



## Parental engagement in career guidance

### Research summary: the views of parents in response to Covid-19

*July 2020*

#### Summary

In June 2020, The Gatsby Foundation (Gatsby) commissioned the market research agency Opinium to conduct a quantitative study of 2,000 parents<sup>1</sup> of children aged 11-18 in England. This is part of a long-running programme of work investigating how to support parental engagement in young people's career and education choices. The survey examined how the feelings and experiences of parents had changed specifically in response to the disruption caused by Covid-19.

Questions explored how optimistic parents now felt about their child taking their next step in their education or career, what career guidance information they had received from their school or college, and how closely involved and informed they felt in their child's education and career choices since lockdown began. Some questions in the survey specifically asked how Covid-19 lockdown had changed parents' attitudes. For other questions, comparisons could be made with data from similar research with parents conducted by Opinium for Gatsby in August and November 2019, to examine changes over time.

#### Key Findings

**It remains very important for parents to be informed about their child's education and career options.** 91% agreed that this was very important for education options and 82% for career options, with these figures being unchanged compared to November 2019 data. This shows how resilient parents' engagement in their children's future has been despite the disruption of the pandemic, and shows that involving parents in career guidance is very much still worthwhile for schools and colleges.

**More parents report not feeling informed to support their children's future education choices** (see Figure 1). This has risen to one quarter of parents (25%) saying they do not feel informed to support education choices, compared to just 15% in August 2019. There has also been a small rise in parents not feeling informed to support careers choices (from 23% to 27%). It is heartening that this is still a minority in both cases, but these rises could indicate increasing uncertainty among parents.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the term 'parents' also refers to carers and guardians.

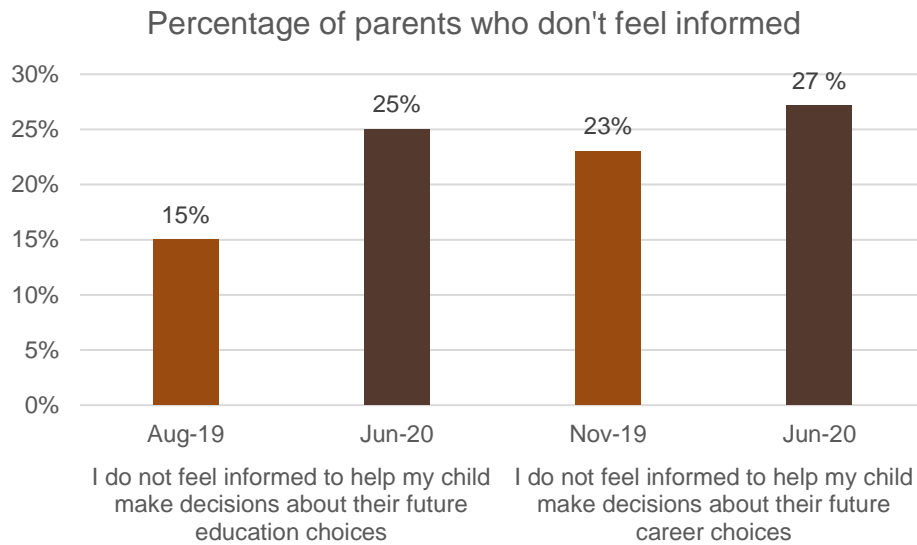


Figure 1: Changes in proportions of parents who feel informed to support education and career choices.

**A half of parents have received career guidance information from their school or college since lockdown began.** This information was most frequently about the school or college career guidance programme itself (21% of all respondents), information around post-16 and post-18 options, or information about different career options (see Figure 2).

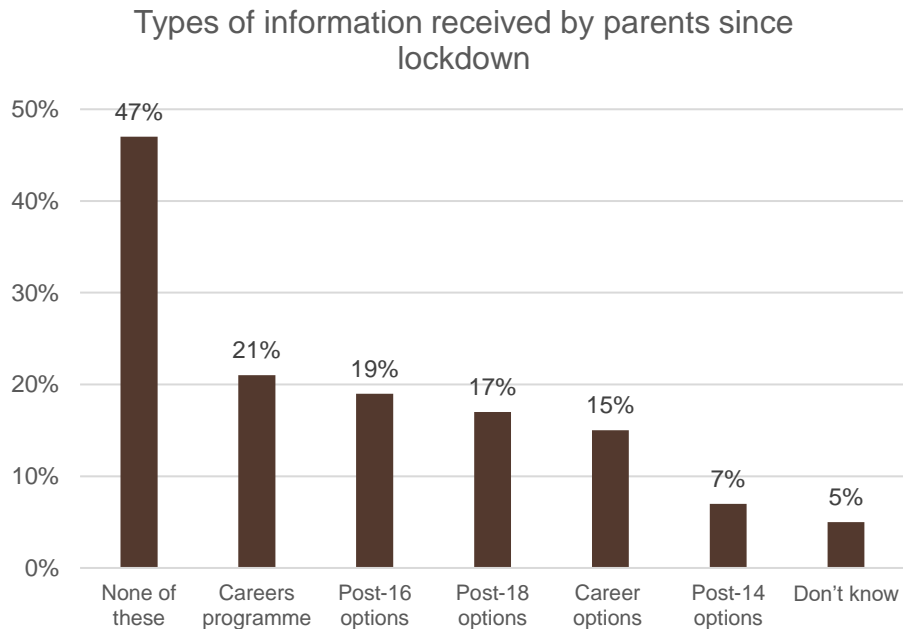
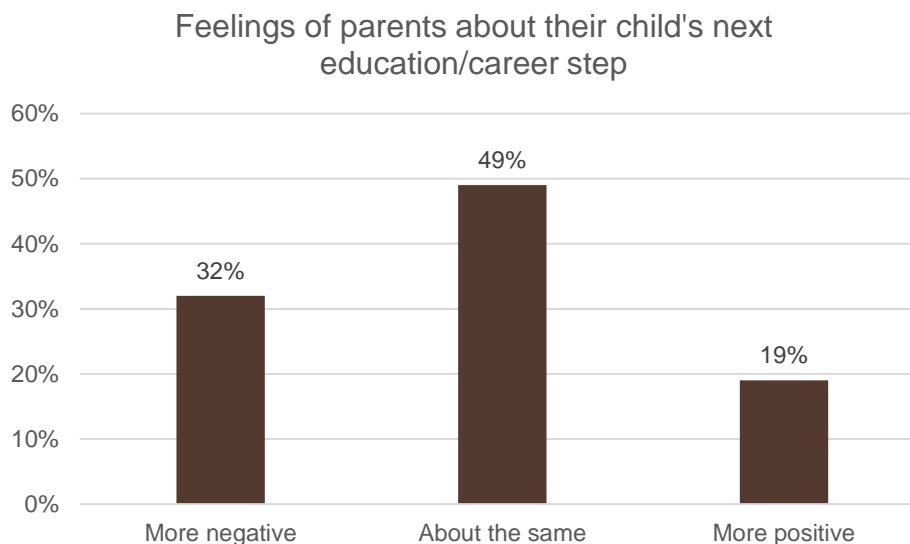


