, it is important to understand the incentives and pressures acting on schools. When schools were asked how they make decisions about the information they provide to students about onward progression options, they identified several motivational incentives: personal (to ensure students have a positive future), legislative (e.g. the statutory responsibility to provide impartial guidance and the Baker Clause) and others (e.g. the Gatsby Benchmarks, school level data such as NEET figures and Ofsted inspections). The information provided to students is also

⁴ The Baker Clause forms part of the 2017 Technical and Further Education Act.

shaped by staff professional judgement, and input from students (e.g. input from the student council, evaluations from individual events and activities).

Satisfaction, quality, and perceived barriers

20. The majority of responding colleges (70%) believe schools are ‘fully aware’ of all opportunities which they offer, while 28% of colleges believe schools are only ‘slightly aware’. A lower proportion of colleges which provide apprenticeship training, and of those which offer some form of higher education, believe that schools are ‘fully aware’ of the courses on offer at colleges (both 63%). These findings suggest that colleges which offer a greater variety of onwards educational pathways find that schools struggle to grasp the diversity of options available, or lack the information required to be aware of all options.
21. Colleges state that the Gatsby Benchmarks have made schools improve and broaden the information they provide, but most colleges feel that the information schools provide to school students is still mixed, with students often uninformed about apprenticeship and T-level opportunities.
22. A fifth of students state they are ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ with information provided on higher technical qualifications, and a sixth likewise regarding T-levels, suggesting that students would like to have more information on these pathways. This point echoes earlier findings that students have a lower understanding and/or knowledge of these options. Thus, while on the face of it, it may appear that interactions between schools and colleges are reasonably healthy, there is still a pervading lack of knowledge and awareness – and satisfaction with information available – among school students regarding technical options.
23. When rating satisfaction with various aspects of their interactions with schools, colleges report that they are highly satisfied with their ease of access to students in schools without sixth forms (average 8.5 out of 10). However, they report much lower satisfaction with their ease of access to students in schools with sixth forms (5.7), indicative of a reasonable degree of non-compliance with the Baker Clause which requires that the whole range of technical education and apprenticeship providers are granted access to students.
24. Colleges note that the main barriers to successfully engaging with schools are limited school staff time to arrange sessions (mentioned by 57%), while just under half perceive that schools restrict access to certain groups of students (46%), and a third simply note that it is difficult to engage with schools, or that schools do not respond to offers of engagement (31%). By contrast, schools identified similar barriers to engaging with colleges, including logistical challenges such as difficulty fitting in time to engage with colleges in the student timetable (70%), limited staff in school to support arranging sessions (46%) and a lack of response from colleges (18%). But there were some indications of other factors influencing willingness to engage for smaller numbers of schools, including budget implications if students leave at 16 (15%), and a perceived lack of poor progression for students at college (7%).
25. The data therefore point to several key barriers to engagement. Broadly they fall into two categories: logistics and attitude. Logistical barriers included things such as managing timetables and sufficient resourcing, e.g. staff time to build relationships or funding for transport. Attitudinal barriers pertain to a minority of schools (particularly those with sixth forms) wanting to retain students or perceiving that technical education information is not relevant, but also to

a wide perception from colleges that schools are not open to college interactions (despite this only being the case in a minority of schools, with the main barriers being logistical).

Strengthening interactions and support between schools and colleges

26. Good communication and age-appropriate presentations are highlighted as key characteristics of an effective interaction between college and school students. Interactions with smaller groups of young people are also noted to work well. The importance of a single point of contact at schools and at colleges to ensure relationships can be built upon year on year is also stressed.
27. Over half of colleges would like to have an improved digital presence to boost awareness with young people e.g. via websites and social media platforms.
28. Schools' most common suggestions for improvements colleges could make to increase school student awareness of options included more regular visits from students and staff at colleges to school students in Year 11 and under, and for more electronic information on future options. In follow up interviews many schools were satisfied with the interactions they had with colleges, although some suggested there could be improvements to logistics (to make it easier for students to visit colleges) and ensuring information is clear and easy to access.
29. Schools note that it is important that wider access to careers information is provided to key stakeholders, such as parents and carers, SLT, governors, and subject teachers, so that all influencers can provide some information to students, if requested.
30. Many of the college students and older school students (years 10-13) say that they would like to hear about a broader range of educational options, including more information about technical and vocational options, or educational opportunities on offer at further education colleges, in addition to information about A-levels. This finding links into students' satisfaction, where they were most dissatisfied with information provided about T-levels and higher technical qualifications, and had lower awareness levels beyond A-levels, degrees, and BTECs.
31. Several students comment that they would like a return to more face-to-face delivery post-Covid-19, such as open days, talks by staff, and assemblies, expressing a preference for information provided through these face-to-face channels. Younger students (years 7-9) also say that more information aimed at their age groups would be welcome.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background and context

In 2014, the Gatsby Charitable Foundation ('Gatsby') published the Good Career Guidance report, which identified eight benchmarks to act as a guideline for secondary⁵ schools and colleges to improve the quality of career guidance on offer to students.⁶ These benchmarks have since received endorsement from government through the 2017 Careers Strategy and more recently in the 2021 Skills for Jobs White Paper.^{7,8} Careers monitoring research to date has informed discussions and subsequent actions undertaken by Gatsby and other key partners including the Department for Education (DfE) and the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC).

Of particular importance for this research is Benchmark 7, which emphasises engagement between students and providers of further education, higher education and apprenticeships. The benchmark goal is that students fully understand and are comprehensively informed about the full range of potential academic and technical or vocational pathways. The Good Career Guidance report describes Benchmark 7 and lists that students will have had a) at least one "meaningful encounter" with providers of further and higher education by the age of 16, and b) that all pupils considering applying for university should have had at least two visits to meet staff and pupils by age 18. Benchmark 7 equally applies to students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND),⁹ and the CEC in particular undertake focused work in this area.¹⁰

The goal that students in secondary schools and colleges receive sufficient and broad information on the full range of education opportunities to inform both career and tertiary education choices, is a key challenge. This goal is also a political priority and has been enshrined in the so-called Baker Clause, which entered into force in January 2018 and compels schools to give education and training providers access to students from year 8 to year 13 to present apprenticeship and technical education opportunities. In addition, schools are obliged to publish a yearly provider 'access statement' to indicate how providers can access students and who they should contact at the school about this, the purpose being to ensure pupils are informed about what technical education opportunities, including apprenticeships, are available.

The effective implementation of the Baker Clause to date has been brought into question by review reports. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) review "The Baker Clause – One Year On" claims that 37.6% of schools had published a provider access statement. It also found that 70% of University Technical Colleges (UTC) and Further Education Colleges were finding access to local schools difficult. Barriers of access to students and cooperation with schools cited by providers included giving limited access to high-performing students as well as continuing incentives for schools to retain students as funding is based on student numbers.¹¹

⁵ Referred to as schools henceforth but throughout the report the term schools should be taken as meaning secondary schools unless otherwise stated.

⁶ Gatsby, 2014, *Good Career Guidance*. Later that same year, Gatsby published similar Benchmarks for Young People in Colleges focusing on Good Career Guidance.

⁷ Department for Education, 2014, *Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents*

⁸ Department for Education, 2021, *Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth*

⁹ Gatsby, CEC, and DisabilityRightsUK, 2019, *Good Career Guidance: Perspectives from the SEND sector*

¹⁰ CEC website, accessed April 2020, <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/support-send>

¹¹ Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 2019, *The Baker Clause – One Year On*

A more recent House of Commons briefing quoted the Schools Minister saying that the situation is improving with 76% of schools partially complying with Baker Clause requirements.¹² However, there was recognition that the Baker Clause required strengthening, with the government's Skills for Jobs White Paper outlining measures to toughen up its enforcement with careers funding conditional on compliance.

Latest achievements on those meeting or partially meeting Benchmark 7 are detailed within the CEC's 2020 report. Clearly progress on achieving the goals of this benchmark have been made, with a third of schools and colleges achieving it in the year up to March 2020 (prior to Covid-19), compared to 13% two years previously.¹³

However, what is not known from the various sources and reports is the extent and breadth of, and frequency with which, the information being provided to students by schools, colleges and other training providers, is of high quality. Furthermore, it is unclear how this information is viewed from the student perspective.

In addition, it is unclear what barriers and opportunities to engagement between schools and colleges exist, and what lessons can be learned and shared from potential best practices (in line with guidance published by the CEC in February 2021¹⁴) to ensure that the goals of Benchmark 7 can be implemented, or support provided where needed to meet it. Furthermore, it is important that barriers to engagement or even perceived biases (if any) of schools towards colleges and training providers are better understood in order to consider/offer options to address them appropriately.

2.2 Aim and objectives

Against this backdrop, Gatsby commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to undertake research to explore these issues around Benchmark 7 in greater detail. While Benchmark 7 concerns encounters with both further education and higher education, this research focuses predominantly on schools and college interactions.

The overarching aim is to understand the breadth, quality and frequency of information being provided to school and college students about their onward education options.

Specific objectives of the research were to understand:

1. The views of schools, colleges, and students on the frequency with which information is being provided to students regarding the different pathways available to them;
2. The form in which this information is provided;
3. The perspectives of schools, colleges, and students on the quality of the information being provided;
4. Satisfaction levels with the quality and range of information made available;
5. Barriers to engagement between schools and colleges, and any support required;

¹² House of Commons, 2020, *Careers guidance in schools, colleges, and universities*

¹³ Careers & Enterprise Company, 2020, *Careers education in England's schools and colleges 2020*

¹⁴ Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021, *Practical ideas for achieving Gatsby Benchmark 7*

6. How all the above issues have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic; and
7. Examples of best practices.

It should be noted that Benchmark 7 is focused specifically on encounters with further education and higher education, and that it is not focused on employers, who are the focus of other Benchmarks. This research examines the particular inter-relationship between schools, colleges, and students, but findings should be read while bearing in mind the wider landscape beyond this system.

2.3 Methodology

The research comprised three core strands:

- A Rapid Evidence Review
- Survey of careers leaders and advisors in schools and colleges and a pilot survey with independent training providers (ITPs), and a survey of school and college students aged 11-19
- Follow-up depth telephone interviews with these cohorts

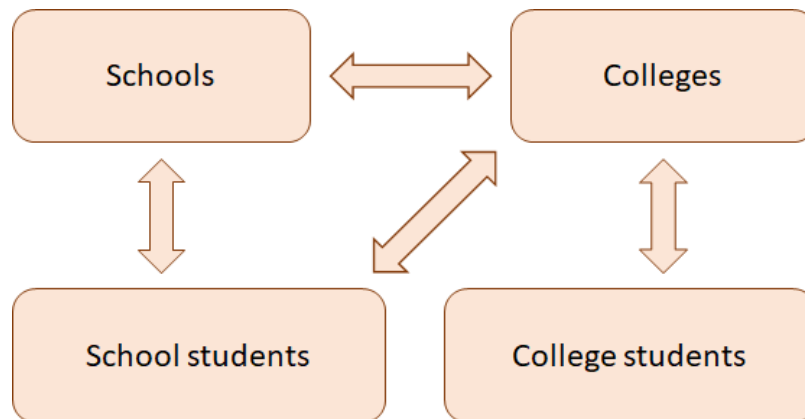
The Rapid Evidence Review comprised a focused piece of desk research undertaken in the summer of 2020. Key references and sources from a grey literature search were examined from the past 10 years (back to 2010) to examine the landscape both before and after the introduction of the Gatsby benchmarks. Key, relevant sources were examined, and a particular consideration given to sources focusing on assessing the implementations of the Gatsby benchmarks and the Baker Clause, in addition to recent, relevant information related to the impact of Covid-19 on careers guidance provision.

The three surveys – one for schools, a second for colleges (that was also piloted with ITPs to assess their level of involvement in providing information about choices to students), and a third for students – were co-designed by Pye Tait and Gatsby and were hosted online, launching in November 2020, with the scope limited geographically to England. The surveys were promoted on social media, and the respondents to the school and college surveys were asked to cascade the student survey to their students. To boost responses, a mailing was sent to school and careers leaders and advisors to promote the research. In addition, a CATI-based approach¹⁵ was used to speak to careers leaders and advisors in schools, colleges, and ITPs. Furthermore, a panel-based approach was used to boost responses from students. The three surveys closed on 15 January 2021, with responses from 202 schools, 83 colleges, seven ITPs (as a pilot), and 318 students.

Figure 1 illustrates the ‘directions’ in which research questions were asked of each respondent group, with questions designed to be mirrored for each group where possible to obtain comparable responses. For instance, colleges were asked about the information they provide to schools, to school students, and to their own students at their college. The research explored how all education options (academic and technical) were explained to, and understood by, students.

¹⁵ Computer-assisted telephone interviewing

Figure 1 Inter-relationships of respondent groups and 'directions' of research questions



Topic guides for the follow-up depth telephone interviews were co-designed by Pye Tait and Gatsby. Three topic guides were produced, one each for schools, colleges, and students. Participants in these depth interviews were recruited from the preceding surveys. The interviews with 10 schools, 10 colleges, and 30 students took place in December 2020 and January 2021. Student interviews were incentivised with a £15 Amazon voucher upon completion. Appropriate permissions were gathered to engage with young people aged under 16.

Institutions' Unique Reference Numbers (URNs) were recorded during the research, and these were used to map across information from the DfE's online tool Get Information About Schools. This fed into the analysis stage to examine any trends by key metrics such as location and Ofsted rating.

Note: For clarity of presentation, abbreviations have been used in some figures, and are defined here:

- Info: Information
- Qual(s): Qualification(s)
- Univ(s): University/Universities

Note: Due to the relatively small sample sizes, depth interview findings should be treated with reasonable caution and are indicative only, rather than being statistically robust. (For context, there are approximately 3,500 secondary schools in England, and just under 250 colleges.) In particular, findings relating to ITPs should be treated with extreme caution as these are based on seven responses to a pilot exercise – these are included in a Technical Annex.

Note on cross-tabulations: The overall findings for each respondent group were analysed by the splits in respondent characteristics noted in the table below. Where there are notable differences between sub-groups of respondents, these are discussed in the text. Where there is no discussion of differences by sub-group, this indicates there is no notable difference between sub-groups.

Schools	Colleges	Students
Institution type	Institution type	Studying at school or college
Rural or urban location	Rural or urban location	Age bracket 11-15 vs 16+
Ofsted rating	Ofsted rating	
T-Level provider or not	T Level provider or not	
Sixth form or no sixth form	HE provider or not	
	Off-the-job apprenticeship training or not	

Students participating in the research were studying at school or college, and might be studying academic or technical or vocational qualifications/courses. This report describes findings relating to “students” by treating these respondents as one cohort, but key differences between sub-groups of students are drawn out where applicable throughout the report.

2.3.1 Report structure

This chapter (2) provides an overview of the background to, and aims of, the research, and explains the methodology used, and provides an overview of the respondent profile.

Chapter 3 outlines the qualifications which are currently offered by responding institutions and goes on to discuss which onwards educational pathways are discussed with students, and how well the discussion and communication of these are perceived by students in each respondent group.

Chapter 4 outlines how colleges design their interactions with school students, the views of schools on how useful the information being provided by colleges is, and the perspectives from students themselves in this regard.

Chapter 5 explores schools’, colleges’, and students’ views regarding the satisfaction and quality of their relative interactions with respect to the information being provided about onwards educational options, and discusses key perceived barriers to engagement between schools and colleges.

Chapter 6 discusses the support requested which could help to improve these interactions in the future to increase their effectiveness.

Chapter 7 outlines the effects of Covid-19 on the frequency, approaches, and quality of information being provided to students, and the impact this has had for them.

At the end of each chapter, a summary of best practice and lessons learned of what is working well is provided. The final chapter outlines the key themes and conclusions drawn from this research.

A separate Technical Annex accompanies this report which contains a more detailed respondent profile, a summary of the findings of the Rapid Evidence Review, conducted at the outset of this research, and additional figures and data pertaining to results discussed in the main body of this report. The Technical Annex also contains a section on the results from the pilot exercise with ITPs.

2.4 Overview of respondent profile

Across the surveys and depth interviews for this research, a broad range of participants was sought to reflect the diverse backgrounds and contexts of the research landscape. A brief overview of the respondent profile is presented here, and a more detailed respondent profile can be viewed in the Technical Annex.

2.4.1 Survey respondent profile

The survey required a member of staff in a school or college who understood the implementation of the careers programme. Of the staff responding from schools, over half are careers leaders (55%) and one in five are careers advisors (19%), while a fifth take on both roles (23%). In colleges, a third of respondents are careers leaders (36%), two in five are careers advisors (41%) while around one in ten take on both roles (12%). 'Other' respondents typically have careers focused roles such as Careers Co-ordinator, Director of Careers, or Head of Careers.

This sample breakdown in relation to institution type is approximately reflective of the profile of schools across England.¹⁶ Respondents to the school survey work across a wide range of type of institutions, with over half (62%) working in academies (including converter, sponsor-led, special, and Multi-Academy Trusts) and free schools. Some 14% are from community, foundation and voluntary schools, while 5% are from grammar schools. The 8% of respondents working in 'other' types of school are almost all based in independent and other fee-paying schools. This is broadly reflective of the make-up of institutions across England.

Respondents to the college survey also work across a wide range of type of institution, with most respondents either working in a general further education college (52%) or in a sixth form centre (34%), broadly reflective of the split of institutions across England. Respondents from 'other' colleges are based in specialist colleges with a SEND focus.

Around two thirds of responding schools (68%) and three quarters of responding colleges (77%) note that they are currently fully meeting Gatsby Benchmark 7 (Encounters with Further and Higher Education). The achieved sample has a higher proportion of institutions achieving this Benchmark compared to the national average – for context, one in three schools and colleges (33%) were achieving Benchmark 7 in March 2020.¹⁷

Of the 318 students responding, two thirds are based at school (66%) and the remaining third (34%) are studying at college. Students across all ages between 11 and 19 participated, with the highest proportion of responses from those aged 16 (22%).

Respondents to the school, college, and student surveys came from across the whole of England. Most responses from schools were received from those based in the South East (17%), while for colleges most responses were received from those in the North West (19%), and most student responses were received from London (17%) – broadly reflective of overall student numbers.

All figures and full data, and a more detailed respondent profile, can be found in the Technical Annex.

¹⁶ DfE, 2020, *Statistics: School and pupil numbers*

¹⁷ CEC, 2020, *Careers education in England's schools and colleges 2020*

2.4.2 Depth interviews respondent profile

Of the ten school interviewees, seven are careers leaders, while three are both careers leaders and careers advisors.¹⁸ Five work in academies, three in independent schools, and one each in a voluntary aided school and a comprehensive school. Respondents are from across England, and eight teach sixth form students.

Of the ten college interviewees, five are careers leaders, four are careers advisors, and one works in both roles. Six work in sixth form centres/colleges, and four in general further education colleges. Respondents are from across England.

Of the 30 student interviewees, 11 are currently studying at college and 19 are attending school. School students interviewed are aged between 11 and 18, and college students interviewed are aged between 16 and 19. Respondents are from across England.

¹⁸ Note: Careers leaders' role is to plan and implement a strategy for developing a careers programme that prepares students for the choices and transitions in education, training, and employment. Careers advisors provide personal and impartial guidance to students, while careers leaders have overall responsibility for institutions' programmes and career guidance.

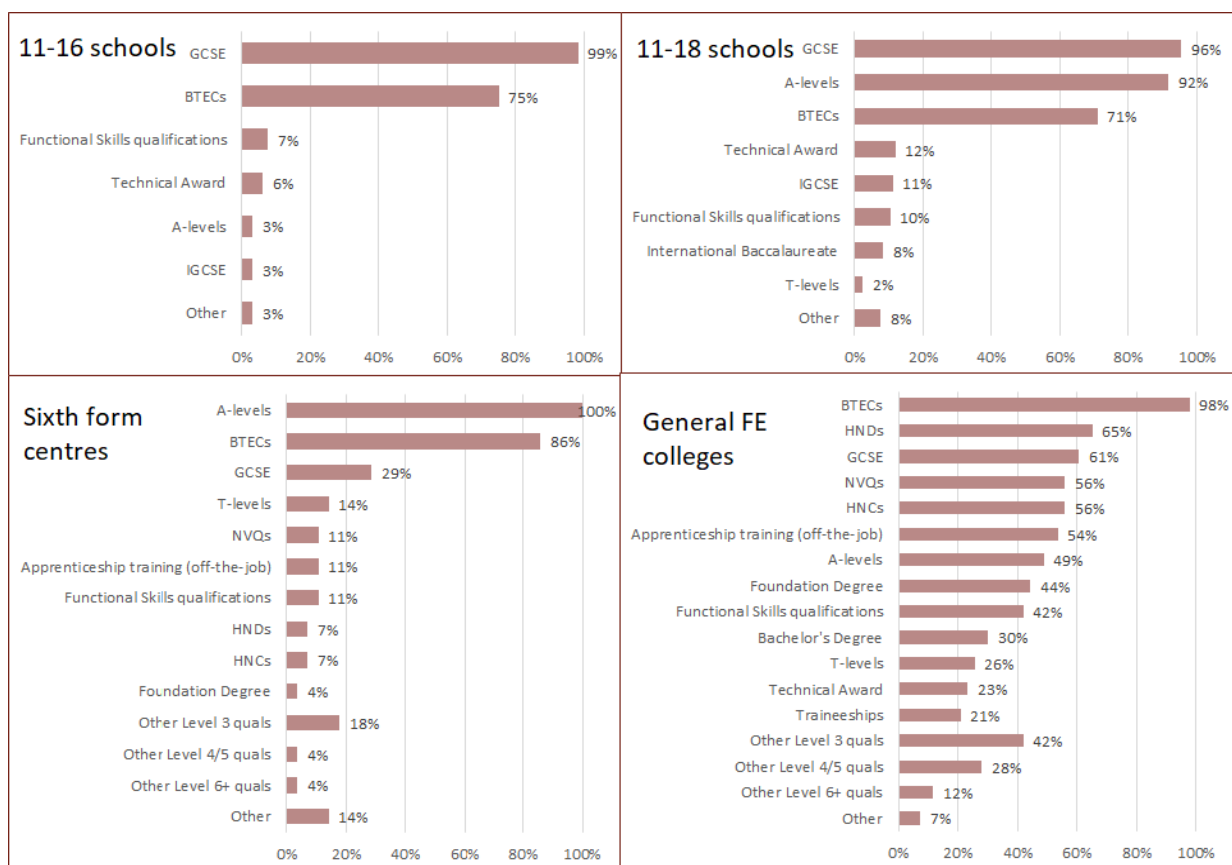
3. Educational pathways

This chapter outlines the qualifications which are currently offered by responding institutions and presents which onwards educational pathways are discussed by schools and colleges with students. The chapter goes on to provide indications of how well these are perceived to be discussed and communicated with students from the perspectives of schools, colleges, and students themselves.

3.1 Qualifications offered

Schools: Almost all schools responding to the survey offer GCSE qualifications to their students (97%). The majority of schools also offer BTECs (72%) and A-levels (62%). A small minority of schools also offer Technical Awards, Functional Skills qualifications, IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate or T-level qualifications (Figure 2). ‘Other’ qualifications offered typically include Cambridge Nationals or Cambridge Pre-U.

Figure 2 Qualifications offered by responding institutions, by type of institution



Which qualifications do you offer students currently?

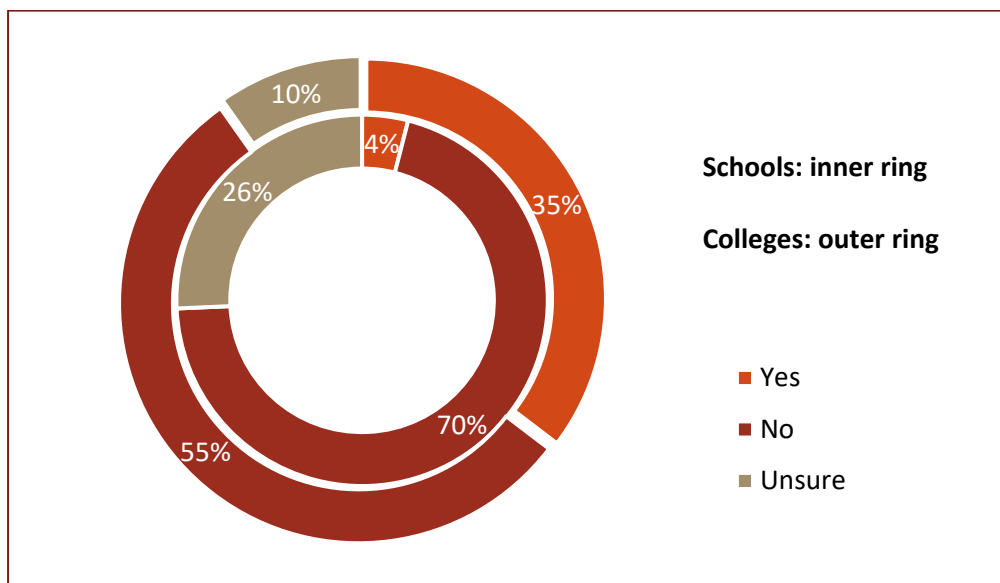
Base: 202 schools and 83 colleges (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: Meanwhile, colleges offer a much wider range of qualifications. Most commonly offered are BTECS by five in six colleges (83%) followed by A-levels (60%) and GCSEs (45%). Other qualifications or training commonly offered by over a third of colleges include Functional Skills qualifications (34%), off-the-job apprenticeship training (36%), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) (35%), Higher National Diplomas (40%) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) (35%). Just under half of responding colleges (46%) offer some form of higher education provision, i.e. Bachelor’s degrees, Foundation degrees, HNCs, or HNDs.

T-levels, launched in September 2020, are 2-year courses designed to prepare students for the world of work, combining study with industry placements, and are intended to become one of the main choices for students alongside apprenticeships and A-levels.

Schools and colleges: Only a very small minority of schools (4%) currently offer, or plan to offer, T-levels in the coming years (Figure 3). This compares to colleges where a third of institutions (35%) state they do, or plan to, offer T-levels. Of schools with sixth forms, 2% currently offer T-levels and just 5% definitely plan on doing so in the future. Meanwhile, 14% of sixth form colleges currently offer T-levels, and a third plan on offering this qualification in the future.

Figure 3 Will your institution offer T-levels in the future?



If your college is not offering T-levels at present, will it be offering T-levels in the coming years?
Base: 202 schools and 82 colleges. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

3.2 Which educational pathways are discussed with students?

As a backdrop, careers leaders’ role is to plan and implement a strategy for developing a careers programme that prepares students for the choices and transitions in education, training, and employment, while careers advisors provide personal and impartial guidance to students. Together, these staff aim to provide students with a full range of balanced information via a variety of means to enable students to make informed decisions.

In the depth interviews, schools and colleges were asked which options they discuss with students at schools.

Colleges: General further education and technical colleges note that they talk to school students about all the courses that they offer including apprenticeships, vocational courses, T-levels, Foundation degrees and undergraduate degrees. Most sixth form colleges note they solely offer A-levels – a small number also offer BTECs – and so only discuss these options when talking to students in schools.

Schools: Interviewed schools say that the options colleges discuss with students can depend on the year group they come in to see and/or which qualifications, subjects, or careers are of interest to particular students. In contrast, when universities visit schools, they tend to discuss UCAS applications, how to choose subjects, degrees and degree apprenticeships, and a wide range of other issues such as employability skills, the option to do a gap year, mental health and well-being, university life/lifestyle, and the wider benefits of going to university.

Surveyed schools and colleges were asked to rate, on a scale of one (not at all well) to 10 (very fully and completely) how well they feel various educational options are described and communicated to students. For options scored at five or lower, respondents were asked to provide reasons for a low rating.

Table 1 How well institutions feel options are described and communicated to students

Qualification	Schools	Colleges	
	To students in your school	To students in your institution	To students at schools your institution may visit
A-levels/sixth form	9.3	8.9	7.8
BTEC	8.2	8.9	7.0
Bachelor's degree	8.1	8.4	7.4
Higher apprenticeship	7.4	8.2	6.8
Degree apprenticeship	7.4	8.2	6.8
Intermediate apprenticeship	7.3	8.1	6.4
Advanced apprenticeship	7.3	8.1	6.3
Foundation degree	6.6	7.9	6.4
NVQs	6.3	8.5	7.1
Traineeships	5.8	7.7	6.6
HNDs	5.5	8.5	6.5
HNCs	5.4	8.5	6.5
Diploma of Higher Education	5.2	6.9	6.0
T-levels	4.9	6.7	5.4
Certificate of Higher Education	4.9	7.3	6.1
Technical Baccalaureate	3.9	5.3	5.3

On a scale from 1 (not at all well) to 10 (very fully and completely), please indicate how well you feel the following options are described and communicated to students

Base: Variable from 151 to 183 (schools) and 15 to 58 (colleges). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: For all qualifications apart from A-levels, colleges generally feel that they describe and communicate qualifications to their own students better than schools feel they do to their students (Table 1).

Schools: Schools are confident that they describe and communicate more academic options including A-levels, BTECs, and degrees, although they have confidence in the way apprenticeships are communicated to students. However, schools clearly have much lower confidence in how well options such as TechBacc, Certificate of Higher Education and T-levels are being described and communicated to their students, with each of these options receiving an average score of below five. Schools with a sixth form typically provide a higher rating for how well they communicate options to students, compared to those without.

Schools: Schools providing a rating of five or lower for at least one option (about 60% of schools) typically do so for one of three main reasons:

- Firstly, the majority of those commenting argue that some options are perceived not to be relevant to students. For instance, if a school does not have a sixth form, or if most students proceed into degrees at university.
- Secondly, a minority state that a lack of staff knowledge or information available about some options is cited.
- Thirdly, a small minority argue that there is a lack of time to cover all options in detail and they only discuss the “main” options in detail to avoid overloading students with too much information.

“Information on these options is harder to find and staff knowledge is also poorer in these areas.”

Academy, East of England

Colleges: In contrast, colleges demonstrate a much higher confidence across the board in how options are described and communicated to their students. This likely reflects the broader range of qualifications which they offer, and the richer understanding of what is involved, as well as their own interests in recruiting students to their college. Where colleges provided a score of five or lower, the most typical reason for this was that the option was not offered by their institution. Colleges with higher education provision rate their ability to describe and communicate higher education options to students higher than those without such provision.

Colleges: For qualification options which schools state that they describe and communicate less well, colleges appear to overestimate schools’ ability to describe and communicate these options. Colleges rate almost all options at a six or greater for how well these qualifications are communicated to school students, whereas schools rate their communication of options such as Traineeships, HNDs and HNCs below six. However, where colleges score five or lower (about 20% of responding colleges), respondents note that they have interacted with school students who seem confused about the options available to them post-16, and the differences between such routes.

This implies that schools perhaps suffer from a lack of confidence in the material which they are delivering. Colleges’ higher confidence implies a feeling that their interaction with schools is a positive one, and that in actual fact such options are communicated well. However, simply because institutions feel that options are communicated well, does not necessarily mean that students feel likewise and acquire a better understanding.

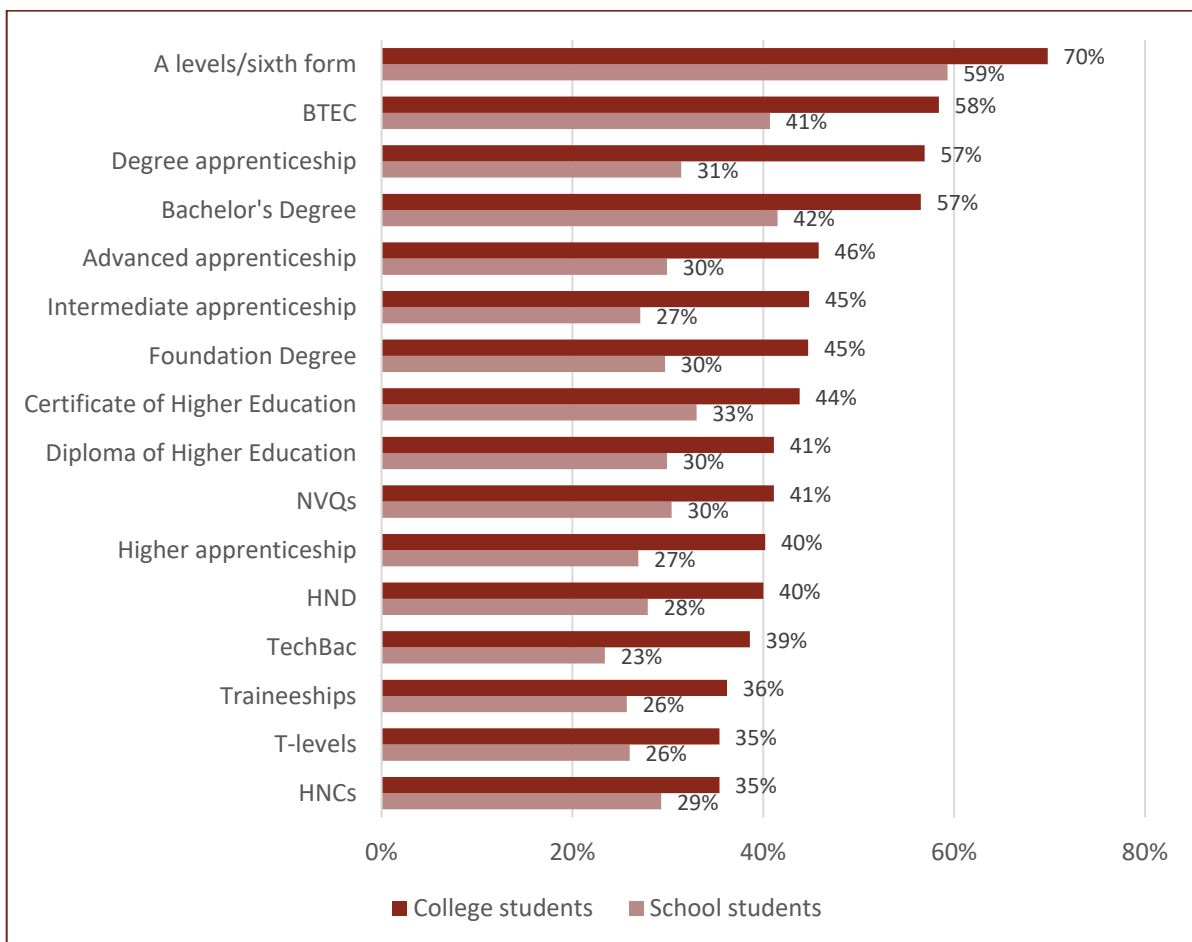
3.3 Students' understanding of educational pathways

Students were asked a related question to rate their level of understanding of the various educational pathways available to them. Students typically have best understanding of A-levels, BTECs, and Bachelor's degrees. However, with fewer than half of students reporting a good understanding of degrees, this suggests that schools' ability to communicate and describe these options is somewhat limited compared to schools' own perceptions of how well they do so (see Table 1).

Furthermore, students have limited understanding of several alternative options, for instance, over half of responding students have a "limited" or "very limited" understanding of T-levels (55%) or TechBac qualifications (53%), and just under half respond likewise for HNCs and HNDs (both 48%).

Students aged 16+ report a higher level of understanding for all these pathways compared to those under 16, as do students at colleges compared to school students (Figure 4). This also raises the question of, at what age students should or could receive information on pathways, and this is revisited later in this report.

Figure 4 Proportion of students' with very good, or good, understanding of educational pathways – by type of institution



How well do you understand the different education pathways which are available to young people in general?
Base: Variable from 296 to 306. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

In a similar vein, students studying at a college report a higher level of understanding of these options than school students – this could be due to two reasons, firstly either reflecting the fact that college students are on average older than school students, or secondly that college students are more exposed to, and hence aware of, the various options available.

During depth interviews both school and college students were probed about their awareness of their local FE and HE offers. Knowledge of the local offer increases as students progress in their school, although student awareness significantly varied between individuals even within different ages. The students interviewed from year 7 and 8 struggled to distinguish between university and colleges. Students interviewed from colleges understandably had a clearer awareness of the local offer at colleges.

Interviewed students were also asked about their detailed knowledge of different education options. Students from colleges' understanding of apprenticeships varied between those in general FE and those in sixth form colleges. Those on more vocational courses tend to have quite detailed knowledge about apprenticeships – including course structure and the fact that apprentices are employed while they study – while those at sixth form colleges often lack such detailed knowledge.

For students in school, their year group was a bigger factor in determining their level of understanding of apprenticeships. Younger students had heard of apprenticeships, and although students interviewed from middle school years (9-11) had a firmer idea of apprenticeships, many seemed to lack specific or deeper understanding (not knowing about things such as how to apply or what apprenticeships consist of). This supports the survey findings which show a low level of apprenticeship understanding among school students (Figure 4).

Student understanding of academic options was higher, although some college students lacked confidence on these options. School students also noted some uncertainty about elements of academic pathways such as the different degrees and programmes on offer in universities. Again, the interviews also showed that older the student the greater the understanding of the options.

3.4 How often are educational pathways discussed and information provided?

Students were asked to note how frequently information was provided on the various educational pathways open to them. By far and away the most commonly discussed pathway is A-levels/sixth form, with over a quarter noting this is discussed weekly (29%) and a further 17% saying this is discussed monthly. Around a quarter of students note that BTECs (25%) and Bachelor's degrees (22%) are discussed at least monthly. Information on the various educational pathways is provided on a more regular basis to students aged 16+ than to those aged 15 and under and is also more regularly provided to college students than school students (Figure 5).

Students: On the whole, other options aside from A-levels are rarely discussed on a weekly basis, and indeed between a quarter and third of students note that such options are “never” discussed with them, while another fifth are “unsure” on the frequency these options are discussed. These findings are supported by the depth interviews with students. For example, two students state that their sixth form college has not provided any information about apprenticeships.