Figure 2: Proportions of parents who have received different types of information from their school or college since the start of lockdown.

The most common communication methods were through the school or college website or letters, although around 1 in 5 had reported receiving contact by phone calls, text message or through an app. 21% had been signposted to the websites of external organisations. This shows how adaptable many school and college careers teams have been in maintaining their activity and communication to parents during a time of unprecedented disruption. However, it is troubling that 47% of parents report

not having received any information - this could be due to their children being younger and further from decision-making points, but this may be giving rise to some parents' increased anxieties. A significant minority of parents report not being satisfied with the support provided by their school or college to support education choices (42%) and career choices (40%).

**Parents feelings about their child's future are very varied – although a third feel more negative since lockdown, nearly 1 in 5 are feeling more positive.** The level of disruption to education, exams and daily life in the early stages of the pandemic means it is perhaps unsurprising that such a high proportion of parents are now feeling more negative about their child taking their next step in their education or career. However, it is notable that nearly 1 in 5 (19%) reported feeling more positive (see Figure 3). These reactions varied significantly depending on parents' demographic characteristics and their general levels of satisfaction with their relationship with their child and school or college, underlining that parents are not a homogenous group and even hugely disruptive events can be experienced very differently. This highlights both a challenge and an opportunity for schools and colleges: while a significant proportion of parents will need more support to help their child navigate their next step, there will be some whose enthusiasm can be built upon to further strengthen parental engagement programmes.



*Figure 3: Changes in how parents feel about their children taking the next step in education or their career.*

**A quarter of parents are feeling more closely involved in their child's education and career choices since lockdown.** 26% reported feeling more closely involved – perhaps an expected response to the necessary role many parents have had to take in the day-to-day education of their children. However, results are mixed, with 16% feeling less closely involved than before. Again, results varied substantially depending on demographic characteristics and on parents' general levels of satisfaction with their relationship with their child and school or college.

### Conclusion

While the unprecedented disruption of Covid-19 has understandably caused many parents to feel less informed and more anxious about their children's education and career choices, it is encouraging that the level of importance they place on being informed about their children's future has remained very high. With significant proportions of parents now feeling more involved in their children's education and career choices, or more optimistic about their future, there is an exciting opportunity for schools

and colleges to further grow their relationships with their parent community. Many schools and colleges have shown their adaptability in continuing to issue information to parents under lockdown. We hope that this will serve as a good example to other schools and colleges to share more information in the new academic year, particularly with those parents who have not yet reported receiving information during this period of disruption.

### Background to Gatsby's parental engagement programme

The Gatsby Foundation (Gatsby) is a philanthropic trust set up by Lord David Sainsbury over 50 years ago. The trust focuses on six areas, one of which is education. Within education, our four key focus areas are technical education reform, STEM skills in the workforce, science and maths in schools and good career guidance. In 2014, Gatsby published the *Good Career Guidance* report, which introduced the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. In 2017, these became the core framework for Government careers policy for English secondary schools and colleges.

Parents have significant influence over their children's career decisions, and conversations with careers specialists and headteachers have shown us that more could be done to fully engage parents in the career and education choices of their children. Career guidance programmes will be more effective, and young people's outcomes will improve, if they can have better-informed conversations with their parents about the choices they face.

Gatsby has therefore committed to a significant programme to investigate how secondary schools and colleges can be supported to work with parents around their children's education and career decision-making. This work includes research<sup>2</sup>, resource development and piloting in schools and colleges across 5 regions in England during the 2020/21 academic year.

**If you would like to find out more about this research, our larger parental engagement project and pilot, or Gatsby's general work in careers, please contact [careerguidance@gatsby.org.uk](mailto:careerguidance@gatsby.org.uk).**

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<sup>2</sup> This includes an international literature review undertaken by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/careerguidanceparents/>