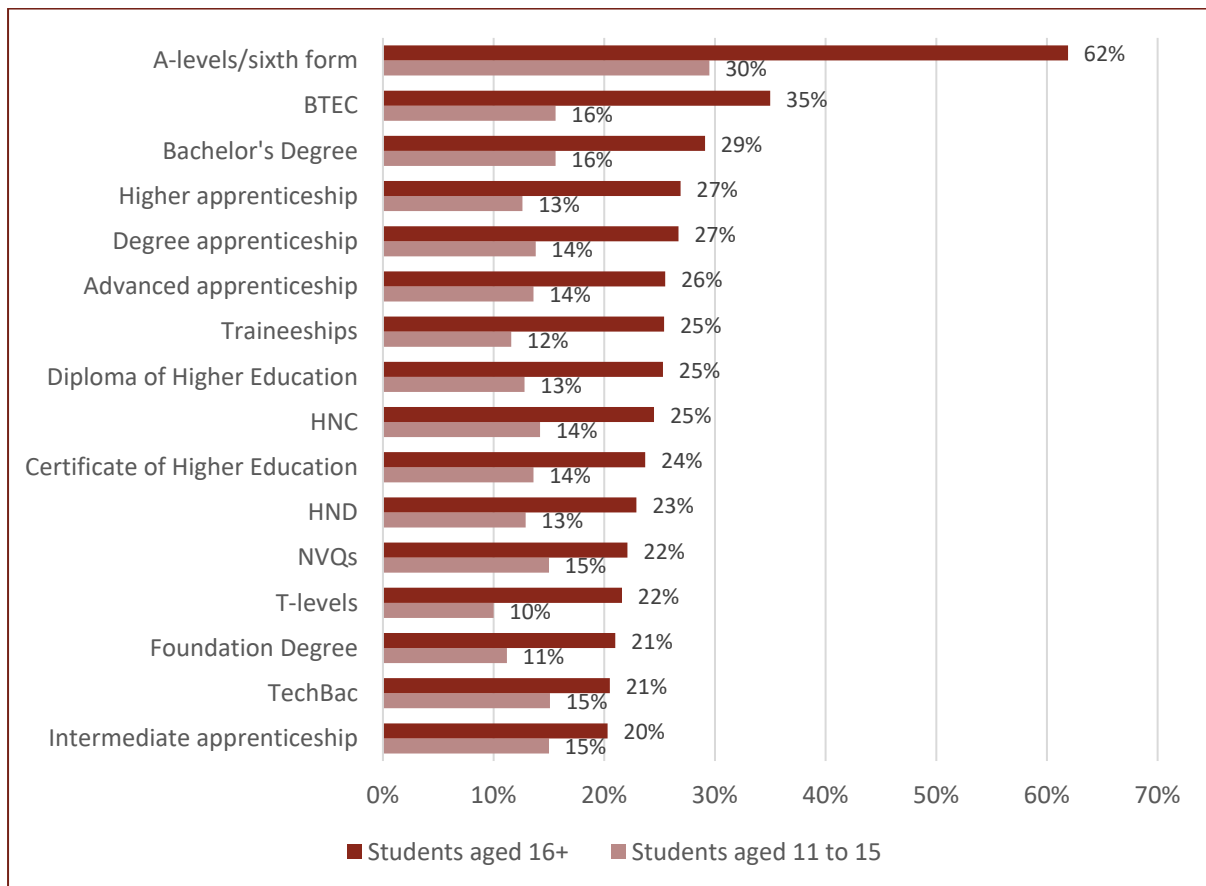
“We’ve never been told anything about apprenticeships. Can you do apprenticeships at university? I didn’t know that.”

College student, Age 18

In addition, almost all of the school students who were interviewed claim that their schools had not provided any information about T-levels. The majority of students, covering all age groups, have never heard of T-levels; a noticeable minority say that they have heard of them but do not know what they are.

These findings suggest that schools and colleges could provide a more balanced approach to how regularly these options are discussed, for instance to talk less regularly about A-levels and more so about (say) HNCs, so that students are presented with all options in a balanced and equal manner.

Figure 5 Proportion of students noting which options are discussed on a weekly or monthly basis – by age



How regularly are the following options presented and discussed at your school/college?

Base: Variable from 290 to 299. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

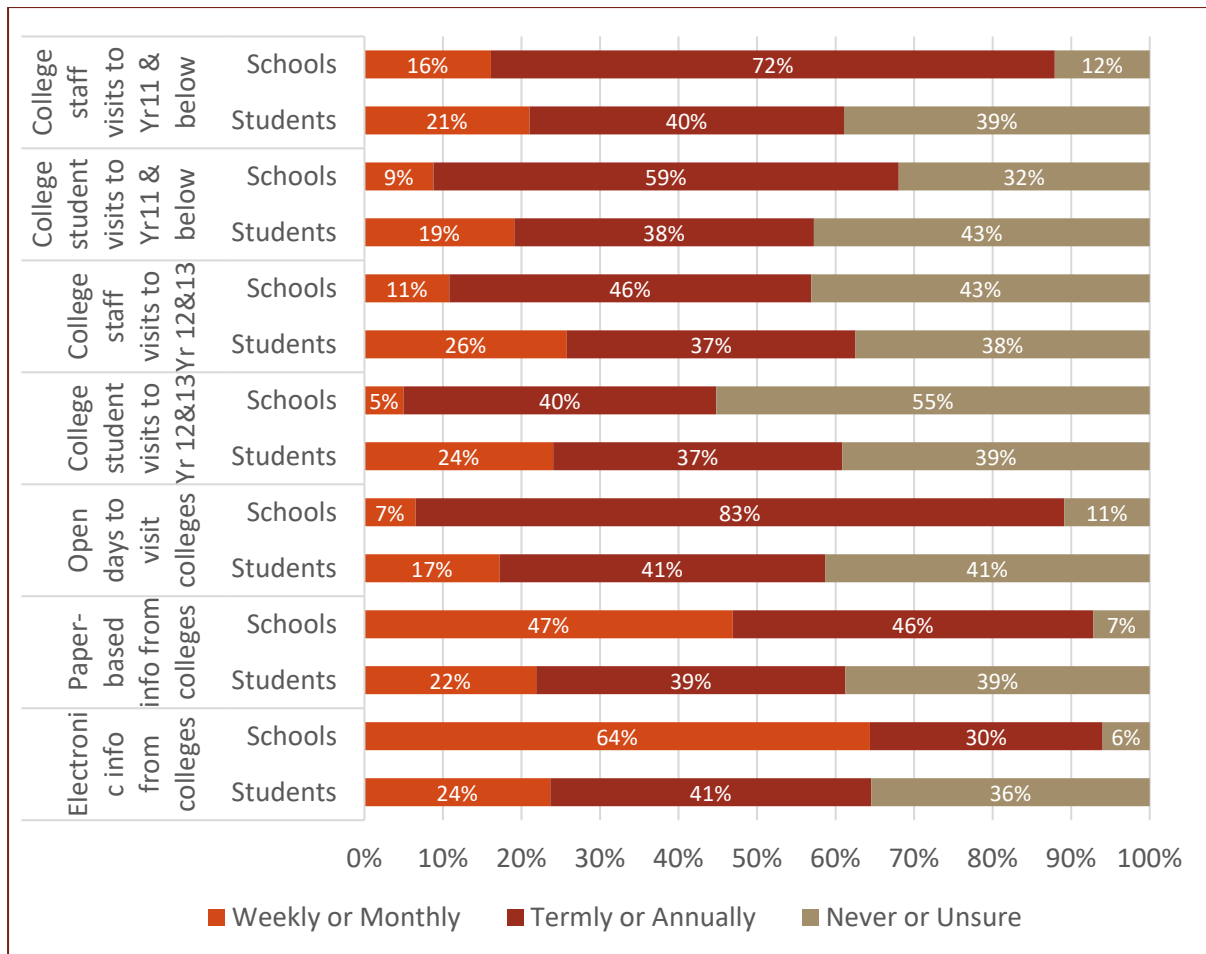
Schools were asked how frequently they provided their students with information from colleges through a variety of means prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and students were asked likewise the frequency with which information was provided by such avenues before March 2020.

Schools: The most common way in which information on future options at colleges is provided to school students is in the form of electronic information, provided via websites, social media, or virtual/online offerings (e.g. virtual tours). Around two thirds of schools provide this on a weekly or monthly basis. Paper-based information on future options from colleges is the next most common

means of providing information to students, being provided by around half of schools and colleges on a weekly or monthly basis (Figure 6).

Typically, besides electronic and paper-based methods, the most common response is that information provided by other routes (staff and students visits, or open days) is most likely to occur either on an annual or termly basis.

Figure 6 Views on frequency with which information was provided by colleges pre-Covid-19



Students: Before the Covid-19 pandemic, how often did your school/college provide you with the following?

Schools: Prior to Covid-19, how often did your school provide students with the following?

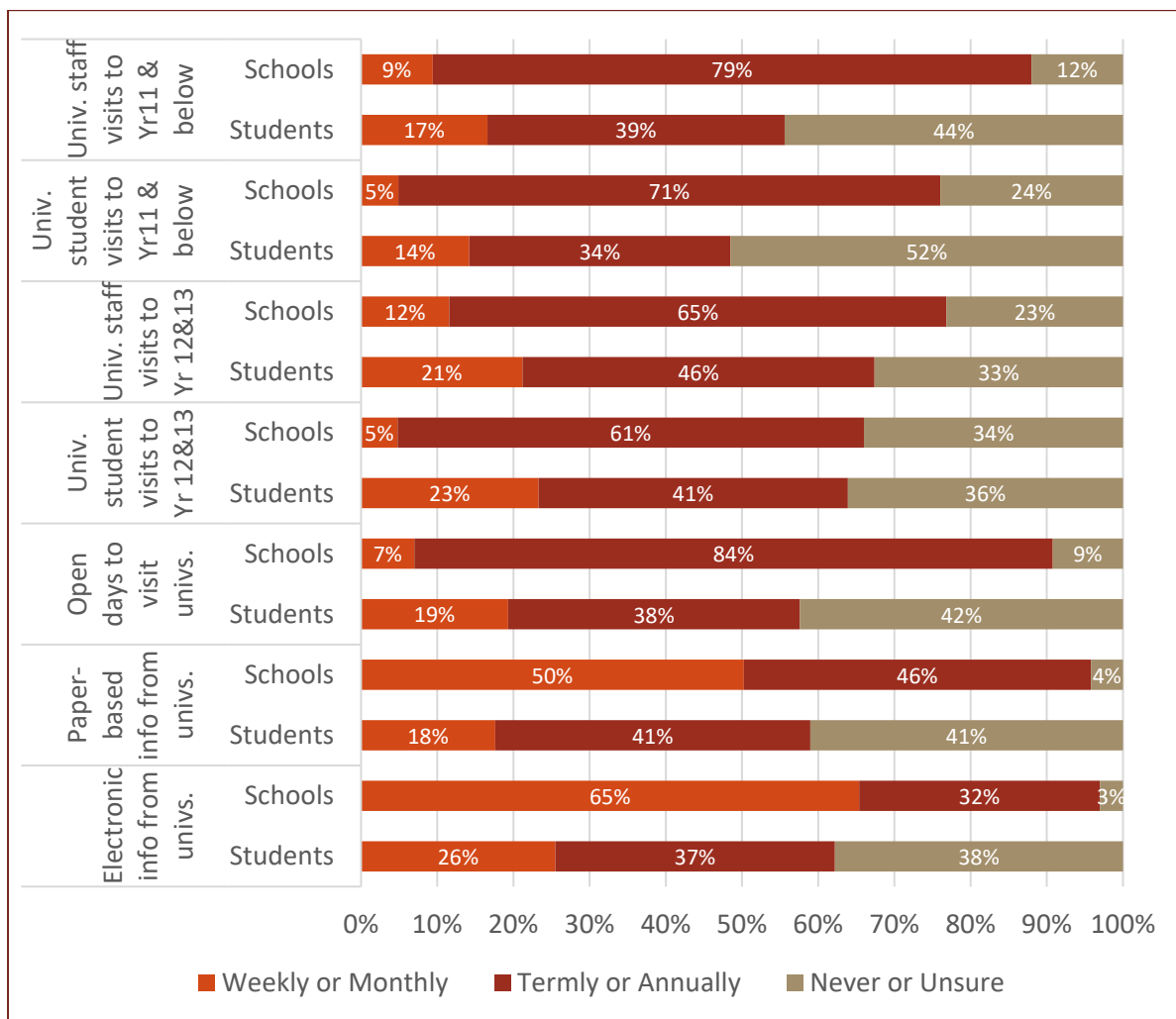
Base: Variable from 163 to 199 (schools), 132 to 296 (students). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Around one in five students report that they had received information about colleges through visits, open days, electronic, or paper means prior to Covid-19 on a weekly or monthly basis. Students at college, or students aged 16 and over at school, report that information is provided via each of these means on a more regular basis than those studying at school or those aged 15 and under, respectively. In a similar vein, schools which have a sixth form generally provide information via each of these means on a more frequent basis than those without a sixth form. Taken together, these findings suggest that there is an understandable increase in the volume of information provided to students as they get older, and closer to decision making points.

Schools were also asked how frequently they provided their students with information from universities through a variety of means prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and students were asked likewise the frequency with which information was provided by such avenues before March 2020 (Figure 7).

Schools: The most common way in which information on future options at universities is provided to school students is in the form of electronic information, provided via websites, social media, or virtual/online offerings (e.g. virtual tours). Around two thirds of schools and colleges provided this on a weekly or monthly basis prior to Covid-19. Paper-based information on future options from colleges is the next most common means of providing information to students, being provided by around half of schools and colleges on a weekly or monthly basis.

Figure 7 Views on frequency with which information was provided by universities pre-Covid-19



Students: Before the Covid-19 pandemic, how often did your school/college provide you with the following:

Schools: Prior to Covid-19, how often did your school provide students with the following?

Base: Variable from 163 to 199 (schools) and 132 to 296 (students). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Around one in five students reported that they had received information about universities through visits, open days, electronic, or paper means prior to Covid-19 on a weekly or

monthly basis, similar to the level of information received from colleges. This is an interesting finding as student knowledge about the university offer, particularly Bachelor's degrees, is higher than their knowledge of the college offering (Figure 4).

Students: A finding of possible concern is the reasonably high prevalence of “never” responses with regard to how often information is being provided in certain means. Barriers to engagement, and support suggested to boost engagement between schools and colleges, are discussed later.

Educational pathways What lessons can be learned?

- Students note that A-levels and BTECs are the pathways discussed most regularly at their school/college.
- Only A-levels, BTECs and Bachelor's degrees are scored higher than eight out of ten by schools in their rating of how they describe and communicate such options to students. Other pathways are scored lower in this respect, and with apprenticeships the only other option to score above seven. For qualification options which schools state that they describe and communicate less well to their students, colleges appear to overestimate schools' ability to do so.
- Interviews reveal that knowledge and understanding of apprenticeships vary markedly between college students. Those on more vocational courses tend to have quite detailed knowledge about apprenticeships – including course structure and the fact that apprentices are employed while they study – while those at sixth form colleges often lack knowledge about apprenticeships.
- In terms of *how* information is provided, students, schools, and colleges broadly agree that information is provided by colleges and by universities with approximately equal frequency, with electronic and paper means being most common. Older students (16+), and students at college, report that information is provided on a more regular basis than for younger students (15 and under) and school students, respectively.
- However, this does not explain the disparity in knowledge and confidence among students and schools. While information is provided through a variety of different means, a lack of knowledge and confidence regarding some options suggests that schools and colleges could provide a more balanced approach to how regularly these options are discussed, for instance to talk less regularly about A-levels and more so about (say) HNCs, so that students are presented with all options in a balanced and equal manner.

4. Designing and evaluating college interactions with school students

This chapter outlines how colleges design their interactions with school students, the views of schools on how useful the information being provided is, and the perspectives from students themselves in this regard.

4.1 How colleges design their interactions with schools

Colleges were asked to rate on a scale from one (not at all useful) to ten (highly useful) which methods work best when designing sessions and determining what information to provide to school students about their college's offer. The most useful method for designing these interactions is feedback from school staff following a previous event with the school, with colleges providing an average score of 8.8. Feedback from school students after such event was also informative for colleges in designing sessions (8.7 rating). Internal discussions with other college staff are also highly rated (8.5) and although advice from careers bodies and the use of online career tools was rated lower, these are still seen as valuable touch points with both receiving rating of over seven (Table 2).

Table 2 Best methods for designing student interactions and deciding what information to provide

Method	Average (mean)	Most common rating (mode)
Feedback from school staff about previous events with schools	8.8	10
Feedback from school students about previous events with schools	8.7	8
Internal discussions with staff at your college	8.5	8
Advice from careers bodies	7.6	8
Use of online career tools	7.3	8
Other	8.2	8

On a scale from 1 (not at all useful) to 10 (highly useful), which methods work best to design your sessions and determine what information you will provide to school students?

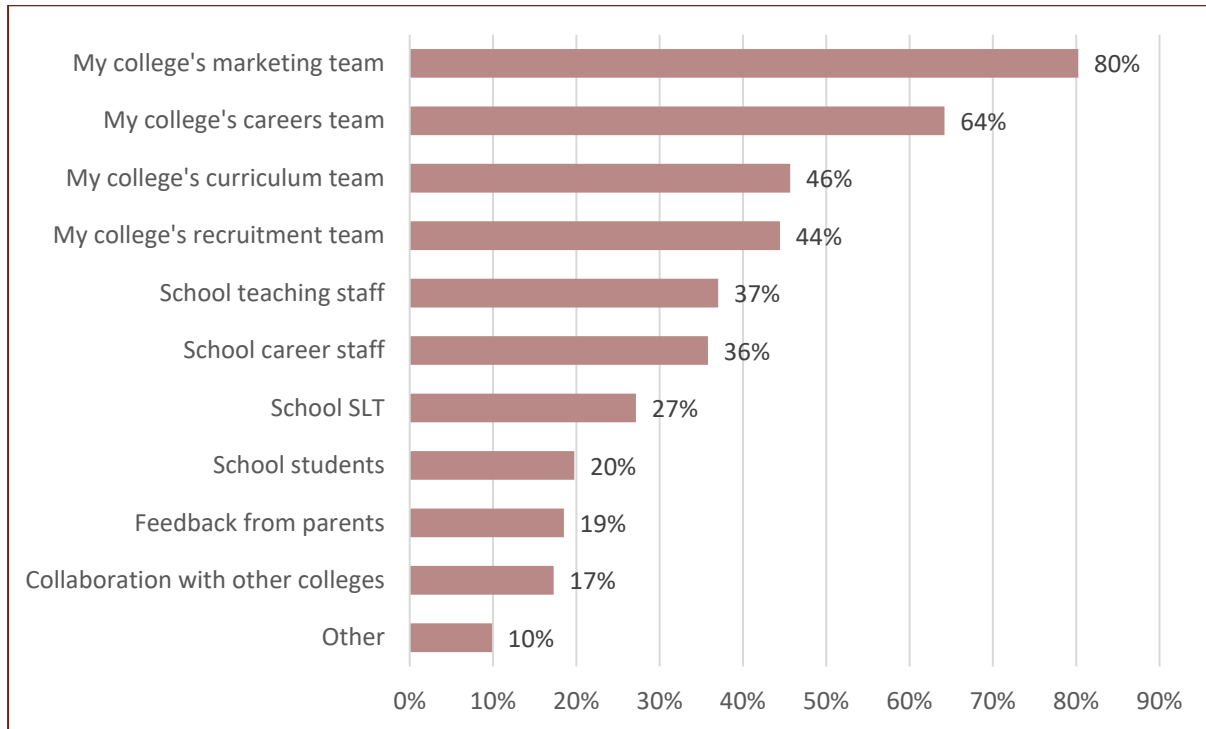
Base: Variable from 61 to 71 (13 other). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

A variety of 'other' methods are mentioned by 13 colleges including focus groups, specific careers events/open evenings, and interactions via colleges' websites, each being mentioned by two to three respondents.

Colleges were also asked which staff input into the design of their interactions with schools. The majority of responding colleges note that their college's marketing team is involved (80%) while two thirds (64%) note their careers team also inputs to this. Just under half of responding colleges note their curriculum team (46%) and recruitment team are involved (44%). Meanwhile, about a third of schools' teaching staff (37%) or schools' career staff (36%) directly input into designing interactions. Senior Leadership Team (SLT) staff at schools input into designing interactions at a quarter of colleges (27%), while input from school students and feedback from parents is less commonly relied upon, being used by around a fifth of colleges (20% and 19% respectively) (Figure 8).

'Other' individuals noted by colleges to input into the design of their interaction with students included external agencies such as My World of Work, and a specialist school liaison team.

Figure 8 Who inputs into college design of student interactions



Who inputs into the design of your college's interactions with schools?
Base: 55 respondents (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges which have a higher education provision, apprenticeship provision, or T-level provision all generally have a higher proportion of input from all sources (i.e. school teaching staff, career staff, school SLT etc.) than those colleges which do not offer such provision.

Colleges with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating typically engage more with parents, school teaching staff, and SLT, and less so with school careers staff. Colleges which 'require improvement' show much lower engagement and their main means of gathering input is from school career staff.

Colleges: This topic was also explored within the depth interviews. Colleges note that a range of staff in various roles input into the design of colleges interactions with schools. Most state that schools' liaison teams are involved in the creation of interactions, and college marketing teams are also used to ensure the material looks attractive and the branding is correct. At two colleges, college SLT or academic staff oversee the process to ensure course information is factually correct.

Colleges interviewed were also asked how they decide what information to provide to students. Most colleges note they provide a wide range of information to school students, to ensure that they are aware of all the courses available to them. A small number of colleges state that they deliver interactions based on the preferences of each school. Some schools request a presentation on specific pathways and these colleges are happy to do so. One college notes that they provide schools with a prospectus and let schools pick the areas they wish sessions to focus on.

Colleges interviewed note that they work with a wide range of types of school to ensure students receive information about the education options at their college. The main reasons given for interacting with certain schools centre on the proximity to the college; to benefit students and increase their knowledge and awareness; to directly benefit the college by increasing their student numbers; and because schools have approached them directly.

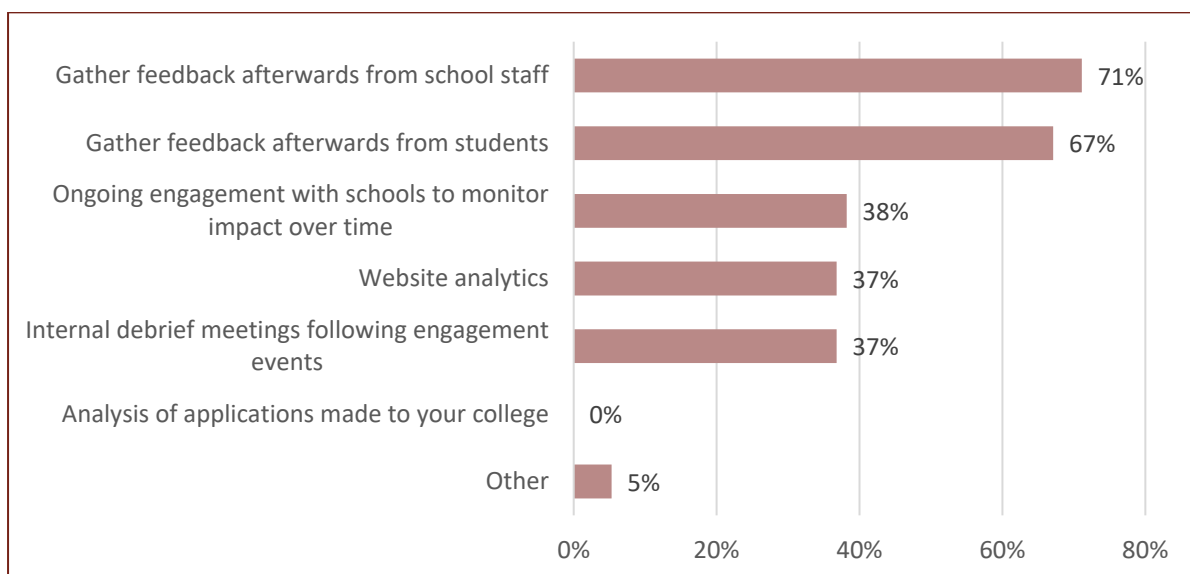
Colleges: The incentive that influences colleges’ approach to providing school students with information mentioned most often in college interviews is the Baker Clause, which now requires schools to engage with further education providers. Some colleges also mention that “good” career advisors in schools are happy/willing to engage as they themselves are motivated to provide their students with all the information about educational pathways. Besides this, the largest incentive for colleges to engage with school students is for recruitment to attend their college and increase student numbers.

Colleges: In a similar vein, surveyed colleges were asked how they gather feedback to evaluate the impact of their engagement with schools. The most popular methods are through gathering feedback from school staff, and also from students, both being done by around two in three colleges (71% and 67%, respectively). About one in three colleges monitor impact via ongoing engagement with schools over time, website analytics, or internal debriefs following such events. ‘Other’ methods for evaluating impact include reviewing destinations data, or feedback gathered through colleges’ website and social media pages from students (Figure 9).

Colleges: Almost all colleges rated as ‘Outstanding’ gather feedback from both students (89%) and all do so from staff (100%), while over half continually engage with schools to monitor impact over time (56%), and few hold internal debriefs after events (11%).

Colleges: With increased distance between institutions, colleges in a rural location are much more likely to evaluate the impact of sessions via website analytics (56%) while urban-based colleges are more likely to gather feedback from students (71%) and staff (75%) than rural-based colleges (33% and 44%, respectively).

Figure 9 How colleges evaluate impact of school engagement



How do you evaluate the impact of your engagement with schools?

Base: 76 respondents (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: Most colleges interviewed further note that they work with other local colleges to enable them to give students information about the whole local offer. Many areas have regional partnerships where local colleges put on events and assemblies for school students, such as Greater Manchester Higher, the VENN group or the Oldham Technical Education Partnership. These partnerships have a central careers team that disseminate material on behalf of the colleges to all schools in the local area.

4.2 How schools design their interactions for students

Schools: Interviewed schools note that there are three key strands which act as incentives to influence their approach to providing students with information:

- **Personal incentives:** wanting to do a thorough job, having an outstanding careers programme, caring about students doing well, and knowing students have got somewhere to go.
- **Legislative incentives:** students have a statutory right to information on education pathways (inc. Baker Clause).
- **Other incentives:** meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks, being judged on NEET figures, and the influence of Ofsted inspections.

Schools were asked to rate on a scale of one (very little influence) to ten (very large influence) the extent to which factors influence their engagement with colleges. The factors which have the largest impact in this regard are schools' locality to colleges (average 8.3 rating) and the choice of courses on offer (8.1) – see Table 3. A college's Ofsted rating has a much lower influence (5.8) than factors such as the quality of college courses (7.9), onward career progression opportunities from the college (7.7) and the quality of previous interactions (7.6). This implies that schools really value past interactions, established relationships with institutions and their knowledge of quality of colleges' interactions.

Table 3 Factors which influence schools' engagement with colleges

Factor	Average (mean)	Most common rating (mode)
Locality to school	8.3	10
Choice of courses on offer at college	8.1	10
High-quality courses at the college	7.9	8
Onward career progression opportunities offered for students	7.7	8
Quality of past interactions school students had with college staff / students	7.6	8
Easy to interact with and to arrange sessions for my students	7.5	8
College's Ofsted rating	5.8	5

On a scale from 1 (very little influence) to 10 (very large influence), please rate the extent to which the following factors influence the choice of FE college(s) you engage with?

Base: Variable from 185 to 198. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Schools in a rural setting typically rate each factor higher than those in an urban setting. This finding suggests that, being based in a more remote location forces such schools to think more carefully about which colleges to engage with, while urban-based schools potentially enjoy the greater luxury of greater choice of colleges with which to engage.

Schools interviewed corroborate this survey finding, noting that they typically work with providers in the local area, and that this can include a range of different types of college. They make this choice based on locale; colleges' willingness to spend time and resource on schools where they are likely to recruit; and colleges offering opportunities that are of interest to particular students.

Schools: In addition, the majority of interviewed schools note they also work with universities. They make this choice based on locale; where there are existing relationships; the quality of what the institutions offers; where students wish to go; and willingness/level of engagement reciprocated.

4.3 Schools' perceptions of the information available

Schools were asked how they would rate the range and quality of material being provided to them through various avenues, on a scale from one (very poor) to ten (very good). Generally, schools have a very similar opinion of the quality of information and interactions with colleges and universities. For example, schools view electronic information from universities (average rating of 8.3) and colleges (7.9) as having the greatest breadth and highest quality (Table 4). Open days for students to visit universities (7.8) and colleges (7.5) are also seen as valuable in this regard, as is the paper-based information being received from universities (7.6) and colleges (7.5).

Table 4 Schools' perceptions of range and quality of information available

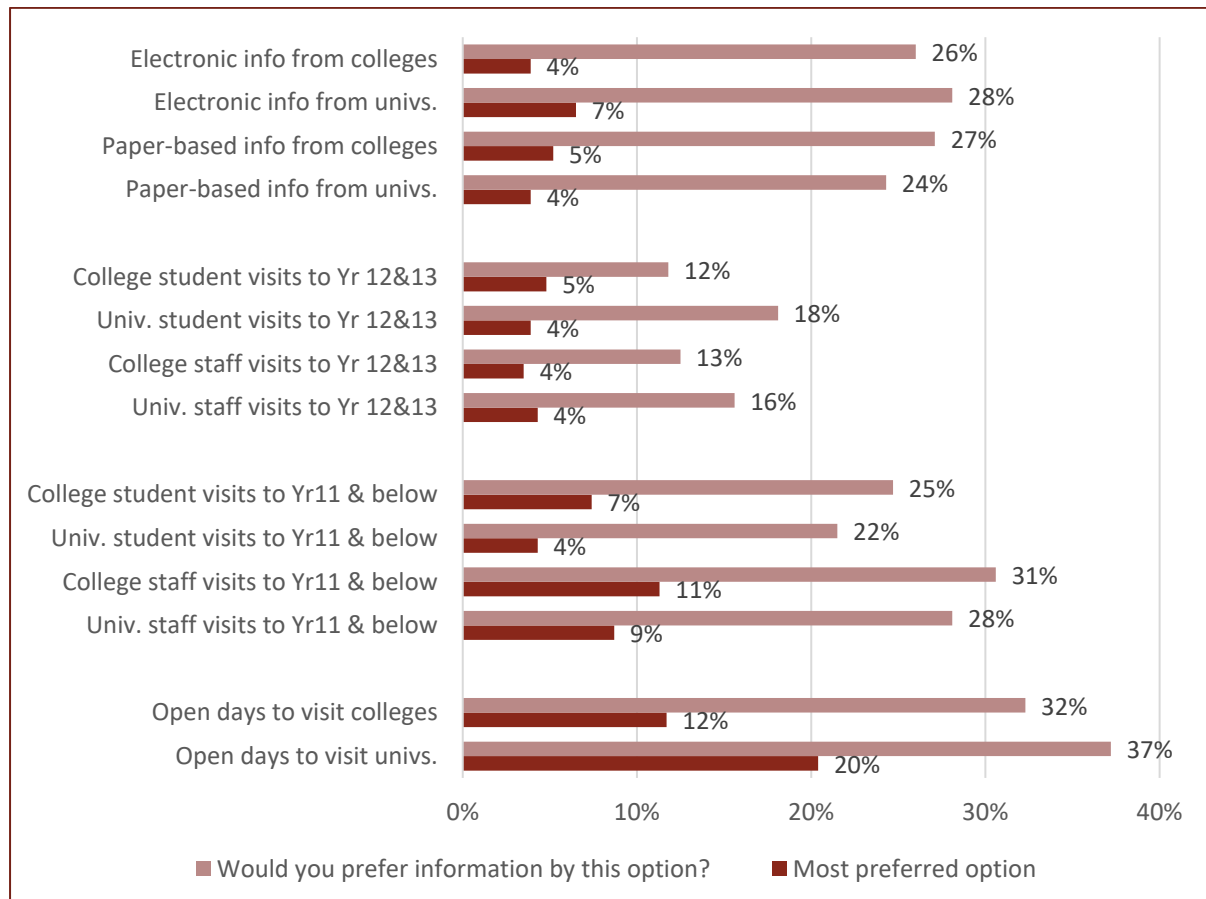
Type of information	Average rating
Electronic info from univs.	8.3
Electronic info from colleges	7.9
Open days to visit univs.	7.8
Paper-based info from univs.	7.6
Open days to visit colleges	7.5
Paper-based info from colleges	7.5
Univ. staff visits to Yr11 & below	7.4
College staff visits to Yr11 & below	7.3
Univ. student visits to Yr11 & below	7.0
Univ. staff visits to Yr 12&13	7.0
College student visits to Yr11 & below	6.6
Univ. student visits to Yr 12&13	6.4
College staff visits to Yr 12&13	6.0
College student visits to Yr 12&13	5.4

On a scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (very good), how would you rate the range and quality of material being provided by...?
Base: Variable from 127 to 190. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

4.4 Students' preferences and perceptions

Students: To contrast against schools' perceptions of the range and quality of information being provided, students were asked how they themselves would prefer to receive information regarding onward education options (Figure 10).

Figure 10 How students would prefer to receive information



By which of the following channels do you/would you prefer to receive information about possible education pathways?
And of these, which would be your most preferred channel?

Bases: 288 (would you prefer information by this option) (multiple responses permitted), and 230 respondents (most preferred option). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Noted by around a third of students, open days to visit universities (37%) and to colleges (32%) are most commonly mentioned. Visits by staff from colleges (31%) and universities (28%) to students in Year 11 and below are also popular ways in which students would prefer to receive information. Both electronic and paper-based information are also popular, being mentioned by over a quarter of students responding. Staff and student visits to students in Year 12 and 13 are less preferred.

Students: When asked what the single most preferred way to receive information is, there is a general trend for information about both universities and colleges to be delivered face-to-face through open day visits and visits by staff and students.

Students surveyed were asked to rate their perceptions of the trustworthiness of such information sources from one (not at all trustworthy) to ten (highly trustworthy). Most information sources receive a ‘middling’ average score of between six and seven, indicating that students do not place either huge trustworthiness in all these, but neither that they strongly doubt the information being provided (Table 5). Rather, all sources all receive a “fair” rating of trust, but none are perceived as excellent in this regard. Information sources from universities are generally perceived to be marginally more trustworthy than that coming from colleges.

Table 5 Students' perceptions of information sources' trustworthiness

Option	Average (mean)	Most common rating (mode)
Univ. student visits to Yr 12&13	7.1	8
Electronic info from univs.	6.9	8
Open days to visit univs.	6.8	8
Paper-based info from colleges	6.8	7
Paper-based info from univs.	6.8	8
Univ. student visits to Yr11 & below	6.7	8
Univ. staff visits to Yr 12&13	6.7	7
Electronic info from colleges	6.7	8
College student visits to Yr 12&13	6.6	7
Open days to visit colleges	6.6	8
Univ. staff visits to Yr11 & below	6.5	8
College student visits to Yr11 & below	6.3	8
College staff visits to Yr 12&13	6.0	5
College staff visits to Yr11 & below	5.9	7

On a scale of 1 (not at all trustworthy) to 10 (highly trustworthy), please can you rate the extent to which you trust the information from these sources?

Base: Variable from 110 to 256. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Broadly, younger students aged between 11 and 15 perceive the information provided via such sources to be more trustworthy than older students aged 16 and over.

Besides the way in which information is provided, students were also asked to rate the usefulness of the types of information being provided to them when considering onward education options, on a scale from one (not at all useful) to ten (highly useful).

Students: The most useful types of information that students value being provided with regarding onward education options involve the job that they will be able to get with that course of qualification, or the career progression possibilities offered by the course or qualification (both rated 7.2 on average) – see Table 6. Information on the qualifications required to apply for particular options, and on the qualification gained on completion are valued as equally as the reputation of the institution at which students consider studying (7.1). Students value least information regarding the cost of a course or qualification (most common score of five out of ten).

Students: Younger students aged 11 to 15 provide higher ratings on average than those aged 16+. Meanwhile, students at college most value information regarding qualifications needed and qualifications gained (both average 7.2), while school students most value information regarding jobs (7.3) and career progression (7.4) possibilities post-qualification.

Table 6 Students’ perceptions of usefulness of types of information when considering options

Type of information	Average (mean)	Most common rating (mode)
The job that I will be able to get with that course or qualification	7.2	10
The career progression possibilities offered by a course or qualification	7.2	8
The qualification that I will gain at the end of a course	7.1	10
The qualifications that I need in order to apply for a particular option	7.1	10
The reputation of the college or university where I am considering studying	7.1	8
The amount of time required to complete a particular course or qualification	6.7	7
The reputation of a particular course or qualification	6.7	8
The cost of a particular course or qualification	6.6	5

On a scale of 1 (not at all useful) to 10 (highly useful), please rate how useful different types of information are to you when considering future education options?

Base: Variable from 267 to 282. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Interviewed students were also asked about what they particularly like about the information provided to them by their school or college. Many college students and older school students say that they particularly like the quality and breadth of information provided, although in some cases, students qualify this by stating that they often had to seek out this information themselves by asking members of staff at their institution. Once sought/acquired, students generally find information useful and informative. Several older students also mention that they like the personalised support offered by a careers advisor at their institution. Students appreciate the opportunity to talk through a range of options with a designated member of staff. More broadly, students spanning multiple age groups also express a preference for a range of face-to-face provision. While some students state that their favourite element is careers fairs, others mention careers talks and open days at colleges in this regard.

“I like how before the pandemic I could make a meeting with the careers advisor and have a one to one – we could talk about anything and I could get my thoughts straight on what I was thinking.”

School student, Age 17

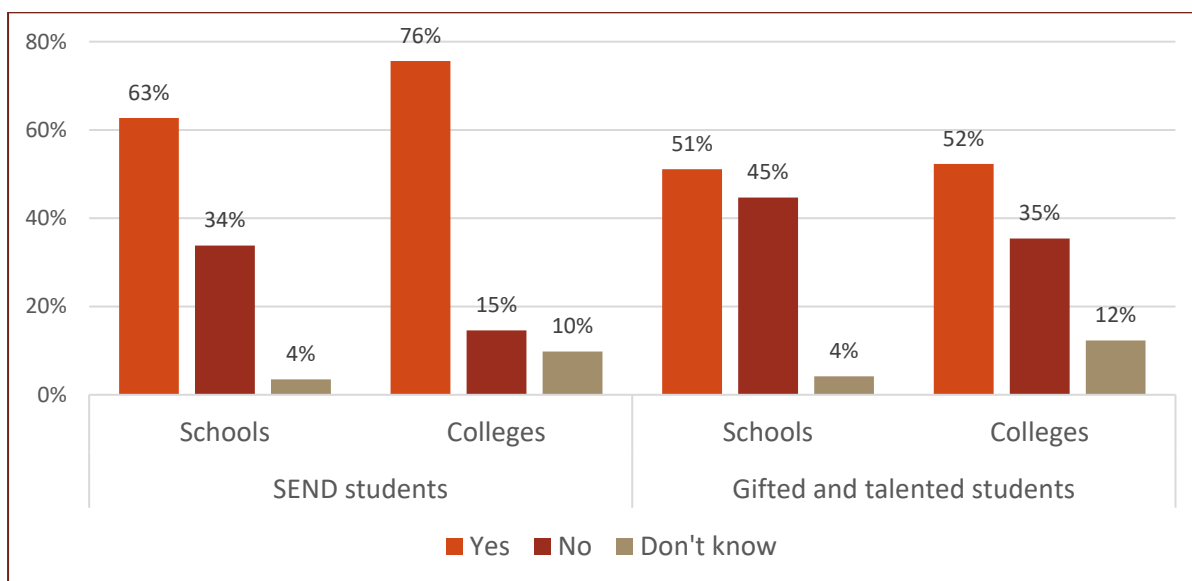
“They explained that it’s not rigid, it’s not one single pathway. They allow you to look at other options, if you miss the results there are other pathways you can take.”

College student, Age 17

4.5 Differing approaches for specific student cohorts

Schools & colleges: In designing interactions for students, schools and colleges were asked whether the advice and information being provided differs for different student groups, using the examples of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) students and GAT (Gifted and Talented) students. Around two in three schools (63%) and three in four colleges (76%) alter their approach in terms of the information they provided to SEND students, while approximately half of schools and college (51% and 52%, respectively) do likewise for GAT students (Figure 11).

Figure 11 Whether advice provided by schools/colleges differs by cohort



Does the advice/information being provided to SEND students differ?

Does the advice/information being provided to gifted and talented students differ?

Base: Variable from 190 to 201 (schools) and 65 to 82 (colleges). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: Going into detail on how their approach differs, colleges typically note that they have a specialist team or specialist advisor who is able to focus on and assist SEND students. There is general consensus that colleges provide support which is tailored to individual needs, and that each SEND student will have a greater degree of one on one assistance.

Schools take a similar approach, noting they provide additional relevant and bespoke information and appropriate levels of support that meet the specific needs of individuals. Often, SEND students will have individual action plans in place so that support and information can be provided which meets their needs.

“We guide them individually through their options and give them more time and staff support to read and understand the information.”

Middle school, North West

Schools & colleges: With regard to GAT students, colleges and schools take similar approaches, commonly having in place specific support and mentoring programmes in place for high achievers, which broadly aim to stretch individuals and to assist them in their goals, with red brick universities

commonly mentioned in this regard. Similar to their approach to SEND students, colleges and schools note that they seek to provide students with information and support that is tailored to their needs and aspirations.

“This will tend to be highly focused and individualised advice one-to-one by our Careers Advisor / Lead, for both categories.”

Academy, South West

Schools interviewed were also asked whether the nature and extent of information provided varies by different groups of students. One interviewee said that across age groups, all students will get everything at certain points, i.e. they focus on particular careers and employability-related topics (e.g. writing a CV) for different year groups, and the entire year group has access. Interviewees describe how their provision for SEND students differs – schools clarify what is needed with individuals, and they may receive sessions on topics such as self-esteem and how to complete applications, or receive more meetings and support. One interviewee mentions that GAT students can work with an Oxbridge group through a sister school, and another interviewee mentioned a local sixth form that has a programme for GAT students that school students can access.

Schools: For the most part, schools interviewed note that their aim is to provide as much information as possible to all and/or being driven by students and their interests. There are ad hoc examples of individual staff members whose opinions influence the information they give, but this is not widespread.

Designing and evaluating interactions with students What lessons can be learned?

- Colleges with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating typically engage more with parents, school teaching staff, and SLT, and less so with school careers staff when designing their interactions and engagement with school students. Colleges which 'require improvement' show much lower engagement with wider stakeholders (e.g. parents, school SLT, students). Input from college marketing and recruitment teams is the most common means through which interactions are designed.
- Almost all colleges rated as 'Outstanding' evaluate their interactions by gathering feedback from both students and staff, while over half continually engage with schools, and only a minority hold internal debriefs after events.
- Key factors which influence whether schools will decide to engage with a college include the proximity to the school, the breadth and quality of courses on offer, and clear information about onward progression opportunities. The Ofsted rating of a college was less important.
- Students generally prefer information about both universities and colleges to be delivered face-to-face through open days and visits by staff and students to the school.
- The most useful types of information that students value being provided with include: the job that they will be able to get with that course of qualification, the career progression possibilities offered by the course or qualification, information on the qualifications required to apply for options, information on the qualification gained on completion, and the reputation of the institution at which students consider studying.
- Students interviewed have a middling level of trust in information provided by both universities and colleges, and trust information from colleges to a slightly lesser extent than information from universities. Tied into the previous point, if colleges can provide clear information about onwards course quality and progression opportunities, this approach may lead to more successful engagement with schools and higher levels of trust with students.

5. Satisfaction, quality, and perceived barriers

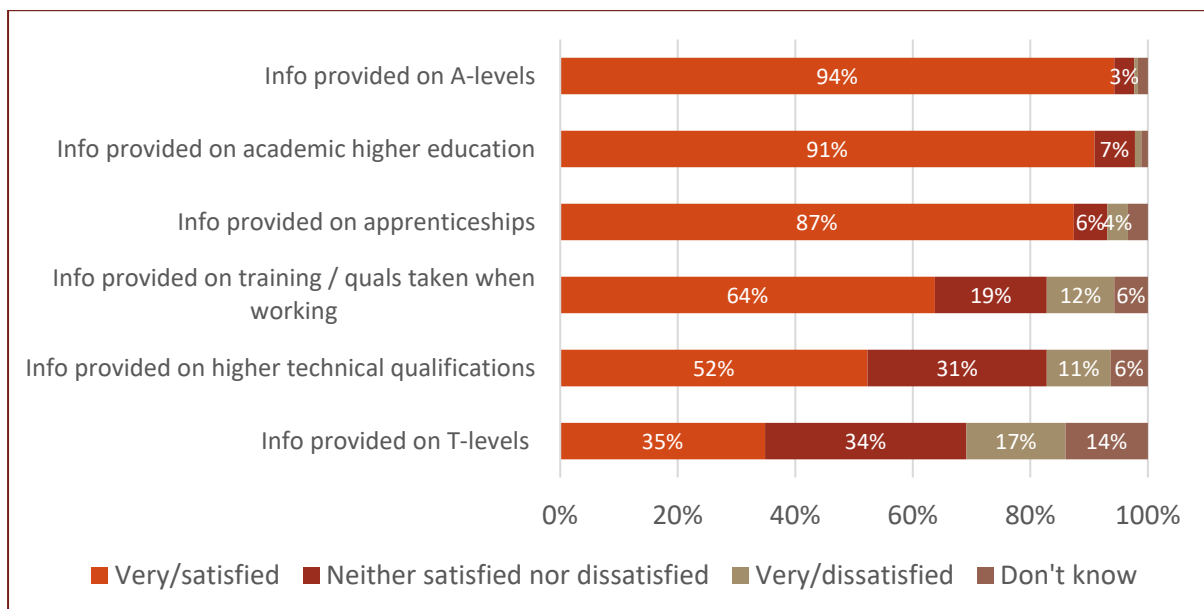
This chapter explores schools', colleges', and students' views regarding the satisfaction and quality of their relative interactions with regard to the information being provided about onwards educational options, and outlines barriers perceived to satisfactory interactions.

5.1 Satisfaction with information provided

Chapter 3 discusses how well various educational options are described and communicated to students. This section discusses relative satisfaction, both in terms of the quality of information being provided, and the frequency with which this is done.

Schools: Firstly, schools were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various sources of information. Careers leaders and advisors in schools are most satisfied with the information provided on A-levels, with 94% stating they are 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied'. The majority of schools are also 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the information provided on academic higher education (91%) and the information provided on apprenticeships (87%) – see Figure 12. However, schools' lowest satisfaction is with information provided on T-levels (35%), likely reflective of their relative novelty to the qualifications landscape.

Figure 12 Schools' satisfaction with information provided to their own students

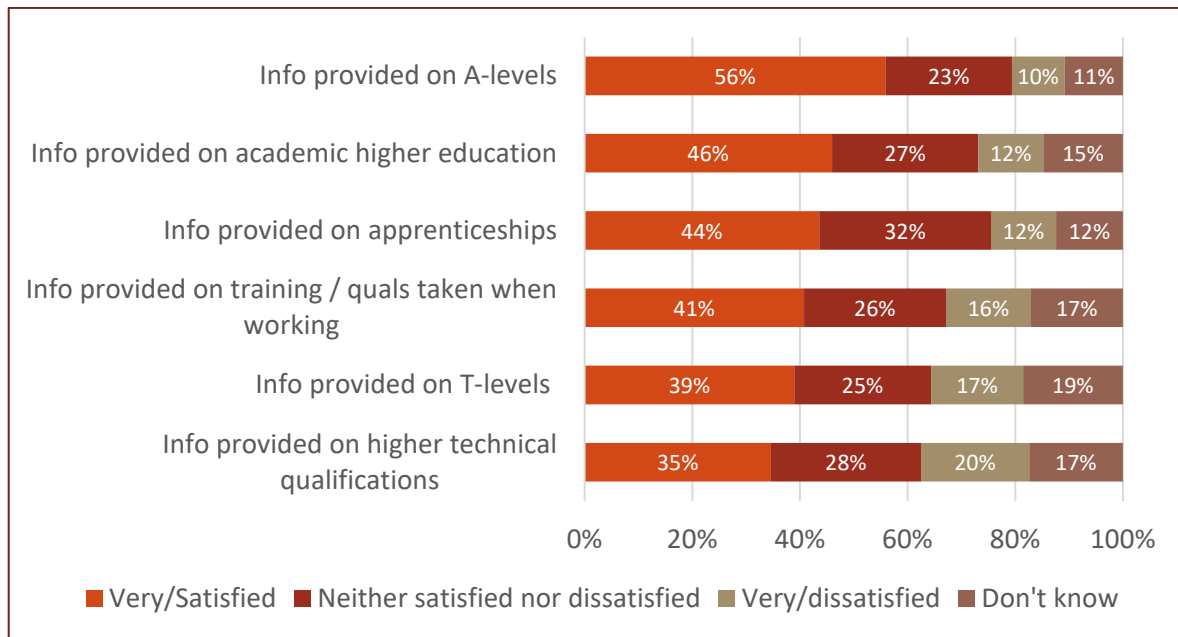


How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the following?
Base: Variable from 172 to 176. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Similar to schools, students were asked a question in relation to their satisfaction with the information being provided via various information sources. On the whole, students' satisfaction is lower than that of schools. While the majority of students are 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' (56%) with

the information provided on A-levels, fewer than half of students provide these same ratings for any other options (Figure 13). In contrast to schools, students' relative satisfaction with the information provided on T-levels is higher, with 39% stating they are 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' in this regard, even though information on T-levels is provided less regularly (cf Chapter 3).

Figure 13 Students' satisfaction with information provided

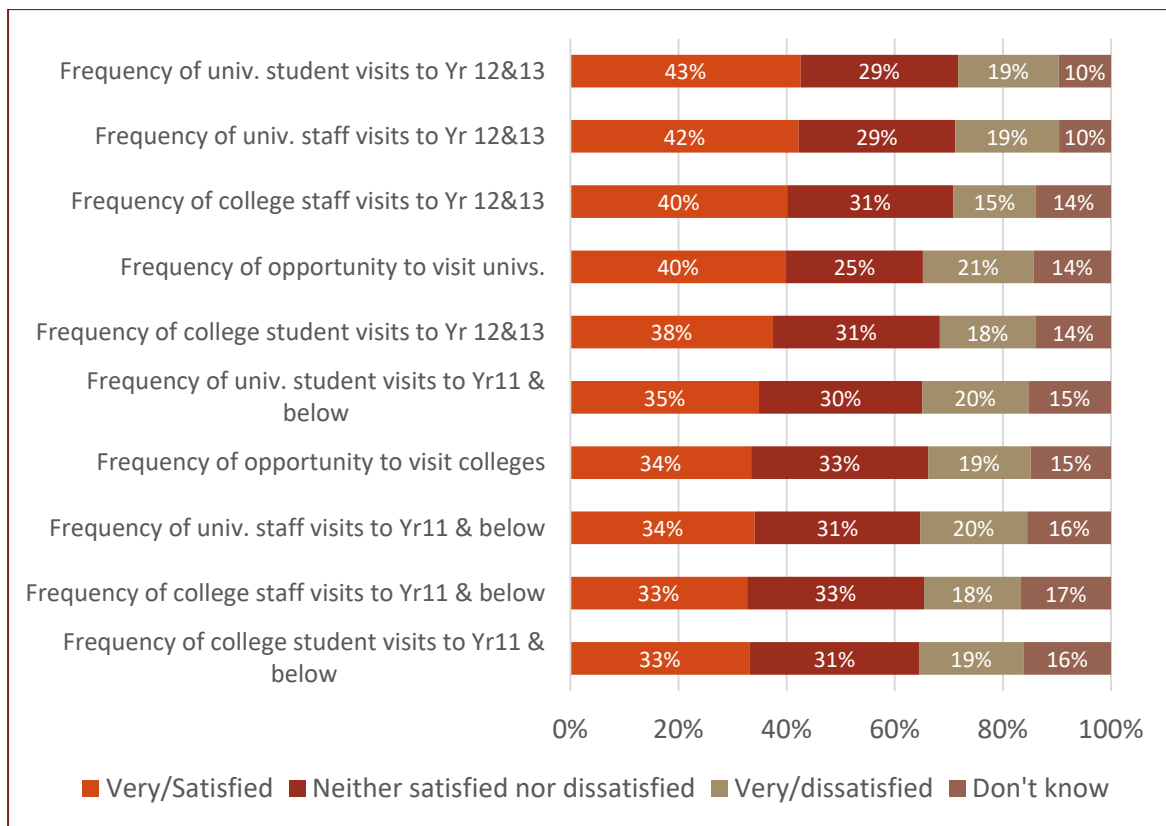


Please state your level of satisfaction with the following:
Base: Variable from 295 to 303. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students: Aligning to schools' views and indicative of the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students are most dissatisfied with the frequency of opportunity to visit universities (21%) and colleges (19%) – see Figure 14. A fifth of students (20%) also state they are 'very dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied' with information provided on higher technical qualifications, echoing earlier findings that students have a lower understanding and/or knowledge of this option, and suggesting that students would like to have more information on this pathway.

Students: Broadly, students at college are more satisfied with information via these sources compared to school students.

Figure 14 Students' satisfaction with level of frequency of ways information is provided



Please state your level of satisfaction with the following:
Base: Variable from 134 to 296. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Students were also asked about their perception of how the quality of the information they receive via various sources had changed since the first national lockdown imposed in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 2 in Technical Annex).

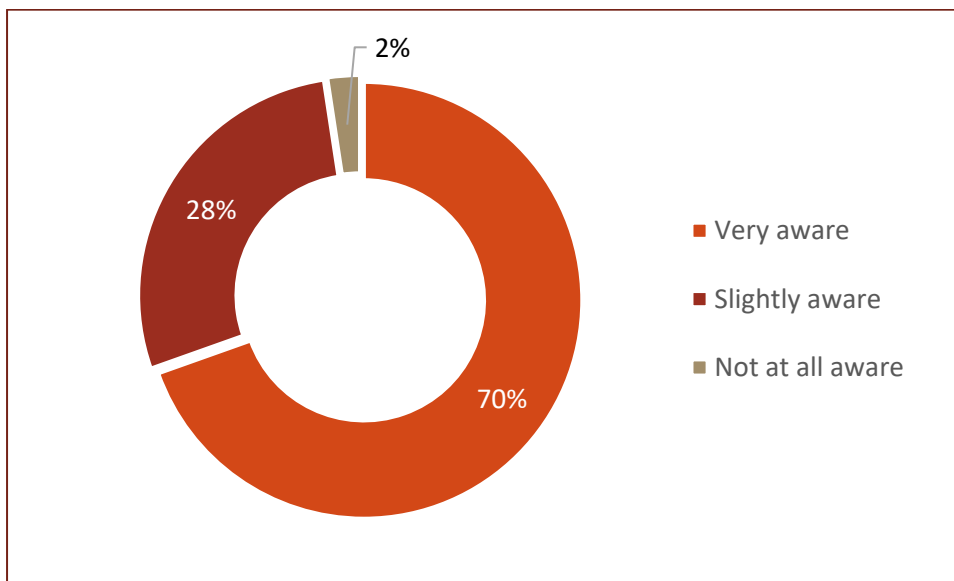
Students: Overall, students report a slight decrease in the quality of information via various sources since March 2020. In general, between a third and a half of students feel that the quality of information being provided through college or university staff and students, open days, paper-based communications, or electronic communications, has remained the same, with a slightly greater proportion noting a decrease in quality than those reporting an increase. Around one in six students (16%) report an increase in the quality of information being provided in electronic form by schools and by colleges. In contrast, over a quarter report a decrease in the quality of information provided at open days to universities (26%) and colleges (27%), likely reflective that these have decreased in frequency since the first lockdown.

Students: A slightly higher proportion of students at college report an increase in quality since the March 2020 lockdown compared to school students, and similarly a higher proportion of students aged 16 and over do so compared to those aged 11 to 15. However, all groups in this regard, overall, lean towards reporting a small decrease in the quality of information being provided.

5.2 Satisfaction and quality of interactions

Colleges were asked about how aware they thought the schools with which they engage were of the full range of courses and opportunities which their college offered. The majority of responding colleges (70%) believe schools are 'fully aware' of all opportunities which they offer, while 28% comment schools are 'slightly aware', and 2% state that schools are 'not at all aware' (Figure 15).

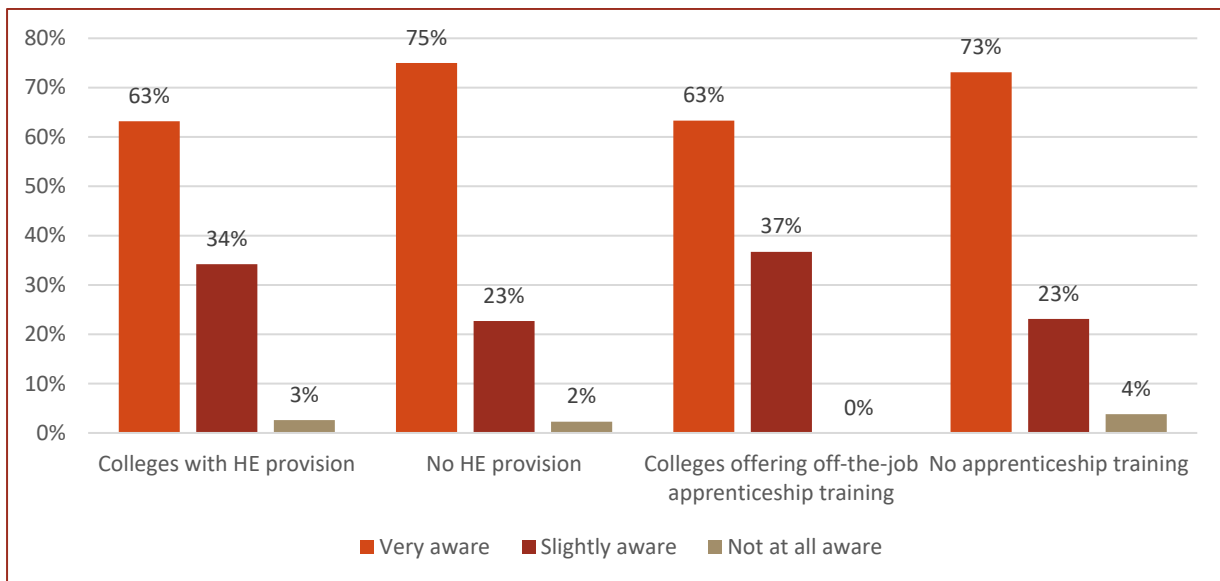
Figure 15 Colleges' perceptions of schools' awareness of full range of courses they offer



How aware do you think schools are of the full range of courses and opportunities offered by your college?
Base: 82 respondents. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: Examining college responses by their offer, a lower proportion of colleges which provide apprenticeship training, or of those which offer some form of higher education training, report that schools are 'fully aware' of the courses they offer, compared to colleges which do not offer these options (Figure 16). Taken together, these findings suggest that colleges which offer a greater variety of onwards educational pathways find that schools struggle to grasp the diversity of options available, or lack the information required to be aware of all options.

Figure 16 Colleges' perceptions of schools' awareness of full range of courses they offer – by type of provision available



How aware do you think schools are of the full range of courses and opportunities offered by your college?
Base: 82 respondents. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: As a headline score, colleges were asked to rate from one (very unsatisfied) to ten (extremely satisfied) the satisfaction of their engagement with schools. Overall, colleges provide an average (mean) score of 8.1 with scores ranging from four to ten.

Schools were asked a similar question in reverse and are slightly less satisfied, providing an average (mean) score of 7.7 with scores ranging from one to ten. Schools without a sixth form (8.2) or without T-level provision (7.8) are more satisfied than those with a sixth form or with T-level provision (7.5 and 7.1, respectively). Meanwhile, schools with a better Ofsted rating are less satisfied: 'outstanding' averages 7.3, 'good' 7.8, and 'requires improvement' 8.1.

Colleges offering off-the-job apprenticeship training (7.3), or some form of higher education provision (7.8) are less satisfied than those without this provision (8.6 and 8.4, respectively). Offering a greater breadth of courses potentially means that these colleges may not have the chance to explore these as fully as desired. Similarly, colleges in an urban setting (8.2) are more satisfied than those in a rural setting (7.3). There is no notable difference by Ofsted rating.

Colleges: Asked to provide reasons for their headline satisfaction rating, colleges rating eight or higher note that they have good relationships and engagement with schools, with clear communication and feedback between parties. Several note that the recent appointment of individuals in schools who have clear responsibilities to manage engagement with colleges has helped to improve engagement significantly. Those scoring seven or lower typically state that they are broadly satisfied, but would like engagement with students at a younger age to make them aware of options, or for a closer/stronger relationship with schools.

Schools were also asked to provide reasons for their rating. Those scoring eight or higher generally note they have close personal working relationships with individuals in colleges, that colleges are very willing to engage and proactive in doing so, and that they provided relevant and clear information to students. Schools scoring seven or lower typically state they are generally satisfied

though feel there is room for improvement, for instance having more interactive sessions for students, or more dedicated time to focus on this element of their role. A minority note they engage little with colleges as their schools' focus is on A-levels (rather than focusing across all pathways as outlined in Benchmark 7).

"We have worked with them for many years and have a good understanding what they provided and what will suit our students best."

Foundation School, West Midlands

Colleges were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their interactions with schools on a scale from one (very unsatisfied) to ten (extremely satisfied). Colleges report that they are highly satisfied with their ease of access to students in schools without sixth forms (average rating of 8.5), however, they report much lower satisfaction with their ease of access to students in schools with sixth forms (5.7), reflecting a lack of universal adherence currently to the Baker Clause (Table 7).

Colleges which are apprenticeship providers give a slightly lower average satisfaction ratings for different interactions with schools, compared to colleges which do not provide off-the-job apprenticeship training. Similarly, colleges offering some form of higher education provision report a slightly lower average satisfaction ratings compared to those without such provision. Taken together, these findings again suggest that colleges which offer a greater variety of onwards educational pathways can struggle to engage as successfully as they might wish. Perceived barriers to such interactions, and potential support that might be required, are explored further later in this chapter and the next.

Table 7 Colleges' satisfaction with aspects of interactions with schools

Aspect	Average (mean)	Most common rating (mode)
Ease of access to students in schools without sixth forms	8.5	9
Ease of access to students in schools with sixth forms	5.7	8
Level of interest of students	7.8	8
Quality/level of performance of students engaged	7.8	8
Representativeness of students compared to the school as a whole	7.6	8

Overall, on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied), please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following:

Base: Variable from 71 to 77. Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

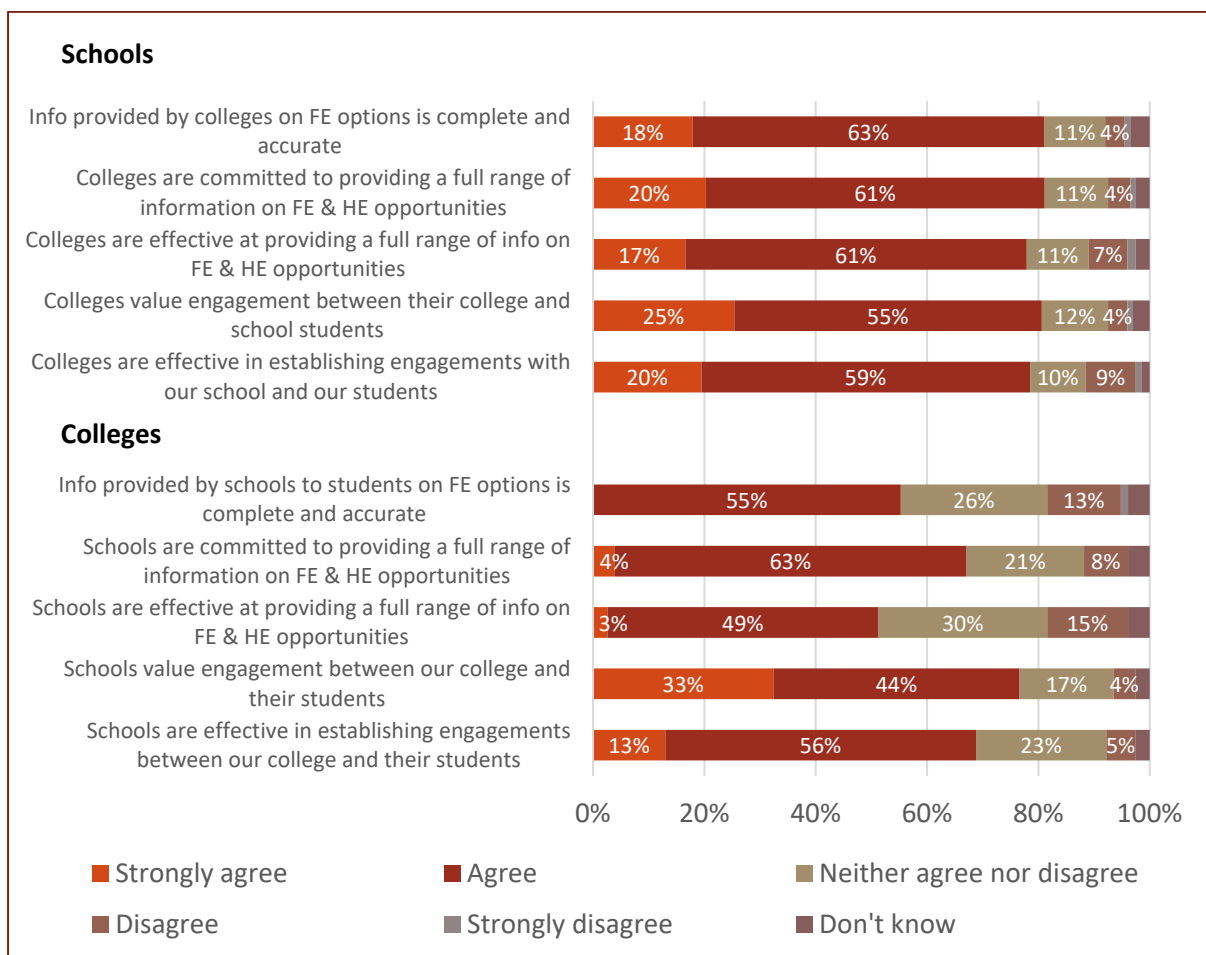
Schools and colleges were each asked for their level of agreement with a series of statements focusing on the satisfaction and quality of their respective interactions and mutual engagement. These are presented in the figure below with schools' perceptions in the top half, and colleges' in the lower half.

In general, schools are slightly more satisfied with their interaction with colleges than vice versa. Approximately four in five schools 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the information colleges provide is complete and accurate (81%), that colleges are both committed to (81%) and effective at providing a full range of information to students (78%), and that colleges are both effective at engaging with the school and students (79%) – see Figure 17.

Colleges are in agreement with schools in that both value their respective engagement with one another. However, colleges demonstrate much more variable levels of satisfaction with their interactions with schools. While most colleges note that schools are effective at establishing relationships with them (69%), around one in six colleges (15%) ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that schools are effective at providing a full range of information on further and higher education opportunities, or that the information being provided directly by schools to their students regarding further education options is complete and accurate, with very few (if any) ‘strongly agreeing’ in those regards.

Colleges in rural settings report a higher level of disagreement regarding their interactions with schools compared to colleges in an urban setting. Such a finding is perhaps reflective of the increased distance to travel for schools to engage, which may act as a barrier for interactions. This is explored further in the next chapter.

Figure 17 Schools’ (top) and colleges’ (bottom) perceptions of mutual engagement



Please state your level of agreement with the following statements

Base: Variable from 199 to 202 (schools) and 76 to 77 (colleges). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

The variation in experiences between individual schools and colleges was highlighted in the interviews. For examples, schools interviewed perceived only some colleges to be proactive and

responsive, and colleges interviewed (as reflected in the survey data) note that schools without a sixth form were more likely to engage. School interviewees identified capacity as a barrier to engagement, as it takes time to build relationships with colleges and careers staff are balancing multiple priorities.

5.3 Satisfaction with information provided to students

Colleges: As in the survey data (Figure 19), when interviewed colleges were asked for their views of information being provided by schools to students, there was a mixed response. Colleges state that the Gatsby Benchmarks have made schools improve and broaden the information they provide. Most colleges feel that the information schools provide to school students is still mixed, with students often being uninformed about apprenticeship and T-level opportunities. Many colleges feel that the main focus at schools is to encourage students to move on to A-levels, often because the teachers at school are most familiar with that route. This supports findings from the survey in which options besides A-levels, BTECs and degrees were less well-understood by students.

Students: Indicative of this, almost all college students and older school students (years 10-13) interviewed agree that schools provide considerably more information about universities and A-levels than they do about technical educational routes and apprenticeships. Students point out that schools focus disproportionately on A-levels as post-16 routes – at the expense of information about further education colleges, technical and vocational pathways and apprenticeships – while sixth form colleges focus primarily on disseminating information about universities. This supports findings from the survey in which options besides A-levels, BTECs and degrees were less well-understood, and that information about A levels is provided to students at a higher frequency.

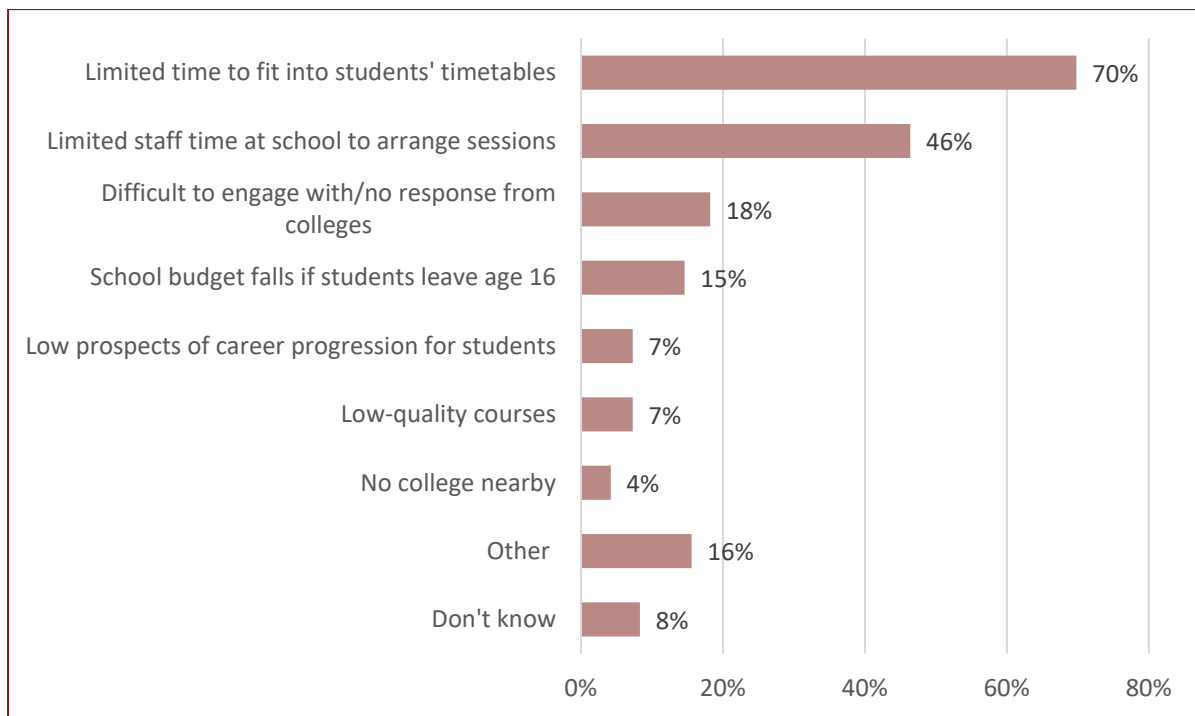
Colleges: Generally, most interviewed colleges feel that school students are very aware of the courses and opportunities available at their college and other further education institutions, confirming survey findings. Through speaking to students, careers leaders believe that students understand the options that are available to them, and how opportunities differ at a college or sixth form, although two colleges noted this was not the case.

Students: When asked about whether the information provided meets their needs, interviewed students are split into two camps. Some feel that the information provided meets their expectations satisfactorily (both in terms of frequency and quality), while others not wishing to pursue A-levels or degrees would have liked to have received more information about alternatives to A-levels and university. Several college students and older school students also state that they had to find information about options at further education colleges themselves, either through their own research or by personally seeking out a member of staff at their schools who could help.

5.4 Barriers

Schools were asked to note the main barriers to engaging with further education colleges, based on their experience prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The most common barrier, mentioned by over two in three schools, is the limited time available to fit such sessions into students' timetables (70%). The other major barrier, cited by around half of respondents, is limited staff time at school to arrange such sessions (46%) – see Figure 18.

Figure 18 Schools' perceived barriers to engaging with colleges



What are the main barriers to engaging with FE colleges (based on your experience before the current pandemic)?
Base: 192 respondents (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Schools: 'Other' barriers mentioned by 29 respondents generally fall into three categories.

- Firstly, around a third of schools commenting state that because most of their students stay on for sixth form, and/or will progress to university, they believed that college interactions are deemed less important or less relevant.
- Second, a small minority of respondents note that staff turnover either at their school or colleges they interact with (or both) results in weaker relationships and poorer levels of engagement than might be desired.
- Third, around a third of schools commenting reiterate that travel can be difficult and presents a barrier to successful engagement with some colleges, because either their school or the college in question is too far away and/or difficult to reach.

"Generally, our students go on to university, only one or two a year leave in Year 11 and go to degree apprenticeships."

Non-maintained secondary school, London

Schools: A higher proportion of schools with an Ofsted rating of 'Require improvement' report that limited time to fit sessions into timetables (87%), and limited staff time to arrange sessions are barriers (73%) compared to those rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Schools: 15% of schools surveyed admit to there being a barrier to engaging with colleges, as their funding is affected if students leave at 16 (Figure 20). This finding was confirmed in the interviews with the schools interviewed with a sixth form noting that there are challenges around having a sixth form on site, as there can be a conflict of interest if what a local college offers competes with what the school offers.

Schools: During the depth interviews, schools were also asked to reflect on their interactions with higher education institutions, to compare whether there are similar barriers to interactions with colleges (as shown in Figure 20). The main challenges mentioned by school interviewees to work with higher education institutions are also to do with logistics, including the distance, time, and cost involved in travelling for visits. This corroborates findings from the CEC’s recent focus groups with schools, that funding can be a barrier to deliver encounters with higher education.¹⁹ The recent move to online/virtual/remove delivery has helped address this challenge.

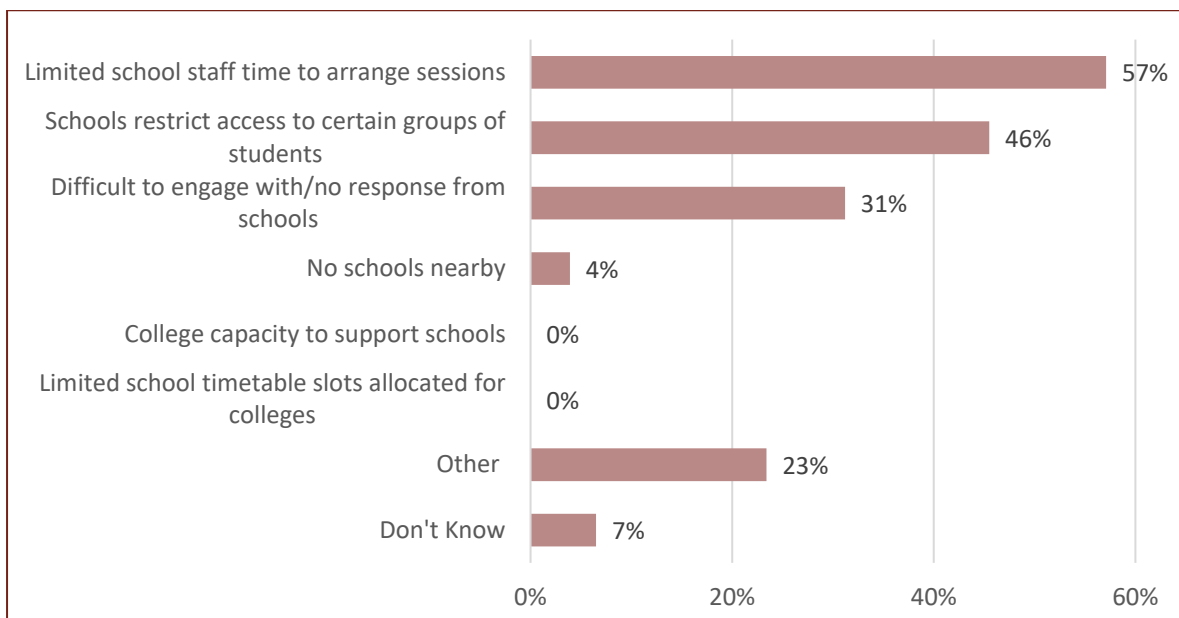
“We’ve got a virtual event soon and six different universities are coming to talk. They’re scattered around the UK – that’s an advantage of doing everything online.”

Non-maintained secondary school, London

Colleges: In a similar fashion, colleges were asked to note the main barriers to engaging with schools, based on their experience prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 19). The main barrier to successful engagement, mentioned by over half of colleges, is limited school staff time to arrange sessions (57%). Just under half of colleges perceive that schools restrict access to certain groups of students (46%), while a third simply note it is difficult to engage with schools, or that they have no response (31%), reflecting a lack of adherence to the Baker Clause.

Colleges: ‘Other’ barriers noted by colleges are that they have found in some instances that schools with sixth forms are less willing to engage as they wish to retain their students. Colleges also note that synchronising college and school calendars can make timetabling sessions difficult. A small handful of colleges also note that they feel excluded from schools’ discussions regarding how their careers sessions are devised.

Figure 19 Colleges' perceived barriers to engaging with school students



What are the main barriers to engaging with schools (based on your experience before the current pandemic)?
Base: 77 respondents (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

¹⁹ Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021, *Practical ideas for achieving Gatsby Benchmark 7*

Colleges: Most colleges interviewed discuss the challenges of accessing and speaking to students in schools with attached sixth form colleges, as they perceive that these schools prefer to keep students and encourage them to stay on. Two colleges state that schools with sixth form colleges do allow them to come to talk to students, but only to a sample that has been selected by teachers. A small number of colleges also mention digital exclusion as a barrier to accessing students. As most engagement has now moved online, colleges based in poorer areas explain that large numbers of students are missing out, due to them lacking access to a computer or the internet.

Satisfaction, quality, and perceived barriers What lessons can be learned?

- The majority of responding colleges (70%) believe schools are ‘fully aware’ of all opportunities which they offer, while 28% are ‘slightly aware’. A lower proportion of colleges which provide apprenticeship training, or of those which offer some form of higher education training, report that schools are ‘fully aware’ of the courses they offer, compared to colleges which do not offer these options. Taken together, these findings suggest that colleges which offer a greater variety of onwards educational pathways find that schools struggle to grasp the diversity of options available, or lack the information required to be aware of all options.
- A fifth of students state they are ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ with information provided on higher technical qualifications, and a sixth likewise regarding T-levels, suggesting that students would like to have more information on these pathways, echoing earlier findings that students have a lower understanding and/or knowledge of these options. Thus, while on the face of it, it may appear that interactions between schools and colleges are reasonably healthy, there is still a pervading lack of knowledge and awareness – and satisfaction – among school students.
- When rating satisfaction with various aspects of their interactions with schools, colleges report that they are highly satisfied with their ease of access to students in schools without sixth forms (average 8.5 out of 10), however, they report much lower satisfaction with their ease of access to students in schools with sixth forms (5.7), indicative of a reasonable degree of non-compliance with the Baker Clause to ensure discussion of the whole range of technical and apprenticeship options are discussed.
- Some schools (15%), likely those with sixth forms, admit to being put in a difficult situation as funding is affected if students leave their institutions at 16. There is also some belief by a minority of schools that students do not need information about the college offer if they think students are destined for university.
- Colleges note that the main barriers to successfully engaging with schools are limited school staff time to arrange sessions (mentioned by 57%), while just under half perceive that schools restrict access to certain groups of students (46%), and a third simply note it is difficult to engage with schools, or that they have no response (31%).
- The data point to several key barriers to engagement, which broadly they fall into two categories: logistics and attitude. Logistical barriers include challenges such as managing timetables and sufficient resourcing, e.g. staff time to build relationships or funding for transport. Attitudinal barriers pertain to a minority of schools (particularly those with sixth forms) wanting to retain students or perceiving that technical education information is not relevant, but also to a wide perception from some colleges that schools are not open to college interactions, despite this only being the case in a minority of schools, and the bigger barriers being logistical.

6. Strengthening interactions and support

This chapter goes on to discuss how things can work well, and provides examples of how existing barriers can be / have been overcome to strengthen relationships between schools and colleges, ultimately for the benefit of students. Best practice is summarised in the Conclusions section.

6.1 How interactions may be strengthened

Colleges surveyed were asked how they thought the interaction between their college and schools could be improved. While colleges returned an average satisfaction rating of 8.1 out of 10 in terms of their engagement with schools, the most common improvement mentioned centres on colleges' access to students, with a third of responding colleges noting that access to schools with sixth forms is often restricted, and as such they are unable to provide students with information about alternative routes besides A-levels (or whatever else is offered at 16+ by schools).

A second theme emerging is the need for stronger relationships between school and college staff, to understand each others' needs and constraints and to work around these for the good of students. Thirdly, colleges further note that more information could be provided by schools to students about the range of pathways available besides academic routes.

"If the schools with little engagement were more open to providing access to information about vocational courses and level 4/5 courses, it would help significantly to raise awareness of all the options available to both very academic students and those with lower grades."

General Further Education College, North West

"Schools need to provide the college with fair access to those pupils who are applying to sixth form to talk about Level 3 options at the college including T-Levels."

General Further Education College, North West

Colleges and schools interviewed were questioned on what an "effective interaction" between such institutions might look like, and the factors that ensure success.

Colleges: For their part, colleges notes that good communication and age-appropriate presentations are the key characteristics of an effective interaction. Interactions with smaller groups of young people are also noted to work well. Colleges note that schools are best placed to understand the needs of their students, so for a classroom session it is best to liaise with school staff before going in. In addition, colleges note there must be a joint understanding that if a college is offering information, students need all the information to ensure they can make informed choices. Another key learning point colleges note for an effective interaction is the importance of a single point of contact at schools to ensure relationships can be built upon year on year.

Schools: For their part, schools note a number of key learning points that shape an effective interaction, which align with colleges' views in several areas:

- being enthusiastic, keen, and proactive
- knowing what school students are like

- strong, positive, open, and honest relationships and dialogue
- good outcomes in terms of students knowing more than they did before so that they can make informed decisions
- organisation
- good and frequent communication, and
- having someone consistently there, or at least having a policy that doesn't change even if the people do.

Schools interviewed were asked whether colleges could do anything more, or differently, to meet students' needs. Those that did suggest changes mention logistics in terms of making it easier for students to visit them or meet them in person, being in touch more with schools, and ensuring the information provided is clear and easy to access.

Schools interviewed were asked a similar question of their interactions with higher education institutions. Several interviewees report positive experiences regarding their engagement with universities, in particular pointing to the amount and quality of information provided. Those with suggestions for improvement note that information could be more tailored to students, that more information could be provided around financing higher education, and that online interactions could only offer so much compared to face-to-face interactions such as summer schools and outreach work. Typically, schools note that their approach to working with higher education institutions does not differ to their approach to working with colleges. This mirrors survey data about the similarity in the frequency in which schools interact with colleges and universities (Figures 6 and 7).

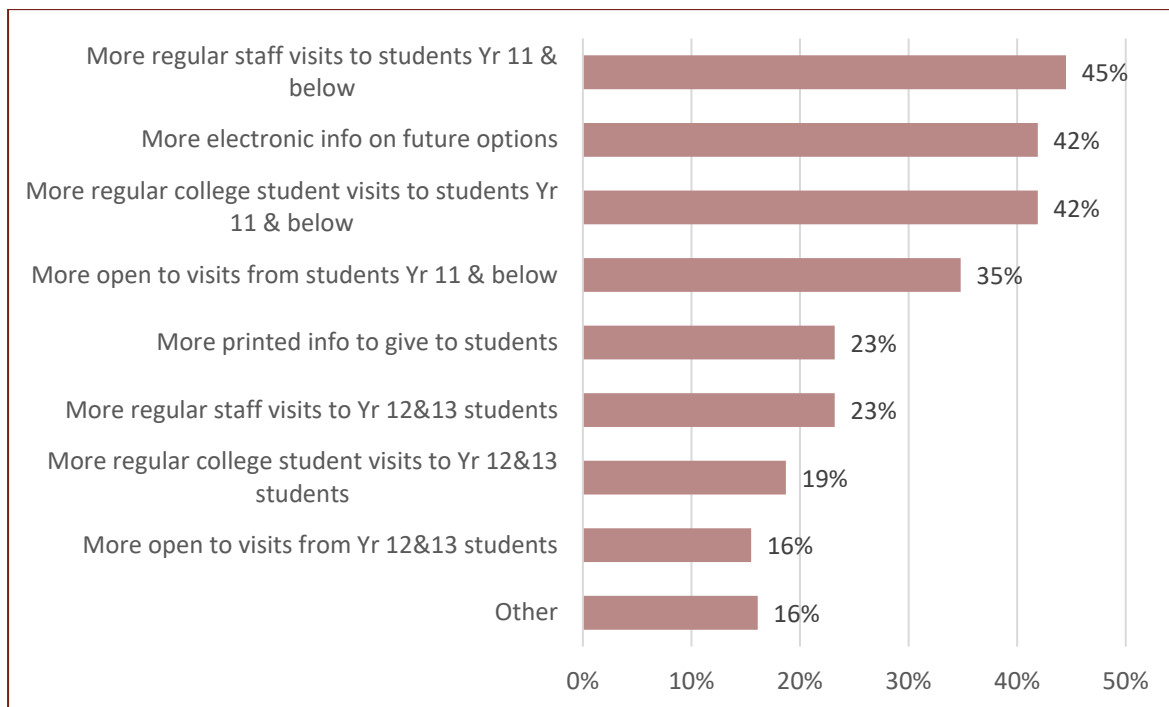
6.2 Wider support required

Schools were asked what more they thought further education colleges could do to make students at their school more aware of the opportunities on offer at their college (Figure 20). The most common actions, noted by just under half of respondents are for more regular college staff visits to students in Year 11 and under (45%), for more college student visits to this same cohort (42%), and for more electronic information on future options (42%). Open day visits for Year 11 students are also mentioned by a third of schools (35%).

Schools: 'Other' areas of support commonly mentioned by schools are for increased financial support for students, e.g. to support travel to open days and careers events at colleges which are less local. Such funding might typically be available from local colleges which deliver higher education courses, as noted in the CEC's recent research.²⁰ While schools note electronic information provision has improved recently, respondents note they would like to see this improvement continue, and to be more targeted and less generic. A handful of schools note that no further support is required as interactions already work well currently.

²⁰ Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021, *Practical ideas for achieving Gatsby Benchmark 7*

Figure 20 School suggestions for college actions to increase student awareness of options



What more could FE colleges do to make students at your school more aware of opportunities they offer?
Base: 155 respondents (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

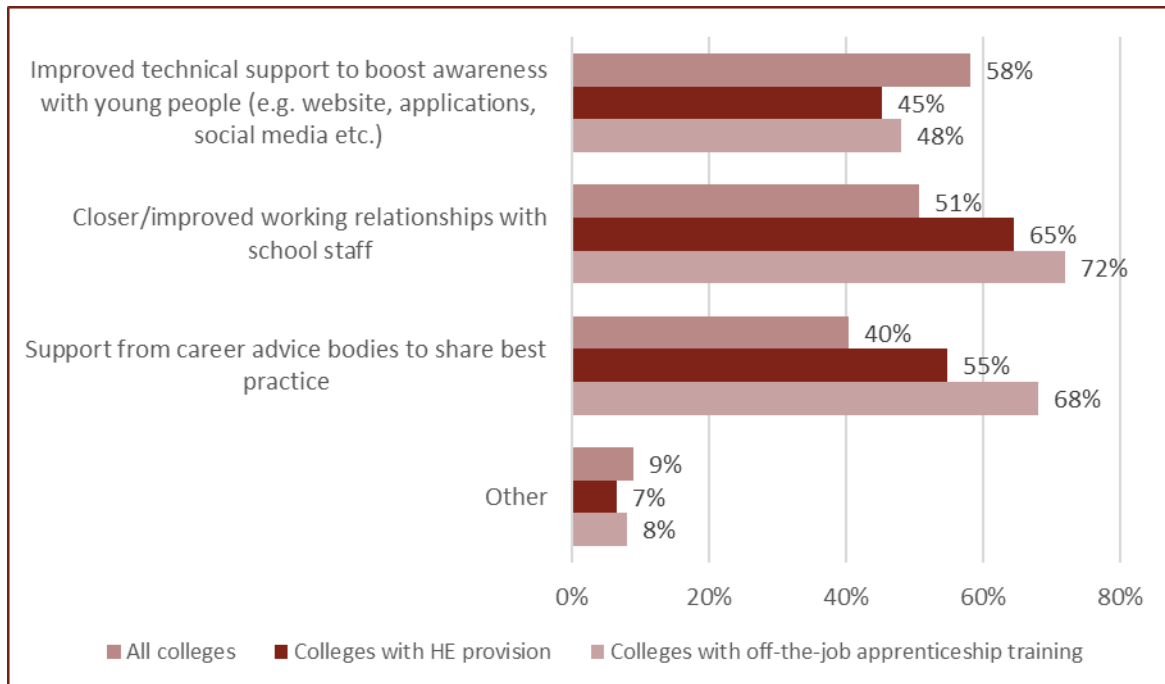
Colleges: Mirroring this, colleges were asked what support would help them to increase the information they are able to offer to schools (Figure 21). Over half of respondents note that they would like to have improved technical support to boost awareness with young people via websites and social media platforms (58%), or to have closer/improved working relationships with school staff (51%). Two in five (40%) would also welcome increased support and sharing of best practice from career advice bodies.

Colleges: Of the ‘other’ supporting actions suggested, colleges commonly note an increased awareness among students about further education is required – a “culture change” as noted by one respondent. Other colleges would like the opportunity and resource and time allocation to be able to build stronger links with schools and their students.

Colleges with a higher education provision, or offering off-the-job apprenticeship training, are more likely to note that closer/improved working relationships with school staff, or greater support and sharing of best practice from career advice bodies, is required, compared to those without these types of provision.

Meanwhile, a higher Ofsted rating typically correlates with an increased desire for improved technical support to boost awareness among young people via websites and social media: 89% of ‘outstanding’ colleges mention this compared to 58% of ‘good’ colleges and 29% of colleges which ‘require improvement’.

Figure 21 Help colleges require to increase information offered to schools



What would help your college increase the information you are able to offer schools?
Base: 67 respondents (multiple responses permitted). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021.

Colleges: Asked about what support would be needed to strengthen connections with schools, a few colleges interviewed suggest that additional financial support is required, to be available and used for large events with schools which would enable them to undertake these more often. Funding for training is also suggested by two colleges, with one noting that the Level 7 careers advisor qualification enabled the careers leader to lead their team more effectively.

Beyond the features of good practice highlighted in Section 6.1, the **schools** interviewed report a wide range of ideas for how to ensure better access to information across all pathways and improve the quality of information provided to students. A key theme is the challenge of the amount of information available and how to filter or organise it. For example, one interviewee suggests that it would be helpful to develop a centralised platform where a large proportion of local providers have a presence in one location rather than separate websites. Another interviewee recommends centralising the process of applying for apprenticeships. A second theme is ensuring buy-in from key stakeholders, such as parents and carers, SLT, governors, and teachers themselves. When they receive a lot of information, teachers may inadvertently prioritise information related to their subject. In addition to these two themes, one interviewee mentions the importance of monitoring student participation in careers-related activities to ensure there are not pockets of students missing out on certain types of engagement and/or on information about certain types of opportunities. Finally, another interviewee points to time and money, particularly with regard to staff cover. When organisations visit schools to run events, it could be helpful for this aspect to be considered beforehand. This is in contrast to higher education where such institutions are more strongly funded for encounters.

Students interviewed were asked how the information provided by schools and colleges might be improved. Consistently, most college students and older school students (years 10-13) say that they would like to hear about a broader range of educational options, including more alternatives to

universities and A-levels – this sits against the survey findings which reveal that students have a lower understanding of routes other than A-levels, degrees, and BTECs. Many of the college students say that they would have benefited from receiving more information about technical and vocational options, or educational opportunities on offer at further education colleges, in addition to information about A-levels. College students who have committed to the academic pathway say that they would also have liked information about a greater diversity of options. These comments are echoed by many of the older school students, who say that they would like more information about apprenticeships and T-levels.

“More diversity about the pathway you could take so if you change your mind, you can do that.”

College student, Age 18

Students: Several students also comment that they would like a return to more face-to-face delivery, such as open days, talks by staff, and assemblies. Students appreciate the virtual offer but express a preference for information provided through these face-to-face channels. Younger students (years 7-9) also say that more information aimed at their age groups would be welcome.

Strengthening interactions and support What lessons can be learned?

School & college feedback

- Good communication and age-appropriate presentations are noted as key characteristics of an effective interaction. Interactions with smaller groups of young people are also noted to work well. The importance of a single point of contact at schools and at colleges to ensure relationships can be built upon year on year is also stressed. Being organised and enthusiastic is also essential for careers staff to successfully deliver for the benefit of students.
- Over half of colleges would like to have an improved digital presence to boost awareness with young people e.g. via websites and social media platforms.

School feedback

- Schools' most common suggestions for improvement are for more regular college staff visits to students in Year 11 and under, more college student visits to this same cohort, and for more electronic information on future options.
- Schools' suggested changes for colleges include improved logistics to make it easier for students to visit or meet them in person, being better in touch with schools, and ensuring the information provided is clear and easy to access.
- Schools note that it is key to ensure wider access to careers information being provided from key stakeholders, such as parents and carers, SLT, governors, and subject teachers, so that all influencers can provide some information to students, if requested.

Student feedback

- Many of the college students and older school students (years 10-13) interviewed say that they would like to hear about a broader range of educational options, including more information about technical and vocational options, or educational opportunities on offer at further education colleges, in addition to information about A-levels. This links into students' satisfaction, where they were most dissatisfied with information provided about T-levels and higher technical qualifications, and also to lower awareness levels beyond A-levels, degrees, and BTECs.
- Several students interviewed comment that they would like a return to more face-to-face delivery, such as open days, talks by staff, and assemblies, expressing a preference for information provided through these face-to-face channels. Younger students (years 7-9) also say that more information aimed at their age groups would be welcome.

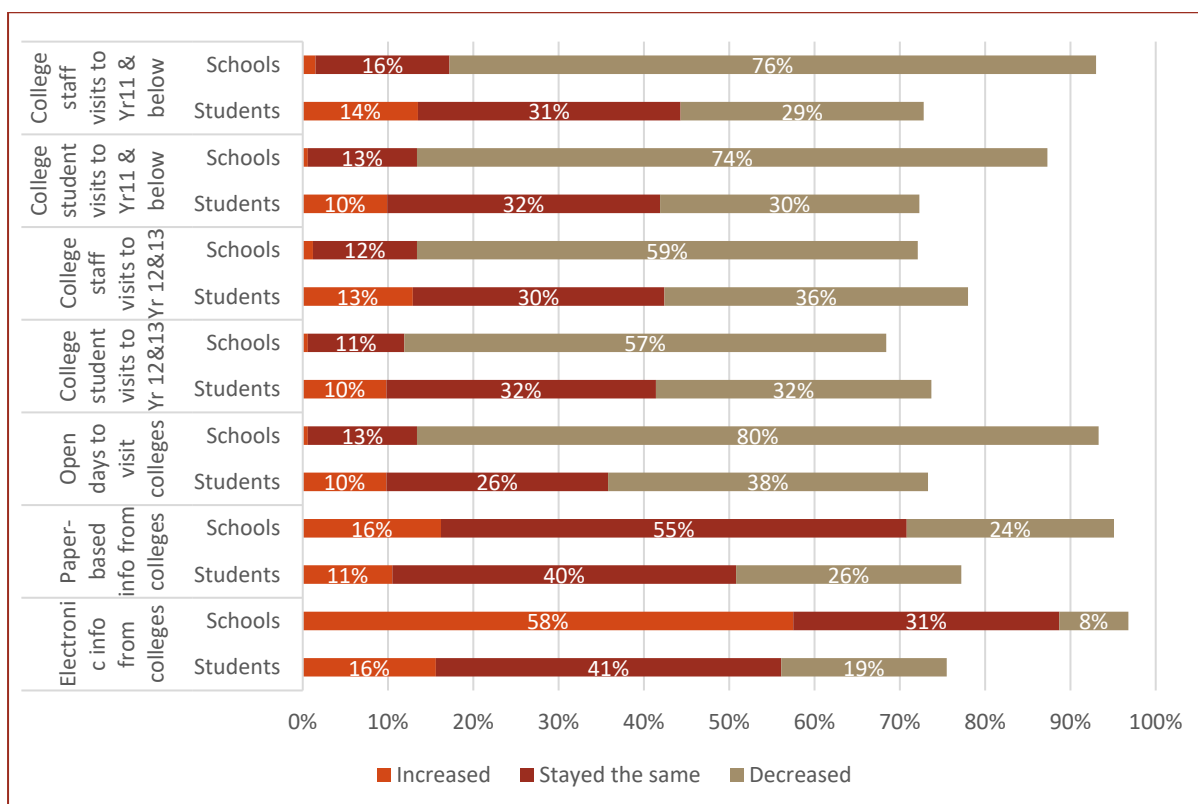
7. Changes arising due to Covid-19

This chapter outlines the effects of Covid-19 on the frequency, approaches, and quality of information being provided to students, and the impact this has had for them.

7.1 Frequency of information provision

Schools and students were also asked how the frequency with which information being provided by colleges by each various means had changed since the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 22).

Figure 22 Views on change in frequency with which information is provided by colleges post-Covid-19



Students: Since Covid-19 and lockdown in mid-March, how has the frequency of your interactions with the following information sources changed, in relation to discussing onward education options?

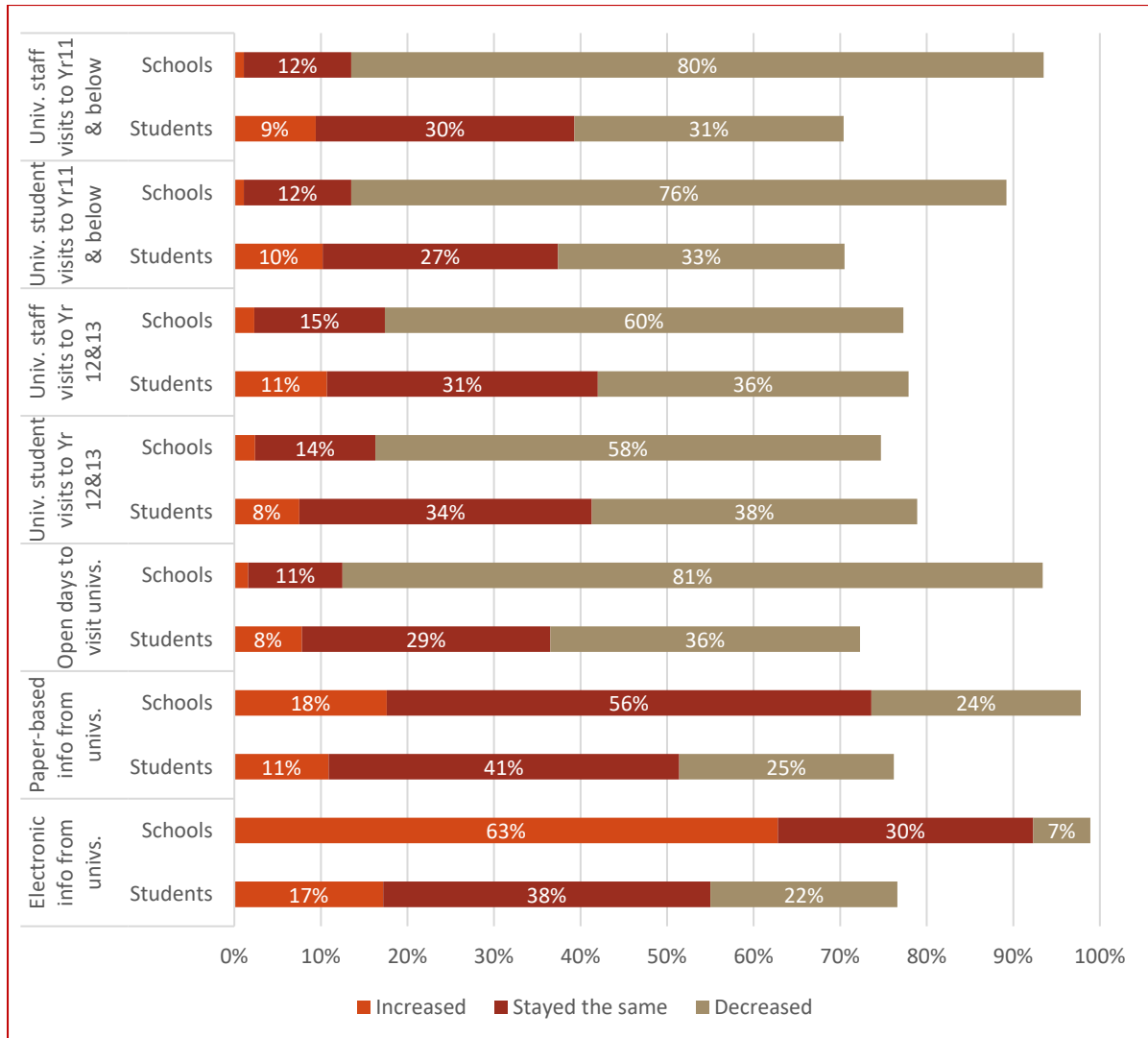
Schools: Since Covid-19 and lockdown in mid-March, how has the frequency of students' interactions with the following information sources changed, in relation to discussing onward options?

Base: Variable from 166 to 198 (schools), 131 to 294 (students). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021. (Not applicable and Don't know responses removed)

In general, the most common response from all groups is that visits by staff and students, and open day opportunities, have decreased since March 2020. This is unsurprising given the lockdown restrictions around travel, the temporary closures of institutions and the shift to home-based

learning. In response, there has been a notable increase in the frequency with which electronic information is supplied to school students regarding future options at college.

Figure 23 Views on change in frequency with which information is provided by universities post-Covid-19



Students: Since Covid-19 and lockdown in mid-March, how has the frequency of your interactions with the following information sources changed, in relation to discussing onward education options?

Schools: Since Covid-19 and lockdown in mid-March, how has the frequency of students' interactions with the following information sources changed, in relation to discussing onward options?

Base: Variable from 166 to 198 (schools) and 131 to 294 (students). Source: Pye Tait Consulting 2021. (Not applicable and Don't know responses removed)

Similarly, surveyed schools and students were also asked how the frequency with which information being provided by universities by each of these means had changed since the Covid-19 pandemic. As per interactions with colleges, there has been a notable increase in the frequency with which electronic and paper-based information is supplied to school students regarding future options at university, while open days and visits and decreased dramatically (Figure 23).

Students: The frequency with which information is being provided was also discussed in the depth interviews with students and with schools. While the majority of college students tend to say that they have noticed no significant change in the frequency of information provided to them about educational options, most school students (principally in years 10-13) say that the frequency of information provided to them has decreased. Many school students talk about events or interactions which their schools would normally run but which have not taken place because of Covid-19. These include assemblies given by careers advisors, group sessions or visits to colleges which have had to be cancelled due to the lockdown. School students in lower year groups (years 7-9) tend not to be able to comment on a change in frequency in information, generally because these students received little information about onwards educational pathways prior to Covid-19.

Students: Students also note that they have had little recent contact with university staff or students (since Covid-19). Older students report slightly more contact, but this has been by no means universal over the past year. Some students have taken part in virtual events such as virtual open days, tours, lectures, while a small number has visited universities through their own initiative or through family when restrictions allowed.

Students: As with university staff/students, contact between students (at all levels) and further education staff and students also appears scarce. No student in the depth interviews mention any contact with college students, and those studying at sixth form colleges report that the sixth form college was the only option promoted to them. Furthermore, contact between school students and further education staff is also rare: a small minority of students talks about representatives from colleges coming into the school on careers days (pre-Covid-19) or having attended college open days, and a small handful have visited colleges through their own initiative.

7.2 Adapting approaches

Colleges were questioned about how they have adapted their approach to providing school students with information regarding educational pathways due to Covid-19. Colleges interviewed describe how they have been using more online methods to reach school students. Most colleges provide virtual tours, video assemblies, Q and A sessions, and online taster events. A small number of colleges ran face-to-face interactions with a handful of schools in September before the second lockdown. Most colleges say the information they provide to school students has not changed, rather they are just delivering it differently.

“We went into two or three schools in September but then we had to stop going in so moved everything remotely: video talks, online assemblies, and virtual presentations.”

General Further Education College, North West

Schools: Likewise, schools interviewed highlighted the shift to online/virtual delivery when describing adaptations made since March 2020. People are more accustomed to online interactions and are better equipped to engage online than previously. For example, one interviewee mentioned that tutors and careers advisors now have webcams. While online delivery can enable schools to offer new resources and reach larger groups of pupils, there are concerns about how engaged pupils are.

7.3 Impact for students

Colleges interviewed were asked for their views on how these changes have impacted on students' knowledge of onwards education pathways. Broadly, colleges feel that students' knowledge has been negatively affected. Some colleges felt that without face-to-face interactions, the onus is more on students and parents to find the information for themselves. Concerns are raised that engagement with online sessions is not as positive as face-to-face interactions, and that young people have virtual fatigue and compared to a physical event, numbers attending virtual talks are lower, as the appeal is not the same. This concern is corroborated by students interviewed who – as noted previously – feel that, while both virtual and face-to-face interactions have merits, in-person events are broadly more valuable than virtual offerings.

“Some students might not know as much about options and pathways. We have information online but unless you go looking, you won't know it is there.”

General Further Education College, East of England

“I know there will be a chunk of students not reading emails and accessing the information.”

Sixth form college/centre, East Midlands

Schools: In answer to an identical question, schools interviewed comment that there is variability in students' buy-in/access to virtual opportunities. Schools further note that it is harder for students to ask questions when they are not in person at school, and that there are limited opportunities to interact face-to-face, which would normally include undertaking visits to providers for students to gauge atmosphere as well as information.

Students were asked whether they had noticed any change in the quality or breadth of information being provided since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK in March 2020. College students state that they have noticed no major change in quality, despite the switch to online/virtual. While a handful of college students mention losses of certain services (those not easily moved online – one student mentions not being able to do work experience, for instance), the majority are quite satisfied with online solutions for information about educational pathways. School students give a more mixed response. Some note that information provided online is not as detailed as face-to-face delivery. Others, however, believe that the quality and range of information has actually increased with online delivery, for instance allowing colleges to post videos and hold Zoom calls for prospective students.

Schools were asked a similar question on perceptions of quality changes since Covid-19, and responses vary depending on the type of information being considered. Similar to students, some interviewees explain that the quality and breadth are still there, but the difference is the way in which information is being delivered (i.e. virtually rather than face-to-face). While some virtual resources are high-quality, it can be difficult to know how many students are accessing or engaging with online content and to what extent. There is some concern that students may be missing the benefits of face-to-face interactions, such as staff being able to spot when and where clarification is needed and students having the opportunity to easily ask questions. However, one benefit of virtual delivery is being able to accommodate larger groups.

8. Conclusions

This chapter offers a chance to reflect back on the key findings and to draw together conclusions based on the research findings. It proposes recommendations based on the research findings.

It is useful at this stage to look back to the initial aim at the outset of the research, which was to understand the breadth, quality, and frequency of information being provided to school and college students about their onward education pathway options. The specific objectives of the research are outlined below, and beneath each of these is a summary of the key points arising from the research findings which link directly to the initial research objectives.

1. Views of schools, colleges, and students on the frequency with which information is being provided to students regarding the different pathways available to them

Students, as a whole, state that the most frequently discussed pathways are A-levels, BTECs, and degrees, while other educational pathways are discussed less commonly.

Schools note that the options colleges discuss with school students vary depending on the year group colleges come in to talk to and/or which qualifications, subjects, or careers are of interest to the students. This may potentially mean that schools with lower awareness of some pathways are less likely to request such options for discussion, potentially creating lower awareness among students.

Colleges generally provide information to school students on all education pathways to ensure they have a clear picture of the options available. They also tailor sessions based on schools' preferences.

Information on the various educational pathways is provided on a more regular basis to students aged 16+ than to those aged 15 and under and is also more regularly provided to college students than school students. Younger students (years 7-9) also say that more information aimed at their age groups would be welcome.

2. Form in which this information is provided

The most common way in which information on future options is provided to school students (prior to Covid-19) is in the form of electronic information, both from universities and from colleges – this is provided via websites, social media, or virtual/online offerings (e.g. virtual tours). Around two thirds of schools and colleges provide this electronic information on a weekly or monthly basis. Paper-based information on future options from both colleges and universities is the next most common means of providing information to students, being provided by around half of schools and colleges on a weekly or monthly basis.

Typically, besides electronic and paper-based methods, other means of providing information, for instance through staff and students visits or open days, are most likely to occur either on an annual or termly basis.

The frequency with which information from colleges and universities is being provided by various forms (electronic, staff/student visits, etc.) is on a roughly equal basis, however, the disparity in knowledge among students regarding non-academic options (see later in this Chapter) implies that some options are discussed more commonly than others.

3. Perspectives of schools, colleges, and students on the quality of the information being provided

For all qualifications apart from A-levels, colleges generally feel that they describe and communicate qualifications to their students better than schools do to their students. Schools are most confident that they describe and communicate the options which are most commonly offered (by schools to school students), including A-levels, BTECs, degrees and apprenticeships. However, schools clearly have much lower confidence in how well alternative routes such as TechBacc, Certificates of Higher Education and T-levels are being described and communicated to their students. In contrast colleges demonstrate a much higher confidence across the board in how they describe and communicate the various educational pathways to their students.

Students typically have the best understanding of A-levels, BTECs, and Bachelor's degrees (in that order). Students aged 16+ report a higher level of understanding for all these pathways compared to those under 16. Knowledge of apprenticeships is variable and patchy at best, and T-levels are little known as yet among students. Furthermore, students broadly lack confidence in their knowledge of the full range of both academic and technical options, as well as apprenticeships.

Schools believe that the range and quality of information is best provided via electronic means, open days and paper-based information rather than staff/student visits. Students themselves prefer to receive information via open days to gain a feel for the location and atmosphere and note that online offerings miss out this critical element.

Students trust differing information sources to a 'middling' extent, indicating that they do not place either huge trustworthiness in sources, nor strongly doubt the information being provided. Rather, sources receive a "fair" rating of trust, while none are perceived as highly trustworthy. Information sources from universities are generally perceived to be marginally more trustworthy than those from colleges.

4. Satisfaction levels with the quality and range of information made available

Schools feel generally content with the information they provide to students in most regards. However, schools rate only A-levels, BTECs, and degrees as options which they feel they describe and communicate well to students, while other options are scored lower in this regard.

Both schools and students are most dissatisfied with the frequency of opportunity to visit universities and colleges, and a fifth of students also state they are 'very dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied' with information provided on higher technical qualifications. This echoes earlier findings that students have a lower understanding and/or knowledge of this option suggesting that students would like to have more information on this pathway.

Schools and colleges are broadly satisfied with their respective engagement which they put down to good relationships and engagement with one another, clear communication and feedback between both parties, and a proactive approach and willingness to engage. However, there are schools and colleges with lower satisfaction about this. On consideration of the barriers faced, colleges would like more engagement with students at a younger age, while schools would like more interactive sessions, as well as more time to focus/dedicate on career activity.

Schools are slightly more satisfied with their interaction with colleges than vice versa. While both value their respective engagement with one another, one in six colleges 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' that schools are effective at providing a full range of information on further and higher

education opportunities, or that the information being provided directly by schools to their students regarding further education options is complete and accurate.

Career staff state that the Gatsby Benchmarks have made schools improve and broaden the information they provide. Most colleges feel that the information schools provide to school students is still mixed, however, as students are often uninformed about apprenticeship and T-level opportunities.

Almost all college students and older school students (years 10-13) interviewed agree that schools provide considerably more information about universities and A-levels than they do about technical educational routes and apprenticeships. Indeed, knowledge and understanding varies markedly, even between college students depending on the course they are studying.

5. Barriers to engagement between schools and colleges, and any support required

Generally, schools and colleges are positive about existing relationships, and broadly seek to build on these further.

However, when asked to identify any barriers, a common barrier for schools, mentioned by over two in three respondents, is the limited time available to fit career-focused sessions into students' timetables. Another key limitation noted is staff time to arrange such sessions.

The main barrier to successful engagement for colleges, mentioned by over half of respondents, is limited school staff time to arrange sessions. Just under half of colleges perceive that schools restrict access to certain groups of students. Colleges report that they are highly satisfied with their ease of access to students in schools without sixth forms, however, they report much lower satisfaction with their ease of access to students in schools with sixth forms, as they perceive that these schools prefer to keep students and encourage them to stay on, highlighting a reasonable degree of non-compliance with the Baker Clause to ensure a range of technical and apprenticeship options are discussed.

The data point to several key barriers to engagement, which broadly fall into two categories: logistics and attitude. Logistical barriers include challenges such as managing timetables and sufficient resourcing, e.g. staff time to build relationships or funding for transport. Attitudinal barriers pertain to a minority of schools (particularly those with sixth forms) wanting to retain students or perceiving that technical education information is not relevant, but also to a wide perception from some colleges that schools are not open to college interactions, despite this only being the case in a minority of schools, and the bigger barriers being logistical.

In terms of support required, schools would like colleges to assist with logistics in terms of making it easier for students to visit colleges or to meet staff/students in person. Where schools do suggest improvement, they would like colleges to be in touch more to build relationships, and to ensure the information provided is clear and easy to access, as schools note the sheer volume of information can leave them feeling overwhelmed. Schools would also like more regular college staff and college student visits to school students in Year 11 and under.

Over half of college respondents note that they would like to have improved technical support to boost awareness with young people via websites and social media platforms or, mirroring schools' similar point, to have closer/improved working relationships with school staff.

A lower proportion of colleges which provide apprenticeship training, or of those which offer some form of higher education training, report that schools are 'fully aware' of the courses they offer,

compared to colleges which do not offer these options. This suggests that colleges which offer a greater variety of onwards educational pathways find that schools struggle to grasp the diversity of options available.

6. How all the above issues have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic

Visits by staff and students, and open day opportunities, have decreased since March 2020, due to Covid-19. There has been a notable increase in the frequency with which electronic and paper-based information is supplied to school students.

Many school students talk about events or interactions which their schools would normally run but which have not taken place because of Covid-19. These include assemblies given by careers advisors, and group sessions or visits to colleges which have had to be cancelled due to the lockdown. Interviewees mention that the form of the information given has shifted from face-to-face (in person) to online delivery. Most colleges note they have altered their provision to include virtual tours, video assemblies, Q and A sessions, and online taster events. This same shift to online is mentioned by schools.

As with university staff/students, contact between students (of all ages) and further and higher education staff and students since Covid-19 also appears scarce. There is little mention of contact with college or university students. Some students have taken part in virtual events such as virtual open days, tours, lectures, while a small number has visited universities through their own initiative or through family.

Colleges feel that students' knowledge has been negatively affected by this shift. Some colleges felt that without face-to-face interactions, the onus is more on students and parents to find the information for themselves. Concerns are raised that engagement with online sessions is not as positive as face-to-face interactions, and that young people have virtual fatigue and compared to a physical event. Schools further note that it is harder for students to ask questions when they are not in person at school, and that there are limited opportunities to interact face-to-face.

Students interviewed have noticed no major change in quality, despite the switch to online/virtual. Some note these formats are not as detailed as they would be via face-to-face delivery, while others believe that the quality and range of information has actually increased with online delivery. Schools note that it can be difficult to know how many students are accessing or engaging with online content and to what extent, and there is some concern that students may be missing the benefits of face-to-face interactions.

7. Examples of best practices

a. Designing interactions

Colleges note that their most useful methods for designing student interactions include feedback from school staff, feedback from school students, and internal discussions with college staff. Staff roles usually inputting into this include teaching and careers staff. Almost all colleges rated as 'Outstanding' gather feedback from both students and staff, while over half continually engage with schools, and only a minority hold internal debriefs after events.

Colleges with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating typically engage more with parents, school teaching staff, and SLT, and less so with school careers staff when designing interactions for school student.

Colleges which 'require improvement' show much lower engagement and their main means of gathering input is from school career staff.

Schools note that it is key to ensure wider access to careers information being provided from key stakeholders, such as parents and carers, SLT, governors, and subject teachers, so that they too are informed and aware of options.

Good communication and age-appropriate presentations are noted as key characteristics of an effective interaction. Interactions with smaller groups of young people are also noted to work well.

b. Promoting engagement between schools and colleges

The importance of a single point of contact at schools to ensure relationships can be built upon year on year is also stressed.

A higher proportion of schools with an Ofsted rating of 'Requires improvement' reports that limited time to fit sessions into timetables, and limited staff time to arrange sessions, are barriers compared to those rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

Schools engage with colleges which are in close proximity to the school, showcase the breadth and quality of courses on offer, and have clear information about onward progression.

c. Meeting students' needs

The most useful types of information that students value being provided with include: the job that they will be able to get with that course of qualification, the career progression possibilities offered by the course or qualification, information on the qualifications required to apply for options, information on the qualification gained on completion, and the reputation of the institution at which students consider studying.

With regard to Gifted and Talented (GAT) and students with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), colleges and schools take similar approaches, commonly having in place specific support and mentoring programmes in place for high achievers, which broadly aim to stretch individuals and to assist them in their goals, with red brick universities commonly mentioned in this regard. Similar to their approach to SEND students, colleges and schools note that they seek to provide GAT students with information and support that is tailored to their needs and aspirations, offering focused one to one support and mentoring.

Over half of colleges would like to have improved technical support to boost awareness with young people via websites and social media platforms. A higher Ofsted rating typically correlates with an increased desire for improved technical support to boost awareness among young people via websites and social media: 89% of 'outstanding' colleges mention this compared to 58% of 'good' colleges and 29% of colleges which 'require improvement'.